

Support for ICC investigations key to preventing more violence in Kenya: Wangari Maathai

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Kenya could easily descend into violence unless we support the work of the International Criminal Court. This warning came from Nobel Peace Laureate Professor Wangari Maathai, who made her comments during a press conference in Nairobi. Earlier this month, the ICC's chief prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, officially opened an investigation into Kenya's post-election violence.

"Those involved in the violence are still at large," said Maathai. "It is almost impossible to bring about peace, justice and reconciliation without stopping impunity and punish the perpetrators of this horrendous episode in our history. The ICC investigation brings hope to victims of the violence—and can serve as an example of the justice system we need to build here in Kenya."

Maathai will be bringing this message to governments around the world at the first Review Conference of the International Criminal Court, being held from May 31 to June 11 in Uganda. So far, 111 countries have ratified the Rome Statute that created the ICC—including 30 in Africa. Maathai noted that the ICC was born in the aftermath of some of the most horrific violent conflicts in the 1990s in Africa, including Rwanda and Liberia.

"The ICC represents the desires and values of Africans who value the rule of law and an end to impunity," said Maathai. "Whether it is here in Kenya or Darfur, the call for justice is the same. People want those who commit crimes against humanity to be held accountable for the crimes they commit. They also want their leaders to uphold the principle of the responsibility to protect."

The current cases before the Court—Sudan, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic—were referred to the ICC. The Kenyan inquiry is the first investigation begun by the ICC's chief prosecutor acting on his own initiative. The violence that followed Kenya's flawed 2007 election left over 1100 people dead and caused 400,000 to flee their homes. Not to mention the many thousands more who were traumatized and still in need of healing.

Kenyans welcome the opening of the ICC investigations, given the complete failure of Kenya's political elite to bring justice and accountability for the post-election violence.

The women of Sudan, who have borne the brunt of multiple conflicts, including as survivors of sexual violence, have yet to see real justice and would like to see African leaders respect the ICC arrest warrants and work of the ICC.

Maathai will be joined in Uganda by fellow Nobel Peace Laureate Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer and former judge who is known for her work defending human rights workers in Iran. These two Nobel Peace Laureates are calling for signatories to the Rome Statute to strengthen their financial support to the ICC, as well as their political support. The ICC has established ground-

breaking standards in criminal prosecution and accountability particularly for women. Maathai lauds that crimes against women—such as rape, sexual slavery and forced sterilization—are recognized as crimes against humanity, war crimes and in some instances genocide. She hopes that there will be support in Uganda for all these issues and our continued expansion of space for justice.

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