

UN chief urges universal ratification of International Criminal Court's founding treaty

4 December 2017 – United Nations [Secretary-General](#) António Guterres on Monday stressed the importance of all States ratifying the treaty that established the International Criminal Court as the central institution of the global criminal justice system, known as the Rome Statute.

“To ensure accountability around the world, it is essential to reach [universal ratification](#) of the Rome Statute,” said Mr. Guterres at the opening in New York of the 16th session of the Assembly of States Parties to the treaty, whose adoption in 1998, he said, was “a hopeful, historic moment near the end of a century marked by atrocities and unspeakable inhumanity.”

“I invite all State parties to support any effort to achieve this goal,” he added.

According to ICC, 123 countries are [States Parties](#) to the Statute –33 African States, 19 Asia-Pacific States, 18 Eastern European States, 28 Latin American and Caribbean States, and 25 Western European and other States.

The UN chief noted that nearly 20 years after the signature of its founding instrument, the Court has become a fundamental pillar of the rule of law in the world.

The Court has helped investigate and secure convictions in important cases, such as the use of child soldiers, or of sexual violence as a tactic of war, and also attacks on cultural property, while helping many State Parties reinforce their domestic criminal justice systems, he added.

Mr. Guterres also stressed that “the ICC was created as a court of last resort” and States Parties have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute the serious crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

“The United Nations supports State Parties, at their request, to develop domestic capacities to uphold this obligation,” he said.

He explained that how essential it is to reach universal ratification of the Statute to ensure accountability when States Parties fall short of fulfilling the obligation.

Mr. Guterres welcomed the decisions of South Africa and The Gambia to rescind their notifications of withdrawal, but expressed his regret over Burundi's decision to withdraw from the Statute.

He also said that achieving justice also means assisting victims, noting that the Trust Fund for Victims is now engaged in reparations and is supporting

efforts to address the harm caused by the international crimes covered by the Statute.

At today's meeting, ICC President Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi and Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda presented an annual [report](#) on the institution's activities to the Assembly of States Parties. The session runs through 14 December at UN Headquarters in New York.