

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

Monday, February 14, 2005

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
If you are aware of omissions or have any comments or suggestions please contact
Ibrahim Tommy
Ext 7248
MOBILE: 232 76 645 914

Witness reveals how Kamajors killed 64 people

By Odilia French

The 41st witness in the ongoing CDF trial- TF2 015 has revealed how Kamajors killed a total of 64 people at Kamboama and that he was the only survivor. According to the witness, the Kamajors took the people on top of a hill and shot them; adding that the corpses then rolled and fell into a swamp nearby. The witness who was the last one on the queue said that there were eight of

them left when one of the Commanders came and told them to use knives instead of wasting the ammunition. "They started using knives and I was struck at the back of my neck. I rolled down the hill and fell on top of the other corpses," he further narrated. He said that one soldier came to his rescue and took him to a hospital in Kenema and was there for three months receiving treatment. The witness earlier in his testimony

said that he was in Tongo, a rebel stronghold when Kamajors launched an attack. He went on to say that people were running helter skelter whilst bullets were coming from every direction. "People were killed and I was shot in the stomach as I was running towards the NDMC headquarters," he explained. According to him, he was at the headquarters together with some other people when Kamajors arrived and took them to a place called- Bumi. "In

Contd. Page 2

Witness reveals

From Front Page

Bumi, we the men were separated from the women and asked to queue up.

The Kamajors took five men out of the queue and killed them, whilst others were asked to carry their loads," he added.

AWD/KC

Monday February 14, 2005

Kamajor 'death squad' commander testifies

TF2-190 BORBOR Tucker has told the Special Court that it was at a meeting summoned by some leaders of the Kamajors, that is, Moinina Alieu Kondawa, Joe Tamidae and others in 1995, that he was appointed a leader to capture Sinjahun.

by *SU*
THORONKA

Led in evidence by prosecution counsel Joseph Kamara, the witness said he was in Grima Sogbendi when he received orders from Joe Tamidae instructing him to organize the people of Sogbendi for an attack on the rebels at Gbengeh in the Kpanda Kemo chiefdom.

Tucker said he was in his village on 28 May, 1997 when he heard, through a radio broadcast, that the Kabbah government had been overthrown.

On hearing the news, he said, he and some

of his colleague kamajors went to Blama-Bandama to inform Kemolai Bangura, the initiator to the Kamajor society, about the coup and that they, the Kamajors, had been asked to surrender their weapons.

"Eventually, an emergency meeting was held in which the following people were present at the Talia-Yorbeko Court Barrie: Borbor Tucker, Kemolai Bangura, Moinina Fofana, Kamogberi, MT Collier, Rufus Collier and many others whose names I cannot recollect.

"Mr MT Collier who chaired the meeting instructed the kamajors to resist the junta and after the meeting, twenty people volunteered to fight against the rebels. So I enlisted

them into the kamajor," the witness said.

According to him, another meeting was scheduled to take place two weeks later at Teihun and at this meeting chaired by Alieu Kondawa, strategies were put in place as to how they were to launch their attacks.

He said he was instructed by Alieu Kondawa to mount up check-points at Bauya Junction because that was the entry point from Bo, a second check-point at Tobanda Junction, the entry point from Mattru Jong and a third at Bumpeh town.

"I received two packets short-gun cartridges plus AK special ammunition from Alieu Kondawa in his house at

Teihun," the witness said.

According to the witness, he then organised his men and launched an attack on the soldiers who were deployed at Mokanji and succeeded in capturing some weapons from them which they handed to Alieu Kondawa at his house.

After that, the witness said, he was ordered to lead the battle to capture Bo from the soldiers. The commanders involved, he said, were Mustapha Gobeh, Lahai George and Lamina Gbokabama and that the arms and ammunition were supplied by Alieu Kondawa.

"The group moved as far as to Bumpeh but because we ran short of food, we had cause to return to Teihun and explain to Alieu Kondawa. I later accompanied

Continued Page 7

For the People

Monday February 14, 2005

Kamajor testifies!

From Page 6
Kondawa to Mobinbi at Sierra Rutile to see the Executive Outcome who were based there.

"At Mobinbi, Kondawa requested from the Commander of the EO for arms and ammunition. The Commander gave ten boxes of AK special ammunition and out of this consignment, Kondawa gave me two boxes for my group. I was again ordered by Kondawa to attack Taiama which I carried out successfully.

"I Killed some rebels and captured the town but lost one of my men called Asmiru. After Taiama had been captured, a meeting of all leaders was held at Talia Yorbeko in order to contact Pa Norman and explain to him that there was only one strong warfront at Gendema," the witness testified.

He said Aliou Kondawa wrote a letter and also spoke in a recorded cassette inviting Pa Norman, so that they could plan as to how they could conquer the rebels. Moinina, Kemolai Bangura and MT Collier took the letter and cassette to Norman at Gendema using the route along the beach.

Three weeks later, the witness said, a helicopter landed in Talia and that the people who alighted were Kemolai, Aliou Kondawa, Pa Norman and many other dignitaries and the following were also off-loaded and taken to the court barrie: rice, fuel, guns and boxes of ammunition. The following morning, the witness said, a meeting was held but this time no fighter was present at that meeting but only the elders - that is, Kemolai, Kondawa, Pa Norman and others.

After the meeting, he said, the fighters were informed that Moinina Fofana was the Director of War while Aliou

Kondawa was the high priest. He said Aliou Kondawa introduced him to Pa Norman and others that he was a loyal fighter and that Norman congratulated him with a hand-shake and his group of fighters called 'Death Squad', responsible for the security of Base Zero, Talia Yorbeko and its environs, was increased from 21 to 42 manpower. He said the 'Death Squad' also took part in major assaults by the Kamajors, and that he used to receive direct instructions from Pa Norman.

In 1997, the witness said Pa Norman ordered him to re-enforce the Kamajors in Moyamba whose commander he said was Mustapha Gobah.

"I took along the following in a vehicle: fuel, ten AK-47 rifles in a box, two RPG tubes, LMG, one 60mm mortar tube and a quantity of ammunition to be delivered to Mustapha Gobeh. I handed over the consignment to Mustapha Gobeh at the battlefield around Waterloo in the Fakunia chiefdom with a letter from Pa Norman.

"Few minutes later, after I had handed over the supplies, I saw a group of boys who told us that soldiers were around, eventually, we heard gun shots and decided to go on the offensive. We engaged them in a fierce battle and killed most of them and some civilians whom they used as human shield," the witness said.

Tucker said the battle extended to Moyomba Junction and that after defeating the enemy, he took all the combat fatigue captured from the soldiers to Base Zero where he said he made a situation report to Pa Norman.

Tucker further revealed that the trainers at Base Zero were ex-service men like Nbogha and SS Dumbuya. These men, he said, trained well over

5000 fighters of the Kamajor and that the training was done at the Talia School field. He said at the end of the training session, trainees were issued with certificates.

In 1998, the witness said Kamajors were summoned to a meeting and that at that meeting, they were ordered to attack rebels on all fronts. Moinina, he said, told them that the training they underwent should now be out into practice and that any Kamajor commander that was assigned to capture a particular area or location and failed should never think of returning to Base Zero alive.

For Hinga Norman, he said, whatever weapon one is good at should be used to the best of his advantage to get rid of the rebels.

For Kondawa, he had done all he could in his power to have all fighters protected and no one should have fear. The witness said he was instructed to capture Koribondo junction to prevent any further re-enforcement by soldiers from Bo.

"Joe Tamidae and I moved our men to Kpetewema to prepare them for the final battle for Koribondo. We distributed ammunition to the fighters. Some ammunition were given to Joe Tamidae on the orders of Hinga Norman.

"We then attacked Koribondo on Friday 13 February 1998 from 2 pm to the following day Saturday," he said, concluding that Kamajors set houses ablaze and went on a looting spree, and that he too looted fifty-six bundles of zinc which he kept in Joe Tamidae's house.

For di People

Monday February

14, 2005

“Special Court

Witness Is A Liar”

By Joseph Komeh.

The 39th Prosecution Witness of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, TF2-006, at the ongoing CDF trials, on Wednesday wept bitterly in the witness box. This incident prompted the presiding Judge, Benjamin Itoe halt court proceedings until the witness was fit to continue his testimony.

But this did not however restrain various defence

...Defence



David Crane: Is that true?

lawyers from describing TF2-006 as a witness that lied on oath and in his statement of November 27, 2002 to investigations of the prosecution office. This is the first prosecution witness since the resumption of CDF trials.

The witness, who claims

Contd page 2

From front page

to be a victim of CDF atrocities, told the court that 3 kamajors placed his left hand on a stick and chopped off four of his fingers in Bo, because he was considered a junta collaborator. “We miss you”, the kamajors told him in Krio after amputating his hand, adding that he was asked to make the ‘One Love’ sign.

Whilst being cross-examined by lead counsel, Victor Koppe, on behalf of CDF second accused,

the witness initially agreed he was a farmer and welder, but later denied he ever told the prosecution that he did welding. He also denied ever thumb printing his purported statement to the investigators. He also denied knowledge of pieces of papers extracted from his statement indicating his nickname, his wife and mothers’ name. He however acknowledged the paper bearing his address.

Before concluding his cross-examination, Victor Koppe told the witness that

investigations carried out by the defence team confirmed that he (witness) lost his fingers in an accident during welding few years before the kamajors attacked Bo. He deemed and referred to those saying as lies.

Defence Lawyer Yada H. Williams standing for the third accused also put it to the witness that his fingers were not amputated by kamajors. At this juncture TF2-006 wept, accusing the defence lawyers of not having sympathy for him.

Financial Times (London, England) February 14, 2005 Monday

Copyright 2005 The Financial Times Limited
Financial Times (London, England)

February 14, 2005 Monday

Trials off to mixed start SPECIAL WAR CRIMES COURT: Officials warn about the potential for trouble making, writes David White

By DAVID WHITE

Behind high grey walls topped with razor wire, the purpose-built court compound in Freetown represents a new approach to the handling of war crimes. But to ordinary Sierra Leoneans the Special Court's value is as yet uncertain, the most wanted figures having either died or fled.

The court, which started trials last June, was designed to provide a shorter and cheaper process than other international tribunals, giving people the opportunity to see international law applied on the spot. But its beginnings have been surrounded by controversy and questions about its scope and relevance.

It was set up as an innovative hybrid, a joint venture between the United Nations and the Sierra Leone government. Apart from the post-second world war Nuremberg and Tokyo trials, it is the first of its kind established within the country concerned.

As the trials proceed, senior government officials warn about the potential for trouble-making by some of the factions involved, and rank this as one of the country's chief security concerns.

The idea when it was created in 2002 was that a local court, backed by international authority and legal capacity, would be more efficient in dispensing justice than an external tribunal. It was meant to avoid the costs and delays associated with the international tribunal for former Yugoslavia in The Hague and the Rwanda tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania.

Not a full UN court, it relied instead on contributions from 33 individual members, led by the US, Britain and the Netherlands. This distinction had the advantage of freeing it from some bureaucratic constraints, but the drawback of not providing a mandate under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, invoking UN powers to oblige other countries to co-operate.

Finance has been squeezed. Voluntary funding ran out last year and the UN has had to make up the gap. "We've demonstrated that we can lower the bar in terms of cost," says court registrar Robin Vincent, a former UK regional administrator. Spending of Dollars 81m for its first three financial years would be considerably lower than the cost of the Rwanda tribunal in a year.

David Crane, the US chief prosecutor, whose flamboyant verbal style has added a show business dimension to the proceedings, has set out to break new legal ground,

for instance by establishing forced marriage as a crime against humanity. But the mixed court has so far proved a mixed success.

It is questioned principally because of the small number of people in the dock and the absence of Charles Taylor, the former Liberian president accused of fomenting the 11-year conflict in Sierra Leone in exchange for plundered diamonds. The Liberian-backed Revolutionary United Front (RUF) is held to blame, not only for starting the conflict but for giving it its horrific signature, inflicting terror by cutting off hands, arms, feet, legs, lips or ears.

In the opening trial stages, many were shocked to discover the main defendant was not from the rebel camp but from the government - Sam Hinga Norman, indicted as co-ordinator of tribal militias in the pro-government Civil Defence Forces and commander of the notorious cult-based Kamajors. Mr Norman was deputy defence minister late in the war and subsequently interior minister.

The defendants' list breaks down into three groups of three, representing the Civil Defence Forces, the RUF and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, the junta that seized power between May 1997 and March 1998. The trial of this third group is expected to start next month, when a new second trial chamber starts operating.

The court's remit was restricted to those alleged to bear "the greatest responsibility" for organising atrocities, and to crimes committed since November 1996. It was widely thought this would involve between 20 and 30 indictments but only 13 were issued. The death in 2003 of two chief protagonists - RUF field commander Sam "Mosquito" Bockarie, killed in Liberia, and Foday Sankoh, the movement's leader, who was in prison awaiting trial - reduced the number to 11. Of these, military junta leader Johnny Paul Koroma is missing, believed dead, and ex-president Taylor has been sitting in exile in Nigeria.

The indictment against Mr Taylor was issued in March 2003 and unsealed three months later, at an extremely delicate time in Liberia's peace process. It seemed the move might upset plans for persuading the Liberian president to leave office and make way for a transitional government. To help the peace effort, Nigeria gave Mr Taylor asylum in August that year, and has said it will grant extradition only if requested by a democratically elected Liberian government. But some observers believe a formula may be found for extraditing him directly to Sierra Leone. "I do think there is a prospect of us getting Taylor," Mr Vincent says.

Also controversial was the decision to hold a South African-style Truth and Reconciliation Commission at the same time, gathering testimony from victims and perpetrators of atrocities to piece together a historical record.

Mr Vincent recognised that "the planning stage for both institutions was not as thorough and comprehensive as it could have been".

The commission found some people reluctant to testify, even though court prosecutors promised they would only use evidence from their own investigations.

Like the court, the reconciliation exercise was prey to funding problems and scepticism. The four Sierra Leoneans on the seven-member commission were widely regarded as too sympathetic to the government. When it produced its four-volume report in October, a year later than planned, only 10 sets were delivered.

The delay in public distribution was at first blamed on printing problems in Ghana. But President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah said the report was having to be amended after "disagreements" in the commission.

In spite of the difficulty of running the court and reconciliation process simultaneously, commission chairman Joseph Humper, a United Methodist bishop, says they are "one coin with two faces: one of them is justice and the other peace."

NATIONAL LEAGUE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS VICTIM TELLS ORDEAL WITH BRITISH COP!

...he sniffs and shot at me!"

MORE REVELATIONS now seem to follow in the wake of recent allegations that a British cop, Ray England took part in several torture exercises involving Sierra Leoneans. Now, another victim Alex G Williams, 35, is alleging that England also beat him up physically and that he was spearheading their execution, when a Unamsil patrol intervened and saved them from what was an apparent death.

Williams, commonly known as "Twin Barrel", is a decorated gunner in the national army and one of those soldiers associated with late rebel leader Foday Sankoh.

Speaking to FDP at the court lock-up, Williams said England made for his cell 4 location at Clarkson Block where they were locked up two to a cell.

"He rushed at me and hit my face with the butt of his pistol leaving a deep cut on my head.

"Then armed with a medium truncheon that transmits electric shocks, he hit my mouth and uprooted my four front teeth, with blood spattering all over the place," he said.

However, Williams said he put up a resistance before England whipped out his pistol and fired.

"The shot hit at the wall and the mark is still there. He then blasted me a sonofabitch and bastard and that my head would be blown-off if I move one single step," Williams said.

He said that apart from the heavy kicks and punches, gun-butts and truncheons with their hands in handcuffs and mouths cellotaped, it was England who placed a black hood on his head.

Williams, who is born of Sierra Leone-Nigeria parentage, said they were fortunate when a Nigerian officer on inquiry was later told by President Kabbah that he was shocked to know that executions were about to take place that night of May 8 2000. "That saved us from what was an inevitable death."

"The officer telephoned president Kabbah who said it was a surprise to him and that the order to execute us did not come from him. But right there before they hooded us at the gate was president Kabbah's special presidential aide, Abdulai Mustapha and the present Sierra Leone's ambassador to Liberia, Rtd Captain Patrick Foyah.

"England said so too and went further to say that he used similar torture methods during apartheid South Africa," he said.

Williams said they were eventually taken to the OSD torture at Jui where they spent 90 days living in sub-human conditions.

Last week, the Inspector-General of police, Brima Acha Kamara ordered an investigation

into alleged police brutality against suspects involving England and the newly-promoted Assistant Inspector General of Police, Tamba Gbekie. Furthermore, the police as well as the British High Commissioner in Freetown is soliciting the co-operation of For Di People newspaper in the ongoing police investigations.

It should be noted that both the United States and Britain, including human rights organisations, have condemned the use of torture and several soldiers have been punished for abusing this essential human rights provisions.

Meanwhile, anonymous callers from police circles continue to threaten FDP staff that they would raid their offices if anything negative is further published about police brutality and for what they view "as siding with armed robbers."

But FDP acting editor Harry Yansaneh said FDP, like its sister organization - the National League for

Human Rights, does not discriminate in defending those whose human rights have been trampled upon or in defence of the defenceless.

Yansaneh said when the late SLE parliamentary leader SB Marrah slapped a policeman, Francis Kamara, it was both organisations that stood up when the crown was defiled by the government who claim to respect law and order. In the end, the police was ridiculed by the law that they couldn't charge a simple case of assault and the politician was instead acquitted and discharged, instead of acquitted and discharged so that the right charge could've been proffered.

"We've been defending the police, army and the entire society from our inception in 1983. We've also defended many politicians in the past whenever they fall from grace.

"That is why we answer to no party, we answer to the people. And we hope therefore that every genuine and patriotic policeman, soldier, youth and every Sierra Leonean for that matter should consider FDP as representing the genuine and patriotic interest of every Sierra Leonean.

"And therefore, they too must protect us now because we are only doing our job," Yansaneh said.

For di People

Monday February 14, 2005

Amputees appeal for more houses

Rounding up his Provincial visit while in Sierra Leone, Crown Prince Haakon Magnus visited the Norwegian Refugee Council's (NRC) amputee housing project in Makeni. Whilst there, the Paramount Chief of Makari Gbanti Chiefdom- Massa Yeli

N'tham welcomed the Prince and expressed thanks to the people of Norway for their immense assistance to the people of Sierra Leone, especially the amputees in Makeni. He maintained that had it not been for the involvement of the NRC, the lives of the amputees would have been

miserable. The Chairman of the National Amputees and War-Wounded Association- Alhaji Lamin Jusu-Jaka in his statement said that 420 of them- out of 1000 have so far benefited from the Housing and Reintegration Project funded by the Norwegian Government.
Contd. Page 2

Amputees appeal for more houses

From Front Page
He explained that while they were in Displaced Camps, they were scared to return back to their villages; fearing that they would not be accepted; noting that it was the NRC Project Manager- Madam Elise Schancke who challenged them and together they prepared themselves to sensitise the communities. Mr. Jaka said that it was only the

NRC that was prepared to start a shelter programme for them; adding that their drama group has been very instrumental in proving that they can still do well even though they are without hands and legs. He expressed thanks to Norway and especially Prime Minister- Bondevik, whom he said was very instrumental in ensuring the donation to the

amputees in Sierra Leone. He appealed that the people of Norway should not forget that there are still 600 amputees in the country without houses. The Norwegian Crown Prince inspected the houses built for the amputees and spoke to some of them about their life and the constraints they are facing. The Amputee Drama Group rendered songs of praise and thanks for the Prince.

Awoke

Monday February 14, 2005



We Are The World

Women's Organization Up in Arms Over Dropped Rape Charges Against Former Army Officer

Hirondelle News Agency (Lausanne)

NEWS

February 10, 2005

Posted to the web February 11, 2005

Arusha

A motion filed by the Prosecutor to drop rape charges against the former military commander of Butare, Colonel Tharcisse Muvunyi, has met stiff opposition from an international women's lobby group.

The group, Coalition for Women's Human Rights in Conflict Situations, is not convinced that the tribunal has no "strong evidence" to make the rape charges stick.

In a letter addressed to the Prosecutor of the ICTR, Hassan Bubacar Jallow, the coordinator of Coalition for Women's Human Rights in Conflict Situations, Ariane Brunet, urged the prosecutor to "withdraw or modify" the motion, pointing out that the tribunal's past record on rape prosecutions was "shameful".

"Please do not continue to perpetrate this injustice against Rwanda's women by dropping rape charges against Muvunyi", wrote the activist.

She continued that Butare had been devastated by killings and sexual violence during the genocide, and that what the Prosecutor needed to do was put together "a dynamic and committed team of investigators" who would come up with evidence in no time at all.

She compared the situation to that of the special court for the Sierra Leone which, "with only two gender investigators, was able to compile their evidence for all of their cases in the space of one year".

Muvunyi's trial is set to open February 28 at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR). The original charge sheet had five counts: genocide, complicity in genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide and two counts of crimes against humanity (rape and other inhumane acts).

The office of the Prosecutor did not immediately comment on the protest by the women's organisation.

Copyright © 2005 Hirondelle News Agency. All rights reserved.
Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media (allAfrica.com).

United Nations



Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia
(UNMIL)

**UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary
11 Feb 2005**

International Clips on Liberia

Source: Global Witness Limited, Date: 09 Feb 2005

Critical shortfall in funding and lack of reform threaten to undermine stability in Liberia

One and a half years since the fall of Charles Taylor's regime and one year since the International Conference for Reconstruction for Liberia, Liberia's fragile peace remains under threat. The failure of the international donor community to honour their aid pledges, which now total over US\$600 million, the lack of progress by the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) in reforming key institutions and the severe shortage of reintegration programmes for over 100,000 ex-combatants are undermining efforts to promote regional stability.



ICTR Defence Lawyers Turn to UN Rights Body for Help

Hirondelle News Agency (Lausanne)

NEWS

February 10, 2005

Posted to the web February 11, 2005

Arusha

The president of the association of defence lawyers practicing at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ADAD-ICTR), Hamuli Rety, Wednesday met with officials of the UN High Commission for Human Rights in Geneva.

Rety informed the Hirondelle News Agency via telephone shortly after the meeting that the main reason behind his visit was to keep the UN human rights body informed about the impending accord between the ICTR and Rwanda that will see convicted prisoners transferred to serve their sentences in Rwanda.

He also called their attention to the plight of those prisoners who have been acquitted, but have not yet been released a year later, because they have not yet found a host country.

According to Rety, the official who received him promised to transmit the cases to the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louse Arbour, and find a solution. Arbour is a former Prosecutor for ICTR and UN Tribunal for former Yugoslavia.

Both Rwanda and the ICTR are on the verge of concluding an agreement for the eventual transfer of prisoners to serve their sentences in Rwanda.

According to official sources, a final version of the accord is expected to be sent to UN headquarters in New York soon before being approved.

The text has been under discussion since last September when a delegation from Rwanda visited the tribunal.

The visit triggered a strike by prisoners charged with having instigated the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. They refused to appear in court in protest against the transfer of prisoners to Rwanda either for trial or to serve their sentences.

The president of the tribunal, in an effort to reassure them, told the striking prisoners that any decision to transfer them would only be taken by an individual trial chambers.

The transfer of cases to national jurisdictions is part of the tribunal's exit strategy before its mandate ends in 2008.

Rwanda has orally promised not to apply the death sentence to any suspect transferred to its jurisdiction.

Copyright © 2005 Hironnelle News Agency. All rights reserved.
Distributed by AllAfrica Global Media (allAfrica.com).

A dark, horizontal banner with a grainy texture. On the left, there is a faint, high-contrast image of a person's face. To the right of the image, the text "Build. Your business." is written in a white, sans-serif font.

UN Refugee Agency Prepares for Start of Large-Scale Repatriation to Liberia

UN News Service (New York)

NEWS

February 11, 2005

Posted to the web February 11, 2005

The United Nations refugee agency is preparing for the start next week of a potentially dramatic increase in the repatriation of Liberians, with plans to help more than 100,000 exiles return to the once war-torn West African country ahead of elections scheduled for October under the new peace agreement.

The first land convoy to Lofa county in northwestern Liberia, near the borders with Guinea and Sierra Leone, is scheduled to leave Guinea on Monday. A third of the 340,000 Liberians in the region are believed to originate from Lofa, once Liberia's breadbasket. Guinea's Kouankan camp alone hosts 30,000 of the refugees, who fled 14 years of vicious civil war in their homeland.

UN High Commissioner for Refugees Ruud Lubbers called for the repatriation movement to be accelerated after he saw improved conditions on the ground when he visited Liberia last week.

At the other end of the country, UNHCR is also preparing for facilitated returns to Maryland county in the southeast, bordering Côte d'Ivoire, where it had earlier held off the return movement due to a curfew imposed by the Government last month after riots linked to alleged ritual killings.

The authorities lifted the curfew earlier this week and a UNHCR team is assessing return options across the border in the Ivorian town of Tabou, host to more than 48,000 Liberian. Convoys could start by the end of the month.

Lofa and Maryland are among the seven counties declared ready for return by the Liberian Government last month. In all, 13 out of 15 counties have now been cleared.

UNHCR has facilitated the return of some 7,200 Liberian refugees since the voluntary repatriation operation started last October. Overland convoys arrive on a regular basis from Sierra Leone and Guinea while repatriation by sea and air are organized from Ghana and Nigeria. Another estimated 100,000 Liberian refugees returned on their own in 2004.

Copyright © 2005 UN News Service. All rights reserved. Distributed
by AllAfrica Global Media (allAfrica.com).

Top News

South Africa to review mercenary law, targets Iraq

Sat February 12, 2005 10:41 AM GMT+02:00

By Gordon Bell

CAPE TOWN (Reuters) - South Africa will review tough mercenary laws to try to dissuade citizens from becoming embroiled in war zones like Iraq, President Thabo Mbeki said on Friday.

Mbeki's statement followed a high-profile court case involving former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's son, who admitted last month to a role in a foiled mercenary coup plot in West Africa. Other defendants included South Africans.

South Africans, many trained in apartheid-era special forces, have been involved in a series of mercenary operations abroad, becoming a thorn in the side of the government as it tries to promote peace and security across the continent.

"In the coming year ... (we will) review the Foreign Military Assistance Act in order to discourage, for their own good and the good of the country, those who seek to profit from conflict and human suffering such as in Iraq," Mbeki said in his state of the nation address at the opening of parliament.

Existing South African legislation, dating from 1998, bars civilians from any involvement in foreign conflicts except in humanitarian operations, although a South African government committee can give approval for deployments.

At least 11 South Africans, most of them security contractors, have been killed working in Iraq since April 2003.

South African mercenaries have shown up in civil wars in Sierra Leone, Angola, Ivory Coast and as far afield as Papua New Guinea, but the war in Iraq and its aftermath has created new opportunities.

Defence Minister Mosiuoa Lekota said in October South African soldiers were quitting their posts or going absent without leave to take up lucrative jobs in Iraq in contravention of South Africa's anti-mercenary laws.

"In terms of the Foreign Military Assistance Act this is a transgression, particularly for the serving members of the national defence force and other security agencies," he said.

CASH REWARD

Lekota said at the time that around 100 former and current South African soldiers were working for international security agencies in Iraq, earning up to \$12,000 a month -- many times what most could expect to earn back home.

An estimated several hundred South Africans, including ex-soldiers, work in Iraq. Security companies operating in Iraq frequently emphasise they are not acting as mercenary groups, but as legitimate companies supplying security personnel.

In last month's South African court case over the failed West African mercenary coup plot, Mark Thatcher pleaded guilty to a role in the plot against Equatorial Guinea's government under a plea bargain to avoid prison.

The Cape High Court agreed to a deal for him to pay a fine of 3 million rand or face five years in jail in South Africa, in addition to a further 4-year prison sentence suspended for five years.

Mark Thatcher admitted attempting to contravene South Africa's anti-mercenary legislation by agreeing to charter a helicopter, for which he paid a total of \$275,000.

Thatcher was the most prominent of scores of people charged in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Equatorial Guinea in connection with the failed coup bid last year.

South Africa's anti-mercenary law was introduced to stem destabilising mercenary activity in other African countries, but it has failed to deter some soldiers of fortune from plying their trade abroad. Critics say only a handful of people have been brought to book.