

SIDE EVENT REPORT

AFRICA AND THE ICC - LOOKING BACK, MOVING FORWARD

23 November 2015

VENUE: Worldhotel Bel Air, The Hague

14th Session of the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court, co-hosted by Botswana, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom

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On 23 November 2015 in The Hague, the Wayamo Foundation announced the formation of the Africa Group for Justice and Accountability, an independent group of senior African experts on international criminal law and human rights.

The public launch of the Group was witnessed by state representatives, judges, journalists, civil society representatives and African parliamentarians at the side event entitled "Africa and the ICC – Looking Back, Moving Forward" at the 14th Session of the Assembly of States Parties to the International Criminal Court. The side event was co-hosted by the governments

of Botswana, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom.

MODERATOR

Mark Kersten

Research Director, Wayamo Foundation

PANEL MEMBERS

Femi Falana (Nigeria)

Human rights activist and lawyer

Hassan Bubacar Jallow (Gambia)
 Prosecutor at the International
 Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and
 International Residual Mechanism
 for Criminal Tribunals

- **Richard Goldstone (South Africa)**Former Chief Prosecutor of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for
- Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia
 Athaliah Molokomme (Botswana)
 Attorney General of Botswana
- Navi Pillay (South Africa)
 Former UN High Commissioner for
 Human Rights
- Fatiha Serour (Algeria)
 Director of Serour Associates for Inclusion and Equity

OPENING REMARKS

• Bettina Ambach

Director of the Wayamo Foundation

• Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi President of the ICC

WAYAMO FOUNDATION



WELCOMING REMARKS

Addressing a packed room, Wayamo Foundation Director **Bettina Ambach** welcomed the public to the evening's side-event and launch of the Africa Group for Justice and Accountability (AGJA), mentioning the individual Group members (including the three who could not be present but were following the discussions via e-mail).

She then thanked the governments of the co-hosting states -Botswana, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway Sweden Switzerland and the UK - for their generous support in making the event possible, and briefly outlined the Wayamo Foundation's work across Africa over the past 30 years. It had begun by giving media training in international criminal justice issues, and then switched over to capacity building among prosecutors and investigators in the fields of international and transnational crime.



Bettina Ambach introduces the Africa Group for Justice and Accountabilit

purposes of that evening's discussion, the panel members would be speaking in an individual capacity). The intention was that the Group should grow, with the possibility -still under discussion- of forming a support group, she would inform the public just as soon as this was decided

cerns of African citizens and states can be heard." She hoped that this initiative would be welcomed by all parties. The Group was currently in the process of holding strategic meetings, with the Wayamo Foundation in the role of co-ordinator and facilitator.

She thanked the Court for its encouragement, and called on ICC President, Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi to address the audience.

"Who better to deal with these problems than people who have an intimate understanding of their own regions and a huge expertise in issues of justice and human rights?"

Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi President of the International Criminal Court

It was when it had repeatedly come across the "very common perception" that the ICC was possibly "targeting Africa", that the idea was born of forming a group to address these issues and overcome the challenges, through a mix of debates, seminars, outreach and meetings with the different stakeholders. The Group was currently 10- to 11-strong, with the members having been drawn from wide range of different backgrounds (here she noted in passing that, for the

The AGJA's Mission Statement read as follows: The Africa Group for Justice and Accountability shall support efforts to strengthen justice and accountability measures in Africa through domestic and regional capacity building, advice and outreach, and enhancing co-operation between Africa and the International Criminal Court.

The Group was to be independent and provide "an open and interactive forum in which the con-

Silvia Fernández de Gurmendi said that she was really honoured to be there and grateful both to Wayamo for organising the initiative and to the states that had expressed support by sponsoring it. She was "heartened" by the Group's mission statement, which she saw as "extremely important and extremely relevant" for the Court and even beyond the Court, and singled out the mission's two limbs as: (i) supporting efforts for regional domestic-justice initiatives and capacity building, areas of key importance in view of the fact that the ICC was complementary and a court of last resort, and what was more, could not do this work itself; and, (ii) strengthening co-operation between Africa and the ICC.





Former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and Former Chief Prosecutor of the United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the former Yuaoslavia Richard Goldstone.

She agreed that there was a perception that the continent was being targeted by the Court but stressed that this was not the case. The truth was that the Court was interested in Africa and in victims in Africa. Moreover, it was a global institution which, by definition, was detached from any national system or region.

It was extremely important for the Court to understand community concerns, and "Who better to deal with these problems than people who have an intimate understanding of their own regions and a huge expertise in issues of justice and human rights?"

Co-operation was ongoing: a lot was already being done ...but a lot still remained to be done to enhance the relationship between Africa and the Court.

She concluded by thanking the experts for being there and reaffirmed the Court's full support.

PANEL DISCUSSION

On being introduced by BA, the moderator, Mark Kersten, said that he was "thrilled" to be there. It was a remarkable occasion and a remarkable panel. It was evident to him that the audience's interest was not confined to the nature of the relationship between Africa and the ICC or between Africa and international criminal justice, but extended to "some fresh, creative and original ways of examining the relationship", how to strengthen this and overcome some of the issues encountered by the Court along the way. A better panel could not have been found.

After giving the briefest of descriptions of each of the panel members and explaining that a strict limit would have to be imposed on the permitted speaking time, he then posed his first question.

What is the source of your interest in international criminal justice?

Navi Pillay – When it came to interest in ending impunity, countries across Africa were as like-minded as all the other countries in the world that had ratified the Rome Statute. Her personal experience had been a wonderful one, having been elected (with Nelson Mandela's backing) as the only woman to serve on the Rwanda Tribunal.

The tribunal had shown African's commitment to international criminal justice and had been a success story, thanks to the excellent co-operation received from other African countries in terms of arrests, the handing over of suspects, protection of witnesses, etc.

Not only had it been the first international tribunal based in Africa, but it had also given the world the first decision on genocide and the first decision on rape as constituting genocide and crimes against humanity, jurisprudence which was being actively followed in many countries and universities



around the globe.

Looking back, she could see that "Africa had consistently supported the principle of ending impunity" and had truly appreciated the fact that dictators who had escaped justice and found safe refuge abroad, were finally being brought to trial. In consonance with President Fernández de Gurmendi, she too saw the relationship between the ICC and the various countries as being more with victims in need of justice and civil society than with governments.

While she quite understood some of the current tensions, her experience as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights had taught her that students all over Africa wanted justice for atrocities committed but did not want double standards: indeed, it was precisely selectivity and double standards that was lending various governments popular support for their anti-ICC stance. That was why it was so important to have a panel that would focus on information, education and capacity building, a panel that would work closely with civil society organisations and NGOs.

Richard Goldstone - He had been reflecting on the reasons for Africa's initial enthusiasm for and subsequent "pull back" from the ICC. He had had first-hand knowledge of Nelson Mandela's enthusiasm for international justice, as he had been summarily dispatched to The Hague as a most "inappropriate" Chief Prosecutor of the Yugoslavia Tribunal. That precise point in time had coincided with international justice being welcomed as part of a post-colonial syndrome in Africa (indeed Africa was going to take generations to overcome the harm inflicted by colonialism).

International justice had been perceived as affording the weak



nations protection from being preyed upon by their more powerful neighbours. Despite its initial stance, Rwanda had not wanted the tribunal as constituted but the movement across Africa had been sufficiently strong to overcome its objections. He had been tasked by the Security Council to set up the Office of the Prosecutor in Kigali, the capital of the very country that had voted against the tribunal. Even so, the support he received from the local authorities had been remarkable in the circumstances.

He also echoed Navi Pillay's remarks about the "deplorable" double standards in international criminal justice: obviously not all war crimes were committed in Africa and yet it was only African countries, "for whatever reason" that had been made subject to the jurisdiction of the ICC.

The Africa Group should be involved in helping the victims of such double standards to fight them and improve the system. The last thing African nations ought to do was to surrender and "give up": it was "the

double standards that should be fought, and not the institution that had been set up exactly to avoid the effect of those double standards."

Athaliah Molokomme - The source of her interest in international criminal justice was her strong belief as an African woman lawver that all efforts had to be directed at "fighting impunity and injustice at all levels", whether national, regional or international. She felt that all those present, public and panellists alike, "shared the conviction that human rights were universal and inalienable", that no-one should be denied his/her rights or be victimised, and that the international system had to rise above any differences "to fight the scourge of impunity."

The Rome Statute of the ICC provided a framework, albeit not perfect, for fighting impunity. As the ICC President had pointed out, there had been an expectation that states would be primarily responsible for putting in place the structures to fight impunity and complement the work of the ICC, which exp-



lained their enthusiasm.

She felt that, as a continent, Africa had a history which justified this enthusiasm, and that, despite all the challenges and double standards, it remained committed to the fight, with her own country, Botswana, being able to claim modest achievements in this regard. One lesson she intended to share was that investment in democracy and the rule of law at the domestic level was critical to the success of anv regional or international fight against impunity, indeed, it was at the domestic level that the Group's efforts should be focused.

Furthermore, the "commitment of leadership was a critical success factor", especially when it came to leading by example. A group such as the AGJA "should be able to complement the efforts of others who were already making a contribution". Indeed, she hoped that other actors, both state and civil society, would - like the Court welcome the initiative and, as an "eternal optimist", felt that there was a great potential for Africa to continue playing a leading role in fighting impunity and strengthening justice and accountability.

She was very confident that, with the collective experience and commitment of the members, they would collaborate with all parties to improve the interaction between Africa and the ICC, and would go far in this respect.

Femi Falana – As a victim of impunity — having been detained a total of fifteen times between 1985 and 1998 by a series of military dictatorships — he, and others like him, had both embraced and popularised the Court. Graphically illustrating his review of Nigeria's recent past with a series of telling political anecdotes, he explained that the threat of being "dragged to The



Hague" acted like "a whip".

Indeed, in the case of Nigeria, the Court was very popular. Originally, support for the Court had been due to the fact that Africa was then emerging from apartheid, military dictatorships and one-man rule, and it had been "fashionable" to embrace the Court.

Moreover, due to the impossibility of accessing justice domestically, "people were already going outside their countries", and international criminal justice had already become "part of the Nigerian system", inasmuch as many of the leading cases had been brought in foreign courts. Accordingly, any suggestion to withdraw from the ICC would be met by fierce opposition in Nigeria.

Apart from Senegal, all ECOWAS states had been under one kind of military dictatorship or another, with complaints being filed before the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the ECOWAS court in Abuja. It was therefore difficult for West African sub-regions not to embrace the ICC.

However, the argument heard from leaders "in the spirit of African solidarity" was not that they were opposed to fighting impunity but rather that the ICC was discriminating against Africa. Human rights activists like himself had, however, defended the Court by pointing out that most of the cases which had gone to the ICC had in fact been initiated by African governments themselves, and so any protests about victimisation were "rather hypocritical".

When it came to dealing with major world players, on the other hand, it was essential to make it impossible for the people concerned to move around freely. Furthermore, one had to continue to demand justice for the victims of human rights violations and fight impunity on the African continent (as in the case of Habré), and insist on complementarity under various guises (e.g., the African Court of Justice and Human Rights and the ECOWAS Court).

National and regional courts had to be encouraged to take on cases of grave international crimes,



and this would then serve to counter anti-ICC sentiment.

Fatiha Serour – She was neither a lawyer nor a judge but rather a human rights activist who had worked in 45 countries and seen the "worst of the worst". Her interest was both:

(i) personal, dating from her youth when she had witnessed conflict, iniustice, violence and impunity, and deeply believed that these had to be addressed if peace, stabilitv and social cohesion were to be created; and,

(ii) professional, having seen the worst cases of genocide and sexual violence and heard "the cry of the victims".

On the subject of double standards, she wanted to add another level; on one hand, there was the double standard which involved the perception that it was only African countries that were being targeted, and on the other, there was the double standard at work when the international community debabut "dichotomy" had set in when it came to facing the victims or even indicting their colleagues: the AGJA was thus going to be important in terms of trying to bridge this dichotomy between policy and practice, or, as some would say, "walk the talk".

There was a lot they could do when it came to advocacy, training and advice, and they needed to be honest with themselves about the real reasons why they were there, namely, to undertake a renewed commitment to the idea that, "Fighting for justice is a basic thing that any decent person should do and should support".

Hassan Bubacar Jallow - Jokingly protesting that, after hearing all his colleagues there was nothing useful he could add, he said that Africa had had a long and abiding commitment to and had been at the forefront of the struggle for justice, accountability and human rights, in that "much of the content of the modern law of human rights

even before the whole issue of the ICC had arisen, there had been an African-based proposal for a World Crimes Court.

However, many had thought it premature, and so they had confined their efforts to creating the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, which was itself unique in that it was vested with the task of overseeing the implementation (enforcement) of, not only political and civil rights, but also social, economic and cultural rights. It was therefore no mystery that Africa was the largest grouping under the Statute and the only region that had thus far made any self-referrals, a genuine sign of good faith.

That was not to say there were no challenges in the justice and accountability process or issues in the relationship between the various states and the ICC. These issues had to be addressed to ensure that Africa was equipped to deal with its own problems of justice and accountability at a domestic and regional level, while remaining "engaged to the global system".

In this connection, he expressed the personal opinion that the Rwanda Tribunal had gathered invaluable experience for addressing the current challenges entailed in dealing with the international level

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"Much of the content of the modern law of human rights

ted resolutions on human rights in the Security Council and then "very conveniently turned a blind eye" when other more important issues such as security were at stake.

Then there was the issue of dichotomy: when the ICC had been set up, African leaders had wanted a mechanism that would sort out all the post-colonial baggage (injustice, plundering of resources, etc.) owes its origin to the struggles of the African peoples and the peoples in the third world for liberation, independence and emancipation".

Beyond that, many of the third-generation rights (such as the right to peace, environment, health, etc.) had originated on the African continent and were enshrined in the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. As far back as 1979,

Moderator Mark Kersten said that he had been struck by the similarity of the responses as regards the call for continuity and change, in the sense of: continuing the existing dedication to the principle of ending impunity and the calibre of leadership the panel members had already shown; and the need for change when it came to a number of ongoing problems, such as the issues of double standards, complementarity, accountability and

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justice.

Reversing the speaking order of his panel members, he now posed his second question to them:

What do you think our Group can do to improve the Africa-ICC relationship and strengthen justice and accountability measures on the continent?

Hassan Bubacar Jallow – The experience of the ICTR, the Rwanda Tribunal, and the residual mechanism could be useful, not only in Africa but globally, because they had been forced to deal with the need for co-operation with states, challenges in arresting fugitives, etc., and had been largely successful.

As examples of this, he cited the fact: that of a total of 93 indictments. only 9 arrests were still outstanding; and that referral to national jurisdictions had been complicated by the lack of local capacity ("you will hardly find a ready-made jurisdiction"), which had called, not only for positive measures such as training and capacity building, but also for law reform to enable prosecutors to deal with these international crimes, including some of the most difficult types of such crimes, such as sexual- and gender-based violence, rape, etc.

The Tribunal's record might not have been totally exemplary in terms of convictions, yet there were lessons to be learnt. A network of national prosecutors had been developed to ascertain what challenges were being faced and how the Tribunal's experience could be of help.

The Africa Group should be able to draw on this experience and that of other similar tribunals in order to help African jurisdictions at a local level to discharge their primary res-



Director of Serour Associates for Inclusion and Equity Fatiha Serour.

ponsibility of investigating and prosecuting international crimes, since it was plainly impossible to deal with everything at an international level.

Indeed the bulk of cases had to be dealt with locally and it was thus local jurisdictions that had to be empowered.

Fatina Serour – It was extremely important to pinpoint the "best winning opportunities", e.g., investing in the domestic national level to build capacity, and encourage greater "ownership of the process".

It was therefore necessary to identify where capacity needed to be built and investment made. Maintaining dialogue was of the essence: as her time in Somali had shown, initial resistance to ideas often changed to a frank confession of a lack of knowledge and ability, which in turn translated as a need for very simple skills, institutional development and resources.

It was here that the Africa Group was hopefully going to be able to contribute, both alone and in co-operation/collaboration with others.

Turning to the problem of how to broker or facilitate more dialogue between the 33 signatory states and the ICC, she mentioned the need to address the issue — or the perception — of the double standard, and so contribute to "demystifying" the impression that the Court was only targeting Africa.

Any success scored could then be used to encourage other countries to join the ICC. It amounted to widening knowledge of lessons learnt and building respect between the two sides.

Femi Falana – After suggesting that Group members who had acquired experience in the courts should be encouraged to write books on the subject, he went on to list some of the main problems to be addressed by the Court.

These were the slow pace of trials and investigations, the Court's perceived distance from the victims of impunity who were so-





Audience members at the public launch of the Africa Group at the side event entitled "Africa and the ICC – Looking Back, Moving Forward."

metimes thousands of miles away, the perception of the bias in its prosecutorial strategy and selection of cases, and the need to improve the implementation of complementarity. Additionally, he felt that the lessons could be drawn from the example of the Ivory Coast (i.e., invocation of Article 12 (3) by countries in transition from armed conflict).

Athaliah Molokomme – While saying that she did not have much more to add, she nonetheless felt that the Group's collective experience could go a long way towards helping to solve problems. Indeed the members of the Group could enrich themselves by learning from one another and reflecting on how best to "operationalise" their knowledge, for the purpose of helping others and building bridges between parties that often held polarised views.

Richard Goldstone – Ultimately, it was a matter of good leadership,

both at a national level and in civil society. Without this, no society could hope to advance in stopping impunity or providing food and education for its people.

It was therefore vital for the Group to be involved in capacity building, which was a sine qua non of complementarity in domestic systems.

He said that the Group could also engage with civil society, and illustrated this point by reminding the audience that, without a "huge push" from civil society, there would never have been international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia or for Rwanda, or "the revolution in the prosecution of gender-related crimes" which came about as a result of the horror-filled reaction to systematic mass rape and other forms of gender-related crimes.

Navi Pillay – "A great deal of myths, misconceptions and false propaganda" had been successfully generated by people who fea-

red accountability.

Firstly, it had to be stressed that the ICC was in the business of prosecuting individuals rather than countries. Here, she urged the ICC President to look at the Court's own website because she had been given to understand that it was adding to the mistaken perception that countries were on trial and so feeding the accusation that Africa was being targeted.

The facts had to be set straight, which was something she had personally attempted to do in many fora, on radio and on television. A sustained effort had to be made to counter such propaganda.

Secondly, there was the matter of "all those who escaped justice". The objections and questions came from the young generation, who blamed the West and the developed countries for things such as human rights violations, economic crimes and the arms trade, and



pointed to the lack of accountability and transparency.

In this same vein, she mentioned the widespread concern about extra-judicial executions and assassination contracts. As an instance of the sort of thing that happened, she mentioned a case where Germany had not complied with an extradition order from its own Supreme Court, and indeed had not even gone to the trouble of formally requesting the extradition of a suspected torturer because it knew full well that the USA would not comply.

In South Africa too there was generalised concern among NGOs about the Government's non-compliance with the High Court order to detain Omar al-Bashir. Countries were not complying with the rule of law: citing rendition, Guantánamo, and indiscriminate drone-based killings, she said that international law had not yet caught up with regulating such aspects.

Her hope was that the Africa Group could play a role, by bringing in some balance in the way "we look at human rights violations and accountability on the part of every government."

AUDIENCE QUESTIONS:

Mark Kersten now opened the discussion to the floor, explained that as time was short he could only take a few questions, and proceeded to recognise the following four members of the audience:

Kithure Kindiki, Kenyan Senate Majority Leader

How did one isolate the issue of double standards? How did one isolate the institution from its practices? He supported the view that one should not fight the institution but that one should fight doub-



Kenya's Senate Majority Leader Kithure Kindiki addresses the panel.

le standards: but how did one isolate the one from the other, when the Court was "actively pursuing double standards".

Secondly, the argument that the cases were referred by African states was "hypocritical, simplistic and weak", since it implied that double standards and impunity should be excused merely because it was a referral. If it wanted to be seen as providing an avenue of substantive justice, the Court had to provide procedural justice.

International Law lecturer, University of Nairobi

Would it not be easier to change the system instead of finding a group that answered African questions?, i.e., he saw it as being a group that was meant "to hold Africans' hand while the ICC spanks them". He felt that the Group came to address injustice with a system that was colonially conscious.

James Goldston, Open Society Justice Initiative

He wished to thank Wayamo and the Panel for a very important initiative at a very "timely moment" because the Court was beginning to move outside Africa, e.g., Palestine, Ukraine, Georgia and Afghanistan. While he recognised the importance of the issue for Africa and the ICC, he would encourage the Group to consider how its arguments and recommendations could apply solutions to countries outside Africa since there was already evidence of "resistance to the Court and resistance to the struggle for impunity".

Angela Mudukuti, Southern Africa Litigation Centre (SALC)

She represented the organisation that had tried to arrest President Omar al-Bashir in South Africa. One of the criticisms levelled against SALC was that its stance had been very "unAfrican". Directing her question at Femi Falana, she asked how such anti-African rhetoric could be countered,

ASSORTED RESPONSES

Navi Pillay – On the matter of double standards, the best way to

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address these was to make sure that one did not have double standards and to keep faithful to the rule of law. One, she told the questioner from Kenya, should first put one's own house in order!

Richard Goldstone – Politics was at the centre and at the edges of international criminal justice; if one did not understand the politics of international justice, one did not understand international justice. As someone had once said, a problem without a solution was not a problem but a fact; and politics in international justice was both a problem and a fact ...and one had to deal with that.

What was upsetting to him as an African was to see some of his leaders, both at home and abroad, giving sanctuary to an alleged war criminal. He was proud to that the last questioner, Angela Mudukuti, had been responsible for challenging the South African government's stance in the courts. Leadership, and young leadership in particular, was vital in the fight against double standards.

Lastly, he agreed with James Goldston that it was also important to encourage other regions to set up similar expert panels and work together.

Femi Falana – There was a need to ensure that national legal systems and regional mechanisms functioned in the fight against impunity, if that were the case and there was a serious commitment to the rule of law, there might be no need to refer any case to the ICC (indeed, the current tensions with Kenya and Sudan might well have been avoided).

Africa could in no way condone impunity or "forget about international criminal justice" on the pretext that the USA. Russia and China were



Prosecutor Hassan Bubacar Jallow addresses the audience.

not signatories to the Rome Statute. That would amount to doing injustice to all victims of impunity, in Africa and around the world.

Athaliah Molokomme - The rule of law, democracy and human rights were very complicated and difficult issues. She, for instance, did not necessarily like it but nonetheless had to accept the fact that the SALC sued "her" in her own country, precisely because Botswana was committed to the rule of law. On the subject of name calling, her experience in the struggle for women's rights and gender equality had taught her that "labelling and stigmatisation" were inevitable, and that if her questioner, as an African woman and African lawyer, believed in progress, she should "keep doing it, keep up the good work!"

Fatiha Serour – She wished to enforce the point about taking pride in being African, taking pride in upholding the law, and taking pride in having a criminal justice system that was just and fair. Africans thus had to address their own double standards.

Hassan Bubacar Jallow – He hoped that the Group's work would be of relevance to other regions, which would follow suit and start addressing their own issues of accountability. It had to be understood that judicial institutions – laws and courts – were by no means perfect. Accordingly, one had to keep one's eye on the ultimate goal of "justice and accountability" because that ensured peace and progress.

One did not "throw out the whole legal system" because one thought it was imperfect: instead, one tried to change it while remaining under the law itself. In other words, "We must all remain servants under the law so that we can be free."

Mark Kersten asked the audience to join him in thanking the panel and said that he felt that it was very much the beginning and that there would very much more to look forward to. This concluded the discussion, with all those present being invited to join the panel for cocktails in the lobby.