

A lesson in international justice
By Trish Mehaffey
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CEDAR RAPIDS — The International Criminal Court is a permanent, independent judicial institution that investigates and tries heinous crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and serious war crimes.

There's no other court like it, said Matthew Heaphy, deputy convener of the American Non-Governmental Organizations Coalition for the International Criminal Court. The United Nations' International Court of Justice can only decide disputes between states and this international court is treaty-based and can try individuals only for designated atrocity crimes.

Heaphy is the guest speaker today at Kirkwood Community College in celebration of the International Day of Justice. He will explain the court, created 10 years ago, to the students and talk about some of the cases the court has heard.

Heaphy said the United States hasn't joined the coalition because it initially wanted to control the court or exempt U.S. nationals but he hopes that will change in the near future. The United States seems to be coming around as it allowed the Security Council to refer the Darfur atrocities to the court.

Canada, Australia, all members of the European Union and all members of NATO except for Turkey and the United States, are members of the court. About 139 countries signed the Statute adopted in Rome in 1998 and 100 countries have ratified it.

Jeremy Brigham, faculty adviser of Kirkwood's Student Alliance, said the program today, co-sponsored by Amnesty International, also will include student interviews that were videotaped regarding their countries' experiences of crimes against humanity. Another student, Zarif Muhammad, also will read a poem he wrote "Justice for all." The poem asks for the world to take a stand against genocide and other heinous crimes.

Many of the international students come from the Africa and Sudan regions, so they probably have more awareness of the horrible crimes happening in the world, Michael Abdalah, president of Kirkwood Student Alliance, said. There are 500 international students at Kirkwood.

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