

Special Court for Sierra Leone
Press and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

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Santigie Kanu Pleads Not Guilty

One of three former soldiers who allegedly led the bloody January 1999 attack on Sierra Leone's capital pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to atrocities committed against civilians and peacekeepers. Santigie Kanu appeared at his initial appearance before Judge Pierre Boutet in the Special Court's temporary courthouse in Freetown.

Kanu had been transferred into the custody of the Special Court on Wednesday from the national court, where he was facing treason charges. He now faces a seventeen-count indictment by the Special Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity, including killings, mutilations, sexual violence, forcible recruitment of child soldiers, enslavement of civilian, destruction of property, and attacks on United Nations peacekeepers.

Dressed in a khaki-coloured track suit and white sports shoes, Kanu often listened intently as the interpreter translated the charges into Krio. He then denied any knowledge of the allegations. "I wasn't involved," he said. "It's the same thing. I told you - I don't know anything about this."

Early on in the two-hour and fifteen minute-long hearing, Kanu insisted his nickname was not "Five-Five" as alleged in the indictment. He also announced that he intended to challenge the court's jurisdiction. Judge Boutet told Kanu and his lawyers that while the Court would take note of their intent to challenge jurisdiction, the initial hearing was not the appropriate place to bring up the issue.

After defence lawyers requested legal assistance, the Judge called on the Registrar to investigate Kanu's financial resources. Judge Boutet then ordered that Kanu be held in custody.

#END

The Special Court is an independent tribunal established jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone. It is mandated to bring to justice those who bear the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone after 30 November 1996. To date, the Prosecutor has indicted thirteen persons on various charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. Nine indictees are currently in the custody of the Court.

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