



the global voice of
the legal profession'

IBA War Crimes Committee Conference 2026: Masters of war

Leiden University, Leiden University (Spui Campus, The Hague)

The Hague, Netherlands

18 April 2026

Claudio Visco

President

International Bar Association



Welcome remarks

Distinguished delegates, dear colleagues, dear friends,

On behalf of International Bar Association, it is an honour to join you here in The Hague on the occasion of the IBA War Crimes Committee's annual conference, this year focused on the theme 'Masters of war'.

I would like to thank the conference co-chairs from the IBA War Crimes Committee: **Kirsty Sutherland, Daniela Gavshon** and **Elsa Wyllie**, for their commitment and for bringing us together today to discuss a number of critical issues for legal professionals working towards justice and accountability. I would like to extend a warm greeting to all the speakers and moderators who will share their expertise during today's conference.

Since its establishment in 1947, the IBA has worked to protect and advance the rule of law, with the belief that the legal profession can contribute to global justice and stability through the administration of justice.

At a time when international law and international institutions are under threat, this commitment to promote and protect the rule of law and human rights is more necessary

than ever. This has been one of my core goals as IBA President and of my immediate predecessor, Mr Jaime Carey.

During our shared presidency, we have supported long-term IBA priorities and initiatives, including addressing gender disparity in the legal profession, building a more diverse and inclusive membership and enhancing the IBA's presence in regions such as Africa and the Asia Pacific. I was in Tokyo last week for the M&A Conference and a training for young lawyers. We have placed particular importance on understanding and responding to the impact of artificial intelligence on the legal profession and the civil society at large – which will also be the focus of one of the sessions today.

A core goal of our presidency has been to consolidate and strengthen our relationships with relevant international organisations and tribunals, with the aim of taking common positions and further advancing the rule of law worldwide with full respect for the core values of the legal profession. We are deeply involved in a programme for **creating awareness in the younger generations** of which the consequences of the rule of law being disregarded would be fatal.

We have recently launched an IBA presidential initiative developed in collaboration with the **Danish Bar and Law Society**, which is being piloted in seven secondary schools across Denmark to raise awareness among students and inspire them to uphold rule of law principles throughout their civic lives. This initiative aims to equip the next generation with the knowledge and tools necessary to play a pivotal role in strengthening legal systems and institutions, defending fundamental rights and safeguarding democratic societies. The pilot will engage ten classes and more than 400 students aged 15–19, and will culminate in an event at the IBA Annual Conference in Copenhagen in October.

The IBA continues to support the International Criminal Court and the Rome Statute system. At this moment, the ICC, its officials and those cooperating with it are facing significant political threats, intimidation and attacks from those seeking to undermine the Court's authority and obstruct its investigations. These attacks undo decades of progress for victims and weaken the rule of law globally. **The IBA has denounced and will continue to denounce sanctions against the International Criminal Court and its prosecutors and judges** imposed by the US administration, and we call on all states to oppose sanctions and respect the judicial independence of the Court.

Our **ICC & ICL Programme**, based in The Hague, works to **increase cooperation with and support for the ICC and other accountability efforts, to strengthen the Rome Statute system globally and achieve fair, effective and accessible justice for victims of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression**. Notable is the publication issued by the IBA in November 2025 on **'Pursuing the Arrest and Surrender of Suspects at Large to the International Criminal Court – A guide to State Parties to the Rome Statute'**, which identifies concrete measures that States Parties should take, individually and collectively through the ASP [Assembly of States Parties], to strengthen cooperation with, and support for, the enforcement of ICC arrest warrants.

Through the UN Programme of the IBA's Human Rights Institute, we bring a legal voice to the UN system and, with our legal expertise, contribute to enhancing UN legal standards and their implementation, including through ending impunity and promoting accountability for gross human rights violations.

I was particularly alarmed by [US President Donald] Trump's statement directed to Iran a few days ago: '**a whole civilization will die tonight**'. This is not acceptable and I only draw comfort from the reaction this statement has caused even in his own country and also among those who had supported him so far.

The IBA continues to support initiatives to advance accountability for international crimes committed in the context of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In particular, the **Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine** is a critical mechanism to ensure accountability for the crime of aggression. The IBA has supported the Special Tribunal since the earliest steps as an essential component of the legal response to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

We are honoured to have with us today **Ambassador Andriy Kostin** who will speak about the importance of this and other accountability mechanisms in Ukraine. Members of the War Crimes Committee and a number of today's speakers have also played essential roles in the IBA's efforts to support the legal profession and domestic prosecutions in Ukraine. Our **Executive Director, Mark Ellis**, leads these efforts, and just yesterday in London spoke at a high-level event at King's College on the critical need to address the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

The crime of aggression is one the four core crimes under Article 5 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 17 July 1998. Its definition, included in Article 8 *bis* of the Statute, was adopted in 2010 in the framework of Review Conference held in Kampala.

Since then, the ICC has never exercised its jurisdiction over the crime of aggression, due to the fact the conditions for the exercise of the ICC's jurisdiction are based on a regime that differs from the other Rome Statute core crimes. With relevance to the situation in Ukraine, the ICC may not investigate or prosecute alleged acts of aggression committed by nationals of non-State Parties. Currently, the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression is limited to acts of aggression committed by a State Party.

In the long term, bringing the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression in line with other Rome Statute crimes remains the final goal, however the timeline to adopt the jurisdictional amendment (not before 2029) is not compatible with the present situation. The IBA therefore continues to call for both the amendment of the ICC's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression, and the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.

We are also proud to continue to support the ground-breaking and innovative **eyeWitness to Atrocities app**, which provides human rights defenders with a mobile app to capture verifiable video and photos of abuses. Such verifiable documentation can provide critical evidence for trials of international crimes.

Today's conference brings us together to focus on the most pressing issues at the intersection of justice and conflict. This is one example of the contribution the IBA makes. By creating spaces for IBA members to come together, share expertise and ideas, and develop joint initiatives, we create and maintain a critical network to support and uphold the rule of law.

On behalf of the IBA I wish you all the best for today's discussions and I look forward to engaging with you during the day.