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REDRESS celebrates International Justice Day in solidarity with victims of the world's most serious crimes

17 July 2012, London – Today we celebrate International Justice Day as 14 years ago on this date the Rome Statute was adopted, establishing the International Criminal Court, the world's first permanent international court to prosecute the worst crimes in international law.

The last two decades have witnessed historic achievements in international criminal justice. This year, the Special Court of Sierra Leone convicted former Liberian president Charles Taylor of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity – the first conviction of a former head of state since Nuremberg.

The ICC has also come a long way since it began its work. Earlier this year, the Court issued its first judgement against Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga, sending a strong message to those who recruit and use children during armed conflict that such crimes would not remain unpunished. A decision is also expected by the end of the year on the guilt or innocence of Germain Katanga and Mathieu Ngudjolo, who are accused of planning and ordering an attack, in which more than 200 villagers of Bogoro, DRC, were allegedly massacred. A third trial is ongoing and three more are due to start in the next year or so.

Today, REDRESS wants to commemorate a new era of accountability for the most serious crimes under international law in solidarity with the victims. Without them, the achievements that we celebrate would not have been possible nor would they have much meaning.

Exercising one of the landmark rights that were afforded to victims in the Rome Statute, thousands of victims have applied to participate in cases before the ICC. Victims had significant contributions in the Lubanga trial and their submissions were also crucial in expanding the scope of the investigation in the Cote D'Ivoire situation.

In the Lubanga case, victims helped raise concerns about the limited nature of the charges against him and three victims testified to present evidence against the accused. All these achievements have been limited by the inability of the Court to process the applications from all the victims on time, partly due to insufficient resources. This situation has deprived many other victims from the ability to participate in proceedings before the ICC.

Today, we call on State Parties to provide adequate financial support to the ICC, so it can fulfil its victims' mandate. We also call on the Court to put victims' interest at the heart of its review of the system of victim participation, which is currently ongoing. Victims must have a meaningful exercise of their recognised rights.

With the first trial judgement and sentence delivered, and the ICC opening a new chapter under Prosecutor Bensouda, the ICC is well positioned to take the necessary steps so those most affected by the crimes are involved in the justice process.

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