



Ref. No.: 504/2013

Check against delivery

**Al-Haq Oral Statement to the
Twelfth Session of the Assembly of States Parties to the Rome Statute of the
International Criminal Court
General Debate**

Madam President, Members of the Assembly, Distinguished Delegates,

At this moment in time, an impressive total of 122 States are parties to the Rome Statute. The number of States Parties has exceeded earlier expectations and reflects a strong commitment to the Court's founding tenant: that international crimes must not go unpunished.

However, for Al-Haq - a Palestinian human rights organisation that has long born witness to the commission of international crimes against an occupied people - it is clear that the true test of commitment to the Court and the end of impunity is States' uncompromising dedication to achieving universal ratification of the Statute.

Regretfully, the notion of universal ratification of the Rome Statute is being seriously challenged. States are threatening to disengage from the Court and restrict the Prosecutor's ability to prosecute all perpetrators of international crimes, regardless of their identity. Simultaneously, States Parties have blatantly discouraged or intentionally refrained from encouraging and urging Palestine to ratify the Statute. In light of political interests, linked with the on-going Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiations, States and regional bodies have set aside the right of victims to seek and receive remedy and, in so doing, have failed to address a prevalent lack of accountability for crimes.

The willingness of States to waver in their support for universal ratification is particularly dangerous considering their important role in empowering the Court. This is especially true in situations where justice is unattainable at a domestic level and violations are not deterred, such as is the case with Israeli violations perpetrated against the Palestinian population.

Madam President, Members of the Assembly, Distinguished Delegates,

It is clear that the Court and the Assembly of States Parties are at a crossroads. The International Criminal Court was designed precisely to address the crimes that have characterised the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory for decades. Yet States continue to limit the Court's ability to exercise jurisdiction, ultimately weakening it by denying the rights of all victims to seek redress and bolstering allegations that it is biased.

It is imperative that States Parties act in the interest of victims by allowing the Court to fully exercise its mandate. In order to address the alleged selectivity of the Court and thus uphold its credibility, its organs must be strengthened and its independence safeguarded from political influence.



When States Parties decide to limit the cases that the Court can pursue, the Court loses its raison d'être.

Madam President, Members of the Assembly, Distinguished Delegates,

On 27 December, we commemorate five years since the 22-day Israeli offensive on the Gaza Strip that resulted in the death of over 1100 Palestinian civilians. To date, no perpetrator has been held to account for the commission of international crimes during that attack, despite overwhelming documentation and evidence that war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed. Palestinian victims continue to wait for the Court to deliver its promise of ensuring that all perpetrators of serious crimes do not escape justice. Currently, it is States Parties that obstruct victims' access to the Court.

Al-Haq therefore takes this opportunity to remind you of the resonating message included in the Rome Statute's preamble:

“ [that] grave crimes threaten the peace, security and well-being of the world”

Peace is thus not to be detached from justice. Indeed, a durable and fair peace must be premised on respect for international law. As such, we call on the Palestinian leadership to resist external pressure and immediately ratify the Rome Statute. Furthermore, we urge States Parties to actively support Palestine's ratification, as it would constitute a step towards the universal ratification of the Rome Statute.

Thank you.

--- ENDS ---