



International
Commission
of Jurists



Strong push back against US sanctions on the International Criminal Court at UN Human Rights Council

At the 59th session of the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN independent human rights experts, States and civil society firmly condemned the United States (US) retaliatory sanctions and threats against International Criminal Court (ICC) officials and other persons supporting the Court.

The ICC, which has a mandate to investigate and prosecute some of the most serious crimes under international law, is the world's first and only permanent international criminal court. It acts as a court of last resort and is an essential component of the international peace and security architecture. Many victims and survivors of the most serious crimes under international law seeking justice depend on the ICC to hold perpetrators to account.

On 6 February 2025, United States President Donald Trump issued a sweeping [executive order](#) authorizing sanctions, including asset freezes and entry bans, against persons designated by the executive order and their immediate family members, as well as providing for the possibility to designate additional persons deemed to have supported ICC efforts to investigate so-called “protected persons,” namely Americans or nationals of US allies without the consent of those allies. The Trump administration has so far designated the [ICC Prosecutor](#), four ICC [judges](#) and the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 in a bid, among other things, to undermine ICC investigations it opposes. Under the executive order, the Secretary of State may also impose entry bans on foreigners supporting the Court without designating them.

The executive order appears designed not only to intimidate Court officials and staff involved in the Court’s critical investigations, but also to have a chilling effect on broader cooperation with the ICC, including by victims themselves and civil society organizations supporting them. Victims, survivors and witnesses, as well as human rights defenders and members of civil society organizations supporting and cooperating with the Court, may fall within the order’s scope. The sanctions risk undercutting cooperation from various quarters, potentially resulting in the Court losing access to information and evidence necessary to investigate, arrest, detain and prosecute perpetrators of atrocities. It could also result in the Court losing access to essential goods and services necessary to carry out its global mandate.

On 16 June 2025, the High Commissioner, when addressing the Human Rights Council (HRC), [recalled](#) that *“the painstaking work of investigating and reporting abuses and violations, supporting human rights institutions, and addressing human rights emergencies are the best tools we have to prevent and mitigate conflict; and to build peace.”* *“I am therefore deeply disturbed by attacks on the international institutions that underpin our rights, including the International Criminal Court. Sanctioning judges and prosecutors at national, regional or international levels, for doing their jobs, is an assault on the rule of law and corrodes justice,”* the High Commissioner added.

This was followed by other expressions of support by States and independent experts in the context of the HRC session. Belgium delivered a [joint statement](#) by a cross-regional group of 59 States Parties to the Rome Statute, the international Treaty that established the ICC, which reaffirmed their commitment to support and respect the work of the ICC and its independence. They also expressed their firm rejection of acts of intimidation, as well as their concerns *“about the latest sanctions against 4 judges of the court, in addition to the sanctions against the prosecutor, or any threats and attacks in general against the Court, its elected officials, other personnel and those cooperating with it.”*

[Liechtenstein](#) echoed Belgium’s joint statement, highlighting that *“undermining criminal justice has a negative impact on the rule of law and fosters instability and uncertainty. Justice cannot only be called for when it’s politically convenient, but needs to be upheld in an independent and impartial manner.”*

These statements were made on the occasion of the HRC annual discussion with the UN Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers, Professor Margaret Satterthwaite. She has [repeatedly warned](#) against such attacks on the ICC and other international courts.

Human Right Watch (HRW), the International Bar Association’s Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) [also took the floor](#) to condemn threats and attacks against the Court, its officials, and those cooperating with it, including the sanctions imposed by the United States: *“Sanctions against its officials (...) are a threat to the protection of human rights and the rule of law around the world. These deplorable acts (...) obstruct the course of justice, jeopardising victims’ access to justice, and their right to remedy and reparation.”* The organizations concluded that *“[n]o one is above the law and that the international community “must stand with victims and those who seek justice” and “must stand united against impunity.”* Sanctions are a tool to be used against those responsible for the most serious crimes, not against those seeking justice on behalf of victims. States should take concrete action to mitigate the effects of any coercive measures aimed at hampering the Court’s work, including the adoption and implementation of national and regional blocking statutes.

The Special Rapporteur, State representatives and civil society made similar statements supporting the Court at a side event organised by the International Commission of Jurists and supported by HRW, IBAHRI and 15 other non-governmental organisations and 11 States.

At a time when the rules-based international order faces growing challenges, expressions of support for the ICC are more vital than ever. This strong push back by UN human rights institutions and experts, States and civil society, sends an important message of support to the Court and to victims and survivors, and their families. These declarations reaffirm the international community's shared commitment to upholding justice, accountability, and the rule of law—core values enshrined in the Rome Statute and foundational to the protection of human rights globally. Justice and accountability are not optional. They are essential pillars of a peaceful, just and sustainable world.

Signatories:

International Commission of Jurists

International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute

Human Rights Watch