

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**MESSAGE FOR THE OPENING OF THE BUILDINGS
OF THE SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
Freetown, 10 March 2004**

*Delivered by Mr. Hans Corell,
Legal Counsel of the United Nations*

I attach the utmost importance to the work of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Its existence reaffirms two fundamental points: first, that those who commit or authorize serious violations of international humanitarian law are individually responsible and accountable for their crimes; and second, that the international community will exert every effort to bring them to justice in accordance with international standards of justice, fairness and due process of law.

The Special Court is the first of its kind, in that it was established by an agreement between the United Nations and Sierra Leone, at the request of the Security Council and the Government of Sierra Leone. It is a joint endeavour, in which judges appointed by the Government of Sierra Leone, other Sierra Leonean lawyers and Sierra Leonean local staff have been working side by side with international judges and an international prosecutor and registrar.

At the heart of this partnership is the belief, held firmly by both the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone, that if there is to be an end to impunity, if there is to be national reconciliation, and if peace and security are to be restored, it is essential that there be a credible system of justice and accountability for the very serious crimes that were committed in Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996.

Now that the Court is established and trials are about to begin, the Member States of the United Nations should live up to their responsibility and ensure that the Court has the resources it needs to do its invaluable work. The Court, for its part, must complete its work expeditiously and, in so far as it is possible, within its three-year mandate.

I would like to extend to the President of the Court, the judges and the Court's other members my best wishes for success in the difficult work ahead. Your efforts matter greatly not only to Sierra Leone, but to the international community as a whole. In your rulings and convictions lie the capacity to advance the cause of international criminal justice, to uphold the principles of responsibility and accountability, and to build

up a deterrent that could keep other military and political leaders from directing and committing atrocities in the future.

But ultimately, as its name indicates, this is a Special Court for Sierra Leone. As such it is a vital part of the healing process following a tragic and devastating period of conflict. By contributing to a process that establishes justice and the rule of law, it can play a significant role in creating a better future for all the country's people. Let us all do our part to ensure the success of this important endeavour.