38 Global Civil Society Organizations file joint brief in US lawsuit challenging legality of Trump's ICC sanctions

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The Trump administration's escalating campaign against the International Criminal Court (ICC) is reaching far beyond the judges, prosecutors, and human rights groups it has sanctioned, chilling civil society engagement with the Court and undermining victims' access to justice, Amnesty International, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and 36 other Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) said today.

On 23 September 2026, **38 civil society groups jointly filed an amicus curiae (PDF)** ('friend of the court') brief with the US District Court for the Southern District of New York in support of a lawsuit filed by the American Friends Service Committee, the Center for Constitutional Rights, Human Rights Watch, and the Open Society Institute, which **challenges the legality of sanctions imposed under Executive Order (EO) 14203**. The sanctions have targeted ICC prosecutors and judges, a UN human rights expert, and three Palestinian human rights groups.

> "Behind every civil society organization being silenced or pushed away from the ICC are victims and survivors waiting for justice. These sanctions are disrupting the networks of people and organizations that stand with victims who bring their stories and evidence before the Court, and spreading fear far beyond those directly targeted," **said Alexis Deswaef, President of FIDH.** "For victims who have already been failed by justice at home, closing these pathways can mean losing one of their last chances for accountability."
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> "As the Trump administration steps up its attacks on the ICC and the civil society organizations essential to its work, it is crucial to demonstrate to the US Federal Court how sanctions are harming global civil society, victims and survivors of crimes under international law, and the very idea of international justice," **said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty International's Secretary General.** "We will not sit back and let President Trump destroy the Rome Statute. The sheer number of civil society organizations submitting this brief demonstrates the resilience and determination of civil society to oppose the US sanctions and protect the ICC."

The CSOs' brief (PDF) makes two fundamental arguments. First, the sanctions are fracturing civil society networks that are essential to the functioning of the ICC. CSOs and human rights defenders, including lawyers, victim representatives, and survivor-advocates, carry out a wide range of activities which the ICC depends on: connecting victims and witnesses to the Court; documenting atrocity crimes; supporting victim participation and reparations; contributing critical legal,

contextual, and cultural expertise; and advancing state cooperation and domestic investigations and prosecutions, particularly in situation countries where the Court has limited access.

> "Sanctioning those who cooperate with the International Criminal Court is not only an attack on institutions; it is an attack on the very possibility of accountability. When human rights defenders and civil society organizations are punished or threatened for documenting crimes, supporting victims, and engaging with international justice mechanisms, the message is clear: pursuing justice comes at a cost," **said Oumaima Hammami, Programs Lead at HuMENA.** "HuMENA joined this brief because no government should be able to use sanctions to intimidate civil society, obstruct accountability, or isolate victims from the mechanisms created to deliver justice."

Second, by imposing and threatening draconian financial and legal penalties on CSOs and individual actors, EO 14203 violates their rights to freedom of expression and association and has severely damaged the collaboration and infrastructure upon which the international system of justice depends. EO 14203 has already caused the Designated Entities to lose funding, staff, banking access, and partnerships; deterred CSOs from engaging with the ICC; and fractured relationships between and among many CSOs. The result is measurable and irreparable harm not only to civil society, but to the ICC, to the administration of international criminal justice, and, ultimately, to the victims and survivors the system exists to serve.

Background

The 38 CSOs filing the brief are (alphabetical order):

1. **Action for the Reform of Justice and Promotion of Human Rights (ARJPDH)**
2. **Amnesty International**
3. **Arab Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession (ACIJLP)**
4. **Arab Coalition for the International Criminal Court (ACICC)**
5. **Baltasar Garzón International Foundation (FIBGAR)**
6. **Center for Development of International Law (CDIL)**
7. **Center for Justice and Accountability (CJA)**
8. **Centre marocain pour la loi et la paix**
9. **Centro de Investigación y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos (CIPRODEH)**
10. **Chinese Initiative on International Law (CIIL)**
11. **Clinique de droit international pénal et humanitaire, Faculté de droit, Université Laval (CDIPH)**
12. **COMPPART Foundation for Justice and Peacebuilding-Nigeria**
13. **Croatian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights**
14. **Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)**

15. **European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR)**
16. **Global Justice Center**
17. **Human Rights Now**
18. **HuMENA for Human Rights and Civic Engagement**
19. **Indonesian Legal Aid Association for Women (APIK)**
20. **International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)**
21. **International Network for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR-Net)**
22. **Just Access**
23. **Kurdish Organizations Network Coalition for the International Criminal Court (KONCICC)**
24. **Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada**
25. **Libya Crimes Watch (LCW)**
26. **No Peace Without Justice**
27. **The Nuhanovic Foundation**
28. **Philippine Alliance of Human Rights Advocates (PAHRA)**
29. **Platform for Peace and Humanity**
30. **Refugees in Libya**
31. **Rights for Peace**
32. **Robert & Ethel Kennedy Human Rights Center**
33. **StoptheDrugWar.org**
34. **Students for Global Democracy Uganda**
35. **Syrian Center for Media and Freedom of Expression (SCM)**
36. **Women's Initiatives for Gender Justice**
37. **World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)**
38. **World Without Genocide**

The CSOs' amicus curiae submission (PDF) ***was kindly assisted by the Coalition for the ICC secretariat, whose report on US sanctions "Criminalising Accountability: The US lawfare against the international justice system" served as a key reference.***

The CSOs ('amici') were represented by Mascarenhas Law PLLC.

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