**Reuven Rivlin: "Towards Israel, the International Criminal Court does politics, not law"**

By: President Reuven Rivlin

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*[TITLE IN FRENCH: Reuven Rivlin: «Envers Israël, la Cour pénale internationale fait de la politique, pas du droit»]*

*[ENGLISH VERSION PROVIDED BY ISRAEL’S GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE]*

“When I meet President Macron today, we will do so not only as friends, but also as heads of states who enjoy excellent, deeply-rooted bilateral relations. Our countries cooperate on a wide range of issues, including security, counter-terrorism, science and technology, culture and academic exchanges. France and Israel also share the values which guide us and the democratic world as a whole: freedom, equality, justice, pluralism and tolerance.

 Given the depth and strength of the relationship between our countries, I will share a matter of deep concern to Israel with my friend President Macron. Friends may not always agree, but I believe we are committed to hearing each other in order to better understand each other’s perspectives, motivations and decisions.

 he decision by the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court to investigate Israel for possible war crimes is a dreadful misapplication of international law. A court established to deal with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community is being used a political weapon. It is a morally and legally bankrupt decision.

 Since the prophets declared ‘Zion will be redeemed with justice’ (Isaiah 1:27), international law and justice have been at the heart of the Jewish people's vision. Jews were active in the creation of a framework of international law. Jews and Israelis, motivated by the horrors of the Second World War, were at the forefront of the establishment of today’s international legal bodies, including the International Criminal Court itself. We are deeply committed to the theory and the practice of ensuring that war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity are never allowed to go unpunished because domestic legal systems are unwilling or unable to prosecute individuals responsible for them.

 But this is not the case with Israel. We have established beyond any doubt that we are both able and willing to investigate ourselves when allegations of this kind are brought.

 For us, these are not just dry, abstract questions of law. The soldiers and civilians that ICC is threatening to investigate are our children and grandchildren, our neighbors and friends. We will do everything we can to protect them, just as they protected us when asked to do so. At the same time, we will hold ourselves to the highest standards of international law, even when that requires the most painful decisions.

 If we want international law to continue to play its full role in ensuring peace and justice, we must protect it in the face of two challenges. The first is the attempt to politicize international law, as we are seeing with the ICC. We have seen the damage that has been caused to other international bodies, such as the UN’s Human Rights Council, by those who seek only to harness them for political gain. Those who sacrifice human rights for political gain will do the same to international law. We must be vigilant and united in stopping them.

 Secondly, in the arena of asymmetric armed conflict, states like Israel that are committed to international are vulnerable to cynical terrorist organizations that hide militants and weapons in the heart of civilian areas. In such cases we need international law to say not only what is not allowed, but also about what a state that wants to protect the lives of its civilians is allowed to do. International law cannot be a suicide pact. It must provide genuine, effective and humane responses to real threats. This is a dilemma that other democratic states, including France, will face in fighting terrorism around the world. The position of the ICC on asymmetric conflicts could limit the scope of liberal democracies to defend themselves.

 Perhaps one of the most egregious consequences of the ICC’s decision is that it will make it even harder for Israelis and Palestinians to find common ground. Until the Court concludes its investigation, which could take several years, it is hard to see the two sides engaging in serious negotiations. At a time when the recent agreements between Israel and Arab countries make the prospect for such progress better than any time in the recent past, this is an act of perverse logic.

I call on friends of Israel and the Palestinians, in France and beyond, to state clearly, once and for all, that the road to peace runs directly between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Detours via the ICC in the Hague and the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva are counterproductive to the cause of peace and undermine the chances of an agreement between us.”