



STATEMENT

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REGISTRAR

Arusha, 2 July 2012

Remarks of John Hocking,

**United Nations Assistant Secretary-General
Registrar of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the
Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals**

**Opening of the Arusha Branch of the
Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals**

2 July 2012

"During the genocide, they poured petrol on me and set me on fire, they whipped me three times on my back, they pierced my chest with a spear. On the same day. We were 50,000 in that parish. I saw my entire family getting killed. I ran away. When they found me, I begged the Interahamwe to kill me on the spot. They refused because they said it would have been too much work to carry my dead body to the mass grave. I did not know what else was waiting for me, but I knew that the worst had yet to come. A few hours later, many men raped me for five consecutive days and nights. I was shattered. I was dead. I was 12."

Céleste is no longer 12. I met her in a café in February. Her weakened figure and dappled skin hardly disguise the scars of the machetes, the burns of the gasoline and the virus of the HIV/AIDS that she lives with almost 20 years later, a ruthless memento of those tragic days.

But her piercing look, and dignified presence leave no hesitation as to her strength. During the early years of the ICTR, as an entire country was struggling to heal the fresh wounds of the genocide, Céleste boarded a small plane to come to Arusha to testify. Courageously, she re-lived, act by act, the violence she suffered, while facing those whom she considered to be responsible. She shed tears as the defence questioned her rapes.

Her act of courage was not in vain. As recently as 20 years ago, ill-willed leaders could still safely indulge in the temptation to abuse power. Today, we know, that the truth of a girl from a small village in the heart of Africa can resonate across the globe and, ultimately, bring down the mighty. That, to me, is the essence of international criminal justice.

On this day, on which the work of the ICTR and the ICTY converge into an unprecedented institution that further develops international criminal justice, I must give thanks.

I must give thanks to the almost 3,000 witnesses, who like Céleste, testified about the atrocities that occurred in Rwanda in the spring of 1994; and the 5,000 witnesses who gave evidence of the waves of violence that engulfed the Balkans in the 1990s.

I value the compassion of the witness support assistants who held the witnesses hands and offered words of comfort during those long hours before their testimony.

I am grateful to the interpreters and translators. They understand. And by understanding and reproducing the suffering of the witnesses, they suffer with them.

I commend the dogged determination of the investigators who go tirelessly from village to village to gather pieces of information that the attorneys then zealously puzzle together to build their cases.

I recognise and praise the work of defence counsel. Too often, too quickly, stigmatized for “defending the indefensible”, when in fact they defend people’s rights, and, in doing so, they defend the concept of justice.

My profound respect goes to the judges and their staff: passionately working long hours to dissect every piece of evidence, but dispassionately, fairly and impartially adjudicating crimes that shocked the world’s conscience.

The toil of the Tribunals is not, and must not be, just a momentous achievement, obtained through the labour of their hundreds of staff. It is in the hands of the archivists to ensure that this endeavour is preserved and, equally importantly, made accessible to the world. So that, the *Ntibizasubire* written at each genocide memorial in Rwanda, or the *da se ne ponovi, da se ne zaboravi* cried out by the Mothers of Srebrenica, is not a void “never again”, but continues to be a moral imperative that guides our actions and our beliefs.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the prescience and maturity of the Member States of the United Nations, without which, this fight against impunity would never have begun and justice - *condicio sine qua non* to national reconciliation and peace - would have not been done. Whether amending their domestic legislation, or bearing a financial burden, whether providing land and hospitality, or accepting to enforce Tribunals sentences, or ensuring the seamless flow of witnesses to the Tribunals and their protection, I must express gratitude.

But the cooperation that justice demands from Member States is not over. Nine of those accused of being most responsible for the Rwandan genocide still remain at large.

Only one year ago, the last of the 161 ICTY accused was arrested. This proved to us all that the end of impunity is within reach and can be achieved. Less than two weeks ago, Rwanda celebrated the completion of the daunting work of the *gacaca* courts. In the words of President Kagame, the *gacaca* “challenged every Rwandan into introspection and soul-searching that resulted in truth-telling, national healing, reconciliation and justice.” As the ICTR and ICTY are clearing their dockets, may the commencement of the Mechanism bring about the arrest of the fugitives and with that the closure of the most painful chapter of Rwandan history, so that those who suffered the most, like Céleste, may take some comfort from our work.

I thank you.
