

UN experts demand bold action from ICC Member States, denounce new sanctions against president of the court and personnel

Official Letters and Statements - (Press Release)

GENEVA (28 August 2026) - The United States must immediately withdraw sanctions against International Criminal Court (ICC) personnel, UN experts said today, after new designations targeting the President of the Court and a staff member were issued on 18 August.

"All ICC Members and other States committed to accountability must take bold and urgent action to protect the Court against unlawful interference in the administration of international justice," the experts said. "States must act immediately to mitigate the impact of these measures against judges, prosecutors and staff of the ICC."

On 18 August, the President of the ICC, Judge Tomoko Akane of Japan, and ICC Senior Trial Lawyer, Abdoulaye Seye of Senegal, were designated for sanctions by the US Government. With this latest round of designations, 11 current or former ICC judges and personnel have been sanctioned under US Executive Order 14203.

"The imperative to act is all the more urgent because the US Government has pledged to 'systematically dismantle the ICC' on the erroneous claim that it threatens US sovereignty," the experts said. "If that policy succeeds, it will roll back international criminal accountability gains against impunity forged in the fires of Nuremberg and Tokyo, and the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda; and extinguish hope for victims of the gravest atrocity crimes across the world."

"The ICC and its personnel cannot be expected to weather this powerful storm alone," the experts said. "This court took decades to build - the work of States, jurists, human rights advocates and countless others worldwide invested in ending impunity for the gravest international crimes. The institution, and the essential work it performs for humanity, now faces unprecedented attack."

Noting with concern that the sanctions also violate the human rights of those targeted, the experts reiterated their call to the European Union to activate the EU Blocking Statute, which would prevent the bloc's operators - including banks and service providers - from complying with third country sanctions that violate international law.

They also urged Member States to ratify and use the Agreement on Privileges and Immunities of the ICC to mitigate the effects of the sanctions, and deepen their operational engagement with the Court.

"It is imperative for States to ensure that businesses within their jurisdiction do not over-comply with these unilateral sanctions. Member States should confer about actions they can take together to protect the Court, its personnel, and those who engage with the Court."

The experts said that these actions were especially essential following the US decision to target the ICC's top judge.

"Sanctions targeting ICC justice personnel cannot be allowed to stand," the experts said. "Member States of the ICC must act with conviction, courage and haste to protect the court and facilitate its work."

"For victims of atrocities and their advocates, who rely on judges, prosecutors and Court lawyers for justice, accountability and reparation, these sanctions send a chilling message," they said.

Noting with concern that the sanctions, including their extraterritorial effects, may directly violate the human rights of those under sanctions, the experts expressed alarm that NGOs have also been targeted by the sanctions. Victims themselves may also fear punishment under the US sanctions regime, because the legal system allows for civil and criminal penalties against those transacting with sanctioned individuals in some circumstances.

"We also reiterate our condemnation of the US sanctions imposed on our colleague, Francesca Albanese, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967, purely in response to her work as a UN Special Procedures expert, appointed by the UN Human Rights Council."

The experts also expressed deep regret that six ICC Member States have recently indicated their intention to withdraw from the ICC, and urged them to reconsider.

The experts are in contact with the Government of the United States of America about their concerns.

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