

Special Court for Sierra Leone
Press and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 11 October 2002

Contractors in Sierra Leone's capital Freetown are working feverishly on laying the foundations for a new complex of court buildings and a detention facility that will be the Special Court for Sierra Leone. By November, prefabricated offices will be ready for the prosecution and defence teams of the new international criminal court, as well as for the Registry which provides administrative and logistical support. Currently staff are working in temporary facilities elsewhere in the city.

The high security 11.5 acre site will not fall under the authority of the government of Sierra Leone. Though created through an agreement in January 2002 between the government and the United Nations, the Court is an independent international organization. It is mandated to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for recent atrocities committed in Sierra Leone and has only three years to complete its work.

"The first buildings will be prefabricated because that's the quickest way to get started," said Deputy Registrar Robert Kirkwood who is in charge of the construction and management of the site. "Later we may also be moving these buildings around depending on how the Court develops."

A permanent building to house the trial and appeals chambers will be completed by May 2003. It will be a landmark in the city after the work of the Court is complete. Local and international architects are bidding for the design of the structure which is expected to cost US\$3.2m. The overall construction budget for the site is US\$6m.

Unlike the international criminal courts for Rwanda or the Former Yugoslavia, the Special Court for Sierra Leone is located in the country where the war crimes occurred. The site, between Jomo Kenyatta Road and Willoughby Lane, was allotted by the Sierra Leone government in January 2002 through the Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment.

The land was previously occupied by the Prisons Department and contained prison cell blocks, staff quarters and recreation facilities on it. Most of the buildings were structurally unsound and are being demolished. One had been used temporarily as a private school. Another will remain occupied by families of prison officers until the Special Court has constructed new housing for them nearby.

Two existing prison blocks are currently being renovated to house the accused. "We are readying 26 cells," says Kirkwood. "If some cells are not required we can always use them for other purposes. If more are needed then we can quickly build them." All detainees will have individual cells built in accordance with international standards.

The site was designed by the Sierra Leonean architectural firm Ideas Partnership. Another Sierra Leone company, Sierra Construction Systems Limited is the contractor. It is currently undertaking the demolition, laying foundations, installing plumbing and security walls. Soon it will be putting up security lighting and assembling the prefabricated offices.

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Produced by the
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Special Court for Sierra Leone
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