



55th Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government of the
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

REMARKS AT OPENING CEREMONY

by

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Excellences, Messieurs les Chefs d'Etat et de Gouvernement,
Monsieur le Président de la CEDEAO,
Mesdames et Messieurs les Ministres,
Excellences,
Mesdames et Messieurs,

C'est un immense honneur pour moi de prendre la parole devant ce très auguste corps, en tant que Président de la Cour pénale internationale. Je remercie le Président de la Conférence des chefs d'état et de gouvernement de la CEDEAO, son Excellence, Monsieur le Président Muhammadu Buhari, pour cette invitation.

Last year, President Buhari gave a most powerful keynote speech in The Hague, at the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute, the ICC's founding treaty. He reminded the world that the ICC remains a vital tool of protection for our common humanity. For that reason, he urged all States that have not yet acceded to the Rome Statute, to do so without delay 'as a matter of deliberate State policy', so that it can become a universal treaty.

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West Africa has long been a strong bastion of support for the ICC and international justice. Senegal was the very first State in the whole world to ratify the Rome Statute.

Today, all but two of the ECOWAS Member States are parties to Rome Statute. I hope to see Guinea Bissau and Togo soon within the fold of the Rome Statute, alongside their fellow West African States – and I hope they heed President Buhari's call and do so without delay –so that we can say that 100% of West Africa has joined the Rome Statute: for the sake of humanity and good governance according to the rule of law.

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

You may ask: *why does the ICC matter to ECOWAS, which is, after all, an economic community, first and foremost?*

I would answer that there are plenty of reasons.

Central among them is this: **there cannot be sustainable socio-economic development, where conflicts, atrocities and fear reign supreme.**

How can we have successful socio-economic development:

- Where farmers cannot go to their farms because of active military operations, or landmines?
- Where entrepreneurs cannot do business, because of raging wars that always result in destruction of economic infrastructures?
- Where children cannot go to school?
- Where precious resources – already scarce in many cases - are wasted on weapons, rather than education, healthcare and economic sustainability?
- Where investors are frightened away by conflict and instability?
- Where people are being killed, injured and traumatised for life?
- Where millions of people are unable to work, because of economic slowdown?
- Where the best brains of the nation are compelled to flee in droves in search of safer and more prosperous countries?
- And, where neighbouring countries are required to struggle to cope with refugee flows from neighbours at war?

Just a few weeks ago, the Libyan Minister of the Economy described in an essay how the conflict in his country had severely damaged the country's

infrastructure and eroded well over 40 billion US dollars from Libya's foreign exchange reserves alone.

That bears out what the IMF and the World Bank have been telling us all along, about the relationship between armed conflict and economic development. According to an important study published in 2011 by the World Bank, *'the average cost of civil war is equivalent to more than 30 years of GDP growth for a medium-size developing economy [and] [t]rade levels after major episodes of violence take 20 years to recover'*¹.

The ICC has a very direct value to socio-economic development; because it aims to deter these armed conflicts and the atrocities that they breed.

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

The fact that we have today a permanent International Criminal Court has changed the way the world looks at atrocities. The world expects accountability. Victims demand justice. The space for impunity for these atrocities is shrinking.

But the Court cannot do it alone. First, the ICC relies on the cooperation of States for all its operations.

Second, the ICC is a court of last resort. In the first place, justice must be done by national institutions.

The ICC is there to step in if justice cannot be achieved at home. But that should not be the default solution. It should be the exception. National courts retain their primacy under the Rome Statute. And for that reason the ICC system strongly encourages the capacity building of domestic courts.

Regional bodies can play an important role, too. And I am glad to report that we have been exploring ways of strengthening the relationship between the ICC and

¹ World Development Report 2011, Overview, http://wdr2011.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/WDR2011_Overview.pdf, pp. 5-6.

the ECOWAS Community Court of Justice. That is an important regional institution that we must all cherish and support.

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Excellencies,

Peace, development, the rule of law and justice are all interlinked: this is the essence of the UN's Sustainable Development Goal 16.

International law has clearly outlawed acts of mass violence that tear communities apart and hold back the proper development of societies for decades.

We must seek to prevent such crimes, hold the perpetrators accountable, and provide redress to victims. The ICC is a giant leap in the international community's resolve to do exactly that.

Beyond the cases heard before the Court's judges, the ICC's Trust Fund for Victims is helping victimised populations in several countries through rehabilitation and assistance projects.

The member states of ECOWAS have played a momentous role in making the International Criminal Court a reality.

But we must not rest on the laurels of that achievement, by thinking that with the creation of the ICC 21 years ago, our work is done. The Court still needs you. West African leaders must continue to do their best to protect that Court. And I urge you to do so. After all, it makes economic sense.

Thank you once more for inviting me to address this distinguished gathering. I wish you a most productive summit.

Encore une fois, je vous remercie.

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