



PARLIAMENTARIANS FOR GLOBAL ACTION (PGA) FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE COOK ISLANDS BECOMES THE 108 STATE PARTY TO THE ROME STATUTE OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (ICC)

The Hague, 24 July 2008: Parliamentarians for Global Action (PGA), a network of more than 1300 legislators from 124 Parliaments worldwide, warmly welcomes the accession by the Cook Islands to the Rome Statute of the ICC on 18 July 2008, which brought to 108 the number of States participating in the new system of international criminal justice.

“Being a State Party to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court is important for the Cook Islands with respect to its conflict prevention and development concerns” **Hon. Wilkie Rasmussen, MP**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Cook Islands declared concerning the accession, regarding which he played a leading role. On the basis of the revised Cotonou Agreement of 2005, 104 States of Africa, the Caribbean, the Pacific and the European Union (ACP-EU) committed to ‘seek to take steps towards ratifying and implementing the Rome Statute and related instruments’ [article 11.6]. As Co-Chair of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Mr. Rasmussen witnessed inspiring expressions of support for the fight against impunity by fellow parliamentarians from Cameroon, Cote d’Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Germany, Mali, Portugal, Spain, St. Vincent and Grenadines, Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom during the debate on the ICC that he moderated in Ljubljana, Slovenia on 18 March 2008. *“I am therefore proud that the Cook Islands joined these voices taking an important step to prevent and punish genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes”* **Hon. Rasmussen**, also a PGA member, said.

Mr. Jo Leinen (Germany), Member of the European Parliament, affirmed his *“appreciation for this important step taken by the Cook Islands towards the universality of the Rome Statute, one of the key objectives of the EU Common Position on the ICC.”* This accession follows in the footsteps of the ones of Madagascar and Suriname, and may be coupled with the most recent progress on the ICC dossier in the Parliaments of Chile, the Czech Republic, Moldova and Ukraine. *“All these developments are signalling that there is widespread support for the principle of accountability”*, Mr. Leinen – a long-standing PGA member – added. *“We must now intensify the dialogue with Lawmakers from States that are not yet in the ICC system but are committed to international peace and security and recognise the threat posed by the most serious crimes. These States include the United States, Russia, India and Turkey.”*

The accession of the Cook Islands is a positive development in what has been an intensive month for international justice generally. The request by the ICC Prosecutor for an arrest warrant against Sudan’s President Al-Bashir for alleged acts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur and the surrender to The Hague of Congolese Senator Bemba for alleged crimes against humanity and war crimes in the Central African Republic are concrete results proving that no one is beyond the reach of the Rule of Law, even when the national level of law-enforcement is unable or unwilling to act.

These events, along with the significant success for international justice, as evidenced by the arrest in Serbia of former President Karadzic, have been carefully followed in all regions of the world, including the Asia-Pacific, where PGA Members have been very active on the ICC dossier. Accordingly, the President of the International Council of PGA, **Mr. Ross Robertson, MP** (Deputy Speaker of New Zealand’s Parliament), noted with satisfaction that *“the accession to the Rome Statute by our friends of the Cooks Islands is an important step towards ensuring that the perpetrators of the world’s most egregious crimes are denied a safe haven, thus contributing to the universal rejection of the most serious crimes that threaten the security, peace, stability and development of the world.”* PGA organised a regional workshop on Good Governance and the Rule of Law in Apia, Samoa, in March 2008, and the Speaker of the Cook Islands **Mr. Mapu Taia, MP**, and **Mr. Norman George, MP** (opposition), formed the bipartisan delegation that discussed the ICC with other peers attending that event. *“We hope that this accession will encourage other States to join, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. PGA members will continue working towards this end”*, Mr. Robertson said. [END]