

International Criminal Court Picks U.S. Lawyer to Lead First Case

By JESS BRAVIN

NEW YORK—The International Criminal Court picked a prominent former U.S. federal prosecutor to lead its first investigation, into accusations that Ugandan warlords abducted children to serve as soldiers and sex slaves for a rebel army.

Hostility from the Bush administration—which contends the new war-crimes tribunal is a threat to Americans overseas—toward the ICC has been a sore point with many U.S. allies that have joined the court. The appointment of Christine Chung, a Harvard-trained lawyer who prosecuted street gangs, mob bosses and boxing promoter Don King during a 12-year career at the U.S. attorney's office in New York, underscores the controversy over Washington's stance even within American legal circles.

"I'm voting with my feet," Ms. Chung said. "The idea that the court is going to

be prosecuting American soldiers trivializes the whole process."

Ms. Chung, 39 years old, has no prior experience with war crimes or international tribunals. But ICC Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo said he chose Ms. Chung as the best-qualified applicant to pursue the ICC's first case, a high-stakes effort that will shape the fledgling court's reputation around the world.

Her former boss, U.S. Deputy Attorney General James Comey, described her as "a brilliant lawyer and a great prosecutor...who will serve any tribunal well." But Mr.



Christine Chung

Comey declined to comment on the ICC or the U.S. government position toward it.

The Bush administration contends that the ICC lacks safeguards against political prosecutions and that war-crimes cases should be handled by the affected countries themselves, not by a new international court. Washington so far has secured pledges from 82 foreign governments not to cooperate with the ICC should it proceed against an American.

In choosing Ms. Chung, "Moreno-Ocampo is cleverly reaching out to the Americans to try to show them that the court is a valuable tool in foreign policy," said Harold Hongju Koh, a Yale law professor who was an assistant secretary of state in the Clinton administration. "They want to show that it's really a criminal court, not a place for political posturing."

Mr. Moreno-Ocampo and Ugandan

President Yoweri Museveni said in London that Uganda had referred the case to the ICC, starting a process that could lead to the first ever trial before the permanent war-crimes tribunal in The Hague.

The Kampala government asked the ICC to investigate the Lord's Resistance Army, which the U.S. State Department describes as a terrorist group seeking to impose on Uganda "a regime that will implement the group's brand of Christianity."

The ICC cited reports contending that over 85% of the rebel force is made up of children younger than 16 years, who are used as soldiers, porters, laborers and concubines. More than 20,000 children have been abducted during a civil war that traces to the late 1980s, the ICC said, and often "are forced into committing inhuman acts, including ritual killing and mutilations."