

The 2nd International Legal Conference

“The Crimes of the Israeli Occupation in Palestine: Between Legal Responsibility and the Pursuit of Justice”

11-12 July 2026 | Clarion Hotel Mahmutbey, Istanbul – Türkiye

INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVE TO DEFEND THE IN- TERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT AND ITS JUDGES TARGETED BY UNILATERAL SANCTIONS

12 July 2026

1. Rationale for the Initiative.

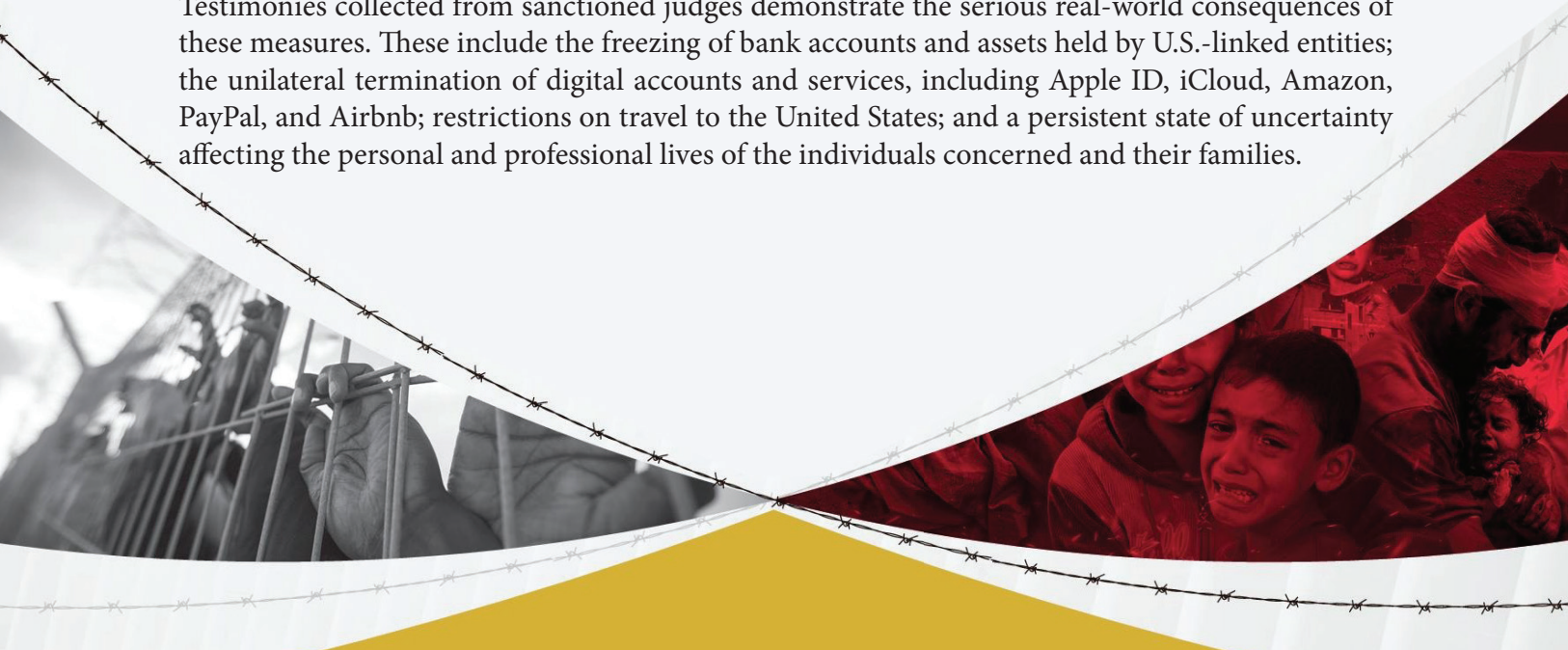
On 6 February 2025, the President of the United States signed an Executive Order imposing sanctions on the International Criminal Court (the “Court”), its personnel, and any person providing support to its activities. The Executive Order draws, in particular, upon the American Service-Members’ Protection Act of 2002, legislation enacted by the U.S. Congress to shield United States nationals from the jurisdiction of the Court.

Since then, the sanctions have been expanded in successive rounds. As of 19 December 2025, eleven judges of the Court were subject to asset freezes and entry bans barring them from the territory of the United States, following the designation of two additional judges on that date.

The Office of the Prosecutor of the Court has likewise been subjected to U.S. sanctions and pressure. In 2020, the U.S. administration imposed sanctions on the Court’s former Prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, including the freezing of her assets within the United States, restrictions on financial and commercial dealings with U.S. individuals and entities, visa restrictions, and a ban on entry into the United States.

Pressure was also exerted against Prosecutor Karim Khan, who was subjected to similar sanctions and publicly stated that he and his family had received threats in connection with his applications for arrest warrants against the Israeli Prime Minister and his position during the genocidal war on Gaza.

Testimonies collected from sanctioned judges demonstrate the serious real-world consequences of these measures. These include the freezing of bank accounts and assets held by U.S.-linked entities; the unilateral termination of digital accounts and services, including Apple ID, iCloud, Amazon, PayPal, and Airbnb; restrictions on travel to the United States; and a persistent state of uncertainty affecting the personal and professional lives of the individuals concerned and their families.



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These sanctions have prompted widespread condemnation from the international community. France denounced “all forms of threats and coercive measures directed against the Court, its personnel, and civil society organisations supporting it,” recalling that such measures “constitute an attack on the Court and on all 125 States Parties to the Rome Statute” and that they are “incompatible with the principle of judicial independence.”

The Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), comprising more than 150 civil society organisations, also condemned the Executive Order and called upon States Parties to “defend the Court, its personnel, and those cooperating with it.” Human Rights Watch, for its part, called upon the European Union to activate its Blocking Statute without delay in order to neutralise the extraterritorial effects of U.S. sanctions.

Against this unprecedented backdrop of efforts to undermine international criminal justice, this international initiative seeks to provide a global legal platform for the defence of international criminal justice and the judges of the Court.

2. Legal Foundations of the Initiative

The proposed action is grounded in a clearly established international legal framework. Article 48 of the Rome Statute guarantees the privileges and immunities enjoyed by judges, the Prosecutor, and Court officials in the exercise of their functions, while Article 70 addresses offences against the administration of justice, including certain forms of interference with Court officials in connection with the performance of their duties.

Unilateral sanctions targeting judges for acts undertaken in the exercise of their judicial mandate directly conflict with these principles and with the broader principle of judicial independence recognised under international law.

The legal initiative centres on three principal considerations:

Interference with judicial independence: Punishing a judge for exercising judicial functions constitutes interference with the functioning of an international judicial institution recognised by 125 States Parties and undermines the fundamental principle of judicial independence at the international level.



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The extraterritorial character of U.S. sanctions: These measures affect individuals and institutions that are not U.S. nationals and that may have no territorial or nationality-based connection with the United States. This raises serious questions regarding their legality under public international law and justifies recourse to blocking mechanisms, such as the European Union’s Blocking Statute, whose activation has been advocated by the Court itself, the European Parliament, and several EU Member States.

The collective responsibility of States Parties: As the collective guardians of the Rome Statute system, the 125 States Parties bear a shared responsibility and, in the words of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, a “critical obligation” to defend the Court, its personnel, and those cooperating with it.

3. Objectives of the Initiative

The initiative seeks to achieve four complementary objectives:

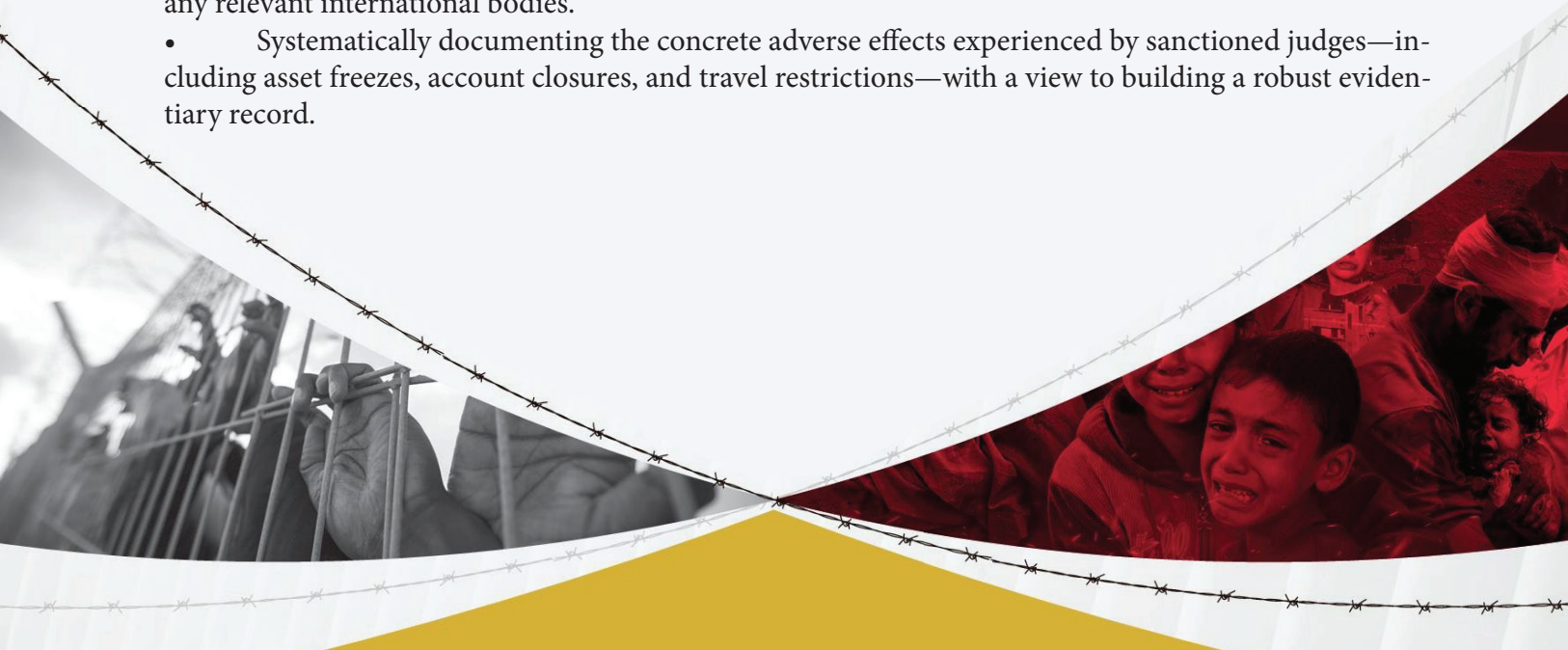
1. To defend the International Criminal Court, its judges, and its personnel.
2. To mobilise international networks and relations in support of judges subjected to sanctions.
3. To activate or strengthen existing protective mechanisms, including the European Union Blocking Statute and comparable national mechanisms.
4. To adopt concrete and practical measures to protect judges subjected to sanctions.

The initiative envisages the establishment of a Legal Support Fund to enable the engagement of lawyers and specialised organisations to defend the interests of the Court and its judges before the competent U.S. courts, as well as before any international or regional body that may examine the legality of such sanctions.

4. Areas of Action and Implementation Plan

The initiative proposes the following areas of action:

- Establishing a network of lawyers and law firms specialising in international criminal law and U.S. law—including sanctions law, constitutional law, and administrative law—willing to provide representation either pro bono or at reduced cost.
- Preparing legal briefs and amicus curiae submissions for filing before competent U.S. courts and any relevant international bodies.
- Systematically documenting the concrete adverse effects experienced by sanctioned judges—including asset freezes, account closures, and travel restrictions—with a view to building a robust evidentiary record.





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- Examining available avenues for legal challenge before U.S. courts, as well as consular and diplomatic protection mechanisms available through third States.
- Coordinating action with existing networks, including the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, national and international bar associations, and judicial associations.

5. Conclusion

In the face of an unprecedented assault on the independence of international criminal justice, this initiative proposes an organised response combining diplomatic mobilisation with legal action. Its success depends on broad international support, transparent governance, and close coordination with stakeholders already committed to this cause—including States Parties to the Rome Statute, the Coalition for the International Criminal Court, bar associations, and human rights organisations—with the aim of building a unified and sustainable front in defence of the International Criminal Court and its judges.

The End

