



## Femmes Africa Solidarité

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### INFORMATION NOTE

#### Charles Taylor's trial begins in The Hague

Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, was absent from the opening of his trial which is being conducted in The Hague by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. He is accused of murder, rape, mutilation and the recruitment of child soldiers during the civil war which engulfed Sierra Leone for a decade in the 1990's. Mr Taylor has pleaded not guilty to all the charges. In a statement read by his lawyer he accused the court of being a 'charade' and stated he would not appear before it until 'adequate time and facilities are provided'. Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS) remains committed to the pursuit of justice against perpetrators of war crimes and supports all attempts to ensure that violators of women's human rights are fully investigated and prosecuted.

Of the 11 charges My Taylor faces, two of them relate specifically to crimes against humanity committed against women – they are rape and sexual slavery, including other forms of sexual violence. The other charges he faces include acts of terrorism, violence to life, in particular murder, pillage, and the use of children under the age of 15 as soldiers. The prosecutors hope to prove that Mr Taylor assisted, condoned and ordered these crimes, by revealing the linkage between him and the forces that directly committed them. The prosecutors allege that Mr Taylor financed the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), by selling diamonds on their behalf, and provided them with soldiers, ammunition and training during their rebellion. The RUF was notorious for its brutal tactics, in particular its practice of hacking off the hands and legs of civilians. Indeed, FAS members witnessed the impact of these acts when they visited camps in Sierra Leone and met people who had been victims of mutilation and rape.

Charles Taylor was a prominent warlord in Liberia throughout the early 1990's. It is alleged he became involved in the civil war in Sierra Leone and supported the rebel groups so that he could gain access to the diamond mines and have a friendly government in Freetown. He was elected President of Liberia in 1997 and remained in power until 2003 when an arrest warrant was issued, after which he fled and sought exile in Nigeria. When Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected President of Liberia in 2006, she requested Mr Taylor's extradition back to Liberia. On 25<sup>th</sup> March 2006 the Nigerian government stated that Liberia was free to collect him, although he disappeared before he



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could be taken into custody. After his recapture, Nigeria repatriated him to Liberia where he was handed to the UN and transported to Freetown to await trial.

The Special Court initially began its work in Freetown, but has since been moved to the premises of the ICC in The Hague in order to minimize the potential unrest and instability it could stir up in West Africa. The Dutch government allowed it to take place in the Netherlands on the understanding that Mr Taylor would be imprisoned elsewhere, if he is found guilty and Britain has offered to take him in these circumstances.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone, which was established in January 2002, was approved by the UN and the government of Sierra Leone but does not come under the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC). A total of eleven people have been indicted and only one, Johnny Paul Koroma, remains to be handed over to the Court. Two other indictments were dropped after the deaths of the accused. Those who have been indicted were leaders of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) or the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

*FAS is an international women's organisation with the ECOSOC Consultative Status working to empower African women to assume a leadership role in peace building, and conflict resolution. FAS programmes operate mainly in war-torn countries such as the Mano River and the Great Lakes regions. FAS also works closely with African sub-regional and regional organs such as ECOWAS and the African Union to ensure greater involvement of women in decision-making processes for peace and development.*

## **Please Contact the FAS Office for more information**

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