



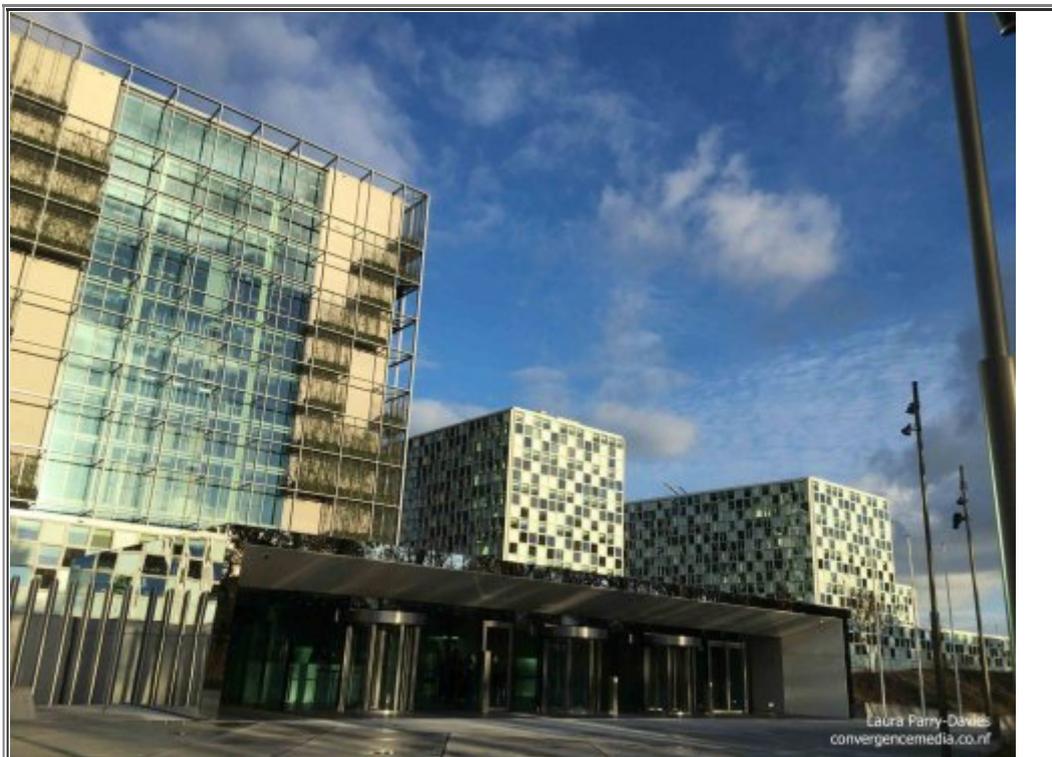
Making
Human Rights
a Reality

Official Opening of ICC Permanent Premises: An African Perspective

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The official opening of the permanent premises of the International Criminal Court (ICC) took place on 19th April, in The Hague, in the presence of illustrious personalities, notably King Willem-Alexander of the Netherlands, who performed the ceremonious act of opening the building. Some, among the African dignitaries present had wished that the King would speak as part of his officiating role. But, there is an African adage that 'a Queen does not talk', so that may extend to the Dutch King as well.



ICC Permanent Premises at the Hague © <http://www.thehagueonline.com/>

Approximately 350 people representing international organizations, the international justice community and ICC member states and non-member states, attended the ceremony. The galaxy of participants included United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and President of the Assembly of States Parties

to the ICC Sidiki Kaba, who recalled that his country, the African state of Senegal, was the first to sign the ICC Statute.

Judge Silvia Fernandez, President of the ICC gave the closing remarks. The ICC host state, The Netherlands, spared no effort in ensuring the success of the ceremony.



From left to right: Xavier-Jean KeÃta, Principal Counsel, Office of the Public Counsel for Defence, ICC; Judge Silvia Fernandez, President of the ICC; Evelyn A. Ankumah, Executive Director of Africa Legal Aid (AFLA).

The general feeling was one of harmony. Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the custodians of international justice, were represented at the ceremony. Bold, vibrant, and independent, CSOs are necessary watchdogs that contribute to the legitimacy and increased efficacy of the ICC.

The ICC permanent premises have been compared with the Peace Palace, the seat of the International Court of Justice established in 1945, describing the former as 'the Peace Palace of the 21st century'. While both buildings are iconic in their own right, this comparison is not apt. The Peace Palace was symbolic in its time, an era during which women were not seen, and African states were under colonial rule. We have now moved beyond symbolism, and the beautiful, contemporary ICC building should rather be seen as the 'Glass Palace', the highest expression of transparency and public scrutiny.

The permanent premises reinforce that the ICC is here to stay. But beyond the rhetoric, the ICC will come of age when it moves beyond cases originating from Africa, and brings to justice leaders from powerful and influential countries whose decisions and actions have caused untold sufferings to faceless victims. This challenge does not rest solely on the ICC, which does not have a police force. The challenge rests on all states, to support the ICC Prosecutor to bring powerful perpetrators of the gravest crimes to account.





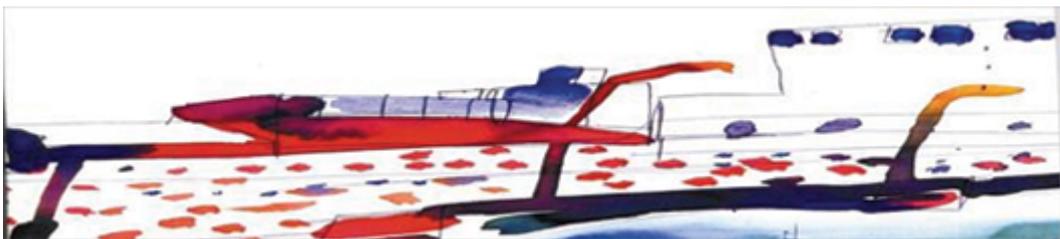
From left to right: Fatou Bensouda, ICC Prosecutor; Evelyn A. Ankumah, Executive Director of AFLA.

The ceremony is available [here](#).

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