

**Statement by United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General
on Sexual Violence in Conflict Margot Wallström:**

Judgment of Charles Taylor by the Special Court for Sierra Leone sends a
Powerful Signal that Sexual Violence will be Punished
(Leidschendam, 26 April 2012)

Today represents a milestone in the history of international criminal justice. In the wake of most wars, mass rape has been met with mass impunity. Wartime sexual violence used to be one of history's greatest silences and the world's least condemned war crime. The trial of Charles Taylor, former President of Liberia, represents a firm commitment by the international community that impunity is not an option for this type of crime. The successful prosecution of a former President signals that no leader – however powerful – is above the law; and that no woman or girl is below it.

When I took up office as the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict two years ago, I made addressing impunity my top priority. The Taylor trial may appear to concern just one perpetrator, but it gives voice to all survivors. I have heard firsthand the stories of these survivors when I visited Sierra Leone last year. This case signals to the women, children and communities affected by sexual violence that the world is watching. These acts are not only crimes against the victims, but crimes against humanity. Allegations in the Taylor case go back to 1996, and relate to Taylor's criminal support to the murderous RUF and AFRC/RUF rebel alliance during the civil war in Sierra Leone. The judgment against Charles Taylor proves that although justice has been delayed it cannot be denied.

Three of the 11 counts in the indictment against Charles Taylor pertain to sexual violence. According to the indictment, widespread sexual violence was committed against civilian women and girls including brutal rapes, often by multiple perpetrators. Acts of sexual violence included but were not limited to rapes of hundreds of women and girls by members of AFRC/RUF rebels at various locations throughout the Kono, Bombali and Kailahun Districts, as well as the Freetown area. An unknown number of women and girls were also abducted and used as sex slaves. According to the judgement, Charles Taylor is guilty of aiding and abetting, as well as planning the commission of, all 11 counts of war crimes or crimes against humanity.

This sets a powerful precedent for all commanders and combatants.