

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
Office of the Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, 26 March, 2006

Urgent Statement by the Prosecutor of the Special Court, Desmond de Silva, QC, on his request to Nigeria to execute a warrant of arrest on former President of Liberia Charles Taylor

Until the indicted war criminal Charles Taylor is in the hands of Liberian authorities to whom Nigeria is making Taylor available for collection, the spotlight of the international community will be upon Nigeria. In particular, the watching world will wish to see Taylor held in Nigerian detention to avoid the possibility of him using his wealth and associates to slip away, with grave consequences to the stability of the region.

I have therefore transmitted via the High Commission of Nigeria in Freetown, an official request to President Olusegun Obasanjo, whose contribution to peace in the sub-region has been huge, to take all necessary steps to ensure that Charles Taylor is unable to abscond. In particular, I have requested President Obasanjo to have his authorities execute the warrant for the arrest of Charles Taylor issued by the Special Court and transmitted to Nigeria in November 2003.

Produced by the
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Visit the Special Court's website at www.sc-sl.org

Brief Chronology on Efforts to Bring Charles Taylor to Justice

On 3 March 2003 the Special Court Prosecutor signed a 17-count indictment alleging war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. The indictment was confirmed by the Trial Chamber on 7 March 2003 but ordered kept under seal.

The Prosecutor unsealed the indictment on 4 June 2003, during Taylor's first trip out of Liberia since the signing of the indictment.

On 4 August 2003 Taylor went into exile in Calabar, Nigeria.

On 31 October and 1 November 2003 Taylor's lawyer, the late Terrence Terry, introduced a preliminary motion before the Special Court's Appeals Chamber unsuccessfully challenging the Court's jurisdiction to try him. The motion argued that as President of Liberia, Taylor enjoyed head of state immunity. He also argued that the Court was not an international tribunal and thus had no jurisdiction outside of Sierra Leone.

On 27 November 2003 a warrant for the arrest of Charles Taylor, issued by the Special Court was transmitted to the Government of Nigeria via the Nigerian High Commission in Freetown.

On 31 May 2004 the Appeals Chamber decided the Special Court was an international court and that a head of state does not enjoy immunity from prosecution before an international court. The motion was consequently dismissed.

On 24 February 2005 the European Parliament unanimously passed a resolution calling for Nigeria to transfer Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

On 4 May 2005 the U.S. House of Representatives passed a Resolution, 421-1, calling for Nigeria to transfer Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

On 11 May 2005 the U.S. Senate passed the 4 May House Resolution by unanimous consent, joining the call for Nigeria to transfer Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

On 24 May 2005 members of the United Nations Security Council underlined the importance of ensuring that all those who have been indicted by the Court appear before it, thereby strengthening the stability of Sierra Leone and the sub-region and bringing an end to impunity.

On 30 June 2005 a coalition of up to 300 African and international civil society groups sent a declaration to the African Union (AU) demanding that Nigeria surrender Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Press conferences were held in 14 countries throughout Africa announcing the declaration.

On 11 November 2005 the UN Security Council passed resolution 1638 which gave the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) the powers to detain Charles Taylor should he ever be returned to Liberia, and apprehend and transfer him to the Special Court. This resolution clearly displays the views of the UN Security Council's that Taylor should be brought to justice at the Special Court.

On 5 March 2006 a formal request was sent to President Olusegun Obasanjo by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf requesting that former President of Liberia Charles Taylor be transferred to the custody of the Government of Liberia.

On 26 March 2006 President Olusegun Obasanjo informs President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf that the Government of Liberia is free to take former President Charles Taylor into its custody.