

**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 the Treason Trials in Sierra Leone**

The EU has been following carefully the current trials of those accused of participating in the coup which overthrew, temporarily, the legitimate Government of Sierra Leone. These trials constitute an important chapter in Sierra Leone's return to normality, and the process is being closely watched by the international community at large.

The EU is concerned that 16 people found guilty of treason have been sentenced to death in Sierra Leone.

The EU calls for universal abolition of the death penalty, or at least for a moratorium. Where the death penalty still exists, it calls for its use to be progressively restricted and insists that it be carried out according to international minimum standards. Sierra Leone should comply with the pertinent provisions of the covenant on civil and political rights. The EU notes, in addition, that the recently agreed statute for the International Criminal Court does not give that body the power to impose the death sentence, even for the extremely serious crimes, such as genocide, over which it will have jurisdiction.

The EU understands that those found guilty have 21 days to appeal against their sentences. It registers its sincere hope that the sentences, if upheld on appeal, will be commuted.

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The EU is further concerned about the courtmartial proceedings against 38 members of the Armed Forces which began in July, in particular about the lack of an appeals process for such trials. It calls upon the Government of Sierra Leone to ensure a fair trial for those accused and to establish a channel for appeals from courtmartial proceedings.

The international community's long-term aim is to encourage and support reconciliation in Sierra Leone. The EU will support a peace and reconciliation process and is convinced that a commutation of the death penalty against those found guilty of treason would constitute an important contribution in this regard.

The Central and Eastern European countries Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia, the associated country Cyprus and the EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area align themselves with this declaration

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