

Africa and the International Court New York Times Op-Ed Contributor – Kofi Annan 30 June 2009

*Kofi Annan served as secretary general of the United Nations from 1997-2006 and is now president of the Kofi Annan Foundation.* (...) The African Union summit meeting will

be the first since the I.C.C. issued an arrest warrant for Sudan's president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir. (...)

The African Union's repeatedly stated commitment to battle impunity will be put to the test. On the agenda is an initiative by a few states to denounce and undermine the international court. In recent months, some African leaders have expressed the view that international justice as represented by the I.C.C. is an imposition, if not a plot, by the industrialized West.

In my view, this outcry against justice demeans the yearning for human dignity that resides in every African heart. It also represents a step backward in the battle against impunity. (...)

The African opponents of the international court argue that it is fixated on Africa because its four cases so far all concern alleged crimes against African victims.

One must begin by asking why African leaders shouldn't celebrate this focus on African victims. Do these leaders really want to side with the alleged perpetrators of mass atrocities rather than their victims? Is the court's failure to date to answer the calls of victims outside of Africa really a reason to leave the calls of African victims unheeded?

Moreover, in three of these cases, it was the government itself that called for I.C.C. (...) The fourth case, that of Darfur, was selected not by the international court but forwarded by the U.N. Security Council.

It's also important to remember that the I.C.C., as a court of last resort, acts only when national justice systems are unwilling or unable to do so. There will be less need for it to protect African victims only when African governments themselves improve their record of bringing to justice those responsible for mass atrocities.

(...) The African Union should not abandon its promise to fight impunity. Unless indicted war criminals are held to account, regardless of their rank, others tempted to emulate them will not be deterred, and African people will suffer.

We have little hope of preventing the worst crimes known to mankind, or reassuring those who live in fear of their recurrence, if African leaders stop supporting justice for the most heinous crimes just because one of their own stands accused.

Source:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/30/opinion/30iht-edannan.html>