

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTOR

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, 3rd April 2006

Chief Prosecutor Welcomes the Successful Initial Appearance of Charles Taylor in Freetown, Sierra Leone

The Prosecutor, Desmond de Silva QC, today stated:

“Today marks the first phase of the trial of Charles Taylor. Today he appeared in the courtroom of the Special Court here in Freetown, to face the people of Sierra Leone against whom he is accused of committing heinous atrocities.

“The people of Sierra Leone have been waiting patiently for three years to see the Accused finally face the Trial Chamber here at the Special Court. Today this has happened. Many voices have come together to uphold the Rule of Law and Justice. The voice of the people of Sierra Leone was the loudest and I commend them for their courage, conviction and persistence. With their resolve I have been able to move forward over the last four years and finally see Charles Taylor in the Special Court.

“Today also marks an important step in the administration of international criminal justice. Those who commit atrocities and violate international humanitarian law will be held accountable. No matter how rich, powerful or feared people may be – no one is above the law.

“Now that the Defendant has pleaded not guilty to all counts, it is up to the Prosecution to prove its case.”

#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. Two indictments were withdrawn following the deaths of the accused. Ten indictees are currently in the custody of the Court.

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 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 16 March 2006 the Judge of the Special Court for Sierra Leone approved an amended indictment of 11 counts.

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