



DEFEND THE ICC: NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS CALL ON STATES TO PROTECT INTERNATIONAL RULE OF LAW AGAINST UNITED STATES ATTACK

JOINT STATEMENT IN DEFENSE OF THE ICC, July 17, 2026

As national human rights organizations working across every region of the globe, we are alarmed by the campaign announced by the United States Department of State to "dismantle" the International Criminal Court (ICC) "brick by brick". This campaign includes an escalation in sanctions "against the ICC and affiliated organizations", visa revocations, and travel bans against ICC personnel and affiliated organizations, and coordinated diplomatic pressure on other states to withdraw from the Rome Statute and cut off support for the Court.

The ICC is an independent and impartial judicial institution created under the Rome Statute in 2002 to investigate and prosecute atrocity crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression. These are the only crimes within its jurisdiction. The ICC may investigate and prosecute a citizen of a non-state party if they commit crimes within its mandate on the territory of an ICC state party. As a court of last resort, it reinforces—rather than replaces—the primary responsibility of states to investigate and prosecute these crimes. It is a cornerstone of the international rule of law system, which — however imperfect — is essential to peace, justice, and accountability. This is not the first time the ICC has faced such pressure, but the scale and explicitness of this campaign represent a dangerous escalation that could reach far beyond any single case or situation: they are an attempt to intimidate an independent judicial body out of existence, and to punish the states, organizations, and individuals who cooperate with it.

If left unanswered, it will set a precedent that will go beyond the ICC itself: that any country with sufficient power can threaten the institutions and individuals responsible for enforcing international law. The ICC was created to ensure accountability for atrocity crimes consistent with the principle that such crimes should not go unpunished and that no one — regardless of rank, nationality, or the power of the state behind them — should be beyond the reach of justice for the gravest crimes known to humanity.

The Court is not perfect. It has faced legitimate criticism over the pace, selectivity, and reach of its investigations, and it has not been able to deliver justice and accountability for all victims of atrocity crimes worldwide. But it has also delivered real convictions, and opened the door to justice for victims who had none. It stands, however imperfectly, as the only permanent judicial institution in the world with a mandate to pursue accountability when domestic systems fail or refuse to act.

We reject the argument that any state can be exempt from scrutiny because of its power or its role in global security arrangements. The strength of the international human rights and justice systems depend precisely on their universality — on the principle that they apply equally, or to no one.

In the face of these attacks, INCLO's member organizations stand jointly by the International Criminal Court, and for the integrity and independence of the international rule of law, which is a prerequisite of universal human rights.

We call on all states — and in particular on States Parties to the Rome Statute — to publicly and concretely defend the Court's independence, to resist pressure to withdraw support or cooperation, and to protect ICC officials, staff, and those who cooperate with its work from retaliation. In that regard, we urge states to:

- Express public support for the ICC and international rule of law, and reject the latest round of attacks announced by the United States.
- Take coordinated diplomatic action in order to defend the ICC in bilateral, regional, and multilateral contexts.
- Adopt measures to protect individuals and organizations targeted by the U.S. sanctions, including by activating the EU Blocking Statute, and by facilitating concrete banking and other financial alternatives for designated individuals and institutions.
- Ensure civil society organizations and individual experts, not only the Court and its officials, are included in any coordinated response to the sanctions.
- Use public and private channels to press the United Nations system, including the Secretary-General and the General Assembly, to stand in defense of the ICC.
- Ensure that new judges elected to the ICC in December 2026 are of the highest moral character to ensure the court's impartiality and uphold the rule of law.

Signed by:

- American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
- Canadian Civil Liberties Association (CCLA)
- Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
- Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC)
- Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU)
- Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL)
- Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC)
- Legal Resources Centre (LRC)