

## Concept Note: Safeguarding International Justice

### Defending the Defenders: Countering Sanctions and Coercive Measures against the International Criminal Court and those Supporting its Mandate

**Date/Time:** 23 March 2026 | 12:00 – 13:00 (60 Minutes)

**Location:** Palais des Nations, Geneva (Room XII)

**Hosted by:** Colombia, the State of Palestine, South Africa, Spain

**Organisers** NPWJ, CICC, Al-Haq, Al Mezan, and PCHR

#### I. Background and Objective

Over the past year, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has faced an unprecedented escalation of coercive measures. These include asset freezes and financial sanctions on the Court's leadership, imposed in February 2025 and repeatedly expanded, and the December 2025 criminal convictions, which sentenced eight judges and the Prosecutor to prison terms of up to 15 years in absentia.

These measures have expanded to target the broader human rights architecture, including the sanctioning of a UN Special Rapporteur and three leading Palestinian NGOs — Al-Haq, Al Mezan and PCHR — specifically for their work in support of international justice. Notably, the net of sanctions has been cast wide enough to capture actors whose connection to the ICC consisted of advocacy in support of the ICC rather than formal cooperation with it, illustrating the breadth and intent of the sanctions campaign.

Despite this administrative siege, the Court has entered 2026 with a message of resilience. Its judicial operations have intensified; its commitment to justice remains undeterred.

This side event aims to:

1. **Expose the Operational Siege:** Detail the tangible impact of sanctions on the daily lives of judges, partners of the Court, and the administrative functioning of the Court (banking, travel and digital security).
2. **Celebrate Institutional Resilience:** Highlight how the Court and civil society continue to fulfil their mandates despite personal and organisational threats.
3. **Mobilise Countermeasures:** Move beyond "condemnation" to advocate for concrete "blocking statutes" and diplomatic protections that ensure the Court has all the support it needs to execute its mandate to deliver fair, independent and impartial justice.

#### II. Conceptual Themes: Resilience vs. Impact

The event will showcase the determination and success of the Court to remain operational, while documenting how sanctions have forced those who support the Court to lose access to basic services (banking, insurance, travel, digital tools).

Drawing on the CICC's forthcoming *2025 Sanctions Impact Report*, the panel will warn against "de-risking" by banks and vendors. The message is clear: the Court is undeterred, but it requires States Parties to provide political, legal and operational support.

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**The Universality of Protection:** The event will demonstrate that the sanctions net has extended well beyond the Court itself — reaching a UN Special Rapporteur whose designation rested on the exercise of the mandate vested in her by the Human Rights Council, and Palestinian human rights organisations for their work in support of justice and accountability. This overreach is itself the argument for structural countermeasures.

### III. Programme (60 Minutes)

Time	Segment	Speaker
12:00– 12:05	Welcome & Political Framing	H.E. Mr. Gustavo Gallón, Permanent Representative of Colombia
12:05– 12:13	The Expanded Net: Sanctions Overreach	Ms. Francesca Albanese, UN Special Rapporteur on the OPT — On what it means to be sanctioned for the exercise of a UN HRC mandate, in violation of UN treaty obligations
12:13– 12:37	The Ground Reality: Impact on Human Rights Documentation	Al-Haq, Al Mezan, PCHR — Three coordinated interventions on what sanctions mean for victim documentation, organisational survival, and access to justice in a hostile political and operational environment
12:37– 12:45	The Extraterritorial Impact of Sanctions: Measures States Parties can take	Ms. Zoé Paris, CICC — Presenting key findings from the 2025 Report on the impact of sanctions on the rights of victims of atrocities
12:45– 13:50	Call to Action	H.E. Mr. Ibrahim Khraishi, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine
12:50– 13:00	Q&A	Mr. Niccolò Figà-Talamanca, Secretary General, No Peace Without Justice

### IV. Expected Outcomes

The event will culminate in a "Call to Action" urging the HRC and States Parties to adopt concrete countermeasures, including legislation modelled on Blocking Statutes (such as the EU's 1996 regulation) to mitigate the domestic effect of extraterritorial sanctions against the Court and designated NGOs.

Specifically, the event will call on ICC States Parties and the HRC to:

- Adopt or support blocking statutes that neutralise the domestic legal effect of extraterritorial sanctions targeting ICC officials and cooperating NGOs;
- Provide concrete diplomatic, legal and operational support to sanctioned individuals and organisations to ensure continuity of their mandates;
- Affirm the inviolability of the Rome Statute system and the protection of those working within it.

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