

Special Court for Sierra Leone
Press and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

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Gbao pleads not guilty to charges in front of the Special Court

The initial appearance of Augustine Gbao took place yesterday, the 25th April 2003. The hearing was held at a Magistrate Court in Bonthe, located near the temporary detention facility of the Special Court. The initial appearance was open to the public and attended by representatives of international organisations, national NGOs and the press.

Judge Bankole Thompson presided over the initial appearance, where the seventeen separate charges against Mr. Gbao were read out. Mr. Gbao stands accused of crimes against humanity, violations of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions and of Additional Protocol II and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, which include murder and rape. Four of the seventeen counts relate to attacks against United Nations Peacekeepers. Mr Gbao pleaded not guilty to all seventeen charges.

Mr. Gbao was defended by Professor Andreas O'Shea, a barrister from the UK who is based in South Africa, and who was supported by a representative from a firm of solicitors in London. O'Shea is Professor of Public International Law and International Human Rights Law at Durban University, and is also defence counsel for a case currently before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda.

Mr. Gbao declared that he did not have the funds to pay for his defence. The Court, according to its rules, therefore contracted the Defence team which represented him yesterday. The Court will pay for the defence until an investigation into Mr. Gbao's financial standing has been completed.

Other accused who have declared that they do not have the means to pay for their own lawyers will also be provided with independent counsel by the Court. Mr. Gbao's case was adjourned until further.

#END

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