

Special Court for Sierra Leone
Office of the Prosecutor

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 16 June 2004

Statement of the Prosecutor David M. Crane on the Day of the African Child

On this Day of the African Child, we should all pause to think about the many children of this country who suffered during the recent conflict. Whether they were the victims of violence themselves, or were forced into combat and made to commit crimes against their fellow citizens, the children of Sierra Leone were among the prime victims of the war.

For too long, children across the continent of Africa have suffered from war, disease, hunger, and a lack of educational opportunity. However, in Sierra Leone there is new cause for hope.

The Appeals Chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone recently issued a landmark decision in allowing the prosecution of forcible recruitment of child soldiers as a crime against humanity. There can now be justice for Sierra Leone's children living with the horror of what they were forced to do to others.

Children across Africa must be nurtured and provided with books, not guns. On this Day of the African Child, we can all celebrate one step toward achieving that goal.

In 1991, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now the African Union, initiated the Day of the African Child to commemorate the courage of children killed in 1976 while protesting for better educational opportunities under the Apartheid regime in Soweto, South Africa.

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