

Remarks of Alison Smith
Legal Counsel, No Peace Without Justice
On the Inauguration of the Sierra Leone Institute for International Law
24 April 2009

Excellencies, Honourable guests, dear friends and colleagues; As much as it saddens me not to be able to be with you, I am delighted in equal measures both that this meeting is taking place and for the reason you have gathered here today.

No Peace Without Justice first came to Sierra Leone in the year 2000, having already worked for some years before that with your representatives in New York, first Ambassador Dabor and then Ambassador Kanu, whose energy and enthusiasm continues to inspire us. Our relationship with Sierra Leone, now for more than a decade, has been not only important, but incredibly rewarding, both personally and professionally.

Our engagement with Sierra Leone has come about because of international law, because we believe international law is not an abstract set of legal instruments, but a living, breathing force that springs from and reaches into national legal systems. There can be a tendency within the international legal community to assume that theirs is an elite space, and that understanding of international law takes many years and much study to obtain. But international law is, in the end, the law of the people: the United Nations Charter begins with “we, the peoples”. This is the real point and purpose of international law, to regulate affairs between States and, in so doing, to protect people from harm, be it serious crimes like genocide, or human rights violations, or environmental damage, or displacement, or a host of other potential ills. If international law must be kept within the preserves of the elite, how can it meet these purposes?

Today’s inauguration is a testament and an illustration of something that was very evident the moment we began to engage with the legal community here: Sierra Leone is not, nor has it ever been, a legal wasteland. When the Special Court was first established, it rested on the foundations of its international predecessors and, like those predecessors, thought it had to bring its own human resources, particularly for its international law needs, for surely none would be found in Sierra Leone. You put paid to that notion when members of the Bar demonstrated an equal knowledge of international law to the newly-sworn-in judges at the seminar on the Rules of Procedure and Evidence at the Kingtom Complex

in December 2002, and introduced the judges to the interplay between Sierra Leone law and international law, showing them how the Special Court could be embedded more fully into the day-to-day life of the country. This was a critical turning point in the dialogue regarding the Court's relationship with the Sierra Leone legal system and the legacy that it will leave for that system.

Today's inauguration is part of that legacy but, more importantly, it is a demonstration of your willingness to continue to occupy a leading role in the ongoing development of international law and its capacity to protect. For this, we have to thank not only you, the members of the Sierra Leone legal profession and civil society, we have to thank Ambassador Allieu Kanu, who for many years has pushed, cajoled, persuaded and encouraged people to think of international law as one cog in the machine that can improve people's lives everywhere. I am proud to have worked with him throughout the years, honoured to serve with him as the Institute's first Vice President, and privileged to call him not only a friend, but family.

Thank you and I hope to see you all soon in the country I have come to love as my own, Sierra Leone.