

Special Court for Sierra Leone
The Office of the Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 9 March 2003

Mr. Chairman, Members of the House of Commons, Select Committee on International Development,

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts regarding the progress of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. While I regret that I am unable to appear before you this morning, I am confident that my Deputy Prosecutor, Desmond de Silva, QC, will provide you with the information you require. Mr. de Silva has been an invaluable member of our team. You should all be proud of his contribution to the people of Sierra Leone. He represents the best the United Kingdom has to offer.

The assistance your government is providing to Sierra Leone is having a tremendous positive impact in the country and region. For over a decade, the people of Sierra Leone have suffered from unspeakable crimes of a magnitude beyond comprehension. Women and children bore a disproportionate brunt of the conflict. Thousands of women and girls were subjected to widespread and systematic sexual violence and a whole generation of children were abducted and forcibly conscripted by armed groups. Without the leadership of your government, the war would still be raging on today.

However, much work remains to be done. I am of the firm belief that the people of Sierra Leone will never truly enjoy a just and sustainable peace until the architects of the brutal conflict are brought to book. The cycle of impunity that has reigned for decades must be broken and the Special Court for Sierra Leone represents our best chance to do just that. From the start, my prosecutorial strategy has included gender crimes and crimes against children. I intend to send a clear message that these crimes will not be tolerated in Sierra Leone or anywhere else in the world.

During the past seven months, my team of investigators and prosecutors have been working diligently to build cases against those "who bear the greatest responsibility" for the atrocities committed during the war. Our offices are fully operational. We have conducted dozens of missions inside and outside of Sierra Leone, and collected hundreds of witness statements. The ongoing investigation is regional and international in scope, with external actors and resources at the heart of the conflict. Our investigations continue to move forward expeditiously and have resulted in seven indictments so far.

Furthermore, we are committed to ensuring that a legacy of the rule of law is left behind long after our mission is completed. My office employs several Sierra Leonean lawyers and investigators, and we are working to support the local bar association and civil society in their efforts to promote legal reform and accountability. We are also establishing a vigorous outreach program that will educate, inform, and engage Sierra Leoneans about the Court's mandate and mission.

Finally, I must add that none of this would have been possible without the hard work and support of the Court's Registrar, Robin Vincent, and the leadership of President, Geoffrey Robertson, QC. Together, with your continued support, we will deliver justice for the countless victims that suffered or perished in this war.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

David M. Crane The Prosecutor

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