

PRESS RELEASES

REFORM JEWISH LEADERS DISMAYED BY THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION'S DECISION TO UNSIGN THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT TREATY

Rabbi David Saperstein and Robert Heller: *The United States has a proud heritage of leadership in advancing human rights and, especially since the Nuremberg trials, in bringing war criminals to justice. We are dismayed by the Bush Administration's decision to shrink from America's historic leadership role by withdrawing the United States' signature from the Rome Treaty.*

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Washington, May 13, 2002 - Last Monday Under Secretary Marc Grossman announced the Bush Administration's intention to withdraw the United States' signature from the Rome Statute creating the International Criminal Court. A letter was sent to the U.N. Secretary General Annan, signed by Under Secretary of State, John Bolton stating, "This is to inform you in connection with the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, adopted on July 17, 1998, that the United States does not intend to become a party to the treaty. Accordingly, the United States has no legal obligations arising from its signature on Dec. 31, 2000. The United States requests that its intention not to become a party, as expressed in this letter, be reflected in the depositary's status lists relating to this treaty."

In response, Rabbi David Saperstein, Director of the Religious Action Center and Robert Heller, Chair of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, issued the following statement:

The recent decision by the Bush Administration to withdraw its support for the International Criminal Court is unprecedented in the history of the United Nations: no nation has ever revoked its signature from a treaty. For our government to be the first sends the wrong message at this critical time. At a minimum, it sets a dangerous precedent and creates a climate in which other countries feel free to revoke their signatures from treaties on issues that are politically sensitive for them such as drug trafficking or terrorism. We recognize that concerns have been raised, for example, with respect to the potential inappropriate exercise of the ICC's jurisdiction. However, we believe that the wisest way to protect American interests and advance the cause of international justice is to maintain U.S. support for the International Criminal Court and work cooperatively with other governments to ensure that the ICC is established as a court of high integrity and fairness.

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). Our tradition also teaches 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. How well we understand, from our own tragedies as a people, the awesome price paid for indifference and silence. Our history teaches that all people must be alert to suffering and injustice anywhere in the world and must be proactive in deterring war crimes. We cannot allow those who commit crimes against humanity to escape justice. Failure to apprehend and prosecute war criminals sends a message that their actions are acceptable, and tells potential perpetrators of evil that they have nothing to fear.

The United States has a proud heritage of leadership in advancing human rights and, especially since the Nuremberg trials, in bringing war criminals to justice. We are dismayed by the Bush Administration's decision to shrink from America's historic leadership role by withdrawing the United States' signature from the Rome Treaty. We urge the Administration to reconsider this unwise, shortsighted decision.

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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 **1800 Reform rabbis**.*