

Statement
by
The Representative of the Secretary-General,
Mr. Hans Corell, the Legal Counsel of the United Nations
at
the Opening of the buildings of the Special Court for Sierra Leone
Freetown, 10 March 2004

Mr. President,
Mr. Vice-President'
Mr. Attorney-General and Minister of Justice,
Members of the Special Court,
Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I have now delivered the Secretary-General's message. Allow me a few personal remarks.

It gives me great pleasure to be here today to witness the opening of the court house for the Special Court for Sierra Leone. I was last in Sierra Leone just over two years ago, on 16 January 2002. On that day, I had the honour to sign with H.E. Solomon Berewa – then Attorney General, now Vice-President – the Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone on the Establishment of the Special Court.

Much has been achieved here since that time. The opening of the buildings that we celebrate today is an important milestone, marking not only the achievements of those who have worked tirelessly to set up this Court. It also symbolizes the important work which is to follow in this new court house.

I would like to give thanks and recognition, in particular, to the work of Justice Geoffrey Robertson QC, the President of the Court, for his leadership in the Chambers of the Court; to David Crane, the Prosecutor, for the work of his Office and the Investigations Unit; to Robin Vincent, the Registrar of the Court, for all the work that he has done to ensure that the Court is up and running today; and to all those others involved in the setting up of the Court, the Witness Protection Unit and the Outreach Unit. We also thank UNAMSIL for its invaluable assistance, and we are grateful for the support and guidance of the Management Committee, some of whose members are here today.

It is also important to recognize that the establishment and operation of the Special Court is not taking place as an isolated event. Rather it is part of a process to establish justice and the rule of law in Sierra Leone, with roles to be played by both the international community and the people of Sierra Leone. As the Secretary-General mentioned, the Court is a common endeavour between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone, and in this respect I wish to thank the President, Vice President, and Attorney-General of Sierra Leone who are present here today, as well as

many other Sierra Leoneans, for their continued co-operation, support and guidance in the establishment of the Special Court.

I would also like to draw attention to the complementary role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, whose work is also supported by the United Nations. As I pointed out in January 2002, the Commission seeks to address impunity, to respond to the needs of victims, to promote healing and reconciliation, and to prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered.

As I said earlier, the opening of the buildings also marks the work which is to be performed in the future – not only by the officials of the Court, but by the people of Sierra Leone in building a better future for this country.

The Court is now ready to start its work. This building, with its two trial chambers balanced to replicate the scales of justice, is a symbol of not only what has been achieved, but also for the potential of this Court. It is hoped that it will leave a legacy of justice and of the rule of law for years to come after the Special Court has fulfilled its mandate.

We hope that the Special Court, which is a different type of model to that of the other international tribunals and the first of its kind, will prove to be an exemplary model – and one that it will be efficient and expeditious. We hope that the accused awaiting trial in custody can be brought before the Court without delay, that trials will commence forthwith, and that both trial chambers will be fully operational very soon. We hope that the Court will be able to complete its work within its three year mandate, which at this stage is expected to be the end of 2005.

The Court is now ready to commence its work. I wish to express my support for all those involved in the work of the Court, in particular the Judges. As Judges of the Special Court, you bear the ultimate responsibility to help ensure that the perpetrators of crimes are brought to justice and so to contribute to the restoration and maintenance of peace and security in Sierra Leone. In discharging this trust, you offer help to future generation – a hope that no more may those whose deeds offend the conscience of mankind go unpunished, and that, in the affairs of men and women of all nations, the rule of law may prevail.

May the Special Court for Sierra Leone serve as an important contribution to the healing process that this beautiful country must undergo to create a better future for those who live here.

Thank you for your attention.