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For Immediate Release

# Charles Taylor: Hague Trial Must Be Accessible to West Africans

*Former Liberian President Arrives in the Netherlands  
for War Crimes Trial*

(New York, June 21, 2006) – With the transfer of Charles Taylor to The Hague for trial, the U.N.-backed war crimes court for Sierra Leone and its donors must ensure that the former Liberian president's trial remains accessible to the people of West Africa, Human Rights Watch said today in a briefing paper.

Taylor arrived in The Hague on Tuesday from Freetown, where the Special Court for Sierra Leone is headquartered. He is charged by the Special Court with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law during the 11-year civil war in Sierra Leone. The trial in The Hague will be conducted by the Special Court using the facilities of the International Criminal Court.

Human Rights Watch has issued a briefing paper on the relocation of Taylor's trial to The Hague. The 15-page briefing paper provides:

- Background on the Special Court for Sierra Leone and Charles Taylor's alleged crimes;
- Analysis of the implications of moving Taylor's trial outside Sierra Leone; and
- Recommendations to ensure that the trial in The Hague is made accessible to West Africans.

"Now that Taylor is in The Hague, there is a real risk that his trial will feel distant and less meaningful to the people most affected by the crimes," said Richard Dicker, director of Human Rights Watch's International Justice Program. "The court will need to ensure the trial is accessible to people in Sierra Leone and across West Africa."

To make Taylor's trial in The Hague accessible in Sierra Leone, the Special Court should implement robust outreach activities such as video and audio summaries of the trial for dissemination throughout the country. The Special Court should also make live broadcasts of the trial available at the court premises in Freetown. Additionally, the court should ensure that representatives of Sierra Leone's media, nongovernmental organizations, and other sectors of the society, such as paramount chiefs, are able to observe Taylor's trial in The Hague. Human Rights Watch called on the court's donors to provide funding for these critical outreach activities.

"The Special Court has done a tremendous job so far in reaching out to Sierra Leoneans about its work," said Elise Keppler, counsel for Human Rights Watch's International Justice Program. "But for intensified outreach to ensure Taylor's trial in The Hague resonates in West Africa, donors will need to step up and provide the court with more funding."

Donors must also provide funding to cover other costs associated with holding Taylor's trial in The Hague. These include logistical and technical costs. Funding must further be provided to ensure the Special Court can successfully complete the rest of its work in Freetown.

## Background

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was set up in 2002 to try those "bearing the greatest responsibility" for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during Sierra Leone's armed conflict. The crimes include killings, mutilations, rape and other forms



of sexual violence, sexual slavery, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, abduction, and the use of forced labor by armed groups.

The Special Court has indicted Taylor for war crimes (murder, pillage, outrages upon personal dignity, cruel treatment, terrorizing civilians), crimes against humanity (murder, mutilation, rape, enslavement, sexual slavery), and other serious violations of international humanitarian law (use of child soldiers) in the course of Sierra Leone's armed conflict. The indictment alleges that Taylor, as president of Liberia, provided training and financing to the main rebel group in Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Taylor was allegedly the rebel group's main backer, providing logistical and military support to the rebels and benefiting greatly from the diamonds extracted in rebel-held areas.

On March 29, Taylor was surrendered to the Special Court. The court immediately requested to relocate Taylor's trial from Freetown to The Hague due to security concerns. On June 15, the United Kingdom announced it intends to provide detention facilities for Taylor if convicted. This satisfied the key outstanding condition of the Dutch government to hosting the trial. The next day, the Security Council on June 16 passed a resolution providing a legal basis for the transfer.

Initially forced to rely on voluntary contributions, the Special Court has faced constant financial shortfalls. The United Nations provided some financial assistance to the court, but this does not cover all of the court costs. Donors made additional pledges at a funding conference in late September 2005. However, these are insufficient to cover operations for 2006 and beyond.

**To read the Human Rights Watch briefing paper, "Trying Charles Taylor in The Hague: Making Justice Accessible to Those Most Affected," please visit:**

<http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/ij/ij0606/index.htm>

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