

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Sierra Leone: Government should denounce impunity agreement with the US**

Amnesty International today expressed deep shock at the Sierra Leone Parliament's ratification of a reciprocal impunity agreement with the United States of America (USA).

"This is a completely unacceptable decision especially at a time when the country is starting the process of dealing with the mass human rights abuses that have taken place in its recent past," the organization said.

On 6 May 2003, despite strong opposition from civil society, Sierra Leone's Parliament became the first in the world to ratify an impunity agreement with the USA. The Sierra Leone Parliament supported the impunity agreement which provides that Sierra Leone will not surrender US nationals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes to the new International Criminal Court.

Even more disturbingly, as Sierra Leone has accepted the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court, the agreement is reciprocal providing that the USA will not surrender to the International Criminal Court Sierra Leonean nationals accused of the worst possible crimes in the world.

"This agreement is unlawful and violates Sierra Leone's obligations as a state which has ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and other international law," Amnesty International said. "In response, we have written to President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah urging him to refuse to give presidential consent to the agreement."

At the same time, the organization expresses its dismay that members of parliament have supported the ratification of the agreement. Amnesty International welcomes the lone stand for international justice taken by one member of parliament, Ibrahim Sorie, in voting against ratification.

"This impunity agreement should not be enforced and any request by the International Criminal Court for a surrender of a suspect must be met by the Sierra Leonean authorities," Amnesty International concluded.

### **Background**

Sierra Leone ratified the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on 15 September 2000, one of the first states to do so.

As of 6 May 2003, 28 states have reportedly signed impunity agreements with the USA. Not a single parliament, other than that of Sierra Leone, has approved ratification of an impunity agreement. In most cases the agreements were not reciprocal.

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