

Greek lawyers to sue Blair for war crimes

Richard Tyler
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The Athens Bar Association has announced it will file a suit against British Prime Minister Tony Blair for “crimes against humanity and war crimes” for his role in the Iraq war. Association President Dimitris Paxinos told the press the organisation was also considering launching an action against Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, who also backed the invasion of Iraq.

Paxinos said the suit would be filed within a fortnight before the recently inaugurated International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague. The association felt an “ethical and juristic responsibility” to seek action from the ICC, Paxinos added.

Ninety countries have ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC adopted in July 1998, establishing the jurisdiction of the court to deal with what are considered the gravest international crimes including genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Since the US is not a signatory to the ICC, no American officials can be prosecuted.

The court is only competent to deal with crimes committed after the statute came into effect in July 2002. Cases may be submitted to the ICC either by the United Nations Security Council, by one of the signatory states or by the ex-officio prosecutor, acting on the basis of information received from victims, Non-Governmental Organisations or other sources considered appropriate. This would seem to provide grounds for an application from the Athens Bar Association to be considered.

Under the Rome Statute, prime ministers can no longer hide behind their office, since the statute applies “equally to all persons without any distinction based on official capacity. In particular, official capacity as a Head of State or Government, a member of a Government or parliament.”

A Downing Street spokesperson rejected the Greek lawyers’ claims that Prime Minister Blair and Foreign

Minister Jack Straw were guilty of war crimes. “As we have made clear on a number of occasions, the British government has acted in accordance with international law.” However, the Blair government still refuses to publish the legal advice it was given by its most senior law officers on the eve of the war.

The ICC said it could only consider the Greek case after its first prosecutor, Argentinean lawyer Luis Moreno, was sworn in on June 16.



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