

Special Court for Sierra Leone
The Office of the Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 5 June 2003

**Statement of David M. Crane
Chief Prosecutor, Special Court for Sierra Leone
June 5, 2003**

We have witnessed an important day in Freetown that many thought would never come. Following our announcement of the indictment of Charles Taylor, he fled a meeting in Ghana yesterday to return to Liberia as an international fugitive. The fight to bring this indicted war criminal to justice has begun. It will not end until the people of Sierra Leone and West Africa see him in a courtroom.

We are gratified by the outpouring of support within Sierra Leone and around the world from all defenders of human rights and supporters of the rule of law.

Regarding the timing of our announcement, we reiterate our legal and moral obligations for unsealing the indictment. He has been indicted based on the evidence, and that indictment has been made public because of his travels. My job is to investigate and prosecute, but I can only fulfill that mandate when the international community has the political will to make arrests.

As the Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Louise Arbour, said at the time of the indictment of Slobodan Milosevic:

"I don't think it's appropriate for politicians - before and after the fact - to reflect on whether they think the indictment came at a good or bad time; whether it's helpful to a peace process. This is a legal, judicial process. The appropriate course of action is for politicians to take this indictment into account. It was not for me to take their efforts into account in deciding whether to bring an indictment, and at what particular time."

Taylor is now an indicted war criminal and a fugitive. All states are on notice that they cannot provide him with safe harbor.

I regret that the international community has disappointed the people of Sierra Leone and West Africa. In January of last year, the United Nations and the Republic of Sierra Leone, at the behest of the Security Council, established the Special Court and gave my office the independent mandate to 'prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility' for the atrocities committed over the past decade. They did so in the belief that without the rule of law, irrespective of rank or status, the region would never know true peace. Yesterday, they missed a precious opportunity to live up to that promise.

Instead of delivering a strong message about accountability, they provided weak excuses. Now is a time for leadership by the United Nations Security Council, the African Union, and ECOWAS. We either stand up to impunity or we don't.

The warrant of arrest for Taylor is outstanding. Any nation that finds Taylor within its borders is legally bound to execute it. In particular, the members of the International Contact Group have a special responsibility to ensure that decisive action is taken.

The peace process should continue without Taylor. We call on the international community, particularly the United Nations Security Council, to immediately take action regarding this threat to international peace and security, and bring Taylor to justice so that he may answer for the crimes he has committed in Sierra Leone.

Thank you.

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