

PRESS RELEASE

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The decision to suspend the trial of Suriname's President Bouterse is of concern – ICJ

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) is concerned about the decision by a Suriname Military Court to suspend the trial of President Desi Bouterse, and leave it to the public prosecutor and an as yet undesignated court to decide on whether President Bouterse should benefit from the country's Amnesty Law.

Bouterse had been accused of having been present on December 8, 1982, at the military barracks of Fort Zeelandia where 15 political opponents were allegedly executed.

At the time, Bouterse was leading a military government. In 2010 he was elected president of Suriname. The Amnesty Law applies to crimes committed between 1980 and 1992.

“The ICJ is concerned by the decision of the Military Court to discharge itself of responsibilities in relation to this case,” said Dr. Jeff Handmaker, who has been observing the trial on behalf of the ICJ. “Handing the matter over to the office of the prosecutor, without taking a decision on the constitutionality of the Amnesty Law, leads to great uncertainty.”

According to international law, and Suriname's Constitution, the victims to this matter have the right to an honest and public treatment of their complaint within a reasonable period of time.

“Indications are that this will not happen,” Handmaker added.
“The case has been pending for nearly 30 years since the events took place and for five years since the trial began in 2007. Justice delayed is justice denied.”

The ICJ now calls on a higher Court to urgently reconsider the decision of the Military Court and take a decision on the constitutionality of the Amnesty Law.

For further information, please contact:

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NOTES:

- While the Court has provided an extensively argued judgment that was read out in Court, a written version is not yet available, and will be studied more closely by the ICJ.
- Composed of 60 eminent judges and lawyers from all regions of the world, the International Commission of Jurists promotes and protects human rights through the Rule of Law, by using its unique legal expertise to develop and strengthen national and international justice systems. Established in 1952 and active on the five continents, the ICJ aims to ensure the progressive development and effective implementation of international human rights and international humanitarian law; secure the realization of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights; safeguard the separation of powers; and guarantee the independence of the judiciary and legal profession.