

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
Office of the Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, 28 April, 2006

Special Court Prosecutor to Step Down

The Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court, Desmond de Silva QC, today notified the Secretary-General of the United Nations that he will not seek to renew his contract when it expires on 30 June 2006.



Mr. de Silva originally joined the Special Court as Deputy Prosecutor in August 2002 after being nominated for the post by the Government of Sierra Leone.

As Deputy Prosecutor, Mr. de Silva headed the Appellate Section of the Office of the Prosecutor, where he oversaw the successful Prosecution response to the many legal challenges to the Court's jurisdiction and existence which were brought by the Defence.

Some of these cases, Mr. de Silva observed today, resulted in landmark legal decisions which will have a considerable impact on the development of international jurisprudence in years to come.

In July 2005, upon the departure of then-Chief Prosecutor David M. Crane, the Secretary-General of the United Nations appointed Mr. de Silva as Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court.

“At a press conference in Freetown shortly after I took up the post of Prosecutor, I pledged to Sierra Leoneans that I would ‘strain every nerve and every sinew to bring Charles Taylor to trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone’,” Mr. de Silva said. “I leave the Court with that pledge fulfilled.”

When he leaves at the end of June, Mr. de Silva will be the longest serving international member in the Office of the Prosecutor.

In his letter to the Secretary-General, Mr. de Silva indicated that, after four years in Sierra Leone, he now wishes to spend time with his family in England and also to attend to matters at his Chambers in London.

Mr. de Silva further informed the Secretary-General that, when Charles Taylor comes to trial, whether in Freetown or elsewhere, he would be willing to be considered for reappointment were that the wish of the Secretary-General. By Statute, only the Secretary-General can appoint a Prosecutor of the Special Court.

“When I joined the Special Court four years ago, I was no stranger to Sierra Leone,” Mr. de Silva said. “I was called to the Bar in Freetown back in 1969 when I served as defence counsel in Sierra Leone’s first treason trial. One of the defendants in that case, in which my colleagues and I finally prevailed, was Samuel Hinga Norman, who is now one of the defendants facing trial before the Special Court. Such is the wheel of fate!”

After being called to the Bar at the Honourable Society of the Middle Temple in 1964, Mr. de Silva entered the famous London Chambers of the Rt. Hon Sir Dingle Foot, QC, MP. In 1984 he was appointed one of Her Majesty’s Counsel.

Mr de Silva’s own legal practice has made him not only the adviser to Governments and Heads of State, but has also taken him to many jurisdictions in which he has appeared for the prosecution, the defence, or in an advisory capacity. Apart from Sierra Leone, they include The Gambia, Tanzania, Gibraltar, the Bahamas, Ghana, Botswana and South Africa.

“I believe the dedicated team I leave behind in the Office of the Prosecutor, which consists of both Sierra Leoneans and internationals from many countries, is a shining example of the way in which international criminal justice should be administered by the Prosecution,” Mr. de Silva said.

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