

Special Court for Sierra Leone
Press and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

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In the First Special Court Hearings in Freetown, Sankoh's Request is Denied

Hearings on Tuesday took place for the first time at the Special Court's new temporary court house in Freetown. The presiding judge, Benjamin M. Itoe, made decisions concerning two indictees, Foday Saybana Sankoh, the alleged leader of the Revolutionary United Front, and Alex Tamba Brima, an alleged commander in the former junta.

Judge Itoe denied a request by lawyers representing Sankoh for a 'stay of proceedings' until the Court had completed a full psychiatric and physiological examination. The same judge had requested the examination in March after Sankoh was transferred into the custody of the Court.

The equipment necessary for the examination does not exist in Sierra Leone and a United Nations travel ban on Sankoh is still in place. The Court's Registrar said in June that the ban would likely be lifted if a country with the equipment were to offer to assist. No country has yet been found.

A psychiatrist, who made a preliminary examination of Sankoh in March, described him as 'catatonic'. The psychiatrist made a report to the Court but could not make a complete diagnosis or determine whether Sankoh is competent to stand trial.

Judge Itoe also denied applications by lawyers representing Alex Tamba Brima for bail and a habeas corpus writ claiming that his detention is unlawful. Brima was brought by helicopter to the Special Court site from the Court's temporary detention centre at the town of Bonthe. He was returned to Bonthe after the hearing.

Sankoh did not attend.

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