

Statement by:

**Justice Emmanuel Olayinka Ayoola**  
**President, Special Court for Sierra Leone.**

1. I assumed office as President of the Special Court for Sierra Leone on 26 May 2004 having been unanimously elected the Presiding Judge of the Appeals Chamber by the Judges of the Appeals Chamber.

2. I enter into office at a new and crucial phase of the activities of the Court when trials are scheduled to commence.

3. The past years have been characterised by remarkable administrative, prosecutorial and judicial activities and achievements cardinal of which are the numerous decisions of the Trial Chamber which in their thoroughness and depth have gone a long way to develop the jurisprudence of international criminal justice. Quietly and tirelessly the Judges of the Trial Chamber have worked to ensure speedy administration of even-handed justice.

4. The judges of the Trial Chamber, working diligently in all candour, understanding, serenity, judicial collegiality and commitment to the cause of justice, have been able to bring the Court to the trial phase with the first trial scheduled to commence on 3 June, 2004.

5. The credit for the smooth arrival at this phase of the judicial activities of the Court can rightly be shared by all organs of the Court, the Trial and Appeals Chamber, the Prosecutor, the Registrar, the Principal Defender and their respective staff. It is but fitting that as we arrive at the current phase and as I assume office, I must acknowledge the noble part each has played in bringing this phase to fruition.

6. As the Special Court enters into the trial phase, it is an opportune time to emphasize once again the commitment of the Court to the values that underlie its establishment, which consist of prosecuting those who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leone Law during the armed conflict that occurred in Sierra Leone so that in the end, the guilty are convicted, the innocent acquitted, and the victims and relatives experience a moral reinforcement that justice has prevailed.

7. Justice, as we all know, is affronted when impunity reigns bringing in its wake, injustice and a challenge to civilised values and a peaceful world order.

8. It is for this reason that the Special Court sees itself and shall continue to function as an important instrument of global justice and world peace. Its potency as such an instrument can only attain its fullness with the active commitment of all members of the international community, not only in contributing to the funds of the Court but also in co-operating with the Court as may be necessary for the exercise of its functions and for its operations.

9. By the agreement establishing the Court, the international community, acting through the United Nations, has demonstrated its resolve that States voluntarily co-operate with the Special Court as is manifested in the capacity given to the Court to enter into agreement with States as may be necessary for the exercise of its functions and for the operation of the Court so as to fulfil

its mandate.

10. The principal form of co-operation is for States to ensure that persons indicted by the Court are not shielded from justice or encouraged to evade it.

11. It is for this reason that I appeal to all States comprising the international community to demonstrate their commitment to the war against impunity and the injustice that it represents and to co-operate with this Court as may from time to time be necessary, for the exercise of its functions, particularly, by lending its authority to the execution of any warrant of arrest issued by the Court after all due process has been observed.

12. I am emboldened to make this call in the firm assurance that proceedings of the Special Court have been and will continue to be scrupulously fair and that no-one indicted by the Court will be denied of the benefit of their procedural and substantive due process rights especially that of the presumption of innocence.

13. The Special Court is fortunate to enjoy the services of judges, counsel and staff whose commitment to and passion for justice are the motivating factors in their offering their services to the Court.

14. Once again, I thank the States and Organisations whose commitment to the fundamental values that have been translated into material and moral support for the Court.

15. I acknowledge the administrative and professional skills of the Registrar of the Special Court, Mr. Robin Vincent, and his staff who have placed the Court on a sound footing. I look forward to their continued devotion to the excellence in the administration of international justice to which the Special Court is committed.

16. For my part, I am determined to ensure that the Special Court fulfils its promise and strives to complete its judicial activities without delay. This it can do not only with its own effort, but also with the co-operation and support of the international community.

**Justice E. O. Ayoola.**