

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Press and Public Affairs Office as of:

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Issa Sesay Accuses Gibril Massaquoi Of Betraying Him

By *Ralph Ese Donna Sawyer*

Former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader, now Special Court indictee Issa Sesay has bitterly complained that ex-RUF spokesman Gibril Massaquoi is "ganging up" other former RUF fighters in Makeni and offering them money for them to falsely testify against him at the Special Court.

He was speaking to
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Issa Blasts Gibril

SALONE TIMES during a telephone conversation recently.

According to Issa Sesay, Gibril Massaquoi is telling the former fighters that some of them did not get any benefit from the programme and that he Issa as the prime cause because he instructed them to disarm and give peace a chance. "As a result, the boys are angry and bear me grudge and are being cajoled to come to Special Court with made up lies against me," he said angrily.

When this reporter contacted the Secretary General of the RUF Jonathan Kposowa for his reaction, he replied, "The RUF has also gathered intelligence reports that one Amara Peletto, former RUF Brigade commander and later diamond mining commander is one of such persons contacted and is now lined up by the Special Court to give false evidence."

Jonathan Kposowa added that Amara Peletto himself committed many crimes including looting and maiming during the war. Gibril Massaquoi could not be contacted for comments as we went to press.

Salone Times
January 2005

Sexual Violence, An Invisible War Crime

By *Shirley Hatfield and Ernest Harsch*

In 1991, at the very beginning of Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war, a 19-year-old woman crossed paths with a group of 10 rebels led by the notorious commander "Mosquito." Just outside the town of Tolu Bala, "Mosquito was the first person who raped me," she later recounted. "Then he ordered his men to continue the act. Nine other men continued to rape me. . . . After mistaking me to their satisfaction, the rebels left me alone in a very hopeless condition. . . . Even now the pain is still in me, which is creating problems in my marital home, because my husband drives me from my husband's says that I am barren."

Her ordeal -- both during and after the war -- echoes the stories of hundreds of other women and girls who testified to similar statements to Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Created out of Sierra Leone's peace process, the commission was mandated to establish an impartial record of the abuses that occurred in the war, as a step towards achieving national reconciliation.

Early in their efforts, however, commission investigators found that gathering information specifically about sexual violence was not easy. In Sierra Leone, as in many other countries, women and girls confront social taboos against speaking publicly about rape and other sexual violence. They are stigmatized in their own communities when they admit they have been sexually abused.

To help break through such barriers, the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) intervened with advice, training and other support for TRC staff and especially for the women themselves. UNIFEM's work before and during the evidence-gathering process, in collaboration with local civil society organizations, played an important role in making it possible for many women to find their silence and for the commission's final report to place such a strong spotlight on the horrific crimes perpetrated against women.

As a result, the TRC hearings helped bring to light Sierra Leone's "invisible war crime," as Ms. Binifer Nowrojee of the Coalition for Women's Human Rights in Conflict Situations termed the problem in her testimony. The

Kenyan women's rights advocate worked closely with UNIFEM in highlighting the issue in Sierra Leone, as she had in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.

The Sierra Leone civil war was known internationally for its horrific atrocities -- especially the widespread amputations of villagers' limbs. But until recently, little attention was devoted to abuses directed specifically against women. "Violence against women was not just incidental to the conflict," Ms. Nowrojee told Africa Renewal, "but was routinely used as a weapon of war. Sexual violence was used in a widespread and systematic way as a weapon, and women were raped and sexually abused in brutally brutal ways."

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The commission's 1,500-page report, released in October, provides an exceptionally thorough and detailed account of the atrocities committed in the war, which officially ended in January 2002. Out of the 10,002 adult victims the commission was able to identify, 33.5 per cent were female. Among the 1,427 child victims, that proportion rose to 44.9 per cent.

Armed groups carried out human rights violations against women and girls, the TRC report finds. These included kidnapping, rape and other sexual violence, sexual slavery, slave labour, abduction, assault, amputation, forced pregnancy, disembowelment of pregnant women, torture, trafficking, mutilation, theft and the destruction of property. While forced conscription was used mainly -- but not solely -- against males, rape and sexual slavery were committed almost exclusively against females.

Because rape and sexual violence were so rife during the war, the country is now seeing a sharp rise in cases of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, the report notes. According to the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), of the 170,000 people between the ages of 15 and 49 estimated to be living with the virus in Sierra Leone in 2001, some 90,000 were female.

The largest number of atrocities was committed by fighters of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the rebel movement that started the war. The RUF "was the primary perpetrator of human rights violations against women and girls," the commission reports, and "pursued a deliberate strategy of violating women." More than 66 per cent of the 2,058 abductions of women and girls were carried out by the RUF, as well as 73 per cent of the reported cases of sexual slavery.

The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council -- an army faction that seized power in 1997 and was ousted the following year -- also deliberately

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targeted women and girls, the TRC reports. The official Sierra Leone Army and an irregular pro-government militia group, the Civil Defence Forces, employed similar tactics, although on a less-widespread scale.

Some women joined the rebel forces, but many were abducted and then forced to carry out armed actions. Both women combatants and other female abductees were forced to take drugs -- many remain addicted today. The TRC finds that "many women suffer a double victimization, in that they were compelled against their will to join the armed forces, and today they are victimized by society for having played a combative role in the conflict. They are treated with hostility and suspicion for 'breaching' both gender and sex roles." These women were largely excluded from the disarmament and reintegration programmes of Sierra Leone's peace process, which favoured men and boys.

Women who were raped also confront marginalization. Because of the social stigma that is still widely attached to rape, many have been shunned by their own husbands, families and communities -- or obliged to remain silent to avoid being ostracized.

UNIFEM support in overcoming such hurdles posed a challenge to officials of the TRC, many of whom were men. The commission's mandate included looking specifically at crimes against women, but its per-

sonnel admitted at the outset that they had little knowledge or experience of eliciting testimony from women or conducting interviews with a gender perspective in mind. "Because UNIFEM's mandate was so close to what the TRC was expected to do," explains Ms. Florence Bategwa, regional programme director for UNIFEM in Anglophone West Africa, "we made a commitment that we would support building their own capacity, and offer them support throughout the process."

UNIFEM and the Nairobi-based Urgent Action Fund for Women's Human Rights conducted a training workshop on gender-based human rights violations at the time of the hearings in 2003. The workshop focused on the impact of armed conflict on women and children, promoting gender sensitivity in handling female victims' testimonies and building the skills necessary to deal with victims and witnesses.

According to Ms. Betty Muringi of the Urgent Action Fund, "From our early experience with the Arusha Tribunal [International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda], it became quite clear that if these issues of sexual abuse that happen during wartime and internal conflict were left to the devices of officials . . . matters that relate to crimes committed against women are often ignored, mischaracterized, or just completely under-investigated."

Sometimes traditional power relations threatened to impede the collection of information. "One commissioner said he went to a community where he was leading a team of recorders that were collecting testimonies. The women did not come out, only the men came," Ms. Bategwa told Africa Renewal. "When they were asked why, the men said 'We can speak for the women!'"

"It was clear that it was difficult for women to come forward and speak publicly," Ms. Nowrojee says. As a result, "some of the women opted to speak behind a screen, some opted to give testimony in private." Ultimately, hundreds of women around the country testified or gave statements to the commission's investigators.

The commission urges reforms in Sierra Leone's legal, judicial and police systems to make it easier for women to report cases of sexual and domestic violence.

Ms. Muringi summarized the general attitude of the women who testified: "We want to break the silence. We want to say what happened to us. We want to understand why it happened. We need somebody to acknowledge that these things happened to us, to reclaim our dignity, so that this doesn't happen again."

Addressing 'structural inequality' Also hoping to avert similar crimes

in the future, the commission recommends numerous measures to help those women who suffered directly from the war, as well as to enhance the status of women more generally.

For women affected by the war, the TRC "calls on communities to make special efforts to encourage acceptance of the survivors of rape and sexual violence as they reintegrate into society." It recommends that the Ministry of Social Welfare and Gender Affairs establish a directory of donors and service providers where women can obtain information and help. The government should provide free psychological support and reproductive health services to these women, while relief agencies should aid women ex-combatants with skills training and other assistance to advance their social reintegration.

The commission urges reforms in Sierra Leone's legal, judicial and police systems to make it easier for women to report cases of sexual and domestic violence. It calls for the repeal of all statutory and customary laws that discriminate against women, including in marriage, inheritance, divorce and property ownership. It recommends that the government campaign against the customary practice whereby a victim of rape is obliged to marry the rapist.

Besides expressing its gratitude for UNIFEM's role in helping women testify, the TRC also recommends that the UN agency participate in a variety of efforts to improve women's social status, including skills training, adult education, HIV/AIDS education, the abolition of harmful customary practices and leadership programmes.

The commission notes that the government "has not yet taken the necessary steps to eradicate structural inequality against women." It urges the president, on behalf of the government of past governments, to "bring an unequivocal apology" to women for their suffering during the war. To enhance women's role in decision-making, the TRC recommends that political parties ensure that at least 30 per cent of their candidates for public office are women, and that the government work towards achieving a similar ratio in cabinet and other political posts. The government and parliament should both aim to reach gender parity within the next decade.

A new Sierra Leone
The section on recommendations relating to women opens with an extract from an essay submitted to the commission by Ms. Chiusa Cleary: "I hope to see a Sierra Leone offering equal opportunities to boys and girls from the cradle to the grave. . . . In particular, I want to see a country where girls are not left out, but are encouraged to reach the highest peak of their potential."

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Opposition leader arrested in Guinea

By Saliou Samb

CONAKRY, Jan 8 (Reuters) - Police in Guinea have arrested an opposition leader hours after the West African country's new prime minister pledged more open dialogue with political opponents, opposition officials said late on Friday.

Antoine Soromou, head of the National Alliance for Development (AND), was arrested after meeting Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo and was being questioned about a plot to destabilise the country, a security source told Reuters.

"Soromou was arrested on Wednesday afternoon by the police a few hours after we met with the prime minister," said Mamadou Ba, spokesman for the Republican Front for Democratic Change, a coalition of Guinea's opposition parties.

"We have not yet been able to see him because he is being kept at a secret location," he said.

Guinea, which holds a third of the world's known reserves of bauxite, the raw material used to make aluminium, has been shaken by riots in several towns in recent months over price rises for items such as rice and electricity.

Security forces have clashed with protesters in the towns of Pita, Dabola and Fria, in the centre and north of the country, killing at least two people and injuring several. The International Monetary Fund and World Bank have cut off most aid to the country, where inflation has officially risen above 25 percent and the average income is around \$36 per month.

Guinea has nonetheless been seen as a bulwark against the chaos of its neighbours Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast, all of which have experienced recent civil wars. But human rights groups say its stability has come at a high cost.

President Lansana Conte, a diabetic chain smoker whose declining health has prompted worries of political upheaval in the country, seized power in a coup in 1984 and has brooked little dissent since.

He appointed a new prime minister in December after the previous one fled to France saying police repression of the opposition made his task of repairing strained ties with international donors difficult.

The new premier pledged on Wednesday to open dialogue with the government's opponents but the arrest of Soromou did little to help his cause.

"This arrest proves that this regime cannot change. Everything they do is to try to impress the outside world to unblock financing," said a senior member of the Rally of the Guinean People (RPG) opposition party.

Côte d'Ivoire: Slim pickings for Mbeki to report at AU summit

ABIDJAN, 8 Jan 2005 (IRIN) - South African President Thabo Mbeki will brief the African Union (AU) on Monday on Cote d'Ivoire's attempts to restore peace, but there is little progress to report, with the stalemate between the President Laurent Gbagbo and the rebels as strong as ever.

Rebel ministers have still not returned to the government of national reconciliation. Gbagbo is still demanding a referendum be held on a key constitutional change. The rebels are refusing to disarm until their demands for further guarantees have been met. So the prospect of elections being held on schedule in a united country in October looks remote.

"We are very pessimistic. We're not convinced that Mbeki's efforts will be effective," said one Abidjan diplomat. "We're essentially back to where we were a year ago -- a game where no side will give anything to the other and everyone lies to each other."

Mbeki, drafted in by the AU to spearhead peace efforts after an 18-month ceasefire fell apart in November, managed to wrangle promises out of both sides to revive faltering two-year-old peace accord in a 6 December deal.

That prompted the UN Security Council to hold off imposing individual sanctions on Cote d'Ivoire's key players in December so that the African mediation had time to bear fruit.

Leaks to the press have suggested that up to 200 government and rebel leaders could be banned from travelling abroad, have their assets seized or be arraigned for trial by an international court for war crimes if the United Nations decides to take tougher action.

The peace process in Cote d'Ivoire, split into a rebel-held north and a government-run south for since September 2002, has not gathered momentum since Mbeki announced that he had struck a deal more than a month ago.

The international community, which has sent 6,000 UN peacekeepers and 5,000 French troops under separate command to prevent further conflict in Cote d'Ivoire, must therefore decide what to do next.

A summit meeting of the AU's 15-member Peace and Security Council in the Gabonese capital Libreville will hear a report from Mbeki on Monday.

The UN Security Council will decide whether or not to slap further sanctions on Cote d'Ivoire soon afterwards.

The one concrete piece of progress since Mbeki struck a deal with the Ivorian factions is that the National Assembly has voted through the remaining political reforms promised

by the January 2003 Linas-Marcoussis peace agreement, including a reform of article 35 of the constitution.

The reform of article 35 allows individuals with only one Ivorian parent to run for the presidency. This means that Alassane Ouattara, a previously-banned opposition leader backed by the rebels, could run against Gbagbo next time around.

Ouattara, a former prime minister and senior official of the International Monetary Fund, was banned from challenging Gbagbo in the 2000 presidential election on the disputed grounds that his father was born in Burkina Faso.

However, some commentators say that parliamentary approval of the constitutional amendment was cosmetic, because Gbagbo is still demanding that the change to article 35 be rubber-stamped by a referendum. That would be virtually impossible to hold until the rebels disarm and the country is reunited.

On most of the other issues outlined in Mbeki's schedule for peace, Cote d'Ivoire's warring sides get a poor report card.

Gbagbo has kept his man at the head of state television instead of reinstating the previous rebel-backed incumbent. His ousting was branded a "coup" by Guillaume Soro, the rebel leader, who is supposed to be Communications Minister, in charge of the state media.

Meanwhile, Soro and six other rebel ministers have continued to boycott cabinet meetings, despite promises they would start attending them within two weeks of the Mbeki agreement.

They failed to show for the first cabinet meeting of 2005 on Thursday, prompting Prime Minister Seydou Diarra fly to the rebel stronghold of Bouake that same day to try to persuade them to return to work.

Government sources said Diarra had touted the possibility of a one-off cabinet get-together in Yamoussoukro to alleviate rebel concerns that their security cannot be guaranteed in Abidjan.

Given that the cabinet is not meeting yet, the timetable for trickier issues like disarmament, looks increasingly unrealistic.

Under the Mbeki plan, the disarmament and demobilisation of rebel forces in the north and pro-government militia groups in the south is supposed to be completed by the beginning of April. UN officials say the cantonment sites are ready, but there is little indication that the rebels are.

All this provides much material for the AU to chew over in the absence of Gbagbo. Gabonese officials said on Saturday the Ivorian president had declined an invitation to attend the Libreville summit.

The last time AU leaders met to discuss Cote d'Ivoire, following November's violent flare-up, they came down hard and urged the UN Security Council to impose an arms embargo on the country without delay.

Given the slow progress since then, there has been speculation that the Libreville summit may call for the United Nations to slap travel bans and asset freezes on those individuals seen as obstacles to peace.

Whatever the outcome, Mbeki is set to stop in Cote d'Ivoire on his way home. It will be his third visit to the country in as many months.

Officials at South African president's office in Pretoria said Mbeki was expected to fly into Cote d'Ivoire's official capital Yamoussoukro, 200 km northwest of the port city of Abidjan, on Tuesday morning.