

Special Court for Sierra Leone
Press and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

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Special Court Must Apply International Law Standards

For lawyers to represent defendants at the Special Court they must meet strict international standards, said the Registrar Robin Vincent at a seminar held Thursday in Freetown on international humanitarian law and international human rights. The Registry had recently decided that one lawyer who claimed to be representing indictee Augustine Gbao does not appear to be appropriately qualified.

Vincent stated, "I will not let defendants be harried into being represented by lawyers who do not have the proper qualification and international experience." For defendants who cannot afford to pay for lawyers themselves, they can choose from a list of qualified candidates selected by the Defence Unit of the Registry.

Acting chief of the Defence Unit John Jones, who also spoke at the seminar, said that Gbao has chosen Andreas O'Shea, a South African-based professor in international law and the law firm of Thanky Novi Taube. "They have plenty of experience having represented indictees at the international criminal courts for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia," Jones said.

The chief of prosecutions Luc Cote also spoke at Thursday's seminar which took place at the Bank of Sierra Leone Complex in Kingtom and was organized by the Court's Outreach Office. Participants included representatives from the various factions in the conflict in Sierra Leone as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations and academics.

The Chairman of the Seminar, Executive Secretary of the National Forum for Human Rights Sheku B.S. Lahai, said that following the first indictments of the Court last March, many Sierra Leoneans have begun asking questions about international criminal justice that need answering. The seminar aimed to improve awareness of the procedures the Special Court must follow in order to uphold international humanitarian law and international human rights.

A wide range of issues were discussed, including the issuing of indictments and arrest warrants; rules of detention and differences between hearings and the actual trials. The Chief of UNAMSIL's Human Rights Section Rodolpho Mattarollo spoke on what constitutes war crimes and crimes against humanity, explaining how international criminal law has evolved since the first international criminal court in Nuremburg, following the Second World War.

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