



**Special Court for Sierra Leone**  
Press and Public Affairs Office

## **PRESS RELEASE**

**Freetown, Sierra Leone, 7 December 2004**

### **German President Visits the Special Court**

The flag of the Federal Republic of Germany flew over the courthouse Tuesday, marking a visit to the Special Court by German President Horst Köhler. President Köhler's visit was the first ever by a Western Head of State to the Court's complex in Freetown.



President Köhler, accompanied by a high-level German delegation, was welcomed in front of the courthouse by the Special Court President, Justice Emmanuel Ayoola.

In a meeting with Special Court Judges, the President was briefed by the Presiding Judge of the Trial Chamber, Benjamin Itoe, on the progress of the trials so far. President Köhler discussed with the Judges the challenges of providing justice and reconciliation in Sierra Leone.

In a second meeting, which was attended by international and Sierra Leonean Court officials, the German president and his delegation talked about the progress and challenges encountered by the Court, as well as its reception by the people of Sierra Leone.

After briefly observing the trial in progress, President Köhler spoke with reporters gathered in front of the courthouse. In his remarks, the President called the Special Court "a very important institution for working to bring justice to Sierra Leone." He also stressed the importance of reconciliation in the aftermath of the country's decade-long civil war.

"It is important that at the end the people of Sierra Leone will see that there is justice in the world for them," he said. "Based on that, they will get a long-term perspective of peace, economic and social development. We want and have to care about the people here in Sierra Leone."

In response to a question from a German reporter on how he thought justice was delivered at the Special Court, President Köhler said this was not a question which could be answered responsibly with a quick statement.

"I believe that I am encountering two things here, which need to be weighed carefully," he said. "First, from the perspective of the international community, that is, how the crimes here are judged, but also – and for me this is just as important – how within the international community there can be a structured

way of dealing with justice which in the end will benefit the country and also the people themselves. We should never forget that.”

Justice Ayoola explained the mandate of the Special Court, which is to prosecute only those deemed to bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities which took place during the conflict in Sierra Leone.

“We believe that if we had tried everybody who participated in the conflict, the thing will be endless because it’s a very large number,” he said. “When you keep the ringleaders that sends a message that if you can try the highest then the smallest will know that he has no hiding place in future.”

#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 eleven 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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