

**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 at:

Tuesday, 13 November 2007

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
Martin Royston-Wright
Ext 7217

Local News

AFRC Appeals Begin / *Awoko*

Page 3

International News

The case against Kaddafi: Will Charles Taylor "Name and Shame" him? / *The Patriotic Vanguard* Pages 4-8

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary / *UNMIL* Pages 9-11

Uganda's LRA Rebels Say ICC Arrest Warrants Obstacles to Peace / *Voice Of America* Page 12

Congo Militia Leader Faces First ICC Trial In March / *Voice of America* Page 13

Awoko

Tuesday, 13 November 2007

AFRC appeals begin

The Appeals Chamber of the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone yesterday commenced the oral argument of the appeal cases of the three members of the defunct

Council (AFRC): Alex Tamba Brima, Brima Bazy Kamara and Santigie Borbor Kanu.

Submitting on behalf of the prosecutor, Christopher Starker said they had nine grounds of appeal as they were requesting the

Appeals Chamber to revise the judgment of the Trial Chamber.

One of the points raised by the prosecutor was the individual responsibility for crimes committed in Bombali and Freetown, and that they did not intend to

repeat the argument raised before the Trial Chamber.

In challenging the credibility and reliability of the witnesses, Mr Starker said the Trial Chamber should have taken a holistic approach to prove the fact as Brima Bazy Kamara and Santigie Kanu were senior officials during the war and they created a climate of crimes. On the issue of allegation and defect, the prosecutor said that could be highlighted at the trial stage although defects could be raised

during the course of the trial but that strong reasons should be given for the defects.

For the AFRC, defects were not raised at the trial stage but that it was done at a later stage. It was therefore submitted by the prosecutor that all decisions on defects should be squashed.

On amputations and killings, he submitted that the accused were convicted on war crimes and not crimes against humanity, and so they urged the Appeals Chamber that the judgment must reflect all the crimes.

Kojo Graham on behalf of the first appellant, Alex Tamba

Brima, submitted that the first ground raised by the prosecutor that the Trial Chamber erred in law but they could not prove that the meeting called by SAJ Musa showed that his client was a member and he aided in the commissioning of the crimes. And that substantial evidence was adduced by the prosecution to prove these events.

He also submitted that they had faith, trust and confidence in the Appeals Chamber as they would have to separate the wheat from the chaff at the end of the appeal cases.

The Patriotic Vanguard

Tuesday, 13 November 2007

The case against Kaddafi: Will Charles Taylor “Name and Shame” him?

By Professor Hassan B. Sisay, Wisconsin, USA.

As 2008 approaches, the day of reckoning for Charles Taylor draws closer. Soon the former president of Liberia will have his day in court to answer to charges of multiple heinous crimes he allegedly committed against the citizens of Liberia and Sierra Leone.



According to various documented accounts, rebel groups backed by Blaise Campaore of Burkina Faso, financed by Moammar Kaddafi of Libya and sponsored by Taylor, meted out unspeakable brutality and savagery on the citizens of Sierra Leone and Liberia during the civil wars in both countries.

While Taylor is not facing trial for his heinous abuses of human rights and use of violence to hold on to power in his country, his actions in Sierra Leone will soon be subjected to intense international scrutiny at the Hague. Emphatically, I concur with famed Liberian journalist Abdoulaye W. Dukule’s assertion that: **AFTER CHARLES TAYLOR, the international community should go after MOAMMAR KADDAFI...AND BLAISE COMPAORE’.**

The UN Panel of Experts Report on Diamonds and Arms in Sierra Leone “ found conclusive evidence of supply lines to the RUF through Burkina Faso, Niger and Liberia.” Without the money, recruitment of rebels and logistic support provided by the above, thousands of our compatriots would be alive today.

For his involvement in the Lockerbie bombing that led to the deaths of about 300 people, Gaddafi paid his victims families \$3 billion. Imagine how much he owes Liberia and Sierra Leone for financing Charles Taylor and his rebel militias who killed and maimed nearly half a million people. All accounts indicate that Taylor through his support of Foday Sankoh’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group contributed in the killings and destruction of major portions of Sierra Leone.

At its peak, RUF rebels used arms supplied by Libya and transited to them by Taylor to maim, rape and amputate the limbs of hapless Sierra Leoneans. Nearly a million people were displaced from their homes and forced to seek refuge in neighboring countries. It is impossible to determine exactly the level of killings, mutilations, sexual abuse and enslavement of boys and girls perpetuated on Sierra Leoneans by the pro-Libyan RUF militia.

In his opening remarks, David Crane, former founding Chief Prosecutor for the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone (2002-2005), accurately described the carnage saying, “what took place in Sierra Leone marks the limits of our language to communicate, and falls outside the realm of expression...[it’s] “a tale of horror, beyond the gothic into the realm of Dante’s inferno.”

Crane accused Gaddafi of plotting to destabilize Sierra Leone and Liberia, disclosing that, he “was behind the past decade of war in West Africa.” Crane added that the Libyan leader “wanted to geopolitically control West Africa through surrogates such as Liberia’s Charles Taylor and Sierra Leone’s Foday Sankoh.” Crane asserted that Gaddafi was “intimately involved in plotting to take down Sierra Leone,” and had considered indicting him, but he decided against it. “Though Kaddafi would not be on trial,” he said, “the case would name and shame him.” Sadly, Kaddafi was neither ashamed nor repentant of his actions in Sierra Leone and Liberia. He has openly criticized Nigeria for arresting and handing Charles Taylor to the United Nations Special Court in Sierra Leone for trial, and described it as “an unacceptable precedent that threatened all African leaders.”

Crane’s failure to indict the Libyan leader provoked considerable anger, speculation, and left unanswered many questions. For example, since the rebel forces of both Taylor and Sankoh committed such horrible crimes against civilians with the complicity and financial support of the Libyan leader, why were the West African rebel leaders indicted by the UN Special Court and not Gaddafi? Why should the trainer, financier and purveyor of terrorism in the African continent, and particularly in Sierra and Liberia go unpunished? Why has the international community remained largely silent about Gaddafi’s atrocities in Africa. How come his African victims have remained uncompensated compared to those in Europe?

Even more startling, why should the Western powers protect an individual whose propensity for harming and killing fellow human beings has been so well documented? United Nations reports reveal that: “virtually all of the arms and money that fueled the (civil wars in both Liberia and Sierra Leone) were supplied by Libya.”

The thought that Kaddafi may have escaped prosecution because Western powers felt he was an asset to them for security and strategic purposes is deeply troubling. This calls for further investigation. On its face it defies logic and appears to be a double standard that does not promote international cohesiveness and law and order. When crimes against humanity are committed we should employ the same standards of investigation and punishment for the perpetrators, and not seek ways to justify or ameliorate their deeds.

In announcing the move to renew diplomatic ties with Libya, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice praised Kaddafi for his nation’s : “excellent co-operation in the US-led war on terrorism.” Similarly, President George Bush and former Prime Minister Tony Blair heaped unconditional praise on the Libyan leader for his “courage and statesmanship” in giving up his nuclear weapons program. David Welch, US

Assistant Secretary of State rationalized that the American decision to renew diplomatic relations with Libya “came after a careful review of Libya’s behavior, and “adherence to international norms.” Since 1993, this assessment has been contradicted by numerous investigative reports including Amnesty International and the New York-based Human Rights Watch.

The effects of Kaddafi’s actions that wreaked havoc on the civilian populations of Sierra Leone and Liberia, are not minimized by the assumption that Kaddafi may have been changing his politics in the eyes of Britain and America. Why then did he escape indictment for his deeds? The answer is simple. It appears Western powers sanitized the Libyan leader, turned a blind eye to his appalling human rights record, helped him to gain international respectability, and presented him to the world community as a reformed leader who merits acceptance by other civilized nations. Earlier, former President Ronald Reagan described Kaddafi as a “barbarian, zealot, and a “flaky” individual.

In 1986 Reagan ordered an attack on Libya following the bombing of La Belle discoteque in West Berlin that caused American casualties. Reagan held Kaddafi responsible for terrorism aimed at America, and approved air strikes on the Libyan capital, Tripoli, that resulted in over one hundred people dead including Kaddafi’s adopted daughter, Hanna Kaddafi. Egyptian president Anwar Sadat, once described the Libyan leader as 100% insane, while other Arab leaders suggested that Kaddafi’s membership in the Arab League should be terminated. How Kaddafi was morphed by western powers from pariah to patron is a long and complicated diplomatic process.

Bruce Jentleson, a State Department official in the Clinton administration said this to explain America’s reversal of diplomatic direction: “ the US didn’t make this decision because Kaddafi underwent some full transformation; we still don’t like him... but he wanted to stay in power and was willing to move on something important to us, so we struck a deal.” Further, Jentleson indicated that Western leaders convinced Kaddafi that if he gave up his nuclear programs and “did a policy change, we would not do regime change.” Jon B. Alterman, director of the Middle East Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington D.C. noted : “ while some aspects of the Libyan leader’s behavior remained objectionable, such as meddling in African politics it never challenged U.S. strategic interests.”

In other words, although the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia financed by Gaddafi caused the deaths of more than half a million people, massive destruction of property, heinous rapes, displaced two million people, and resulted in immense hardship on the civilian populations of both countries, that unambiguous despicable record of human rights violations was not enough to maintain the diplomatic ostracism of Kaddafi. An exuberant Bush Official even proclaimed that Libya “ is out of the terrorism business.” The Los Angeles Times put it best in its defense of the new policy: “if any atrocious record on human rights were enough to land a nation on the [terrorist] list, then the U.S. would have to add China, Egypt and Uzbekistan and dozens of others.”

Gamal Nkrumah, son of the fiery Ghanaian Pan Africanist, writing in the Al-Ahram weekly, a leading Middle East newspaper, described what happened between Washington and Tripoli as “a marriage of convenience cemented by business ties.” In short, when the rule of law, morality, human rights, and the so-called wider public and strategic interest collide, the latter prevails.

It is highly possible that the above rationalization and or justification may have influenced the Western powers slow reactions to the horrors in Darfur, Sudan, the Rwandan Massacres; and why the international community took such a long time to end “apartheid” in South Africa. Kaddafi knows too well the strong links in the geopolitical considerations by western powers between the economic, social, political and strategic matters, and how the West is behold to him by its considerable dependence on Libyan oil. Accordingly, he has been unwavering in using his economic power to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the West.

But how has Kaddafi been able to pacify Africa to avert any future investigation for his support of rebels in Liberia and Sierra Leone ? Again, Kaddafi uses his enormous economic power to soothe African nations that he has openly offended or undermined. Cash-strapped governments such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Zimbabwe and Malawi receive meager financial aid from Tripoli, including sometimes boat loads of rice, obsolete ferries, weapons, and automobiles to be used by government personnel.

Such aid is miniscule compared to the billions of dollars the Libyan leader has spent to reimburse European victims of his alleged terrorist acts. He has become the self-appointed spokesperson of African causes such as human rights violations in Darfur, Chad, Somalia, and the plight of African would be migrants to Europe. Kaddafi also got Africa to violate sanctions the western powers imposed on Libya. Mandela visited Libya during the sanction period, and air travel between the rest of the continent to Libya were resumed despite the sanctions.

Further, in the late 90s, Kaddafi began a campaign that revived the principles of African unity, as stipulated by the founders of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and these efforts resulted in the founding of the African Union (AU). Kaddafi seemed to have had an insight into the future, and succeeded in emerging as a true African son. How can a true son of Africa and a promoter of African unity be responsible for destabilizing states, or be held accountable for financing rebel activity in Sierra Leone and Liberia? Why should he (Kaddafi) be made to pay compensation to victims of civil wars in the referred countries? No African head of state has yet confronted him on the above. Rather, there is a surprising silence particularly from Liberia and Sierra Leone, and a seeming willingness by continental leaders to tolerate Kaddafi’s highly questionable diplomacy in Africa. This pro-Kaddafi support notwithstanding, the Libyan leader’s activities in Sierra Leone and Liberia will take center stage at the Hague during Taylor’s trial in 2008. And as in the past, there will be a number of important questions to ask. For example, why did David Crane the Chief prosecutor in the UN Special court in Sierra Leone consider it expedient to

reveal in advance that even though the court had not indicted Gaddafi: “this has not been ruled out?” Was this meant to warn Kaddafi to change his ways or face the consequences? Or did the Libyan leader outwit Western powers by doing what he perceived they wanted done and thereby escape indictment. What other nations and personalities will be implicated in the wars of Liberia and Sierra Leone by Taylor’s impending testimony?

If Taylor agrees to “name and shame” Kaddafi for being a collaborator, the victims in Sierra Leone and Liberia have a chance for compensation from Kaddafi. Taylor would have validated what has been common knowledge about the source of financing for his crimes, and Taylor and Sankoh’s victims will have a credible evidence to go after Kaddafi. To succeed the victims in Liberia and Sierra Leone must organize and be well represented in the same manner as Hissane Habre’s victims in Chad. If Taylor decides not to “name and shame” Kaddafi, his and Sankoh’s victims still have the basis for compensation because the case against Taylor is being prosecuted on their behalf.

Certainly, the activities of Taylor and Sankoh were supported and financed by someone, some people or some foreign governments. Somebody provided the guns to rebel militias, and assisted the Revolutionary United Front rebels to sell their “Blood Diamonds “ to European buyers. If and when he is properly cornered, Taylor would name names and avoid going down alone. In anticipation of that possibility, the victims ought to be organized, and demonstrate a presence through legal representation during the trial, to protect their own interests.

In addition, the governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia should put considerable pressure on the UN Special Court that is investigating Taylor’s atrocities to also consider the actions of his financier and alleged co-conspirator. They should emulate Kaddafi’s effective bargaining tactics with the EU and Bulgaria in the matter of his citizens who were allegedly injected with tainted blood containing the HIV virus. Kaddafi showed little mercy during the bargaining process with the EU and western powers on behalf of his citizens, and was richly rewarded. By implication, Kaddafi may agree to quietly compensate the Liberian and Sierra Leone victims without being “named and shamed” to minimize international criticism and condemnation. It is only when the above materializes that Kaddafi will espouse the true qualities of the nobleman and true son of Africa that he has always wanted to be.

Professor Hassan B. Sisay(photo) is with the History Department, St. Norbert College,Green Bay, Wisconsin,USA.

United Nations  Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 12 November 2007

[The media summaries and press clips do not necessarily represent the views of UNMIL.]

International Clips on Liberia

AP 11/12/2007 07:50:34

Prosecutors plan appeal despite accused sex criminal deportation

ROCKVILLE, Md. _ The deportation of a Liberian man whose rape and sex charges in Montgomery County were dismissed is not dissuading prosecutors from trying to reinstate the charges. Mahamu Kanneh was ordered to be deported last week. His sexual abuse case was dismissed this summer when he didn't get a speedy trial. The 23-year-old immigrant from Rockville was charged in 2004 with the rape of a 7-year-old girl. The trial was postponed several times because court officials could not find an interpreter fluent in his dialect.

International Clips on West Africa

VOA 11/12/2007 05:08:59

Ivory Coast: Northern Ivorians pleases with peace

Section: Regional News - Leading non-governmental organizations and the United Nations have recently expressed concern over the pace of the peace process in Ivory Coast. But after visiting a community of northerners living in the southern, commercial capital Abidjan, Phillip Wellman discovered that most of its residents are happy with the current political situation and patient with the government.

When asked if life is difficult for northerners in the south of Ivory Coast, Awa Progo laughs, shakes her head no and says life is good. Progo says all of her neighbours in the Blingue ghetto of Abidjan and all of her relatives in the north of the country are also enjoying life now that the war is over.

Local Media – Newspaper

U.S. Envoy Renews Call to Probe Allegation of Bribery

(The News, New Democrat, Heritage, National Chronicle, Liberian Express and Daily Observer)

- The media reports that United States Ambassador to Liberia, Donald Booth has repeated calls for an independent probe into allegations of bribery in the House of Representatives. Ambassador Booth said the governance of any good legislature depends on its integrity, as such, it was important for the members of the House to immediately institute an investigation into the alleged US\$5,000 bribery scandal.
- Some lawmakers accused their colleagues of receiving bribe during the campaign to remove Edwin Snowe as Speaker of the House in January this year. The International Contact Group on Liberia and several Liberians earlier made the call but was rejected by the House of Representatives.

Supreme Court Suspends Bryant's Lawyers

(The News, New Democrat, The Informer, National Chronicle, Plain Truth and The Inquirer)

- The Supreme Court of Liberia has banned two lawyers representing the legal interest of former Transitional Chairman, Gyude Bryant, accused of theft in the ongoing economic sabotage case.
- The two lawyers, former Solicitor General, Theophilus Gould and Counsellor Samuel Clarke were ordered banned on Friday for requesting Criminal Court "C" Judge Boima Kontoe to stop further proceedings into the Bryant's case after the Supreme Court instructed the Judge to proceed.
- The media however reports that in order not to hinder the Bryant's trial, the two lawyers were given "suspended ban" until such professional act on their part is repeated. They were fined US\$ 300 each and ordered to pay the amount within 72 hours. The ruling stemmed from a Bill of Information filed before the Supreme Court by state lawyers saying the action by Bryant's lawyers to stop proceedings into his trial was contemptuous and that they should be punished.

UNMIL begins Street Project in Ganta

(Daily Observer)

- The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has begun the opening-up of streets in Ganta, Nimba County. The commencement of the exercise was attended by scores of citizens as well as local government officials. Speaking on behalf of UNMIL, Wesley Natana, Civil Affairs Coordinator of the mission said the peacekeepers had brought their equipment to officially start the opening-up of the streets of Ganta as requested by the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Internal Affairs. "This exercise is based on recommendations made by the ad-hoc technical committee of the presidential commission on the Nimba inter-ethnic properties and land disputes as part of a solution in resolving the disagreements", he said. The UNMIL Civil Affairs Coordinator than called on the citizenry to cooperate with the UNMIL Bangladeshi Engineering Battalion #7 for the success of the exercise.

Defense Official Says AFL Restructure Faces Gender Imbalance

(The News)

- The Deputy Defense Minister for Administration, Othello Warwick says the recruitment exercise of the Armed Forces of Liberia(AFL) is facing gender imbalance due to the unwillingness of women to sign up for the army.
- Speaking at the weekend when more than 500 recruits were sworn in at Camp Sandi Ware Military Barracks in VOA outside Monrovia, Minister Warwick said most of the women meeting the criteria for enlisting into the new army are not willing or enthusiastic.

Local Media – Radio Veritas *(News monitored today at 9:45 am)*

Mercy Ship Founder Says Ship will Continue to Support Liberia

- The President of Mercy Ship, an international charity, Mr. Don Stevens said that the Ship will continue its support to Liberia focusing on the Country's national health-care by using the African Mercy Platform for medical education and mentoring in administration and infrastructure management. For her part, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf welcomed the Ship's decision to return to Liberia in February, 2008 because its presence will greatly help Liberia's health sector.

(Also reported on ELBS, Star Radio, SKY FM and Truth FM)

Civil Service Association Calls for Presidential Commission on Pension

- According to the President of the Civil Service Association of Liberia Jefferson Elliot, the Association's Executive Committee called for the setting up of a presidential commission on pension which will ensure the enhancement of social security benefits to guarantee greater social protection for civil servants in Liberia.

(Also reported on ELBS, Star Radio, SKY FM and Truth FM)

French Envoy Says France will help Improve Liberian Media

- Presenting certificates to graduates of the Jireh School of Journalism yesterday, French Ambassador Jacque Gerard promised the French government's commitment to improve the performance of the Liberian media in that the sector was making some progress in terms of growth. He promised that his Embassy will complete the Christian Media Centre studio project.
- For his part, the Press Union of Liberia Secretary-General, Mr. Peter Quaqua regretted that some Liberian journalists have lost their integrity which no amount of training can replace.
- Meanwhile, serving as Guest Speaker at the ceremony, Information Minister Laurence Bropleh called for professional guidelines to be drawn up in order to weed out incompetent and unethical people who pollute the journalism profession.
- Minister Bropleh noted that journalism was a noble profession but incompetent and unqualified persons practicing it were doing a disservice to competent and professional practitioners of the art in Liberia.
- Minister Bropleh said that in order for the media to play its crucial role in rebuilding the Country, journalists must be well paid and have an understanding of issue or they will be pruned to giving out misinformation to the public. He admonished the graduates to see themselves as part of a new generation of journalists, whose focus should be on developmental reporting by going beyond the headlines, double-checking information and verifying the facts.

(Also reported on ELBS, Star Radio, SKY FM and Truth FM)

Local Communities Urged to Undertake Self-Help Initiatives

- Correspondents said that the Ministry of Commerce Acting Director of Communications, Mr. Marbue Gorlafalee Sunday encouraged Liberians to undertake self-help initiatives in order to empower themselves in the absence of government assistance. Speaking to members of the Wesseh Financial Club, Mr. Gorlafalee said that venturing into self-help projects would provide an alternative livelihood for them.

(Also reported on ELBS, Star Radio, SKY FM and Truth FM)

Complete versions of the UNMIL International Press Clips, UNMIL Daily Liberian Radio Summary and UNMIL Liberian Newspapers Summary are posted each day on the UNMIL Bulletin Board. If you are unable to access the UNMIL Bulletin Board or would like further information on the content of the summaries, please contact Mr. Weah Karpeh at karpeh@un.org.

Voice of America

Tuesday, 13 November 2007

Uganda's LRA Rebels Say ICC Arrest Warrants Obstacles to Peace

By Peter Clotey
Washington, D.C.

Uganda's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels say the International Criminal Courts' (ICC) arrests warrants against its top leadership are the main obstacle to finding a lasting peace to the northern Uganda conflict. The rebels also blame Luis Moreno-Ocampo, the chief prosecutor of the ICC of bias and of being involved in a calculated attempt to derail the adjourned peace talks in the Southern Sudanese capital, Juba, between the LRA and the government of Uganda.

The LRA adds that it is committed to finding a lasting solution to the over 20-years of its insurgency. David Matsanga is the technical advisor for the rebels on ICC matters. From Kenya's capital, Nairobi he tells reporter Peter Clotey that the rebels are grateful for the overwhelming support they are enjoying during their ongoing consultations in northern Uganda.

"We want to make it very clear that the position of the Lord's Resistance Army on the question of the ICC is that it was a flawed process. It was a flawed process in that the prosecutor only investigated one side; he did not investigate all the sides that were involved in the conflict. That is our position. And the rest of it we have put it into agenda number three, which is exactly what the LRA stands for as far as accountability and reconciliation are concerned," Matsanga pointed out.

He described as unfortunate the action of the chief prosecutor of the ICC, who he said is trying to undermine the peace process.

"With due respect, Ocampo has lost the credibility of prosecuting this case because he has gone outside his merits as a prosecutor. You wait for the court then you lay your case. But he has become a public relations officer who drums up and makes statements that even jeopardize any action that can be taken against the same people that he is accusing, trying to pin down the situation to confuse the peace process," he said.

Matsanga said most people, including victims of the insurgency want peace to be achieved so they could go on with their lives.

"Ugandans are saying no, this peace process cannot be confused. We want the peace process to be concluded. There are no short cuts. Even the Uganda government knows there are no short cuts to the dialogue in Juba. And you cannot bring any other alternative that can bring long lasting and sustainable peace to the people of northern Uganda and eastern Uganda, and the rest of Uganda who has suffered as a result of this conflict for 21 years," Matsanga noted.

He reiterated that the ICC-issued warrants are a major obstacle to the peace negotiations.

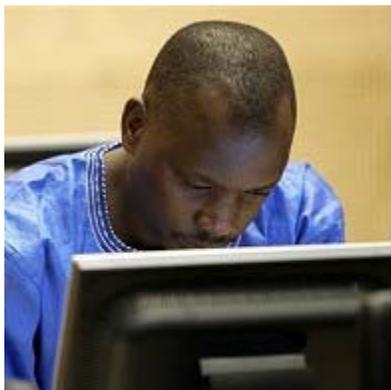
"We have told the government time and time again on the table in Juba. We have argued with the government, with Ruhakana Rugunda, even recently our delegation was in Kampala, when they met President Yoweri Museveni. They told President Museveni with no uncertain terms, categorically that the issue of the ICC is a stumbling block. And President Museveni said he is not also happy with the ICC issue," he said.

Voice of America

Monday, 12 November 2007

Congo Militia Leader Faces First ICC Trial In March

By VOA News



Thomas Lubanga is seen at the start of a hearing at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, Nov 2006

The International Criminal Court has set a March trial date for Congolese militia leader Thomas Lubanga, the first person to face trial at the world court.

The court says Lubanga's trial will start on March 31 of next year. The court also told prosecutors to make available to defense lawyers all the evidence they plan to use against Lubanga by December 14.

Lubanga is accused of recruiting and using thousands of child soldiers to fight for the armed wing of his party - The Union of Congolese Patriots - during the Democratic Republic of Congo's civil war.

Lubanga's lawyers have disputed the charges, saying he worked to end the war.

Lubanga is the first person to be charged at any international court for the alleged use of child soldiers.

Some estimates suggest child soldiers made up 40 percent of all armed forces in the Congolese civil war. The conflict involved six other countries, and led to the deaths of some four million people.

The International Criminal Court is also in the early stages of prosecuting Germain Katanga, another Congolese military leader accused of crimes against humanity during the country's civil war.

In addition, the court has indicted two people for war crimes in Sudan's Darfur region and four leaders of Uganda's rebel Lord's Resistance Army. The court's prosecutor is also investigating crimes in the Central African Republic.