



## Top criminal court condemns US sanctions on officials



Donal Trump file pic

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Trump's order accuses it of "illegitimate and baseless actions", after the ICC issued an arrest warrant for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over alleged war crimes in Gaza, which Israel denies. The ICC also issued a warrant for a Hamas commander.

The ICC is a global court, although the US and Israel are not members, with the power to bring prosecutions for genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. In its statement, it said: "The ICC condemns the issuance by the US of an executive order seeking to impose sanctions on its officials and harm its independent and impartial judicial work."

It added it stood by its personnel, pledging "to continue providing justice and hope to millions of innocent victims of atrocities across the world".

In recent years, the court has issued arrest warrants for Russian President Vladimir Putin over alleged war crimes in Ukraine, Taliban leaders for "persecuting Afghan girls and women" and Myanmar's military leader for crimes against the Rohingya Muslims.

More than 120 countries are members, including the UK and many European nations.

International Criminal Court: What is the ICC and what does it do?

Judges at the court have said there are "reasonable grounds" to suggest Netanyahu, his former defence minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas' Mohammed Deif - who died last year - bear "criminal responsibility for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity".

But a White House memo circulated on Thursday accused the Hague-based ICC of creating a "shameful moral equivalency" between Hamas and Israel by issuing the warrants at the same time.

Trump's executive order said the ICC's recent actions "set a dangerous precedent" that endangered Americans by exposing them to "harassment, abuse and possible arrest".

The order adds it "threatens to infringe upon the sovereignty of the United States" and "undermines" the national security and foreign policy work of the US and allies. The sanctions, announced while Netanyahu was in the US, place financial and visa restrictions on individuals and their families who assist in ICC investigations of American citizens or allies.

The move has been met with condemnation by many US allies, including the Netherlands and Germany.

A spokesperson for Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the UK supported the independence of the ICC.

The United Nations (UN) has called for the measure to be reversed, while Ursula von der Leyen, the European Commission president, said on X that the ICC "must be able to freely pursue the fight against global impunity".

But in a post on X on Friday, Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar said he "strongly" commended Trump's executive order.

He claimed the ICC's actions were "immoral and have no legal basis", accusing the court of not operating "in accordance with international law".

Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto said on Facebook on Friday that Trump's decision was "absolutely understandable", alleging the ICC had "in recent times disguised itself as a biased political tool".

Hungary's government has received widespread criticism for retaining close ties to the Kremlin following its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, and has invited Netanyahu to visit despite the international arrest warrant. clerk to the court's first chief prosecutor warned the

sanctions could have "a profound practical impact" on its operations.

"The sanctions... do have the potential of freezing property and assets, as well as suspending entry into the United States of ICC officials and their immediate family members," Zachary Kaufman told the BBC World Service.

The US has repeatedly rejected any jurisdiction by the body over American officials or citizens, and has accused the ICC of placing constraints on Israel's right to self-defence, while ignoring Iran and anti-Israel groups.

During his first term in office, Trump imposed sanctions on ICC officials who were investigating whether US forces had committed war crimes in Afghanistan.

This included a travel ban and asset freezes against former chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda.

Those sanctions were lifted by President Joe Biden's administration.

Last month, the US House of Representatives voted to sanction the ICC, but the bill foundered in the Senate.

In response to efforts to what they described as attempts to challenge the ICC's authority, nine nations - including South Africa and Malaysia - launched the 'Hague Group' last month in an effort to defend the court and its rulings.

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