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Statement on the Conviction by the ICC of Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo of War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The decision today by a Trial Chamber of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to convict Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, a former Vice President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), of war crimes and crimes against humanity, is a significant victory for international justice and a major advancement in the fight against impunity for crimes of sexual violence.

The ICC concluded that Bemba was responsible for a devastating campaign of rape, murder, and pillage against civilians in the Central African Republic in 2002 and 2003, while he was a leader of the *Mouvement pour la Liberation du Congo* (MLC), a rebel group that later became a DRC political party. The ICC verdict recognizes Bemba's command responsibility for the heinous acts committed by his forces and demonstrates that even those at the highest levels cannot expect to evade responsibility for such crimes. As Secretary Kerry said at the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, "responsibility goes straight to the top, even to the military commanders who knew or should have known about sexual violence and failed to act."

The United States applauds the Central African Republic's continued support for accountability for serious crimes, including those that may constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity, not only through cooperation with the ICC but also through steps they have taken to pursue justice through domestic trials. The decision in The Hague today represents a major step toward justice for the victims of this conflict, and the United States is committed to work with governments in the region and international organizations to continue the fight against impunity.

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