



Special Court for Sierra Leone
Outreach and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

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“Justice is for Us All”: Statement by Special Court President Justice George Gelaga King to Mark International Criminal Justice Day

Eleven years ago, in 2002, we marked two significant moments in the short history of international justice. The first, on January 16th, was the ratification of the Special Court Agreement that set up the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The second, on July 17th, was the ratification of the Rome Statute which, drafted four years earlier – fifteen years ago today, in fact – set up the International Criminal Court.



The establishment of both these courts, along with the ICTY and the ICTR which preceded them and the other tribunals which came after, represent not only milestones in international criminal justice, but also an international awakening of conscience for the plight of victims around the world. Let me state it thus: A just world cannot turn its back on victims, no matter where they may live, and a stable international order cannot rest on a fragile foundation of justice. Justice is about fairness, and due process. Justice is for us all.

As the Special Court for Sierra Leone nears the completion of its mandate in just a few months time, it is fitting on International Criminal Justice Day to consider what we have accomplished.

I have no doubt the Special Court will be remembered for its jurisprudence on such important issues as head of state immunity, on the enlistment, recruitment and use of child soldiers, and on forced marriage as a crime against humanity. We will certainly be remembered as the first international tribunal to try and convict those responsible for abducting children and forcing them to fight in war; for abducting women and girls and forcing them to be “wives” of rebel combatants; and for attacks directed against United Nations peacekeepers. We will also be remembered as the first international court since Nuremberg to indict and to try a sitting head of state, former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who is currently appealing his conviction and sentence.

We should be remembered for our Outreach programme. The Special Court was the first to put people on the ground who, in community town hall meetings, through local radio call-in shows and school visits, with video screenings of the trials in remote villages, by reaching out to victims and civil society groups, and in many other ways brought the workings of the Special Court and an understanding of international justice to the people of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Soon – very soon in fact – we will be remembered as the first modern tribunal to achieve its mandate and to transition to the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone.

But on International Criminal Justice Day, it is even more important for us to remember those for whom these courts were established – and by this I refer to the victims. We should recall the thousands of men, women and children who were murdered during a decade of conflict in Sierra Leone, who were deprived of their families, or their homes or their villages. We should not forget the thousands of children who were taken forcibly from their families and forced to fight. We must not forget the thousands of women subjected to rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage.

It is my hope for International Criminal Justice Day that we will look back to what we have accomplished and feel honoured to have been a part of it; that we will look forward to what remains to be done and be determined to do even better, and that we will continue to build a consensus aimed at the ending of impunity for international crimes and in bringing about of a more just world.

#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.

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Outreach and Public Affairs Office
Special Court for Sierra Leone
Mobile: 232 76 655732
Email: SCSL-pressoffice@un.org

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