

Special Court for Sierra Leone  
Press and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Bonthe, Sierra Leone, 15 March 2003

**Sesay Pleads Not Guilty: Three Other Hearings Adjourned**

Initial hearings for four of the seven men indicted last Monday by the Special Court were held on Saturday in a tiny Sierra Leone district court at Bonthe, a town on a sparsely populated island. One alleged commander of the Revolution United Front (RUF), Issa Hassan Sesay, pleaded not guilty. Hearings for the other three were adjourned to the coming week.

The alleged leader of the RUF rebels, Foday Saybana Sankoh, did not respond verbally to questions by the presiding Judge, Benjamin M. Itoe of Cameroon. The Judge decided to order a psychiatric and medical evaluation and adjourned the case for next Thursday.

In other hearings, Alex Tamba Brima, an alleged commander in Sierra Leone's former junta, and Morris Kallon, an alleged RUF commander, both requested that their indictments be translated into Krio. Their hearings were adjourned until Monday to allow for the time it would take to read the translations to them.

The indictment of Sesay was translated into Krio on Saturday, which took over an hour. Sesay listened carefully to each of the seventeen counts of his indictment, which included murder, rape, extermination, acts of terror, sexual slavery, conscription of children into an armed force and attacks on UN peacekeepers. On several occasions he requested clarification of the counts. Eventually he entered 'not guilty' pleas for each of them.

The fifth indictee, Sierra Leone's Minister of Interior Sam Hinga Norman, who was arrested at the same time as the other four, will be held outside the country until he has his trial. Two other indictees have not yet been arrested.

Hearings are to continue at Bonthe while the permanent Court in Freetown is under construction. A secure detention centre is expected to open next May at the Court. The courthouse is expected to be ready for trials by September.

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