

PRESS RELEASES

REFORM JEWISH MOVEMENT PRAISES U.S. SIGNING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT TREATY

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WASHINGTON, January 2, 2001 — The Reform Movement today welcomed the United States signing of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, a UN treaty that creates a permanent international court to try individuals for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. By signing the treaty, President Clinton has ensured that the U.S. will be able to continue to participate in ongoing negotiations over the Court's development. Before the U.S. becomes party to the treaty, however, the Senate will have to ratify it.

Mark J. Pelavin, Associate Director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, released the following statement:

By signing the International Criminal Court treaty, President Clinton has taken an historic step for global justice. The treaty strengthens the U.S. credibility in the effort to end impunity for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes.

Judaism teaches that we are not to carry grudges in our hearts. However, we cannot confuse this teaching with the urgent ethical obligation to bring criminals to the bench of justice. Our sages observed that a pattern of transgression brings in its wake further transgression. As it is written, "Run away from a transgression, for a commandment pulls along a commandment and a transgression pulls along a transgression." (Pirke Avot 4:2) They also tell us that there is no limit to the judgments for the wicked, and that we are not to stand idly by at the suffering of other human beings. Failure to apprehend and prosecute war criminals sends a message that such actions are acceptable, with the result that other evil human beings, at a later time, will also believe that they have nothing to fear.

The signing of this treaty reaffirms our strong support for international accountability and for bringing to justice perpetrators of genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity. We do so as well because we wish to remain engaged in making the International Criminal Court an instrument of impartial and effective justice in the years to come.

While Mr. Clinton's decision, in the waning days of his second term, requires Senate approval, it nevertheless represents a powerful American endorsement of the treaty's goals, and poses a political and diplomatic challenge for the incoming administration of George W. Bush. I hope that President-elect Bush will follow President Clinton's historic lead to ratify the International Criminal Court Treaty, thereby taking further steps to promote international justice.

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The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism is the Washington office of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), whose 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), whose membership includes over 1700 Reform rabbis