

BBI Suspends Support for International Criminal Court

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Washington, D.C. (April 2, 2002) – B'nai B'rith International has suspended its support of the International Criminal Court, informing President George W. Bush that it cannot overlook increasing evidence of likely abuse of the court for anti-American, anti-Israeli purposes. The court, expected to be established soon when endorsement by 60 countries is reached, might well subvert human rights it was originally intended to protect, according to B'nai B'rith International President Richard D. Heideman and Executive Vice President Daniel S. Mariaschin.

B'nai B'rith was a member of a coalition of organizations supporting creation of the ICC. It "worked on behalf of the establishment of a permanent international tribunal that would bring to justice the perpetrators of crimes against humanity" as did the post-World War II Nuremberg trials, Heideman and Mariaschin say in a letter to Bush. "However, we no longer believe that the ICC, based on the 1998 Rome Statute, will act as envisioned."

The B'nai B'rith leaders assert that "the traditional understanding of human rights, and, therefore, crimes against humanity is being increasingly subverted." This is most clear in the treatment of Israel, "but what could be done to it by a hijacked ICC could be done also to the United States and other democracies."

Heideman and Mariaschin point to a number of troubling developments, including:

- * A United Nations "more biased than ever in singling out Israel for condemnation";
- * The hijacking of the U.N. World Conference Against Racism last year to condemn Israel as racist, dilute the uniqueness of the Holocaust, and minimize antisemitism;
- * The U.N. Commission on Human Rights ignoring abuses in many other nations to repeatedly attack Israel with unwarranted resolutions;
- * Convening the Fourth Geneva Convention to condemn legitimate Israeli activities while ignoring massive human rights violations around the world;
- * A continuing threat in Belgian courts to try Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as a "war criminal" in violation of ICC safeguards against such runaway claims.

"As a result of this pattern, we fear the ICC too will be politicized," the B'nai B'rith leaders say. Efforts by the Bush and Clinton administrations "to negate some of the most serious flaws of the Statute ... have been largely unsuccessful."

B'nai B'rith "intends to monitor the ICC" and, if it proves an unbiased advocate of traditional human rights, reassess its suspension of support.

B'nai B'rith International – with members in 58 countries including the United States and Israel – is the world's best-known Jewish human rights, community service, and humanitarian organization.