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U.S. PULLS OUT OF INTERNATIONAL COURT TREATY

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The United States has renounced formal involvement in a treaty creating the first permanent war crimes tribunal, Ambassador Pierre-Richard Prosper said Monday.

He said the United States has no intention of ratifying the treaty and now considers itself "no longer bound in any way to its purpose and objective."

The declaration was contained in a letter to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan that was delivered to U.N. headquarters in New York.

Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman made the announcement in a speech to the Center for International Strategic Studies.

The International Criminal Court gained the necessary international backing to come into being when 10 nations joined 56 others last month in announcing their ratification of the treaty negotiated in Rome in 1998.

President Clinton signed the treaty, but never submitted it to the Senate for ratification. The Bush administration has made its opposition clear.

Prosper, the ambassador for war crimes issues, told reporters the United States regards the treaty as "a flawed document. This is formal notification that we do not want to have anything to do with it."

But he said President Bush has made clear the decision does not mean the United States is waging war against the court.

Instead, the United States favors working with nongovernment organizations, private industry and universities and law schools to help individual countries set up tribunals if and when they need them.

The United States fears the court's impact on American citizens, arguing that safeguards against frivolous or politically motivated prosecutions of U.S. soldiers and officials are not sufficient.

Sen. Russ Feingold, D-Wis., a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he was dismayed by the withdrawal from the treaty. "Beyond the extremely problematic matter of casting doubt on the U.S. commitment to international justice and accountability," Feingold said, "these steps actually call into question our country's credibility in all multilateral endeavors."

The Washington Working Group on the ICC, a coalition of organizations that support the tribunal, issued a statement Sunday saying, "This rash action signals to the world that America

is turning its back on decades of U.S. leadership in prosecuting war criminals since the Nuremberg trials." The coalition includes human rights organizations such as Amnesty International-USA and Physicians for Social Responsibility.

The court, to be formed this summer without U.S. participation, will fill a gap in the international justice system first recognized by the U.N. General Assembly in 1948 after the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials for World War II's German and Japanese war criminals.

Tribunals have been created for special situations -- like the 1994 Rwanda genocide and war crimes in former Yugoslavia -- but no mechanism existed to hold individuals criminally responsible for serious crimes such as genocide.

"We are the leader in the world with respect to bringing people to justice," Secretary of State Colin Powell said Sunday. "But ... we found that this was not a situation that we believed was appropriate for our men and women in the armed forces or our diplomats and political leaders."