



10th Anniversary of the Adoption of the Rome Statute
17 July 2008

Address by Ms. Ruth Wijdenbosch, MP
President of the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Committees, National Assembly of Suriname
Member of the Executive Board of Parliamentarians for Global Action

Protocol salutations:

It is a great honor for me to have received an invitation to address this distinguished audience on behalf of The National Assembly of the Republic of Suriname and Parliamentarians of Global Action (PGA), a network of members of Parliament from 123 countries from all regions of the world.

Since 1998, every July 17th has been a day of celebration for our Organization, but to stand before you, for the first time as a Member of Parliament representing a State Party is a matter of profound joy to me.

I entered politics in 1987 with the high priority to work together with other Members of Parliament to restore the Rule of Law and

democracy in my country after very difficult years of military dictatorship.

In 1992, I was appointed by the President of the Republic of Suriname as convener for Human Right Issues, acting as intermediary between the President and the families of the murdered civilians during the dictatorship.

In that capacity and as a human rights activist I supported every effort to investigate and bring to justice the perpetrators of the crimes against humanity that had occurred during that time.

But, that was not enough.

We are still confronted on almost a daily basis with the most serious crimes threatening peace, security and the well-being of the world.

Suriname and the rest of the world are in great need of an independent, permanent, non political Court of the magnitude of the International Criminal Court to protect individuals and groups if the national judicial systems are not able or willing to do so.

During my ten years of campaigning for Suriname with the assistance of PGA to ratify the Rome Statute we were confronted with legislation and policies that the US adopted in 2002 imposing

“sanctions” against nations joining the Rome Statute without entering into a Bilateral Non Surrender Agreement with the US. We, members of Parliament from the Opposition and the Government, together with our colleagues from Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Kenya, Mali, Niger, South Africa, Tanzania, and Samoa effectively opposed such an agreement on the basis that it would have undermined the goal of fighting impunity and the principle of equality of all before the law upon which the ICC has been built.

I am, therefore, very satisfied that our principled position to protect the integrity of the Rome Statute, among other factors, such as the European Union firm support of the ICC, gave a decisive contribution to the US Congress and Administration’s decision to substantially modify their legislation and policies with respect to the decision of their partners to participate in the ICC system.

Mr. President of the Assembly of States Parties:

Today is a day of celebration for my country since we are the 107th State Party of the Rome Statute. It is a day of celebration for the

world community for having an institution like the International Criminal Court which applies principles that can build, at both domestic or international level, interactions between individuals, institutions and nations based on the Rule of Law.

We are aware that there are many challenges ahead for the ICC. As a parliamentarian I do support straight-talk. We know that some are of the opinion that arrest warrants issued by the Prosecutor might jeopardize or bring harm to the outcome of the peace processes.

But let it be clear that we, as State Parties committed ourselves to an independent International Criminal Court with precise obligations, and we must now give the Prosecutor our full support to do whatever is lawfully needed to bring justice to those victims who put their life in our hands.

The Milosevic and Charles Taylor cases have proven that 'postponing justice' is detrimental to peace and that affirming the notion of individual criminal responsibility is conducive to sustainable peace based on universal human rights, including the right to justice. In our understanding of the applicable law of the Rome Statute, the right timing for an arrest warrant is whenever

the evidence is available to prosecute, to search for the truth and to prepare for a fair trial.

The Statute applies today to the territories of 107 countries and their nationals. In one case Darfur/Sudan, the Statute is binding on a Non-State Party, as a consequence the UN Security Council's decision that the situation in Darfur constitutes a threat to international peace, which allows the Council to utilize its Chapter VII powers to trigger the Court jurisdiction. In another situation, Cote d'Ivoire, thanks to the mobilization of Parliamentarians, a Non-State Party accepted the jurisdiction of the Court for crimes allegedly committed in the 2002-2007 internal armed conflict.

In the meantime, the Court that has already had an important impact in deterring the commission of atrocities by changing the behavior of those who make decisions, as we in PGA had the possibility to know through communications from policy makers. In some countries, civil and military authorities reviewed the rules of engagement of the arm forces to comply with the Rome Statute standards. In many countries, the message that now there is a permanent Court with jurisdiction over the most serious crimes of international concern was well understood and helped mitigate the

scale of violence, as it happened in Kenya in January 2008 and in Cote d'Ivoire in mid-November 2004.

But in order to give to the Court its full potential to meet its mandate, I therefore appeal to the 85 UN members States, including 40 signatories of the Rome Statute, that have not joined it yet to do so, in order to strengthen the universality and effectiveness of the new system of international criminal justice.

Mr. President:

Parliamentarians for Global Action is deeply indebted with one Statesman of my region, the Caribbean, more than with any other of its Members from the very first day in which the establishment of a permanent ICC became a political priority in the agenda of our global network. This Statesman is Mr. Arthur N.R. Robinson of Trinidad and Tobago, the member of the PGA Board in the late 1980ties who created the International Law and Human Rights Programme and the ICC Campaign of our network in 1989.

Mr. Robinson, you inspired all of us with your commitment and determination, and we are here to continue the cause for human

rights and justice that you brought to the inter-parliamentary and inter-governmental dimensions and that is still uniting us, today.

As I said in my presentation on the 6th of June during the *Paramaribo Regional Parliamentary Seminar on the ICC* to my dear colleagues of Parliamentarians for Global Action from the Americas and the Caribbean:

“When on July 17th Suriname will celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the Rome Statute, you will be able to say to your constituents, friends and family: *I have been in the 107th State Party of the Rome Statute!*”

Today, that promise has been fulfilled: Suriname was not in Rome in 1998, but in 2008 the Rome Statute is in Suriname, with full force of law.

Thank you.