



**Seventh Seminar of Counsel
The Hague, 11 - 12 May 2009**

**Opening Statement of the President,
Judge Sang-Hyun Song**

The Hague, 11 May 2009

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today to welcome all of you to the International Criminal Court's Seventh Seminar of Counsel. I am grateful to the Registrar and Deputy Registrar for organising this important event.

As a judicial institution, nothing should be more natural than consultation with legal professionals. And yet it can be tempting for institutions to develop an inward focus. This risk is particularly acute at rapidly growing institutions. They can neglect to communicate effectively to the outside world about their approaches and miss opportunities to solicit feedback.

The Seminar of Counsel is an expression of this Court's dedication to remaining engaged with its List of Counsel and the broader legal community. It offers a vital opportunity to consult with you on issues of common interest. This interaction serves to ensure that the Court is meeting the highest legal standards, whilst increasing external confidence in our work. That is why the Regulations of the Registry, which were drawn up by the Registrar and approved by the Presidency, explicitly called for this interaction.

Since last year's Seminar of Counsel, the Court has marked an important milestone. In January, the first trial at the Court began: that of Mr. Thomas Lubanga Dyilo. With its start, many parts of the Rome Statute and Rules of Procedure and Evidence are being animated for the first time. Counsel are vigorously defending the rights of the Accused. The innovation of victim representation is being put into practice.

Precedents are being set for future trials before this Court. And these precedents will have far-reaching effects on future practice in other jurisdictions.

On 24 September, the trial of Mr. Germaine Katanga and Mr. Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui is scheduled to begin. Over the coming year, by the time of the next Seminar of Counsel, other cases currently in the pre-trial phase also could enter the trial phase. The work of this seminar is an important factor in ensuring that the equality of arms and victims' rights foreseen in the Rome Statute are realised to their full extent. Now that the International Criminal Court is a fully functioning judicial institution, the interaction that will take place here this week is more important than ever.

Thank you.