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Nigeria: 'International fugitive' Charles Taylor must not be allowed to escape trial

Reacting to today's reports that former Liberian president Charles Taylor has "escaped" from his home in Calabar, Nigeria, Amnesty International said "any country in which he is found has a responsibility to arrest and surrender Charles Taylor immediately to the Special Court in Sierra Leone."

The organization said that the warrant for Charles Taylor's arrest issued by the Special Court, an international court, remains in effect, and that if he has left Nigeria he should now be considered an "international fugitive".

"Any failure by the Nigerian or any other government to ensure that Charles Taylor is successfully extradited to Liberia or surrendered to the Special Court is a failure to fulfil obligations under international law and an obstruction of justice," said Kolawole Olaniyan, Director of Amnesty International's Africa Programme.

Amnesty International also called for an independent and impartial international commission of inquiry to be jointly established by the UN and the African Union to determine the circumstances of Charles Taylor's reported escape, and establish responsibility for the lapse in security.

"It is not enough for the Nigerian government to initiate an investigation. We need an international commission of inquiry that will report directly to the UN Secretary-General and make its findings public," said Kolawole Olaniyan.

"Allowing Charles Taylor to escape trial would be a human rights scandal and a slap in the face for the thousands of victims of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murders, amputations, rapes, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers that took place during the conflict in Sierra Leone," said Kolawole Olaniyan. "It would also be inconsistent with the human rights mandate of the African Union."

Background

Amnesty International has documented in numerous reports the crimes against humanity and war crimes that were committed in Sierra Leone during the eleven year war in that country, including killings, amputations, rape, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone, established jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone, to "try those bearing the greatest responsibility" for crimes against humanity and war crimes, indicted Charles Taylor on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including terrorising the

civilian population, unlawful killings, sexual violence, physical violence, forced conscription of child soldiers, abductions, forced labour, looting and burning, and attacks on UN peacekeeping personnel.

Charles Taylor has been living in Calabar, Nigeria since 2003, when he was offered asylum by the Nigerian government.

Public Document

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