

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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**Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union
on executions in Sierra Leone**

The EU condemns the execution of 24 soldiers by firing squad, which took place on 19 October 1998 in Sierra Leone.

The EU recognises that the military junta overthrew, temporarily, the democratically elected government of Sierra Leone, that it committed appalling atrocities upon the civilian population and that the remnants of the junta/RUF forces continue to commit gross abuses. The EU understands that those responsible for these crimes must be brought to justice.

However, the soldiers had been sentenced to death by a court martial and thus did not have the right to appeal to a higher court, which is contrary to Article 14(5) of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), stating that "Everyone convicted of a crime shall have the right to his conviction and sentence being reviewed by a higher tribunal according to law". The EU had appealed to the Government of Sierra Leone to establish a channel for appeals from court martial proceedings in order to comply with its international obligations.

The EU is particularly concerned that the executions were carried out, although 17 of the 34 soldiers sentenced to death had submitted applications to the Human Rights Committee under the Optional Protocol. Under the First Optional Protocol to the ICCPR, which Sierra Leone ratified in 1996, those sentenced to death are entitled to petition the UN Human Rights Committee to complain of any violations of their rights under the ICCPR. The death sentences should not have been carried out while the cases were pending before the Human Rights Committee.

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The EU has been following carefully the trials of those accused of participating in the coup which overthrew, temporarily, the legitimate government of Sierra Leone. The EU is convinced that the executions which have just been carried out will not be conducive to fostering the peace and reconciliation process, which the international community is aiming to encourage.
