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International Criminal Court: Justice at Risk

Member States Should Use Annual Meeting to Defend Court



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- ICC member countries should use their annual meeting to defend the court human rights groups, and others cooperating with it, and to enforce judicial findings against members who fail to arrest and surrender those sought by the court.

(The Hague) – Member countries of the [International Criminal Court \(ICC\)](#) should intensify efforts to protect the court and human rights groups campaigning for justice from attack, Human Rights Watch said in a new report. The [20-page report](#) makes detailed recommendations for the annual session of the ICC’s Assembly of States Parties, which will meet in The Hague, Netherlands, from December 1 to 6, 2025.

Throughout 2025, the US administration of President Donald Trump [has imposed sanctions](#) against court officials, a United Nations expert, and Palestinian [civil society](#) organizations in an attack on justice and the international rule of law. Russian arrest warrants issued in 2023 and 2024 [against ICC officials](#) remain pending. In June, the court faced a [second serious cyber-attack](#) with the purpose of espionage.

“Government efforts to undermine the ICC reflect broader attacks on the global rule of law, aiming to disable institutions that seek to hold those responsible for the worst crimes to account,” said [Liz Evenson](#), international justice director at Human Rights Watch. “ICC member countries need to stay firm in their defense of the court so that impartial justice remains a critical part of the rules-based international order.”

The Assembly session takes place amid important ICC achievements over the past year. In March, the Philippines [surrendered](#) former President Rodrigo Duterte to the court to face charges of [crimes against humanity](#) related to the country’s notorious “[war on drugs](#),” which killed tens of thousands of people. In October, ICC judges handed down a [landmark conviction](#) of a former “Janjaweed” militia leader for [crimes against humanity](#) and [war crimes](#) in Darfur, [Sudan](#).

On February 6, President Trump [issued an executive order](#) authorizing asset freezes and entry bans on

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Government sanctions should only be used to target those who are committing serious crimes, not those who document and deliver justice for such crimes, Human Rights Watch said.

If unchecked, US sanctions could severely set back the global fight against impunity. [Individuals](#) and [organizations targeted](#) by the US sanctions have lost funding alongside access to bank accounts and other financial services, and face social media restrictions. Financial institutions often comply with US sanctions to minimize their risk and may preemptively refuse transactions with the ICC, jeopardizing the court's work across the globe.

ICC member countries should seize opportunities during the Assembly session to showcase their strong support for the court and human rights defenders, Human Rights Watch said. ICC states parties have issued [individual and joint statements](#) condemning the US sanctions, and they can build on these at the session to demonstrate that they will not be deterred in their support.

They should also pledge to take further concrete action to limit or, where possible, nullify the effects of sanctions and other coercive measures against the court, its officials, and those cooperating with it, including within [civil society](#). The [European Union](#) has yet to act to use its [blocking statute](#), which could provide a measure of protection from the unlawful effect of US sanctions. At the session, EU member states should call on the regional bloc to activate the statute.

Other issues on the Assembly's agenda include addressing recent failures by ICC member countries—[Italy](#), [Hungary](#), and [Tajikistan](#)—to cooperate in the arrest of individuals wanted by the court who were on their territory. Without arrests, the court cannot provide justice, and it relies on governments to carry out arrests.

This is the first time in 24 years that the Assembly will hold a dedicated plenary session on the issue of non-cooperation. It will consider a [finding](#) from the court's judges that Hungary violated its legal obligations when it failed to arrest Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu on his visit to Budapest in April.

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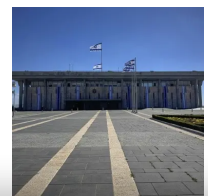
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