PERMANENT MISSION
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
NEW YORK

NEW YORK, 24 SEPTEMBER 2026

HIGH-LEVEL WEEK

INFORMAL MINISTERIAL NETWORK

WELCOMING REMARKS BY H.E. SABINE MONAUNI

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Excellencies,

Dear colleagues,

A very warm welcome to our annual exchange on the International Criminal Court and a big thanks to our friends from Austria for hosting us again this year. The ICC is certainly no stranger to adversity and has weathered many storms during its lifespan. But our meeting today takes place at a moment that is truly unprecedented.

The Court has been under massive political attacks for many years. Some of its leading figures have been subject to sanctions measures and even to criminal indictments. In recent months, external pressure has escalated further, due to the US political campaign trying to "dismantle" the Court through pressure on States Parties and the escalation of sanctions against ICC high-level officials, which now also include the President of the Court.

Last year already, we met among reports and rumours that institutional sanctions against the Court were imminent. This happened again this year, and while President Trump did not announce them in his speech on Tuesday, the situation remains alarming. There is no reason to expect that institutional sanctions are not coming; rather we should use this extra time wisely to do what is necessary to protect the Court and to support the rule of law. The Court is to be commended for the

resilience work it has done in the last twelve months. It has secured its continued operations in the areas of IT and insurances, while it remains vulnerable in the field of banking. Therefore, it is us, States Parties, who are called upon to find practical and legal solutions to prevent possible institutional sanctions from being greatly disruptive to the Court's operation. As we all know, the European Union Blocking Statute can play an important role in this respect.

The political campaign to "dismantle" the Court has put pressure on States Parties to withdraw from the Rome Statute and requires a robust and coordinated response from us. We must rally at the regional level to counter the pressure on States Parties to leave the Court and to offer incentives not just for States to remain within the Rome Statute, but to persuade others to join. We have already witnessed some - while thankfully limited - announcement of withdrawals from the Court. We must make sure that this does not turn into a trend. We know that it is not always easy to do the diplomatic work required to stand up for the ICC. But the Rome Statute remains one of the most significant achievements in the history of treaty-making. It symbolizes something far more powerful than the daily work of the Court in the Hague, which, indeed, can be imperfect. It symbolizes that no one is above the law and, ultimately, it is our strongest expression of support for international law.

Importantly, in the face of adversity, we must remain calm, but act with resolve and in a strategic way. The Court's progress in ensuring business continuity, even under the most difficult circumstances, is a testament to its ability to respond to extraordinary circumstances with determination and resilience. Now it is time for us, States Parties, to match this determination with unity and practical measures to support the Court's work and continue to strengthen the Rome Statute.

Excellencies,

It is my great pleasure to hand over to our co-host.

I thank you.