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INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT 'INSTRUMENT OF JUSTICE, NOT EXPEDIENCY',
SECRETARY-GENERAL SAYS TO BEIJING LAW SYMPOSIUM

Following is the message of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the Symposium on the Comparative Study of International Criminal Law and the Rome Statute in Beijing, 15 October:

With the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on 17 July 1998, the international community took a major step towards ending the culture of impunity that has too often prevailed in our world.

The Rome Statute establishes a permanent international criminal justice system for the prosecution of individuals who perpetrate heinous crimes of concern to the international community as a whole. It is a unique instrument, which reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person.

Just five years later, the International Criminal Court is a reality. Governments and civil society groups have worked tirelessly to put in place the agreements and structures needed to ensure the proper functioning of the Court. I am particularly heartened by the importance that the States Parties, and the Court itself, attached to full geographic representation among the 18 judges elected and sworn in earlier this year, and to electing the Prosecutor, Mr. Luis Moreno Ocampo of Argentina, by consensus.

These first steps in the life of the Court must now be built upon to establish a viable, responsible and universally supported institution. The continued promotion of awareness of the Statute and the Court is vital to that endeavour, since the provisions of the Statute are complex, its aims are often misunderstood, its scope is frequently misrepresented, and its impact on domestic law is difficult for many to comprehend. Your symposium is an opportunity to share knowledge and experience on these and other issues.

The Court is an instrument of justice, not expediency. It can and must serve as a bulwark against evil. At the same time, it is for the Court, now on the verge of beginning its work, to act responsibly and deliberately. In doing so, I believe it will assuage the concerns that linger in parts of the international community, thus opening the door to universal participation.

The United Nations is proud to have been associated with the process of establishing the International Criminal Court, and will continue to support the Court and its work.

On that note, I wish you all the best for a successful symposium.

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