

REPORT RELEASE

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Sierra Leone: A Progress Report on the Special Court

NEW YORK, March 9, 2004—An analysis of the work of the Special Court for Sierra Leone suggests that it has accomplished much in its first 18 months of existence, but also outlines the tremendous challenges it faces in the coming months, the International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) said in a report released today.

In its 14-page Case Study Series report, “The Special Court for Sierra Leone: The First Eighteen Months,” authored by Thierry Cruvellier, a French journalist formerly based in Sierra Leone, and ICTJ Senior Associate Marieke Wierda, the Center assesses the Court’s formative period and extracts some early lessons on the global development of international justice.

“With the Special Court officially opening its doors tomorrow and preparing to begin trials in May 2004, it is facing a particularly critical and challenging time,” said Marieke Wierda. “In the coming months, the Court must ensure trials that are fair and relatively speedy, but without compromising defendants’ rights. Its proceedings and documents must be made accessible to the public and it must ensure a lasting impact on the rule of law in Sierra Leone. All of this is a tall order for the Special Court, but one which we hope it is well-equipped to fulfill.”

The ICTJ in Sierra Leone

The ICTJ has been involved in transitional justice in Sierra Leone since 2001. The Center has provided advice on the relationship between the Special Court and the Sierra Leone TRC; provided technical advice and assistance to both the Court and the Commission on a range of policy and legal issues; and conducted a study with the UN Development Programme on the Court’s potential for legacy and impact on the rule of law in Sierra Leone. Even before the Center’s inception, ICTJ staff members were extensively involved in efforts contributing to the creation of the TRC, providing advice on the draft legislation and on organizational and methodological issues.

In January 2004, the ICTJ released a seven-page Case Study Series report, “The Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Reviewing the First Year,” authored by Priscilla Hayner, director of the Outreach and Analysis Unit at the ICTJ.

About the ICTJ

The International Center for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) assists countries pursuing accountability for past mass atrocity or human rights abuse. The Center works in societies emerging from repressive rule or armed conflict, as well as in established democracies where historical injustices or systemic abuse remain unresolved.

In order to promote justice, peace, and reconciliation, government officials and nongovernmental advocates are likely to consider a variety of transitional justice approaches including both judicial and nonjudicial responses to human rights crimes. The ICTJ assists in the development of integrated, comprehensive, and localized approaches to transitional justice comprising five key elements: prosecuting perpetrators, documenting and acknowledging violations through non-judicial means such as truth commissions, reforming abusive institutions, providing reparations to victims, and facilitating reconciliation processes.

The Center is committed to building local capacity and generally strengthening the emerging field of transitional justice, and works closely with organizations and experts around the world to do so. By working in the field through local languages, the ICTJ provides comparative information, legal and policy analysis, documentation, and strategic research to justice and truth-seeking institutions, nongovernmental organizations, governments and others.

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