Special Court for Sierra Leone
Outreach and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 22 June 2012

Eric Koi Senessie Convicted of Contempt of Court for Witness Tampering

Former RUF member Eric Koi Senessie was convicted late Thursday on eight of nine contempt of court charges alleging that he had attempted to induce five prosecution witnesses who testified in the Taylor trial to recant their testimony. Four of the counts alleged he had offered a bribe to a witness, and five of the counts alleged that he had attempted to influence a witness.

Eric Koi Senessie at his initial appearance

Mr. Senessie was charged on 24 May 2011 by an order in lieu of an indictment. At his initial appearance on 15 July 2011, he pleaded not guilty on all counts.

On Thursday, Justice Teresa Doherty rejected Defence claims that the witnesses had colluded in a plan to make the Prosecutor relocate them and that the five were involved in a conspiracy against the Accused. She found that Mr. Senessie had knowingly and wilfully interfered with the administration of justice, and convicted him on all four counts of offering a bribe to a witness, and on four of the five counts of attempting to influence a witness.

The trial opened in Freetown on 11 June 2012. Independent Prosecutor William Gardner called the five former Taylor witnesses to testify for the prosecution. Mr. Senessie testified on his own behalf, and then called an additional five defence witnesses. He was represented in court by Defence counsel Ansu Lansana.

Prosecution and Defence will now make submissions on sentencing. Under Rule 77(G) as amended by the Plenary of Judges on 31 May 2012, the maximum penalty for a conviction for contempt is seven years in prison, a fine of twenty million leones (approximately $4,600), or both.

#END

The Special Court is an independent tribunal established jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone. It is mandated to bring to justice those who bear the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone after 30 November 1996.

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Produced by the
Outreach and Public Affairs Office
Special Court for Sierra Leone

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