



# NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE

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## **Statement by No Peace Without Justice on the transfer of Charles Taylor to The Hague**

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established in 2002 to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for the crimes committed during the conflict in that country. Charles Taylor is directly responsible for untold death and destruction carried out by the Revolutionary United Front and other armed forces under his direction and with his support, first as a Liberian rebel leader, and then as President of Liberia.

The seat of the Special Court was deliberately established in Freetown, so that justice be done, and be seen to done, by and for the people of Sierra Leone. This has made a significant difference to the operations of the Court and – more importantly- to its significance to the people of Sierra Leone. No other international court has had the impact that the Special Court has had on the people who suffered so much at the hands of those currently indicted before it.

Transferring Charles Taylor to another country for trial would tend to defeat the object and purpose of the Special Court, undermining the process of accountability for the crimes against humanity and war crimes that ravaged Sierra Leone and her people for more than a decade. It would also undermine the single most powerful message that has consistently emanated from the Court since its first personnel set foot in Freetown: nobody is above the law, and everybody is equal before the law, no exceptions allowed.

While it may be logistically easier to try Charles Taylor in The Hague, where the security concerns are not as evident, this would send precisely the wrong signal to the former parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone and to the people of Sierra Leone: some people are different and get special treatment.

A relocation of the trial would not serve the interests of the accused, who can expect fair treatment and full protection of all his rights in Freetown; it would not serve the interests of the Special Court, as it would undermine its credibility even more than Charles Taylor's absence had placed it at risk; it would not serve the interests of the countless victims of his crimes, who would be unable to travel to The Hague to witness the accountability process; and ultimately it would damage the interests of justice, of reconciliation, and the rule of law that is still regaining full strength in Sierra Leone.

In the West and even in Africa, there are those who think that Africa only needs water and food. These are real needs, but what is equally necessary is support for the rule of law and democracy: too often the international community undermines those principles in the name of some quick settlement that will remove a conflict from the world's television networks but will unflinchingly make matters worse for years in the countries affected. In Sierra Leone, throughout the conflict and even afterwards, many actors have promoted amnesties or other forms of impunity as a 'price to pay' for peace and stability. These unrealistic policies have failed again and again. Only the application of democratic principles and the rule of law can bring any stability to West Africa. The rule of law requires implementation of one basic, fundamental principle that is common to all justice systems: that everyone is equal before the law.

Sierra Leone had the courage to recognise that the Lome Peace Agreement settlement would not bring the conflict to an end and instead requested the international community's assistance in establishing the Special Court. Sierra Leone also had the foresight to ensure that the Court would be set up in Freetown, in the country where the crimes were committed, to involve the population in accountability for the wrongs against them and to ensure justice was not only done, but seen to be done, by the people of Sierra Leone. So far it has worked: justice has been the answer for peace and people across the country have grasped the opportunity to follow the Court's work, on the radio, in the newspapers and in the courtrooms.



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Now, with the biggest of the big fish secure in the Special Court's detention facility, it seems that the people of Sierra Leone will be robbed of the moment for which they have been waiting for so long. If security is the reason, so be it: but there should be a complete and transparent accounting of what the security concerns are and exactly how they would be addressed by a change of venue. The people of Sierra Leone, who suffered for more than a decade at the hands of Charles Taylor, deserve nothing less.

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