

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Open Letter

AI Index: AFR 34/002/2006 (Public)
News Service No: 023
27 January 2006

Prompt Action to Ensure Taylor's Surrender Needed Civil Society Coalition Letter to New Liberian President Johnson-Sirleaf

January 26, 2006

H.E. Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf
President of the Republic of Liberia
Executive Mansion
Monrovia, Liberia

Dear President Johnson-Sirleaf,

We are writing on behalf of the Campaign Against Impunity, a coalition made up of some three hundred African and international civil society groups, to urge you to take concrete steps to ensure Nigeria promptly surrenders former Liberian President Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The Campaign Against Impunity believes your urgent action on this issue would not only help consolidate political stability in Liberia, but would also send a strong message about the importance of establishing the rule of law in West Africa.

We welcomed news reports last week that you would ask Nigerian President Obasanjo to surrender Charles Taylor following consultation with regional leaders. The Special Court has a mandate to prosecute those bearing the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed during Sierra Leone's armed conflict, while ensuring a fair trial for all those who stand before it. Charles Taylor has been indicted on seventeen counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity for his alleged role in atrocities committed during the Sierra Leone armed conflict.

While a request from you for Taylor's surrender to the Special Court should not be needed given his outstanding indictment, it could prove determinative. As you know, President Obasanjo has thus far refused to surrender Charles Taylor to the Special Court. However, President Obasanjo has indicated that he would consider surrendering Taylor upon a request from a duly-elected Liberian government.

The Special Court will only operate for a limited time. It is already advanced in its operations and will confront increasing international pressure to complete its mandate. As such, this valuable window of opportunity for bringing justice to countless victims of atrocities in Sierra Leone and for helping to set a precedent for the fight against impunity is rapidly closing. Of course, Charles Taylor's trial by the Special Court would not preclude trials for the many war crimes for which he has been implicated in Liberia. The Campaign Against Impunity also urges you to ensure that Liberian authorities will promptly investigate all

accusations of crimes in the country with a view to bringing those responsible to justice.

The Campaign Against Impunity looks to you, as Liberia's president, to demonstrate your commitment to fighting impunity and to manifest the leadership necessary to ensure that justice is done. We believe the victims of the crimes committed in Sierra Leone – including murder, rape and other sexual violence, mutilation and widespread use of child soldiers – deserve nothing less.

We appreciate your consideration of this letter.

Sincerely,

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