

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTOR

PRESS RELEASE

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Special Court Prosecutor Hails RUF Convictions

The Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Stephen Rapp, today welcomed the convictions of three leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

RUF leaders Issa Sesay and Morris Kallon were convicted on 16 counts and Augustine Gbao was convicted on 14 counts of an 18-count Indictment charging them with atrocities committed during Sierra Leone's civil war.

"Today's judgement recognizes the terrible crimes committed against the innocent people of Sierra Leone," said Rapp. "It respects the suffering of the multitude of victims who were mutilated or enslaved, who were murdered or raped, and who were rendered homeless or destitute. It does this in a review of evidence that concludes that these individual leaders were responsible for some of most serious crimes known to humankind."

"Significantly, the judges convicted each of the three of the war crime of 'acts of terrorism' against the civilian population," said Rapp. "This recognizes that their targets were not military bases or enemy soldiers but innocent men, women, and children. It means that these men chose to commit acts so horrible against persons so innocent in order to frighten the population into submission."

"The Court also convicted two of these men for the use of child soldiers – the employment of those under 15 in a force where they would be ordered to maim and to murder. Abducted from their families, brutalized if they resisted, furnished with drugs and guns, they were turned into tools of terror at a horrible cost to their victims and to themselves," said Rapp.

"This Court today for first time in world history convicted each of these individuals of 'forced marriage' as a separate "crime against humanity." In doing so, it recognizes the very deep and long lasting suffering inflicted upon women through conscription as 'bush wives' during the Sierra Leone conflict," said Rapp.

"Of great significance in the conflict zones of the world, this Court also for the first time in history convicted individuals of the specific war crime of 'attack on peacekeepers,'" added Rapp. "This recognizes that peacekeepers were targeted during the Sierra Leone

conflict. It sends a message that may deter such attacks against the men and women who are protecting individuals, restoring security, and keeping the peace across the globe.”

The Special Court has now delivered judgements against the Accused in all of its Freetown-based trials, with all eight Accused persons convicted. The case against former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, is ongoing in The Hague, where it was moved for security reasons. The Prosecution's last witness, its 91st, completed testimony at the end of January 2009.

Following today's RUF judgement the parties will make submissions on sentencing, which is expected to be pronounced in March.

The final stage in the case will be the appeals phase. “We will closely examine today's judgement and decide whether and on what points to appeal,” said Rapp.

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