

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTOR

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 8 March 2005

Statement of the Prosecutor on International Women's Day

Since last year's International Women's Day, the Special Court for Sierra Leone has begun three trials of nine individuals accused of bearing the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed against the people of Sierra Leone.

When I started this job, my investigators quickly confirmed that armed factions had particularly targeted women and girls. Last year the Special Court approved my request to prosecute, for the first time under international law, the act of forced marriage as a crime against humanity.

The trials in Freetown shine a light on hard truths of the past conflict, offer some justice for the victims, and make future atrocities less likely. Sierra Leone is going through a process of healing.

But across Africa women and girls continue to be the primary targets of war. From Darfur, Sudan to the Democratic Republic of Congo, women and girls still suffer unimaginable brutalization by armed forces. They are murdered, raped, displaced, forced into combat as reluctant soldiers, support personnel, or into forced marriage arrangements with male fighters. They are treated like beasts of burden.

On this International Women's Day, the Special Court for Sierra Leone continues to address the injustices of one African conflict. Now the world must recommit itself to ending ongoing violence against women and girls across the continent of Africa, and holding the perpetrators to account.

#END

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