

Special Court for Sierra Leone  
Office of the Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2 June 2004

**Statement by Prosecutor David M. Crane: The Prosecution is Ready for the Trial of Charles Taylor**

The Appeals Chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone ruled Monday that former Liberian President Charles Taylor has no immunity from the charges brought against him in March of last year.

This is a momentous decision for the people of Sierra Leone and all of West Africa because it means that the rule of law applies to Charles Taylor even though he was a head of state at the time of his indictment.

Charles Taylor will have every opportunity to mount a full defence and receive a fair trial as provided for under the Special Court's statute. For our part, the prosecution is ready for the trial of Charles Taylor. I look forward to his arrival in Freetown.

When the government of Sierra Leone asked the United Nations to assist it in creating the Special Court, the international community came together to make that happen. Sierra Leone, Nigeria, the United States, the United Kingdom and other countries have generously donated money and resources to the court. Nigeria sits on the court's Management Committee at UN headquarters in New York.

Now I urge the Nigerian government to continue its backing of the Special Court by handing Charles Taylor over for trial.

We rely on the political will of the United Nations and its member states to produce Charles Taylor to face the charges against him. For the rule of law to take root around the world it must also apply to politically difficult and high profile cases.

Charles Taylor has been indicted for some of the worst criminal charges a human being can face, including terrorising the civilian population, unlawful killings, sexual violence, physical violence, forced conscription of child soldiers, abductions, forced labour, looting and burning, and attacks on peacekeeping personnel. The victims of this war, and all Sierra Leoneans who want a society governed by law, deserve to see Charles Taylor held to account.

On Monday the Appeals Chamber also ruled that forcible recruitment of child soldiers is a violation of international humanitarian law, and was already a crime under international law at all times relevant to our indictments. This is an historic, first-ever decision.

This ruling confirms that the many children of Sierra Leone who were forced to take up arms and become killers were also victims of a horrific crime. Thousands of these children carry physical scars, and they all bear a psychological burden.

International humanitarian law is largely about distinguishing combatants from non-combatants. By recognising that the forced recruitment of children as combatants constitutes a violation of international humanitarian law, the Appeals Chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone has sent a powerful message to governments and warlords around the world: those who would force a child into combat are now on notice that doing so will make them answerable to charges in international courts.

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