



Australian Bahá'í Community

International Criminal Court

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties Inquiry into the 1998 Statute for an International Criminal Court, April 2001

We wish to express our support for Australia's intention to ratify the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The values of justice and redress for victims of crimes are central to all religious traditions and, in common with many religious organisations, the Bahá'í community worldwide has been a long-standing supporter of the International Criminal Court. The Bahá'í International Community, for example, was a founding member of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court while in the United Kingdom, the Bahá'í community sits on the UK Coalition for the International Criminal Court and is the facilitator on the interfaith caucus for the International Criminal Court. This caucus includes representatives of the Church of England, Catholic Bishops Conference, Interfaith Network, Churches Human Rights Forum, World Conference on Religion and Peace (Europe) and other world religions. A copy of a statement released by the interfaith caucus in support of the International Criminal Court is enclosed for the committee's information.

The Australian Bahá'í community applauds the international leadership shown by the Australian Government in securing a workable Statute for the International Criminal Court. Australia has been at the forefront of the development of the Statute for a number of years and, along with 138 other nations, has already signed it. We note that as of 30 March 2001, 29 countries have ratified the Statute and hope that Australia will take its place in history by becoming one of the first 60 nations to ratify the Statute and bring it into force. Early ratification would also ensure that Australia has ongoing influence in the International Criminal Court's administration.

The Australian Bahá'í community also notes that the International Criminal Court is intended to work in a complementary role with domestic judicial systems, operating where such systems are unwilling or genuinely unable to deal with alleged crimes. It will have the authority to investigate, indict and prosecute individuals who commit the three core crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. A fourth core crime of aggression will come under the court's jurisdiction if and when a satisfactory definition can be agreed.

The establishment of the International Criminal Court will be a significant human rights achievement, creating a permanent framework to deal with the most serious crimes that violate human dignity on a massive scale. A permanent court offers the hope of consistency in prosecution of the gravest crimes against humanity. Australia's

ratification of the Statute will be a further mark of this nation's good international citizenship.

To quote UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, the establishment of such a court "puts the world on notice that crimes against humanity which have disfigured and disgraced this (20th) century, will not go unpunished in the next. The best chance humankind has ever had to end the 'culture of impunity' is within our grasp." The Australian Bahá'í community would welcome Australia's ratification of the Statute of the International Criminal Court.