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PRESS RELEASE

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PHILIPPINE COALITION FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

First Bench to the ICC Inaugurated

Tuesday, March 11, 2003 marked the inauguration of the first eighteen judges to the first-ever permanent International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, the Netherlands. In a high-level ceremony hosted by the Dutch Government, and attended by Queen Beatrix and United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, members of the bench coming from eighteen countries, and of which seven are women, were honored as "the trustees of a new system of international justice", according to William Pace, convenor of the New York-based Coalition for the International Criminal Court, a network of over 1,000 civil society organizations all over the world, working for the establishment of the ICC.

"Having people of excellent integrity and courage to confront the horrors of today, and render justice to some of the most abhorrent crimes of our time, truly makes us proud and strengthens our resolve to work for the full implementation of the International Criminal Court worldwide" said Dr. Aurora Parong, convenor of the Philippine Coalition for the ICC (PCICC).

The Philippines missed the opportunity to nominate and be elected as one of the judges to the Court because it has not ratified the Rome Statute for the ICC. Former president Joseph Estrada signed the Statute in December 28, 2000 but since then it has remained "under review" in the Office of the Presidential Legal Adviser in Malacanang. "The President has kept the instrument

of ratification from the Senate, which is constitutionally mandated to concur with the treaty, for three years now. Unfortunately this results in forfeiture by the Philippines, of further opportunities for employment and appointment to the Court", Dr. Parong stressed. "What is to review, when the former President Estrada has signed and approved it for ratification already. Why can't we bring the instrument to the Senate and debate about the issues there?" she added.

PCICC Co-chairperson and Akbayan Partylist Representative Hon. Loretta Rosales laments, "What is much worse is that we cannot address widespread impunity in our country, but the government refused to join forces with the international community who can. This is our great loss". Department of Foreign Affairs officials reportedly stated that the government fears the withdrawal of US military aid should the country ratify the ICC treaty. The US is the fiercest opponent of the Court because it fears that its soldiers may be arrested for war crimes when it launches its war against Iraq. "The US wages a lonely war against the Court, just as it wages a lonely war against peace. President Bush must realize that the Court can help him bring terrorists to justice, and still have the respect and cooperation of nearly one hundred countries which are States Parties to the ICC", Rosales added.

Elected judges to the Court were: Rene Blattmann of Bolivia, Maureen Harding Clark of Ireland, Fatoumata Dembele of Mali, Adrian Fulford of the United Kingdom, Karl T. Hudson-Phillips of Trinidad and Tobago, Claude Jorda of France, Hans-Peter Kaul of Germany, Philippe Kirsch of Canada, Erkki Kourula of Finland, Akua Kuenyehia of Ghana, Elizabeth Odio Benito of Costa Rica, Gheorghios M. Pikis of Cyprus, Navanethem Pillay of South Africa, Mauro Politi of Italy, Tuiloma Neroni Slade of Samoa, Sang-hyun Song of Republic of Korea, Sylvia H. de Figueiredo of Brazil, and Anita Usacka of Latvia. The International Criminal Court will initiate formal operations after the appointment of the Prosecutor and election of its President and Vice Presidents, approximately toward the end of the year.

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