

## Associated Press

### Supporters of international court warn U.S. law will cut off humanitarian aid

By Anthony Deutsch

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Supporters of the International Criminal Court warned today that a law signed into effect by President George W Bush would cut off humanitarian aid to countries that refuse to grant Americans immunity from the world's first war crimes tribunal.

It will cut off hundreds of millions of dollars in foreign aid to countries that belong to the court, or ICC, but have not signed a so-called bilateral immunity agreement with the United States.

The bill, submitted by House Representative George Nethercutt, passed Congress as part of a \$US388 billion (\$513.43 billion) legislative package covering spending of every federal agency but the Pentagon and Department of Homeland Security. It was approved by Congress and signed by Bush on Wednesday.

"None of the funds made available in this act ... may be used to provide assistance to the government of a country that is a party to the International Criminal Court and has not entered into an agreement with the United States," a portion of the text reads.

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The New York-based Human Rights Watch, a pro-ICC group, said the bill threatens US aid intended to help US allies promote democracy, fight terrorism and corruption, resolve conflict and drugs.

Jordan, which has helped train Iraqi police and hosted conferences on the reconstruction of Iraq, is set to lose approximately \$US250 million (\$330.82 million) in aid. Peru is expected to lose \$US8 million (\$10.59 million) for democratic reforms and agricultural programs, drug-trafficking, and terrorism.

"This is a serious escalation by the Bush administration and US Congress in its ill-conceived, ideologically motivated crusade against the ICC," Richard Dicker, head of the International Justice Program at Human Rights Watch said in an interview.

He called it ironic that the bill's passage coincided with new reports of torture by US forces of prisoners in Iraq and at the Guantanamo prison complex.

ICC officials declined to comment on the bill, saying it was up to the court's member countries to react.

The International Criminal Court is the end result of a campaign for a permanent war crimes tribunal that began with the Nuremberg trials after World War II. It can prosecute cases of

genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity committed after July 1, 2002, but will step in only when countries are unwilling or unable to dispense justice themselves.

The US government vehemently opposes the court, arguing that it could be used for frivolous or politically motivated prosecutions of American troops. But supporters of 1998 Rome Treaty, ratified by 97 countries including the entire European Union, counter that it contains enough safeguards to prevent politically motivated prosecutions.

The court is expected to try its first cases of crimes in Congo and Uganda next year.