

ICTY Staff union 20th anniversary celebration
Statement of Registrar John Hocking

The Hague, 31 May 2013

Judges, President of the Staff Union, Colleagues, Friends

It is an honour for me to be with you this afternoon.

Last week I had a daunting task: condensing my thoughts on 20 years of the ICTY into a 5-minute speech for the formal celebration of the Tribunal's anniversary on Monday. As I was jotting down my memories and then condensing and condensing them again to capture the most poignant image of our work, it dawned on me how easy it can be to forget, to forget that what we do is not a 9 to 5 job, and because of the business of our daily work, to lose touch with the greatness of our achievement.

We have set in stone that the voice of even societies weakest, the different, the abused, the mutilated, the raped, can be more powerful than the political and military leaders who oppressed, perpetrated, and committed international crimes. Powerful enough to bring about justice and enlighten the arduous path towards reconciliation, where the crimes happened and, elsewhere, where similar crimes should never happen.

No-one can remain unpunished for his or her heinous crimes - but even those so charged must always be given a fair trial, have the best possible legal representation and fully enjoy the presumption of innocence. It is this belief, now a tangible reality, that has called us here from all corners of the world. It is this belief, that we share that drives our daily labour as lawyers, archivists, administrative officers, assistants, interpreters, security officers, each and everyone of you. Our activities - disparate in nature, but so equally outstanding in performance across the Tribunal - have not only proved wrong those who initially thought that the ICTY was fated to fail, but, ultimately, propelled international criminal law into a new era and irreversibly curtailed the "business as usual" of ill-intentioned leaders. It is again this belief that made many of us reject higher-paying jobs and, for most of us, to live far from home, family and friends.

At times, however, our beliefs can be shaken. Perhaps by the routine of a job we now do with confidence, by occasional disagreements, by the feeling that our responsibilities may not be as relevant or appreciated as we would like, by the anxieties triggered by our fast approaching closure.

It may be easy to forget the sense of our toil, but rekindling it is nearly effortless. For me, all it took was a few colleagues who brought me back to the challenges of the beginning, and remind me how far we have come today. In the early days defence counsel were not even allowed to enter this building unescorted; we used to make 11 copies of every exhibit and we needed trolleys to carry all the documents we needed in court. Legal officers, like me and my team in Celebici, spent countless hours researching the first development of the elements of the crimes. Today, Judgements routinely cite the now established elements of the crimes, all the judicial documents we need are at our fingertips and defence counsel are welcomed not only at the tables of the cafeteria, but also at those of the Rules Committee.

Where there were no structures, no policies, seemingly no solutions; creativity, resilience and unbendable drive prevailed. This is the result of the fearless engagement and demiurgic yield of what can proudly call today the ICTY generation. 7,000 of us, those who may have spent anywhere from a few months to over a decade at the Tribunal, whose contributions have and will long outlive their presence, and those of us who continue today to bring us closer to the completion of our mandate and through their work foster the growth of other international and national courts and practitioners.

Notwithstanding our achievements, new challenges, different in nature from those of the early days, but no less tolling have again surfaced at the ICTY. The pride in our work coming to an end is intrinsically accompanied by the difficulty of departure. On my part, with the invaluable support of the entire administration, I will continue to ensure that the gradual, necessary downsizing - praised by the auditors as best practice in change management throughout the United Nations - progresses with the same transparency and collaboration between management and the staff union. The professionalism of all involved in the downsizing, this collaboration, it is an extraordinary achievement.

And I will continue to impartially ensure its implementation, as I did when silencing the personal sadness with the vital impassivity that my role as Registrar demands. I let go close friends who contributed so much not only to the Tribunal but also to my personal and professional growth. I will continue to promote initiatives aimed at facilitating your transition by creating opportunities for acquiring new skills and marketing your talents and professionalism. And although I can't speak for all of them, I know that the talents and professionalism of the 6,000 former ICTY staff, have contributed to the success of rule of law, peacekeeping missions, government and the private sector all over the world.

Throughout the difficult months ahead, as our numbers decrease, as we must readjust and reaffirm our commitment, I appeal to our shared belief, to again find that strength that made us achieve the seemingly impossible in the early days. Strength that may now be found in new faces, but is the same that defines all of us, the ICTY generation.