



Peter Lewis

Registrar of the International Criminal Court

Remarks to the 19th Session of the Assembly of States Parties

The Hague

14 December 2020

Your Excellency, President of the Assembly of States Parties,
Your Excellencies, Vice Presidents of the Assembly of the Assembly of States Parties,
Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,
Mr President,
Madam Prosecutor,

It is a great honour and privilege to be addressing the nineteenth session of the Assembly of States Parties.

When we met last year, we discussed the Independent Expert Review and how it could strengthen the Court and prepare us for the future. Little did we know that before the review could report we would face the most extraordinary challenges.

In dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, we needed to ensure the majority of staff could work remotely, undertake a trial, hold appeal hearings, relocate witnesses, deliver reparations, conduct investigations, arrest suspects, and support the work of the Assembly.

In dealing with these challenges, we discovered we were more responsive, more resilient, more flexible and more innovative than we imagined. We also discovered that the cooperation partnerships we had established with States Parties and the United Nations were robust and dependable, even in the most trying circumstances.

In any other year, our response to COVID-19 would be the most significant experience to report to you, but in 2020 we faced a second and more profound challenge. As we came to understand the full impact of the Executive Order, we realised that many fundamental issues we had taken for granted were no longer guaranteed.

The ability of the Court, our members of staff and their families to bank, enjoy a pension and medical insurance, be evacuated in the event of a medical emergency while on mission, have a phone contract and access a computer, and many other things were suddenly at risk.

We came to realise our vulnerability as an institution and as individuals. But as we discovered, we were not alone. We have a secure home and a safe haven in the Netherlands; we have enormous political support and practical support from you, the States Parties, both in your public statements and your quiet diplomacy; the support of civil society was as strong and vocal as ever.

Your support sustained us politically and morally, and we found strength in your commitment and resolve.

2020 has however one more challenge for us. For many years the Committee on Budget and Finance, and the External Auditors, alerted us to our growing arrears and the liquidity problems this would bring.

In 2020 we discovered this liquidity problem was not a technical accounting matter as we faced an unprecedented level of arrears. Simply put, we faced the very real prospect in December of being unable to pay staff salaries, pension contributions and medical insurance, and meet our contractual obligations.

The situation remains critical, and I urge all States Parties to pay their outstanding contributions as soon as possible. Knowing our precarious position, a number of States have come to our rescue and made early payments of their 2021 contributions. Similarly, other States have committed to making their 2021 payments

as soon as they can after the Programme Budget for 2021 has been approved by the Assembly.

I am deeply grateful to these States for their support and generosity in these more difficult times.

The Independent Expert Review has now reported. I want to again thank the Experts for the very detailed and careful consideration they have given to the matter. I look forward in the year ahead to considering its recommendations with you and hopefully agreeing on a change agenda in the years ahead to strengthen the Court.

There is one issue the Experts have raised which I want to focus upon today in view of its importance and the need for immediate action. As the Report makes clear, the practices, policies, mechanisms and culture we now have in place are not producing a safe and secure workplace. This is an issue that we must now address with the same focus, resolve and urgency we have applied to the other challenges we have faced in 2020.

We have now taken an important first step in starting the recruitment of a Focal Point for Gender. In the months ahead, we will also issue new stronger policies in harassment and the disciplinary process.

I want to pledge my personal commitment to work with the leadership of the Court during 2021 to develop a comprehensive initiative to address these issues and, in doing so, I look forward to receiving the help and support of those who have experience of successful tackling these issues.

In concluding my report for 2020, I would like to thank the President of the Court and the Vice Presidents for their leadership of the Court during this extraordinary year and for their guidance and direction.

I would like to thank the Prosecutor and the Deputy Prosecutor. As always, it has been a privilege to work with and, in this year, Fatou's remarkable courage and fortitude have been inspirational.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the President of the Assembly and the Vice Presidents. We have been fortunate that in the time of our greatest challenge we have had such skilled and exceptional champions of the Rome Statute.

We all owe you a great debt of gratitude.

Thank You.