



Coalition for the International Criminal Court  
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MEDIA ADVISORY  
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**ICC SECURES FIRST ARREST  
IN CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC SITUATION**

*Rebel Leader Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo arrested in Belgium for crimes against humanity and war crimes allegedly committed in the Central African Republic*

**WHAT:** On 24 May 2008, Belgian authorities arrested in Belgium Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, alleged President and Commander in Chief of the “*Mouvement de Libération du Congo*” (MLC) on the basis of a warrant of arrest issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) for crimes against humanity and war crimes allegedly committed in the Central African Republic (CAR).

**HOW:** On 23 May 2008, ICC Pre-Trial Chamber III issued a sealed warrant of arrest against Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, upon application of the Prosecutor on 9 May 2008. The Chamber decided to unseal the warrant following his arrest by the Belgian authorities on 24 May 2008. Bemba is soon expected to be transferred to the ICC detention center in The Hague, The Netherlands. Belgium, Central African Republic and Democratic Republic of the Congo are all among the 106 State Parties of the Rome Statute of the ICC. Thus they are obligated to cooperate with the Court which has jurisdiction for crimes committed on the territories or by nationals of these countries.

**WHY:** The charges contained in the warrant of arrest refer to acts allegedly committed in the CAR between 25 October 2002 and 15 March 2003. Pre Trial Chamber III stated that there are reasonable grounds to believe that Jean-Pierre Bemba is criminally responsible jointly with another or through another person for two counts of crimes against humanity: rape and torture, as well as four counts of war crimes: rape; torture; outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment; and pillaging a town or place.

**WHO:** Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, alleged national of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was born on 4 November 1962 in Bokada, in the Equateur province, DRC.

Allegedly, Bemba was the President and Commander in chief of the “*Mouvement de Libération du Congo*” also referred to in the warrant as the « Banyamulengue » forces.

**COMMENTS AND BACKGROUND:** This is the first unsealed arrest warrant and the first arrest in the situation of the Central African Republic. The situation in CAR is the ICC’s fourth investigation and was opened a year ago, on 22 May 2007, upon referral by the Central African Government on 22 December 2004. The Office of the Prosecutor is currently conducting investigations in three other situations, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Northern Uganda, and Darfur, Sudan. With twelve arrest warrants issued for investigations in four different countries, and with four suspects arrested to this day, the International Criminal Court is making its mark on the world stage.

“With the growing global reach of the Rome Statute, there are fewer safe havens for perpetrators of massive crimes” said William R. Pace, Convenor of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court. “Exactly ten years after the adoption of the Rome Statute, this Court embodies the promise of seeing individuals held responsible for the gravest crimes they committed, regardless of their position,” he added. “We are, we believe, at the beginning of a new age when the establishment of these kinds of militias that commit crimes against humanity is no longer a corridor to power, but a pathway to prison. We commend the Belgian authorities for their cooperation with the Court and look forward to a swift start to fair and independent proceedings in the case against Bemba,” he concluded.

Experts from international and local CAR human rights organizations are listed below for further comment and background.

**List of NGO Experts on the Central African Republic:**

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**Important notice:** *The Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), an independent NGO movement, is dedicated to the establishment of the International Criminal Court as a fair, effective, and independent international organization. The Coalition as a whole, and its secretariat, does not endorse or promote specific investigations or prosecutions or take a position on situations before the ICC. However, individual CICC members may endorse referrals, provide legal and other support on investigations, or develop partnerships with local and other organizations in the course of their efforts*

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