

Five states seek debate on US call for new exemption from ICC

Agence France Presse
June 9, 2003

Five countries on Monday [called] for a UN Security Council public debate on a US proposal to renew a one-year exemption from the International Criminal Court for US troops serving as UN peacekeepers. The exemption expires June 30 and diplomats said last week the United States -- the most prominent and vocal opponent of the ICC -- wanted it renewed without delay.

In a letter to their Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, who holds the rotating council presidency this month, the ambassadors of Canada, Jordan, Liechtenstein, New Zealand and Switzerland called for a public debate before a vote on the renewal.

None of the countries are current members of the Security Council. "The proposed renewal has implications of direct import to member states... relating to international peacekeeping, fundamental questions of international law, and the role of the council in promoting law and accountability," they said.

A diplomat said the council was expected to hold a debate on Thursday in which non-members would be allowed to speak, and to vote immediately afterwards.

There is little doubt, however, that the new exemption will be approved. Only five of the 15 council members -- Britain, Bulgaria, France, Germany and Spain -- have ratified the 1999 Rome Statute which created the ICC.

And while the first exemption was granted last year only after two weeks of bruising negotiations, the vote was in the end unanimous. In adopting Resolution 1422, moreover, the council expressed its intention to renew the exemption each year "for as long as may be necessary."

One diplomat said that Germany, which joined the council for a two-year stint on January 1 and therefore did not take part in last year's vote, might abstain.

Established in The Hague, the ICC is the first permanent international court to try war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Its chief prosecutor and 18 judges have been elected by the Assembly of States Parties, but the court has yet to start work.