

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH

350 Fifth Avenue, 34th Floor
New York, NY 10118
Tel: 212-216-1806
Fax: 212-736-1300
Email: revilly@hrw.org
Website: <http://www.hrw.org>

Kenneth Roth
Executive Director
Michele Alexander
Development and Outreach Director
Carroll Bogert
Communications Director
Steve Crawshaw
London Director
John T. Green
Operations Director
Barbara Guglielmo
Finance Director
Lotte Leicht
Brussels Office Director
Iain Levine
Program Director
Tom Malinowski
Washington Advocacy Director
Rory Mungoven
Advocacy Director
Maria Pignataro Nielsen
Human Resources Director
Dinah PoKempner
General Counsel
Wilder Tayler
Legal and Policy Director
Joanna Weschler
UN Representative

DIVISION DIRECTORS

Peter Takirambudde
Africa
José Miguel Vivanco
Americas
Brad Adams
Asia
Elizabeth Andersen
Europe and Central Asia
Hanny Megally
Middle East and North Africa
Steve Goose
Arms
Lois Whitman
Children's Rights
LaShawn Jefferson
Women's Rights

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Jonathan Fanton
Chair
Khaled Abou El Fadl
Lisa Anderson
Lloyd Axworthy
David Brown
William Carmichael
Dorothy Cullman
Irene Diamond
Edith Everett
Michael Gellert
Vartan Gregorian
Alice H. Henkin
James F. Hoge, Jr.
Stephen L. Kass
Marina Pinto Kaufman
Wendy Keys
Robert Kissane
Bruce Klatsky
Joanne Leedom-Ackerman
Josh Mailman
Joel Motley
Samuel K. Murumba
Jane Olson
Peter Osnos
Kathleen Peratis
Catherine Powell
Bruce Rabb
Sigrid Rausing
Orville Schell
Sid Sheinberg
Gary G. Sick
Domna Stanton
John J. Studzinski
Shibley Telhami
Maureen White
Maya Wiley

Robert L. Bernstein
Founding Chair



For Immediate Release:

For more information, please contact:

In The Hague, Richard Dicker: +31-6-2293-6558 (mobile)

In New York, Brigitte Suhr: +212-216-1249 (Spanish)

In London, Steve Crawshaw: +44-20-7713-2766

In Brussels, Lotte Leicht: +322-732-2009

First Judges at New Global Court *U.S. Opposition has Limited Effect*

(The Hague, March 11, 2003) – The inauguration of the first eighteen judges at the new International Criminal Court (ICC) will help to thwart U.S. efforts to undermine the court, Human Rights Watch said today.

The judges are the first officers of the court to take up their duties. The court's 89 members, known as States Parties, will select a prosecutor at the end of April.

“The judges’ inauguration makes this court more unstoppable than ever,” said Richard Dicker, director of Human Rights Watch’s international justice program.

The U.S. State Department is increasing pressure on many governments to obtain what are known as “bilateral immunity agreements,” exempting all U.S. citizens from the authority of the court. The fifteen member states of the European Union and the overwhelming majority of other States Parties have refused to sign agreements invalidating their obligations to the court.

More than twenty states have signed immunity agreements with Washington, but only eight of them are parties to the treaty. Many of these agreements have not yet been enacted into law. A number of states that initially signed are now considering whether the agreements unlawfully amend the jurisdiction of the ICC and are hesitant to formally ratify them.

“We urge all States Parties to resist pressure to enter into these illegal contracts,” said Dicker. “The U.S. government should not be allowed to undermine the legitimacy of the court.”

U.S. officials are claiming the American Servicemembers' Protection Act (ASPA) will cut off military assistance to states that have not signed an agreement by July 1, 2003. The same law, however, allows the Bush Administration to waive this prohibition on grounds of "national interest," said Dicker.

"U.S. officials are double dealing," said Dicker. "They are pointing to the part of the ASPA that makes withdrawal of military assistance look threatening and real. But they conveniently ignore the law's provisions empowering the administration to continue giving assistance."

Dicker said the United States was unlikely to want to alienate allies at a time when it was seeking to build international alliances against al-Qaeda: "States should ask: How likely is it that the United States will discontinue military aid at a time when it is looking to buttress allies in the fight against terrorism? None too likely."

In 1998, 120 states approved the treaty to establish the ICC. The treaty came into force on July 1, 2002, after 60 countries had ratified it.

As of March 11, 2003, 89 countries have joined the ICC. Once a prosecutor is selected, the court will be able to investigate and prosecute those individuals accused of crimes against humanity, genocide, and war crimes. The ICC complements existing national judicial systems and will step in only if national courts are unwilling or unable to investigate or prosecute such crimes. The ICC provides a remedy to those victimized by these crimes, very often women and children.

For more information on the International Criminal Court, please visit <http://www.hrw.org/campaigns/icc/>