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Special Court for Sierra Leone: Amnesty International calls on the government of Ghana to arrest President Charles Taylor

Following today's indictment of President Charles Taylor by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Amnesty International calls on the government of Ghana to act immediately in response to the warrant for the arrest of President Taylor who is currently in Accra attending talks aimed at resolving Liberia's internal armed conflict.

"The government of Ghana must meet its obligations under international law to arrest President Taylor who is indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law," Amnesty International said today.

"It must arrest President Taylor and surrender him to the Special Court or pursue the case under its own legal system."

The Special Court, established by an agreement between the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone in January 2002, has jurisdiction "to prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996".

As clearly set out in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to which Ghana is a state party, no one, regardless of their status - including a head of state - has immunity for the most serious crimes under international law.

In addition, Ghana, as a state party to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, must arrest President Taylor pending a preliminary examination into allegations of torture set out in the indictment.

Amnesty International has welcomed the establishment of the Special Court and the indictments of those alleged to bear the greatest responsibility for the crimes falling within the jurisdiction of the Special Court.

"This is a significant start of a judicial process which will contribute towards ending impunity for the grave human rights abuses which occurred during Sierra Leone's 10-year internal armed conflict," Amnesty International said.

The government of Liberia had actively supported the armed opposition Revolutionary

United Front (RUF) during Sierra Leone's 10-year internal armed conflict which was characterized by some of the worst abuses known: widespread deliberate and arbitrary killings of civilians, torture, including rape and deliberate amputation of limbs, and abduction and forced recruitment of large numbers of people, including children.

In 2001 the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions on Liberia because of the government's support for rebel forces in Sierra Leone, including military training and weapons transfers, and its involvement in the trafficking of diamonds from rebel-held areas in Sierra Leone. These sanctions have been subsequently renewed, most recently in May this year.

Background information

The indictment against President Taylor was issued after he had travelled to Ghana to attend talks, organized by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the International Contact Group on Liberia, aimed at resolving internal armed conflict in Liberia.

This indictment is the tenth to be issued by the Special Court. Amnesty International has been encouraged that the indictments reflect investigation of crimes committed by all parties to the conflict during the period over which the Special Court has jurisdiction.

The Statute of the Special Court has a number of guarantees to ensure a fair trial. These provisions, as well as internationally recognized fair trial guarantees, must be fully implemented in practice to ensure that all trials before the Special Court adhere to the highest standards of fairness.

Public Document

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