



Special Court for Sierra Leone
Outreach and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

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Government of Sierra Leone Hosts Formal Closing Ceremony for the Special Court

The Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations – the two parties which created the Special



Court eleven years ago – formally closed the Special Court at a ceremony late Monday held at State House in Freetown and hosted by the President of Sierra Leone, H.E. Ernest Bai Koroma.

In a symbolic handover, uniformed Special Court security officers formally handed over the Special Court’s flag to a contingent of the Sierra Leone Police in the presence of President Ernest Bai Koroma, and

Miguel de Serpa Soares, Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel, who represented the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Mr. de Serpa Soares hailed the closing of the Special Court as “very much a landmark, not only for the Special Court, but also for international criminal justice in general.”

“The Special Court is the first of the United Nations and United Nations-assisted tribunals to complete its mandate and to fully hand over its rights and responsibilities to its successor residual institution,” he said.

Mr. de Serpa Soares noted the Court’s jurisprudence, especially with regard to its first-ever convictions for the use of child soldiers, and of forced marriage as a crime against humanity. He also pointed to the Court’s contributions to international jurisprudence on aiding and abetting international crimes. “On all of these levels, I very much believe that the work of the Special Court has the strength to last and will readily stand the test of time,” he said.



Mr. de Serpa Soares said that the Special Court’s legacy would benefit both national courts in the region and around the world in dealing with these issues. “It is no understatement to say that the body of international criminal law as a whole is substantially richer for the deep vein of jurisprudence in all these areas that the Court had rendered,” he said.

Mr. de Serpa Soares paid tribute to the witnesses who, he said, stepped forward and allowed the Court “to inscribe their experiences in the history of this country.”

“In the most fundamental sense, this Court is their court,” he said. “Its success validates their accounting of the most horrendous crimes known to humanity. I salute their courage and their conviction in speaking out, in order that justice could be done.”

President Koroma said that the closing ceremony “reiterates our commitment to fight impunity, and it also underscores our respect for the promotion of the rule of law and preservation of pace and stability.”

The President recalled the “horrific brutality against innocent civilians” during Sierra Leone’s civil war in the 1990s which brought about the creation of the Special Court, but also of the “moments of resilience, of bravery, and of faith by the overwhelming majority of Sierra Leoneans.”

“The narrative of the Special Court is thus not only a story about horrific crimes, it is also, and more importantly, a narrative of the better values of hope, justice, resilience, peace, and the supremacy of law,” he said.

President Koroma noted the Special Court had made “unprecedented contributions to gender justice” and laid the foundation in international criminal jurisprudence in the prosecution for acts of forced marriage, sexual violence, sexual slavery, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, and attacks against UN peacekeepers.

The President hailed all of those who “in diverse ways made significant contributions to the success of this historic institution.”

“It is the combined efforts of this network of stakeholders that will make the Court go down in history not only as the first modern tribunal to achieve its mandate, but also for its transition to a residual court that will address the legal obligations of the Special Court.

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The Special Court is an independent tribunal established jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone. It is mandated to bring to justice those who bear the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone after 30 November 1996.

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