

**NEW YORK
CITY BAR**

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January 4, 2006

President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf
c/o Ambassador Lami Kawah
Permanent Mission of the Republic of Liberia to the United Nations
820 Second Avenue, 13th Floor
New York, NY 10017

Dear President-elect Johnson-Sirleaf:

I am writing on behalf of the New York City Bar Association, an independent non-governmental organization, with a membership of more than 22,000 lawyers, judges, law professors and government officials, principally from New York City, but also from throughout the United States and 50 other countries. Founded in 1870, the Association has long been dedicated to human rights, notably through its Committee on International Human Rights, which investigates and reports on human rights conditions around the world. The Association also closely follows legal developments in Africa through its Committee on African Affairs.

We congratulate you on your election as President of Liberia and urge you to take up immediately an issue crucial to ensuring stability and the rule of law in your country and throughout West Africa, namely, bringing Charles Taylor to trial for crimes committed during Sierra Leone's civil war.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted Taylor over two years ago on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the deaths, rapes, disappearances, and maiming of thousands of civilians during Sierra Leone's civil war. However, he continues to enjoy safe haven in Nigeria, where he has been exiled since August 2003.

Nigerian President Obasanjo has thus far refused to surrender Taylor to the Special Court on the basis that Taylor was granted asylum with the international community's support to prevent Liberian civilian casualties during the 2003 battle for control of Liberia's capital. However, President Obasanjo has indicated that he would consider surrendering Taylor upon a request from a duly-elected Liberian government.

We are deeply troubled by Taylor's continued evasion of the rule of law. Continued sanctuary for Taylor undermines justice and the security of the peoples of West Africa, and belittles the suffering of his victims.

There is no legal basis for impunity for Taylor. Article 6(2) of the Special Court's statute states that the official position of an accused does not relieve him of criminal responsibility. In May 2004, the Special Court further clarified that there is no legal basis for Nigeria's shielding of Taylor, ruling that sitting heads of state are not immune from prosecution by an international court. Likewise, the UN Security Council recently authorized its peacekeeping force in Liberia to arrest Taylor if he enters Liberia, for transfer to the Special Court (S/RES/1638 (2005)).

Taylor's alleged manipulation of regional political affairs and his close contacts with supporters presents a real threat to stability in West Africa, and the international community's failure to bring Taylor to justice only serves to perpetuate this threat. Taylor was reportedly involved in manipulating the political affairs of Liberia before the October elections. The Special Court's Prosecutor's Office has received reports of Taylor's involvement in a January 2005 assassination attempt on the Guinean president and support for an insurgency movement in Guinea. Taylor also allegedly remains in contact with his former supporters.

We urge you to demonstrate a clear commitment to rule of law in West Africa by promptly requesting Taylor's surrender to the Special Court. The limited temporal mandate of the Special Court underscores the need to act swiftly so that justice may be done.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bettina B. Plevan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Bettina B. Plevan
President