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REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA

**STATEMENT**

**by**

**H.E. Ms Tanja Fajon,**

**Deputy Prime Minister and**

**Minister of Foreign and European Affairs**

at the Formal Opening

of the

MLA Diplomatic Conference;

Ljubljana, 15 May 2023

Distinguished Delegates,

Ministers, State Secretaries,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to Slovenia, welcome to Ljubljana!

It is a pleasure and honour to greet you at the Formal Opening of the MLA Diplomatic Conference.

My sincere appreciation goes out to all representatives of states, international organizations and civil society who are here today, as well as to all those who will join the work of the Conference at a later stage.

Your participation reflects our joint global commitment to ensure the accountability and end impunity for the most heinous crimes.

A strong team effort is a key to success. With this in mind, let me commend Slovenia's partners in the Core Group – Argentina, Belgium, Mongolia, the Netherlands and Senegal - for their friendship, cooperation, persistent efforts and tireless work. This excellent collaboration has brought the MLA Initiative into being.

It has been 12 years since Initiative's the first steps. It has started with the experts of three European countries and continued to grow steadily over the years. Today, the Core Group has 6 countries with a strong cross-regional dimension, there are 80 Supporting States and almost 20 Observers.

This is the first Diplomatic Conference that Slovenia has hosted. We are determined to be a generous host and to provide all the support needed in order to bring the Conference to a successful conclusion.

Our engagement reflects Slovenia's longstanding commitment to the principles of international law and respect for human rights and our steadfast support for an effective and strong system of international criminal justice.

I sincerely hope that the Conference will be a decisive step toward boosting the political will and strengthening the capacity of States to carry out investigations and prosecutions of the most serious international crimes. We, as States, have a primary obligation to do so.

Excellencies,

Let me underline the importance of ensuring justice, first and foremost, for the benefit of the victims.

Three decades ago, we witnessed horrible crimes in our immediate neighbourhood and we deeply understand the role of justice in ending the conflicts, in reconciliation, in healing the deep wounds in individuals and in societies.

As we have prepared for this opening segment, we have decided to use the opportunity to single out some of the crimes that are still not persecuted on a global scale, in a concerted effort – but they need to be.

In this context, I want to bring attention to the victims of wartime sexual violence. In today’s conflicts, women, men, children and the elderly are deliberately subjected to unspeakable crimes.

Armies and militias use sexual violence as a strategy of war. The more shocking the crime, the more effective it is as a weapon of war.

Our mission is to ensure that the deep wounds suffered by victims and survivors are healed by ensuring justice. Their stories must be heard.

I urge all States to treat the problem of wartime sexual violence as one of their top priorities, to support survivors and to bring perpetrators to justice.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Your discussions and deliberations over the coming two weeks are likely to be wide-ranging and intense. The issues are difficult, the challenges are diverse and there are no easy answers.

We face a huge task of putting in place the legal groundwork that will allow us to investigate and prosecute the most serious crimes more effectively and to react more swiftly.

I see this step as the next milestone in our common fight against impunity. By adopting the MLA Convention, we will establish a new era of accountability.

Once again, let me reiterate the importance of a strong political will to explore the uncharted terrain and the importance of open-mindedness to find widely accepted solutions.

It takes courage and hard work to move forward. I have no doubt that this is our joint commitment as we start the MLA Diplomatic Conference.

In conclusion, I want to commend all the colleagues who have dedicated so much work and energy in making this conference happen. You have really earned our highest respect.

I wish us all an ambitious and successful conference!

Thank you.