FIDH INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

COALITION FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Synergy for Justice

VRWG VICTIMS' RIGHTS WORKING GROUP

ALL SURVIVORS PROJECT

CONCEPT NOTE: VICTIM-CENTRED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED HEARINGS

SIDE EVENT AT THE 25TH SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY OF STATES PARTIES (ASP) TO THE ROME STATUTE, 30 NOVEMBER - 7 DECEMBER 2026

3 December 2026

13:15 – 14:45

World Forum, The Hague [Room: Yangtze 1]

Victims' Rights Working Group (VRWG) co-hosted by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH), and Redress; All Survivors Project; Synergy for Justice; [others TBC].

Sponsored by [TBC]

The event will be held in English, French, Spanish [others TBC].

SUPPORTED BY

Global Initiative Against Impunity – Making Justice Work

Co-funded by the European Union

DESCRIPTION

This side event will bring together members of affected communities including victims and survivors, civil society, international and national practitioners, and other experts to examine how hearings at the ICC and national transitional justice mechanisms are experienced by those most affected by Rome Statute crimes. Civil society from Libya and the Philippines will share their experiences of attending the 2026 confirmation of charges hearings, as well as reflections from affected communities who followed the proceedings remotely. Participants will also hear about best practices from representatives who accompany survivors before other international and domestic justice mechanisms, learn from experts in trauma-informed practice, and gain insight into survivor-engagement tools developed using an age and gender sensitive perspective.

ICC hearings are not only legal proceedings. They are also moments when victims, affected communities, and the wider public form impressions of whether international justice is accessible, understandable, and responsive. For many victims and families, attending and following a hearing is part of their healing. However, for some, it can be deeply traumatising, alienating, and stigmatising. How the Court receives and informs them — in the Public Gallery, at remote screenings, and through the information it provides— shapes their trust in the Court. The same principle applies to domestic justice mechanisms wherein processes have proven able to provide pathways to health, recovery and healing.

Above all, this dialogue is an invitation to States Parties to hear directly what ICC and other national jurisdiction hearings mean for victims and affected communities, to reflect on how their experiences can be improved, and to consider how justice mechanisms can better deliver justice that is meaningful to those they are intended to serve. When conducted in a trauma-informed and victim-centred way that considers and is sensitive to gender, age, and other factors, hearings can provide an opportunity for acknowledgment and validation, for victims to see their views and concerns reflected in proceedings, and for them to feel meaningfully included in the justice process. For some, participation in hearings may even form part of a process of healing. This depends not only on the Court and national justice systems but also on the organisations that support victims to follow and attend hearings, whose work requires and merits the continued financial support of States.

FORMAT

A moderated panel of 90 minutes, including an opportunity for open exchange with participants in the room.

The panel will bring together:

- Nymia Simbulan, Chairperson of the Philippine Alliance of Human Rights (PAHRA), on experience observing Duterte Confirmation of Charges Hearing
- Representative from Libyan Civil Society [TBC] on experience observing El Hishri Confirmation of Charges Hearing
- Charu Hogg, Founder of All Survivors Project on work with survivors in Ukraine and Colombia
- Survivor from Ukraine [TBC]
- A psychologist or other trauma expert [TBC]

OBJECTIVES

- Centre the voices of members of affected communities and civil society who attended or followed the 2026 hearings, in person or remotely.
- Share best practices from national and transitional justice mechanisms, including survivor-centred and intersectional approaches.
- Identify concrete, low-cost survivor-centred and trauma-informed measures the Court can adopt across all hearings, such as standard protocols, staff training, and accessible pre-hearing information to improve the experience of victims and affected communities.
- Set out what States Parties can do to support trauma-informed hearings, including through funding, cooperation on protection, and the revised Strategy in Relation to Victims.

BACKGROUND

In 2026, two confirmation of charges hearings showed how much ICC hearings matter to affected communities, and how far the experience of attending them can still fall short of the Court's commitment to victim-centred justice.

The hearing against former Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (23–27 February 2026) marked a significant moment for victims, survivors, affected communities, and human rights defenders in the Philippines. Filipino civil society, victims' groups and journalists followed it in person and at remote screenings in the Philippines, and valuable meetings took place between Court officials and civil society. Yet attendees also reported distressing experiences: families of victims told by security that crying was not permitted, uncertainty about whether they could leave the Public Gallery, and unexpected exposure to graphic material. Proceedings were interpreted only into English and French and not into languages of affected communities.

The hearing against Khaled El Hishri (19–21 May 2026) was the first case from the ICC's 15-year Libya investigation to reach this stage, and all 17 charges were confirmed on 16 July 2026. For Libyan survivors, seeing the accused before the judges restored hope that justice can reach those responsible.

Many of the lessons from Duterte, set out in the VRWG's May 2026 recommendations on improving engagement, were taken up. The Court held pre-hearing meetings between its organs and civil society, with bilingual staff interpreting into Arabic. An ICC therapist briefed attendees on the risks of re-traumatisation, a PIOS representative sat with civil society and survivors in the Public Gallery, and a room was made available for victims and civil society on the first day of the hearing.

However, gaps remained. The pre-hearing meetings highlighted the need for further collaboration between the relevant sections of the Registry and the CSOs that assist victims and members of affected communities attending hearings, so that meetings are tailored to participants' needs and existing knowledge. Many attendees also feared being identified on the live broadcast. Survivors also raised concerns about their treatment by security staff, including being questioned abruptly, or reproached for expressing emotion or closing their eyes during difficult moments in the proceedings. This underlines the importance of judges recognising that affected communities are in the room, and directing security staff accordingly.

The progress between the two hearings shows what dialogue between civil society and the Court can achieve. The concerns raised in the (forthcoming) publication of the VRWG's Lessons Learned from El Hishri show that this dialogue must continue as a lasting partnership, with responsibility shared between the Court and the organisations that support victims' attendance. However, we welcome learning that the Public Information and Outreach section is implementing our recommendation from both publications to develop a video in multiple languages to be shown at the beginning of each hearing both in the Public Gallery and via the Court's webcast to provide an overview of participants and layout of the Courtroom, expected decorum in the gallery, and permitted conduct.

This side event builds on the experiences of affected communities at both hearings and offers an opportunity to broaden the discussion by drawing on best practices from other international justice mechanisms and national jurisdictions, and on the expertise and survivor engagement tools developed across the international justice sector. This is timely as the Court finalises its revised Strategy in Relation to Victims.

ABOUT THE VRWG

The VRWG is a network of 181 civil society organisations working to uphold the rights and interests of victims in ICC proceedings. Co-led by FIDH and REDRESS and hosted by the CICC, the VRWG was reconvened in 2024 to renew its engagement on victims' rights at the ICC, including contributing to the Court's review of its 2012 Strategy in Relation to Victims.