



Cour
Pénale
Internationale
International
Criminal
Court

Le Président
The President



Judge Sang-Hyun Song
President of the International Criminal Court

38th Congress of the International Federation for Human Rights
Remarks at the Opening Session

Istanbul, Turkey
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Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen,

91 years ago, out of the ashes of the world's first global war, came the world's first human rights federation. It is that federation which meets in this room today.

It is testament to the strength of this federation that I can also stand in this room today.

85 years ago the International Federation for Human Rights began advocating for an international declaration of human rights, and for an international criminal court.

They were audacious goals in their time – and are perhaps audacious still – but both have come to pass. And I stand before you as President of that Court first proposed by this congress almost a century ago.

The ICC's existence is proof that audacious goals can be achieved.

The International Criminal Court has grown from an idea into a fully functioning judicial institution - in no small part because of the advocacy of organisations represented today.

The ICC has grown to an assembly of 122 nations. Nations which have shown a commitment to justice, peace, and security.

The ICC's story demonstrates the power of states working together in the face of greater adversity – it is the story of a coalition working towards a more just world – and it is a story reflected in the Federation gathered here today.

The ICC is now undertaking investigations or preliminary examinations across five continents.

The Court is conducting more proceedings than ever before, ranging from pre-trial to trial and appeals.

The ICC's Registry has provided legal representation for more than 5,000 victims who were granted the right to participate in the proceedings.

The Trust Fund for Victims is addressing specific needs of victims on the ground with reconstructive surgery, community programmes and more.

And, if I may note this point in front of an audience of powerful advocates, we have undertaken this growing amount of work without a correlated increase in budget.

Like those in this room, we have achieved much, and we still have much left to do. And nowhere is this more true than when it comes to defending women's rights.

The particularly acute suffering of women in conflict has far too often been invisible. And when suffering goes unrecognised, when victims are not heard, and perpetrators not held to account – then wounds cannot heal, justice cannot be attained, and the cycle of suffering continues.

A particular strength of this Federation, a federation of so many organizations acting in concert, is its ability to push for change and accountability from within, to harness regional relationships, to literally speak the same language as those in power. And to those in power we must continue to say:

'Whether attendant to war or a weapon of war; whether blindly permitted or systematically enforced – sexual violence leaves invisible scars on its victims which are as painful and lasting as the visible ones. The horrors of conflict inflicted upon women are not incidental; they are not inevitable; and they can no longer be ignored.'

I am proud to be President of a court which gives explicit recognition of gender crimes in its founding statute and in its public proceedings, and which is the first major international court with a predominantly female bench of judges. All of this demonstrates the values of the ICC and of the assembly of nations and the global civil society that stand behind it.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

No country exists in isolation. Through the Arab Spring, through climate change, and through the Global Financial Crisis - this becomes clearer every day. We are all connected by the events which shape our world, and we are all connected by a shared global humanity. It was this collective humanity which the founders of this Federation recognised almost a century ago.

We meet today in Istanbul, a city which sits at the crossroads of continents, a country where East and West come together. For thousands of years this land has seen the power of engagement. In the dust of the Silk Road, in the waters of the Bosphorus, in the energy of Istanbul today - Turkey shows the world that international engagement brings prosperity, peace and security.

Currently, the Islamic world is under-represented in the coalition of states behind the ICC.

We meet in a region undergoing historic change, and I am under no illusions about the fresh challenges which human rights organisations now face.

I strongly believe that accession to the ICC's founding treaty, the Rome Statute, can be a crucial factor for stability, the rule of law, and the protection of human rights.

Granting the ICC jurisdiction deters future violence and turmoil through the adoption of legal norms for justice, backed by an international court of last resort. But it is not a measure for settling old scores. The ICC is a forward-looking institution, and it has no jurisdiction over events prior to accession to the Rome Statute.

I recently met with representatives from Indonesia, which has the largest Islamic population in the world. It is heartening to see that accession to the Rome Statute is high on their agenda in their National Human Rights Action Plan. Similarly, the embrace of the ICC by Bangladesh, Jordan, Mali, Tunisia and others demonstrates that justice is a universally held value, and that the ICC is recognised as a truly independent institution.

Indeed, the independence and fairness of proceedings is a fundamental principle of the ICC. Evidence and arguments will be presented by the Prosecutor, the defence, victims and in some cases states and other participants, but the ultimate decisions are in the hands of the judges, and judges alone. Those decisions are based on the law and the facts. As President of the ICC, elected by my fellow judges, I assure you of this.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Beliefs and values shape the world. If we believe that violence, inequality and injustice cannot be overcome then surely they will not be.

But we are here today because we share a belief in something greater.

A belief that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. A belief that every person has a right to life and liberty, to peace and security. A belief in equality, complementarity and solidarity. A belief that humanity must persistently stand firm in justice. That as a global family built from many, we share one humanity, a humanity united in honor and in pride, in joy and in grief, in rights and in duties.

That is why we do what we do. That is why we gather here today. These values guide us - they are our goals - and right now, standing here before you, I know one thing:

Audacious goals can be achieved.

Thank you. And thank you all for the work you do.

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