

H.E. *dr. iur.* Villu Kõve
Chief Justice
Supreme Court of Justice of the Republic of Estonia

Reference: 2025/PRES/185/TA

Date: 12 December 2025

Subject: Invitation to a Judicial Seminar and the Opening of the Judicial Year of the International Criminal Court, 27 January 2026

Excellency,

It is my distinct pleasure to invite you to the **7th Judicial Seminar** as well as the **Opening of the Judicial Year** of the International Criminal Court (ICC, Court), which will be held at the seat of the Court in The Hague, the Netherlands, on Tuesday 27 January 2026, and simultaneously online.

The purpose of the ICC's annual **Judicial Seminar** is to provide a space for a frank exchange of views on topical issues in the international criminal justice system. The participants of the Judicial Seminar are judges of the ICC, senior judges of the national jurisdictions of the States Parties to the Rome Statute, as well as senior judges of international and regional courts. The Judicial Seminar is organized with the financial support of the European Union.

The **Opening of the Judicial Year** is a ceremonial, symbolic event held in Courtroom I of the ICC, which underlines the Court's special nature among international organisations as an independent judicial institution, and signals the beginning of another cycle of annual work in the Court's life.

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The topic chosen for the 7th Judicial Seminar is: **"Safeguarding Judicial Independence in the Wake of Contemporary Challenges"**.

The 7th Judicial Seminar of the ICC will focus on the safeguarding of judicial independence, particularly in light of contemporary challenges. An independent judiciary is an indispensable component of the right to a fair trial and access to justice. Further, its importance goes beyond respecting the rights of parties in a particular case: an independent judiciary is a fundamental pillar of the rule of law and as such judicial independence safeguards the force of law and the values they seek to protect, be it at the domestic or at the international level.



The International Criminal Court itself has been the subject of several attacks and attempts to interfere with its proceedings, in the form of coercive measures by States, cyber-attacks and witness interference. The contemporary system designed to prosecute international crimes via international and primarily domestic courts relies on an independent judiciary which guarantees the serenity of such proceedings. Attacks against the judiciary therefore endangers the very notion of the fight against impunity and must therefore be dealt with by determined action.

However, the Judicial Seminar is by no means intended to focus on the ICC only; it is equally an opportunity to explore the experiences of national jurisdictions as well as international, hybrid or regional courts and tribunals.

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The first session of the Seminar will focus on the topic **“Attacks against the judiciary and existing mechanisms to ensure judicial independence”**. Attacks against the judiciary continue to persist across jurisdictions. The United Nations Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary stipulates that ‘the independence of the judiciary shall be guaranteed by the State and enshrined in the Constitution or the law of the country’ and that ‘it is the duty of all governmental and other institutions to respect and observe the independence of the judiciary’. It is therefore the responsibility of States to ensure that there are sufficient mechanisms to safeguard judicial independence. However, the availability of such mechanisms may vary from one jurisdiction to another and for international courts, which are not within the authority of a single State, there may be unique challenges in pinpointing the responsibility of each State.

The second part of the Seminar will be devoted to the topic **“Digital technology and judicial independence”**. In this session, we look at how respective judicial bodies have dealt with the issue of digital technology, including the use of artificial intelligence, in their proceedings and what challenges they pose to judicial independence.

In both sessions of the Judicial Seminar, ample time will be reserved for open discussion among the participants. To allow for a candid and open exchange of views between judges, the Judicial Seminar will not be a public event, and discussions will take place under Chatham House rules. Accordingly, while a report reflecting the content of the conversations will be produced and made public, no statements will be attributable to individual participants, except for summaries of any introductory remarks listed on the final programme.

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The provisional programme of the day is as follows (timings subject to change):

Tuesday, 27 January 2026

Location: premises of the International Criminal Court, The Hague, Netherlands

- 10:00-11:00 Opening of Judicial Year (Courtroom I)
- 11:00-11:30 Coffee
- 11:30-12:00 Opening of judicial seminar and keynote speech
- 12:00-13:00 Judicial Seminar, 1st session (ICC conference cluster)
- 13:00-13:45 Buffet lunch
- 13:45-14:45 Judicial Seminar, 2nd session (ICC conference cluster)
- 14:45-15:00 Closing of the Judicial Seminar

While we very much hope that you can attend the Judicial Seminar in person, the Court will also put in place arrangements for remote participation for those invitees who are unable to travel to the Netherlands for any reason. Details on this will follow.

Regrettably the Court is not in position to sponsor any travel or accommodation costs of the participants.

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Excellency, your participation would make an invaluable contribution to the Judicial Seminar of the ICC as well as the Ceremony for the Opening of the Judicial Year, and I sincerely hope that you will be able to accept this invitation, or designate another judge to attend in your stead.

The Court would be grateful to receive confirmations of participation no later than Monday, 5 January 2026 via email to Judicial.Seminar@icc-cpi.int, indicating whether you intend to attend in person, or virtually by way of remote connection (the details of which will be communicated later). This is to allow the Court sufficient time to put in place appropriate arrangements depending on the number of participants.



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Again, I look forward to hopefully seeing you, or another representative of your country's judiciary, on 27 January 2026.

Excellency, please accept the assurances of my highest consideration.

赤根 智子

Tomoko Akane
ICC President