

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
Office of the Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, 13 March 2006

Prosecutor Welcomes Discussions to Facilitate the Transfer of Charles Taylor to the Special Court

Special Court Chief Prosecutor Desmond de Silva QC welcomed today's announcement by the Government of Liberia that discussions have begun between Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo, and Liberian President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, to end Charles Taylor's temporary asylum in Nigeria.

"I am heartened by today's announcement which stresses that both the leaders of Nigeria and Liberia are committed to seeing a resolution of this matter which has dragged on since August 2003", said Mr. de Silva.

"Charles Taylor has been indicted by this international criminal tribunal for his role in the civil conflict in Sierra Leone", said Mr. de Silva. "The trials of nine indictees at the Special Court are already at an advanced stage. Mr. Taylor will enjoy the same rights and safeguards provided to all other indictees under international law. The rights accorded to defendants before international criminal courts are more generous than those in many domestic jurisdictions".

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 committed in Sierra Leone. Two indictments were withdrawn following the deaths of the accused. Nine indictees are currently in the custody of the Court and on trial.

The Prosecutor stressed that the Court's mandate covers only persons responsible for crimes in Sierra Leone – not in Liberia. He emphasised that he had no intention of issuing indictments against active Liberian politicians or any other specific groups of people.

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.

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