

Open Letter

Africa/ICC

Open Letter to African States Parties to the Rome Statute

The victims of the most serious crimes are counting on you

The International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and its member and partner organisations which are signatories of this letter (1) call on African states parties to the Rome Statute which are to meet in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia, on June 8 and 9, to support the action of the International Criminal Court (ICC), a judicial body complementary to national jurisdictions and in charge of trying the perpetrators of the most serious crimes that affect the international community as a whole.

This meeting is convened by the African Union to reflect on the relationships between the ICC and Africa, and comes within a context of criticism expressed by some African leaders towards international justice, since the arrest warrant issued on March, 4, 2009 by the ICC against the Sudanese President Omar Al Bashir, for crimes committed in Darfur.

Our organisations recall that African states have been very active in the establishment and implementation of the International Criminal Court, asserting that the right to justice for victims of international crimes – war crimes, crime against humanity and genocide - is synonymous with prevention and is an integral part of the process of settlement of conflicts which tear the continent apart. This participation of the African continent in the work of international justice meets the objectives and principles stated in the Constitutive Act of the African Union, relating to the fight against the impunity of perpetrators of serious human rights violations.

In March 2009, Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, declared that supporting the ICC means choosing to be on the side of peace, against that of oppressors. Many African states made this choice, taking into consideration that the first state which ratified the ICC Statute was an African state, and that thirty of them are now parties to the Rome Statute. Besides, 3 African states have, on their own initiative, requested the ICC to intervene in complementarity with their jurisdictions, considering that the latter were incapable of providing an answer to the victims' suffering.

«The African victims and victims in the whole world are watching you. Removing your support to the ICC would be like turning your back on those who have suffered too much because of the conflicts and crises that ravage the African Continent», declared Souhayer Belhassen, FIDH President.

As crises and conflicts prevail worldwide, it would be much regrettable to undermine those supporting the victims and peace, by fighting the impunity of the perpetrators of the most serious crimes. However, the moment has come to assert that international justice must truly be universal and apply on every continent, regardless of the states or perpetrators who are involved. This is the fight you must champion. Victims throughout the world are watching you and support you.

Press contact : Karine Appy / Gaël Grilhot : + 33 1 43 55 14 12 / + 33 1 43 55 90 19

(1) The FIDH member and partner organisations which are signatories of this Open Letter are located in 19 out of 30 African States Parties of the Rome Statute :

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
Ligue pour la défense des droits de l'Homme (LDHB) – Benin
Ligue Burundaise des droits de l'Homme – ITEKA – Burundi
DITSHWANELO – The Botswana Centre for Human Rights – Botswana
Mouvement Burkinabé des droits de l'Homme et des peuples (MBDHP) – Burkina Faso
Ligue centrafricaine des droits de l'Homme (LCDH) – Central African Republic
Association tchadienne pour la promotion et la défense des droits de l'Homme (ATPDH) - Chad
Ligue tchadienne des droits de l'Homme (LTDH) - Chad
Groupe Lotus – Democratic Republic of Congo
Ligue des Electeurs (LE) - Democratic Republic of Congo
Association africaine des droits de l'Homme (ASADHO) - Democratic Republic of Congo
Ligue djiboutienne des droits de l'Homme (LDDH) – Djibouti
Organisation guinéenne des droits de l'Homme (OGDH) – Guinea
Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) – Kenya
Liberia Watch for Human Rights (LWHR) – Liberia
Association malienne des droits de l'Homme (AMDH) – Mali
Association nigérienne de défense des droits de l'Homme (ANDDH) – Niger
Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) - Nigeria
Observatoire congolais des droits de l'Homme (OCDH) – Republic of Congo
Rencontre africaine pour la défense des droits de l'Homme (RADDHO) – Senegal
Organisation nationale des droits de l'Homme (ONDH) – Senegal
Lawyers for Human Rights (LHR) – South Africa
Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC) - Tanzania
Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI) - Uganda