

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Liberia: New president must act now on Taylor Taylor's Surrender to Special Court Critical for Justice, Rule of Law in West Africa**

(Monrovia, January 27, 2006) – Liberia's new president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, should take prompt action to ensure that former Liberian President Charles Taylor is surrendered to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the Campaign Against Impunity said today in an open letter to President Johnson-Sirleaf, who was inaugurated on January 16.

The Campaign Against Impunity is a coalition of some three hundred African and international civil society groups that was formed to press for Charles Taylor's surrender to the Special Court. Liberian partners in the Campaign are holding a press conference today in Monrovia at 2 P.M. (GMT) to further demonstrate their support in the fight against impunity in the sub-region.

"President Johnson-Sirleaf said her presidency will stand for accountability and the rule of law," said Ezekial Pajibo, executive director of Centre for Democratic Empowerment (CEDE), a Liberian organization that is part of the Campaign. "Now she has a major opportunity to do just that. We hope she will seize this chance by requesting Nigeria to surrender Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone."

The Special Court was set up in 2002 to try those most responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during Sierra Leone's armed conflict. Charles Taylor has been accused of 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people of Sierra Leone by the Special Court. 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 Sierra Leonean armed opposition groups.

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo has thus far refused to surrender Charles Taylor to the Special Court since 2003 when Taylor went to Nigeria. However, President Obasanjo has indicated since then that he would consider surrendering Charles Taylor upon a request from a duly-elected Liberian government.

The Campaign Against Impunity welcomed President Johnson-Sirleaf's comments to reporters on January 20 that she would ask for Charles Taylor's surrender to the Special Court. Liberia's new president said she would ask for Taylor's handover in due course in consultation with regional leaders.

President Sirleaf-Johnson urgently needs to demonstrate leadership on this issue now. The Special Court indicted Charles Taylor almost three years ago, and it is already advanced in its operations, faces major funding difficulties, and will confront increasing international pressure to complete operations.

“A request from the new Liberian president for Charles Taylor’s surrender to the Special Court should not be needed given Taylor’s outstanding indictment,” said Aloysius Toe, founder and director of the Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy (FOHRD), a Liberian organization that is part of the Campaign. “But it could prove determinative. We are looking to President Johnson-Sirleaf to manifest the leadership needed to ensure that justice is done.”

The Campaign stressed that Charles Taylor’s trial must take place in accordance with international law and international standards for fair trial, including the right to be presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

“The Special Court won’t be around forever,” said Sulaiman Jabati, executive secretary of the Coalition for Justice and Accountability, a Sierra Leonean organization that is part of the Campaign. “Time is of the essence for President Johnson-Sirleaf to act. The victims of war crimes in Sierra Leone deserve nothing less.”

For a copy of the letter sent to President Johnson-Sirleaf, please check Amnesty International's website: AI Index, AFR 34/002/2006

**For further information, please contact:**

In Monrovia, Ezekial Pajibo, Centre for Democratic Empowerment: +231-565-9459  
In Monrovia, Aloysius Toe, Foundation for Human Rights and Democracy: +231-775-15158  
In Freetown, Sulaiman Jabati, Coalition for Justice and Accountability: +232-76-670-948  
In Dakar, Corinne Dufka, Human Rights Watch: +221-636-1013  
In London, Nicole Choueiry, Amnesty International: +44-207-413-5511  
In New York, Richard Dicker, Human Rights Watch: +1-212-216-1248 or +1-917-747-6731

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For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566  
Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW. web: <http://www.amnesty.org>

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