

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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Nigeria: Amnesty International seeks to intervene in case reviewing asylum granted to former Liberian President Charles Taylor

Amnesty International today applied to the Nigerian Federal High Court to submit an *amicus curiae* brief demonstrating that the decision by the Nigerian government to grant refugee status to Charles Taylor with apparent guarantees to protect him from prosecution for crimes against humanity and war crimes violates Nigeria's obligations under international law.

On 31 May 2004, the Federal High Court decided to review the asylum granted to Charles Taylor. Hearings are currently taking place. The court is expected to consider Amnesty International's application on 13 October 2004.

"Charles Taylor has been indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for crimes against humanity and war crimes. In accordance with international and African conventions on refugees which Nigeria has ratified, he should, therefore, be excluded from refugee protection," Amnesty International said summarizing the conclusions of the brief.

"This rule of international law seeks to ensure that states refrain from offering international protection to individuals who are accused of heinous crimes who are trying to evade justice."

In the brief, Amnesty International argues that Nigeria must either surrender Charles Taylor to the Special Court to face a trial to determine his guilt or innocence or open a national investigation with a view to determining whether to pursue criminal or extradition proceedings in Nigerian courts.

Background

In March 2003, Charles Taylor was indicted for "bearing the greatest responsibility" for crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law falling within the Special Court's jurisdiction. These crimes include killings, mutilations, rape and other forms of sexual violence, sexual slavery, conscription of children, abduction and forced labour perpetrated by Sierra Leone armed opposition forces, which Charles Taylor actively supported.

The brief submitted by Amnesty International to the Federal High Court is an *amicus curiae* (friend of the court) brief, in which the organization sets out a legal analysis of issues of international law relevant to the case. It is submitted to assist the Federal High Court in its review of the challenge to the grant of asylum to the former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor.

The brief has also been signed by Professor Guy Goodwin Gill, a leading international expert on international refugee law. He is a Senior Research Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, and formerly Professor of International Refugee Law at Oxford, Professor of Asylum Law, University of Amsterdam, and Editor-in-Chief of the *International Journal of Refugee Law*. He is the author of *The Refugee in International Law*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, second edition, 1996, among many publications. Professor Goodwin-Gill is also a Member of the Bar of England and Wales and practices from Blackstone Chambers, London.

On 31 May 2004 the Special Court rejected a challenge by Charles Taylor to the indictment in which he claimed that it was prohibited under international law since he was the head of state of Liberia at the time of the indictment (see: <http://www.sc-sl.org/SCSL-03-01-I-059.pdf>)

The full text of the *amicus curiae* brief will shortly be available on Amnesty International's website: <http://www.amnesty.org>.

Public Document

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