

Special Court for Sierra Leone  
Press and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 10 December 2002

Remarks by  
PROSECUTOR DAVID M. CRANE  
for International Human Rights Day  
Victoria Park, Freetown

I am pleased and deeply honored to be celebrating International Human Rights day with you all today. I want to thank Chairman Bishop Humper, the other TRC Commissioners, the UNAMSIL Human Rights Section, and the Sierra Leone human rights community. Your hard work to advance human dignity and respect for human rights today and everyday in this country is an inspiration to all of us at the Special Court.

Ladies and gentlemen, I can think of no place in the world more fitting to celebrate International Human Rights Day than Sierra Leone. We are embarking on an unprecedented campaign for human rights, with the international community and the people of Sierra Leone joining hands like never before to ensure that the barbaric abuses of the past decade never recur. With the launch of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court for Sierra Leone, this country has taken a stand against the entrenched problem of impunity. You - all of you here - are leading a global march into the new era of human rights accountability. The people of Sierra Leone should take great pride in celebrating their groundbreaking commitment to the advancement of human rights.

For the past decade, Sierra Leone has been infamous for its human rights abuses. This year, we begin a long process of making Sierra Leone famous for its human rights accountability. For the past decade, the eyes of the world turned to Sierra Leone in pity. In the decade ahead, the world may look to Sierra Leone with admiration for its courageous, creative and comprehensive approach to human rights accountability. For the past decade, Sierra Leone has turned to the international community for help. In the decade ahead, the international community may turn to Sierra Leone to learn lessons in addressing impunity. The key to this transition will be your determination and commitment to the TRC, the Special Court, and the untiring efforts of civil society.

For the past five months, I have had the privilege of serving as the Prosecutor for the Special Court for Sierra Leone. During this time, I have traveled throughout the country to meet with my clients, the people of this country. I have traveled extensively through the provinces to hear concerns and thoughts on how I should approach my mandate of prosecuting those who bear the greatest responsibility for the heinous atrocities committed in this country.

The question I am most frequently asked is whether my office will take evidence from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I have made this statement publicly before, but I want to reiterate it today to make it absolutely clear:

I will not demand any information from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission!

Victims, perpetrators, and witnesses who testify before the TRC should do so without fear of having their statements subpoenaed by my office. My team of investigators and prosecutors are hard at work putting together cases against key individuals responsible for serious violations of international humanitarian law. We are doing this separately from the work of the TRC.

During my community meetings, people also ask me whether it seems strange to pursue reconciliation and justice at the same time. Complex problems require complex solutions. The TRC and the Special Court, at their core, are both designed to reduce the chance of future violence in Sierra Leone. For the tens of thousands involved in atrocities, you have chosen a path of reintegration and reconciliation, but for those few kakatua - the commanders, politicians and financiers who bear the greatest responsibility for these atrocities - we will hold them accountable. The TRC and the Special Court are two key pillars to stabilize the peace in Sierra Leone and both must stand.

For justice, reconciliation, and peace to take hold in Sierra Leone, both the Special Court and the TRC must succeed. I encourage the people of Sierra Leone to come forward and share their experiences with the TRC. To this end, I assure you that you can testify before the TRC without fear that the Prosecution will demand those statements. As Chairman Humper has said, the TRC will and must tell the story of the entire conflict. Without the truth, there can be no forgiveness or healing.

Together, both institutions - the TRC and the Special Court - will work to eliminate the culture of impunity that undermines all efforts to bring peace and stability to this country. However, these institutions present opportunities rather than conclusions. It is still up to all of us present here to make sure that today represents a turning point from the decade past and the decade ahead. I believe that on future celebrations of International Human Rights Day, the people of Sierra Leone will look at these institutions with a profound sense of national pride.

I am proud to be a part of this, and I therefore pledge my best efforts to this end.

Thank you.

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