

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Public Statement

AI Index: MDE 18/010/2004 (Public)
News Service No: 218
2 September 2004

Lebanon: New Action to Ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court

Amnesty International (AI) and the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC) have today launched an action calling on the government of Lebanon to accede to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, as part of their campaign to lobby for universal ratification of the Statute.

Lebanon played an important role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Rome Statute. It should now demonstrate its commitment to international justice and encourage other Middle Eastern states to do the same by acceding to the Rome Statute as soon as possible, Amnesty International said today. So far, only one other Middle Eastern state, Jordan, has ratified the Rome Statute, although several Middle Eastern states have signed it. Since Lebanon did not sign the Statute before the deadline of 31 January 2000, it needs to sign and ratify in one step - a process known as acceding.

"We welcome the steps that Lebanon has taken towards joining the international justice system, and we now urge the government to move forward with the process of accession," the organization said.

When ratifying the treaty, the government will need to enact legislation allowing the Lebanese courts to exercise their primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes and to provide full cooperation with the International Criminal Court. Amnesty International and the CICC are urging the government of Lebanon to begin the process of implementing legislation as soon as possible.

In the past half century, millions of victims of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes have been denied justice, truth and full reparations. The Rome Statute creates a new system of international justice to send a clear message to those planning such horrific crimes that they will no longer enjoy impunity for their actions.

The International Criminal Court requires the support of the whole international community. Amnesty International welcomes the work of civil society groups in Lebanon, and a number of Lebanese MPs, in accelerating the movement for support of the International Criminal Court in Lebanon. Amnesty International and the CICC are encouraging the people of Lebanon and all people in the Middle East to take part in this action calling on Lebanon to accede to the Rome Statute as soon as possible. In doing so, they will be joining the struggle to end impunity for these horrific crimes forever.

Background

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted on 17 July 1998, provides that the Court will have initial jurisdiction over genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The International Criminal Court relies on states that have ratified the Rome Statute to investigate and prosecute people accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in their national courts. The Court will only step in when national courts are unable or unwilling to do so.

On June 23, 2004, the International Criminal Court Prosecutor, Luis Moreno Ocampo, announced the opening of formal investigations into grave crimes committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 1 July 2002 (the date of entry into force of the Rome Statute). On 29 July 2004, he announced the launch of formal investigations in Uganda. It is reported that over three million people have died during the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, many of them victims of crimes within the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction, including rape, torture, forced displacement and the illegal use of child soldiers. For nearly two decades in Uganda, conflict between the government and the Lord's Resistance Army has resulted in reports of a similar pattern of systematic human rights abuses.

For more information please check Amnesty International's website at:
<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/icc-010804-action-eng>

Or contact the International Justice Project at Amnesty International's International Secretariat on +44 (20) 7413 5913.