

**SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE**



Boys 'borrow' a ladder to rescue their ball from the balcony of a building.

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Friday, 11 April 2008

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Exclusive

Friday, 11 April 2008

As RUF Trial Continues Today...

Kabbah May Testify

As the marathon trial of former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters continues today, 11th April, 2008 at the Special Court Trial

Chamber, former President Alhaji Tejan Kabbah has been named by the former RUF Commander, Issa Sesay to testify in today's

trial session.

The court is expected to round up its trials with Issa Sesay whose defense team was almost through

in making its submission.

It is however not clear whether or not the court would invite Kabbah to testify.

BBC World Service Trust

Wednesday, 9 April 2008

The Prosecution insider witness in the war crimes trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor has been speaking of radio communication network and arm supplies allegedly between Charles Taylor and the RUF rebels.

Alphonsus Zeon reports TF1-516 named key personnel in the Taylor security network who secured and delivered arms to the Sierra Leonean rebels on behalf of former Liberian president for military attacks into Sierra Leone and Guinea.

ZEON: TF1-516, who said he was a radio operator during the days of the RUF rebels, said two communication stations were established in Monrovia.

TF1-516: ... Base 1. That was Benjamin D Yeaten's radio... And call sign 020 operated by Sky 1... After the Voinjama operation or I travelled together with Benjamin D Yeaten to Monrovia... This 020, it was located at the Executive Mansion Ground in Monrovia.

COUNSEL: ... there was some arrangement for the supply of material from Benjamin Yeaten. Is that right?

TF1-516: Yes, we remained in Gbarnga and he made that arrangement. It was very simple to relay and pass on information and you had the helicopter flying to his location.... The message was addressed to Joe Tuah, Network, and he was to contact Bulldog who was there to facilitate the movement of the helicopter to Gbarnga... Joe Tuah was a sort of administrator... For the Liberian government.

COUNSEL: And did the material arrive at Gbarnga?

TF1-516: Yes, sir.

COUNSEL: What material arrived there?

TF1-516: Ammunitions... By air... They landed to the airfield, those materials were put into the vehicles and brought to 50's house where we took off for the front line.

ZEON: He said two other stations on Taylor's farm in Gbarnga and another in Voinjama, Lofa county linked stations in Sierra Leone from where RUF Commanders took instructions and coordinated the rebel operations.

TF1-516 said Taylor and personnel acting on his orders used the Liberian stations to coordinate arms, supplies and military attacks in to Sierra Leone and Guinea.

TF1-516: Benjamin D Yeaten and Momoh Gibba travelled to Gibba's house... In fact That day we were supposed to fly to Foya, he said, "I'm travelling," he said. "Get prepared. We are flying back to the front line today." I told him, "Yes, sir." He travelled with Momoh Gibba. After some time he came back on board that same vehicle... What I saw they were taking from the vehicle was rifles, AK rifles, and those rifles were referred to as multi-party. That same day we flew on board the helicopter to Foya and those rifles were put into two partitions. One was handed over to General Issa's men and that was taken to Sierra Leone and the other was left in Foya and those rifles were distributed to the combatants who were to attack Guinea.

ZEON: Prosecution lawyer Mohammed Bangura is expected to continue the direct examination of Witness TF1-516.

This is Alphonsus Zeon for the BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, reporting from Chamber II of the Special Court in The Hague.

The Analyst (Liberia)

Wednesday, 9 April 2008

How Arms, Ammunition Were Supplied

The week ended with prosecution witness Isaac Mongor still under cross-examination by the defense. Defense counsel Terry Munyard spent much of the morning asking about arms shipments from Libya and Burkina Faso, and seeking Mongor's aid in bolstering the defense contention that the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) received no arms or ammunition from Charles Taylor from 1993 to 1998.

However, Mongor insisted that an arms shipment to the RUF in 1998 had come from Libya through Liberia. Munyard sought to discredit this testimony. He spent the latter part of the trial day asking a series of unrelated questions. Supply of arms and ammunition to the RUF from 1993 to 1998.

Continuing where he left off recently, Munyard asked Mongor about an attempt by the RUF to buy arms in 1996. Mongor testified that RUF leader Foday Sankoh had told him after his return from signing the Abidjan Peace Accords that he had sent his adjutant, Jonathan Passawe, to Ghana to collect money for the arms and ammunition. Passawe spent the money for his own purposes and was afraid to return to Sierra Leone.

When Mongor said he didn't know from whom Passawe was to have received the money in Ghana, Munyard introduced a document purportedly signed by Sankoh (Mongor claimed it wasn't Sankoh's signature), which thanked a Libyan government official based in Ghana for past money for arms and ammunition, and requested 1.5 million US dollars more.

Mongor explained that although Passawe had spent the money for his own purposes (he would not say Passawe had "stolen" it), he had returned to Sierra Leone with Foday Sankoh following a meeting in Liberia after the signing of the July 1999 Lomé Peace Accord. Sankoh subsequently made Passawe the RUF's Secretary General.

With regard to another incident, Mongor confirmed telling investigators that Johnny Paul Koroma, the leader of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), had contacted Taylor to request a connection in Libya for purposes of buying arms and ammunition. When Munyard suggested that Mongor, as a senior RUF commander, must have known that Sankoh had direct contacts with Libya, Mongor stated that he knew nothing about arms and ammunition from Libya.

At this point, Munyard confronted him with a prior statement to investigators in which he had told them that he understood an arms shipment by plane to the town of Magburaka in 1998 had come from Libya.

Asked how, then, he could have earlier said he knew nothing of supplies from Libya, Mongor replied that he knew nothing about arms from Libya for Sankoh and the RUF, but that the shipment to Magburaka had been for Johnny Paul Koroma and the AFRC. It had been arranged by Charles Taylor and the plane had first passed through Liberia. Mongor testified that he knew the arms came from Libya because Koroma had told him.

Munyard sought to discredit this claim, presenting Mongor with notes from a previous statement to investigators, which stated that Mongor didn't know where the plane came from, but he'd known that the RUF/AFRC were expecting materials from Burkina Faso.

Mongor claimed that the investigators had made a mistake in writing “Burkina Faso” instead of “Libya”, and that for some reason it had not occurred to him to correct the investigator when the notes were read back to him.

Mongor confirmed telling investigators that he thought Ibrahim Bah (identified in previous testimony from several witnesses as a General in Taylor’s NPFL) had been involved in arranging the air shipments of arms and ammunition from Burkina Faso and Libya, including the shipment to Magburaka.

Mongor testified that during the time of the AFRC/RUF junta (May 1997 - February 1998), he had accompanied Bah to Johnny Paul Koroma’s house, where Bah and Koroma held a closed-door meeting. Koroma later told the assembled commanders that the two had made arrangements for arms shipments. After the AFRC/RUF was dislodged from Freetown in February 1998, Mongor said that new supplies arrived, but he didn’t know whether they had come from Burkina Faso.

Munyard appeared eager to demonstrate that the AFRC/RUF maintained direct links with Burkina Faso, and recalled Mongor’s earlier testimony about a trip by RUF commanders Sam Bockarie (“Mosquito”) and SYB Rogers to Burkina Faso regarding arms. Mongor said that they had gone there at Taylor’s urging, and that Taylor arranged for them to meet with the Burkinabe President (Blaise Compoaré).

While Munyard suggested that the large arms and ammunition shipment with which they had returned to Sierra Leone came from Burkina Faso as a result of this visit, Mongor said that this wasn’t the case and that the visit had just been to establish the contact.

When Munyard sought to move to another topic, Judge Sebutinde interrupted to say that she wanted to hear the logical conclusion of this explanation: if the supplies hadn’t come from Burkina Faso, where had they come from? Mongor said that Bockarie and Rogers had traveled back through Liberia and had received the arms and ammunition from Taylor.

Loose ends.

Munyard then shifted to various issues at different periods of Mongor’s account:

Asked whether Bockarie and Taylor ever talked by radio, Mongor said they had. He said that field reports had not been sent directly by Bockarie, but given in writing to a radio operator who then encoded them.

He said there had been other discussions, however, and that after Bockarie had received a satellite phone, he also had used that to speak with Taylor. Munyard asked whether Mongor had ever overheard a radio discussion between Bockarie and Taylor. Mongor said he had, but said he couldn’t provide any estimate for the number of times.

Munyard asked about Mongor’s earlier testimony regarding a meeting he said had occurred in Voinjama, Liberia on the eve of the invasion of Sierra Leone in March 1991. Mongor had testified that Taylor came to that meeting of RUF and NPFL forces to speak with them. Mongor also said that Taylor called him into the house, where Taylor had thanked him for the job he’d done and told him to “keep the ball rolling”.

Munyard confronted Mongor with notes from a previous interview with investigators, which stated that in the meeting with the troops, Taylor had not spoken specifically with Mongor, and that he had told the troops to “keep the ball rolling”.

Mongor confirmed saying this to investigators, and explained that during the meeting with the troops, Taylor had not spoken with him directly - but only in the smaller conversation later. He said that Taylor had used the expression “keep the ball rolling” in both the larger talk and the smaller discussion, when he had addressed Mongor personally. Munyard suggested that the meeting had never happened. Mongor said

it had, and that the troops had spent the night there before moving to Foya the next morning to enter Sierra Leone.

As he did yesterday, Munyard again asked about tension between the RUF and NPFL in 1992. Mongor confirmed that he had been injured at the time of the two operations against the NPFL: “Top 20” and “Top Final”. He received a cut to his head with a machete, saying he thought the NPFL fighters had meant to kill him, and then was detained in Liberia for three weeks.

At the end of that time, Mongor said his captors - some of them previously NPFL colleagues - told him that Taylor had called to order his release. Munyard expressed disbelief that NPFL men would have tried to kill Mongor if Mongor’s claim were true that the head of the NPFL, Charles Taylor, really had been the one who had recruited him to train the RUF. Mongor replied that it was some members of the NPFL who tried to kill him, not the organization.

Mongor confirmed that prior to these “Top” operations; Sankoh had ordered him arrested for a time because they had been interested in the same woman. It was after his release that Mongor himself organized “Top Final”.

Munyard returned to a topic raised yesterday: Mongor’s participation in a massacre of civilians at the village of Sandiaru.

He asked Mongor whether he had given an order to the survivors that they should not bury the dead, but rather throw the corpses into the bush. Mongor said he didn’t recall giving that order. Munyard then suggested that Mongor had received the nickname “Tombolo” after the massacre, roughly meaning “someone who can destroy a whole family”. Mongor said he never had that nickname.

Munyard asked about the village of Giema, and whether the RUF had treated civilians there “like bush animals”: beating them, keeping them in cells and forcing them to work. Mongor said he hadn’t been the commander there, but had only gone there occasionally to visit his wife and children. He said that the RUF forced civilians in Giema to work for them, but that he had never seen any beatings there.

Asked whether Foday Sankoh had used a special name for him, Mongor said Sankoh simply used his given name, Isaac. Munyard asked whether Sankoh had ever called him “Papay” or “Uncle”, and Mongor answered “no, never”.

Asked about aspects of his account of fighting with the NPFL before the war in Sierra Leone, Mongor said that the town of Bong Mines had been captured from his group by Prince Johnson’s faction (the Independent NPFL), but could not say how long the NPFL had held it before this happened - only agreeing it had been “several days”.

He said he could give no estimate of when the NPFL had captured Bong Mines or reached the Coca Cola factory on the edge of Monrovia. Jumping forward to 2002, Munyard returned to Mongor’s testimony that an RUF delegation sent by Issa Sesay to Taylor to seek campaign funds ahead of pending elections in Sierra Leone (during disarmament, after fighting had ended) had been arrested, returning with nothing.

Munyard consulted with Taylor, who appeared highly interested in the proceedings, then asked whether Mongor was aware that Taylor had given the delegation 150,000 US dollars for the 2002 elections, and that nobody had been arrested. Mongor disputed this.

Munyard asked whether Mongor had been aware that the Sierra Leonean government of Ahmed Tejan-Kabbah had recruited child soldiers during the war, but Mongor insisted he knew nothing about the national army.

He said he had never seen a child soldier opposing him in the field. Munyard then asked whether he had ever seen that ULIMO put human heads on sticks. Prosecutor Nick Koumjian objected that it was irrelevant to the case whether other parties had also committed crimes.

Munyard said he simply wanted to know whether this was common practice in the region and Judge Doherty allowed the question. Mongor said he hadn't been aware of ULIMO placing heads on sticks.

Asked whether Sankoh and Taylor had really maintained contact from the beginning of the war to the time Taylor became president, as Mongor had testified, Mongor said they had. Munyard expressed doubt, given the bloody "Top" operations in 1992 that pitted the RUF against the NPFL. Mongor said that Sankoh and Taylor were friends and that only death could end that friendship. Munyard asserted that Mongor was wrong - that there had been no communication between Sankoh and Taylor from 1992 until Taylor's election.

Mongor did agree that there had been a disruption in their communication in 2000, but that this had been restored before Mongor's own arrest in Sierra Leone in May 2000 (which he earlier testified had preceded Sankoh's arrest by a day). Munyard suggested that the contact had been renewed because Taylor was making an attempt to free UN hostages from the RUF. Mongor said he did not know about that.

Munyard concluded the day by suggesting that the AFRC and RUF had had a tense relationship from the start of their joint rule following the May 1997 coup.

The defense seemed particularly eager to establish this, and Munyard asked about several angles: whether the AFRC high command had treated RUF commanders equally; whether there were two separate command structures; whether Johnny Paul Koroma said that some members of the RUF were plotting to overthrow him; whether the organizations had separate supplies of arms and ammunition; whether during the February 1998 intervention by ECOMOG, the AFRC command had abandoned the RUF to fight; whether members had felt loyalty to their original organizations; and whether Bockarie had ever expressed dissatisfaction with the AFRC or hostility toward its leaders. Mongor provided no satisfaction to the defense on any of these accounts.

He insisted that the two organizations had worked well together in an integrated command and had shared supplies. He denied knowledge of any tension, suspicions or resentment between the groups. Of Bockarie, Mongor said "he was also part of the AFRC". The cross-examination of Isaac Mongor will resume on Monday morning at 9:30.

Star Radio (Liberia)

Thursday, 10 April 2008

"No intention to harm Blah", Taylor's family

Written by Wellington Geevon Smith

The family of detained former President Charles Taylor says it has no intention to harm former President Moses Blah.

The spokesman for the Taylor family also dismissed report that Taylor's associates and sympathizers were planning to set Mr. Blah's car on fire.

Mr. Sando Johnson clarified that the Taylor family wholeheartedly welcomes the decision for Mr. Blah to testify in The Hague.

Mr. Johnson said the family believes Mr. Blah would speak his conscience and whatever he says in court would be a welcomed development.

Mr. Johnson alleged he has repeatedly turned down an invitation to visit Mr. Blah because the former President has become a prosecution witness.

Former President Blah said he has been subpoenaed by the UN-backed Special Court sitting in The Hague to testify in the trial of detained former President Charles Taylor.

Agence France-Presse

Tuesday, 8 April 2008

Liberia ex-VP to talk in Taylor trial

MONROVIA - Liberia's former vice president Moses Blah said that he has been called to testify in the trial of Charles Taylor, the first African leader to face an international tribunal for war crimes.

Blah said the United Nations (UN) Special Court for Sierra Leone, which is trying Liberia's ex-president Taylor in The Hague for his alleged key part in a brutal civil war in the neighbouring country, had sent him a subpoena for April 14.

"I will speak the truth. This is why I am surprised that some people are worried that there is the possibility of me testifying," said Blah, who served as vice-president under Taylor and then briefly took over when he was ousted.

Blah said that he would tell the court in The Hague about the death of Sam Bockarie, who in 1988 and 1989 led Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a brutal force that waged a civil war at a cost of 120,000 lives.

Taylor came to power in Liberia as a warlord in a brutal conflict, but was toppled and forced into exile in Nigeria in 2003 by the combination of a rebellion against him and international pressure.

However, he is on trial in The Hague for what the prosecution presents as a key role in supporting and controlling the RUF, which ravaged Sierra Leone from 1991 and 2001.

Taylor allegedly funded and armed them in exchange for diamonds and other resources, while rebels terrorised civilians by cutting off arms, legs, ears and noses, leaving thousands of people mutilated.

Blah linked Bockarie's death to Taylor's then chief of general staff Benjamin Yeaten.

"The night of the killing of Sam Bockarie I saw Benjamin Yeaten. And other groups were travelling and they stopped in my village. I asked them 'Where are you guys going with such a huge convoy?' Sam Bockarie was among them, his wife also was there," Blah told journalists.

However, he gave no further details of that night, stating only that he would go to The Hague, where Taylor is on trial on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone, all of which he denies.

Blah was head of state for about two months after Taylor went into exile in Nigeria, then he handed over in October 2003 to interim president Gyude Bryant, who oversaw a transition to democratic rule in 2006 under elected President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson.

Lawyer John Richardson, who heads a legal team defending Taylor, on Saturday welcomed reports that Blah could be called to testify before the tribunal in The Hague, which has heard a grisly series of accounts of

atrocities from prosecution witnesses.

"If this is the truth, we will welcome it," Richardson said, describing Blah as "a credible individual, someone who comes from what we will say is a close range circle (and who) knows."

"Having seen the parade of non credible witnesses that the prosecution has lined up claiming they are insiders, we believe that the vice president of president Taylor... going to testify will open up and allow Liberians to share all things."

Taylor's trial before the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone was moved from Freetown to The Hague because there were fears his presence in the African country could destabilise the region.

DAMIAN ZANE

Rough Justice



It was an unfair match from the start.

On the one side there was a highly educated and combative British lawyer – part of the defence team for Liberia's former president, Charles Taylor. On the other side there was a Sierra Leonean pastor, who described himself as a simple country man.

This was the cross examination of the prosecution's first victim witness in Taylor's war-crimes trial.

The pastor, Alex Tamba Teh, had earlier testified to witnessing atrocities during Sierra Leone's civil war. He described, amongst other things, seeing the limbs of a boy being hacked off. The boy was then thrown into a pit latrine and left to die.

For me, hearing Pastor Teh's testimony was the point at which the trial of Charles Taylor began to make sense. Taylor was forced to sit and listen to descriptions of horrific acts that he is being accused of having a link with. He is pleading not guilty.

Stephen Rapp, the chief prosecutor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, says that he feels responsible for making sure that the victim's voice is heard.

The prosecution wants the victims to take centre stage. And it is interesting to see the way the courtroom in The Hague is laid out. Charles Taylor is not the centre of attention. He is not sitting on a raised dais – rather, he is tucked behind his lawyers. It is the witnesses who are in the middle.

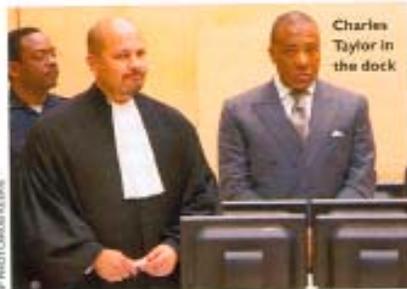
But when defence lawyer Andrew Cayley stood up and began to test the evidence, my perception of what the trial was about changed.

Pastor Teh's recollection of events was questioned line by line. At one point the witness had said he had seen helicopters with Liberian markings landing in Sierra Leone and unloading weapons. But the court heard how the pastor had given different versions of this story at different times.

"I know what I saw," Pastor Teh shouted, losing his temper.

The presiding judge, Jula Sebutinde, told the witness to calm down.

Cayley then started questioning why Pastor Teh had a history of changing his name. Again the witness raised his voice and this time the lawyer said, "The judge reminded you to keep calm and simply answer the questions I'm asking you."



Charles Taylor in the dock

The whole point was to cast doubt on the credibility of Pastor Teh. It made for uncomfortable viewing. I wondered why a victim should be subjected to this. But on reflection, the feelings of the witnesses are not the prime concern.

The special court is not overseeing a reconciliation process. The courtroom is not the space for victim and perpetrator to meet and come to an understanding.

In fact, it is the defendant, in this case Charles Taylor, whose needs are most important.

International justice has adopted the adversarial system of prosecution versus defence, rather than having a panel of judges investigating a case. According to Elise Keppeler, a specialist in this field for the advocacy group Human Rights Watch, vigorous cross examination is vital to this process.

"Of course the trial needs to be conducted fairly and effectively," she says, "and as part of that it means treating witnesses with dignity and respect."

"It must also ensure that Mr Taylor is presumed innocent and has all the benefits of the rights of the accused under international law. That includes having counsel who can really test the allegations put forward."

The point is that in an international court, just as in any other court, guaranteeing a fair trial comes before any other consideration. This means that victims who come to testify will always be given a difficult time.

Justice, in its broader sense, might be about righting a wrong or re-establishing a moral order. And certainly prosecutors at international trials hope that the process will act as a deterrent for others.

But whilst a trial is ongoing, it is only what occurs in the courtroom that is important and the credibility of the process rests on it being fair to the defendant.

It is vital to grasp this as 2008 is an important year for international justice and the way it works for Africa.

Charles Taylor is the first African former head of state to go on trial in an international court and later this year DR Congo militia leader, Thomas Lubanga, is set to be the first ever defendant in a trial run by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

In fact, when it comes to the ICC, it is only Africans who have so far been indicted.

But the courtroom is not the place where the victims can find solace.

The ICC's chief prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, admits as much when he says that "national proceedings and other accountability mechanisms remain essential for the purpose of achieving comprehensive solutions".

Meanwhile, where does this leave the victims who have come to testify?

Pastor Alex Tamba Teh is now back in his home in the east of Sierra Leone. My hope is that he was not too bruised by his brush with the lawyers, and the psychological support that the court offers has helped him cope with his memories.

Damian Zane is a senior producer in the BBC African Service and a former editor of Focus on Africa magazine. He recently reported on the opening of the Charles Taylor trial in The Hague.

"Victims who come to testify will always be given a difficult time"

UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries 10 April 2008

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

Newspaper Summary

President Sirleaf Breaks Grounds for a Park in honour of Alan Doss

(The News, The Informer, National Chronicle, Heritage)

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has paid tribute to the former Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Liberia, Alan Doss for his contribution towards setting Liberia on the path to national recovery. Speaking yesterday when she broke grounds and planted trees for the construction of a peace park in honour of Mr. Doss, the President commended the UN for their resolve in putting their personal contributions into the project.
- Earlier, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General to Liberia, Ellen Løj said Mr. Doss played a critical role in building the political and social structures in the country following the war. Ms. Løj said the groundbreaking ceremony for the establishment of the "Peace Park" symbolizes UNMIL's commitment and support for the rebuilding and prosperity of Liberia.

Traditional Leaders Warn Government on Kendeja Issue - Foresee Trouble

(Heritage)

- The leadership of the National Traditional Council of Liberia has called on government to stop further construction works on the construction of a four-star hotel by the Robert Johnson Group of companies at the site of the National Culture Centre in Kendeja. The head of the Council, Chief Zanzar Kwar said the government failed to inform the traditional leaders about the leasing of the place and warned of dangerous consequences if government ignores the warning.
- Chief Kwar said though they support development initiatives, there should be consensus when it comes to the culture. Contrary to Dr. Bropleh's statement, he said Liberia's culture was imbedded at Kendeja as a lot of rituals were performed there.

Cultural Ambassador's Musical Jamboree Suffers Setback.... Venue to be closed

(The News, The Analyst, The Monitor, The Inquirer, Liberian Express)

- The media reports that Cultural Ambassador, Juli Endee says the musical concert by local musical artists and the Crusaders for Peace set to take place on Tuesday, April 15, 2008, would go ahead as scheduled contrary to wide spread information that the concert has been suspended. The artists had organized the show with the aim that they would raise awareness and sensitize the public on the effect of the deadly HIV/AIDS, violence against women as well as how small arms proliferation can be controlled across the country.
- The musical concert however coincides with the performance of the Senegalese Musical Star, Akon, something which has reportedly sparked tension between the organizers of the two shows. Speaking to the press yesterday at the Crusader for Peace Village in Monrovia, Ambassador Endee alleged that some invincible hands were trying to undermine the show of the local artists and the women of Liberia planned for Tuesday. She said the show would go on as planned at the ATS contrary to information that it has been suspended.

Radio Summary

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

President Sirleaf Dismisses Assistant Information Minister Quiee

- An Executive Mansion release issued in Monrovia yesterday said President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has relieved Assistant Minister for Culture, Jailee Quiee of his position pending an investigation and audit of the transaction relating to the school facility at the Kendeja community.
- On Tuesday, President Sirleaf blamed Information Minister Laurence Bropleh for “misleading” her in connection to the building project and said as a consequence of this “head will roll” at the Ministry.

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth F.M. and ELBC)

DEA to Burn LD\$3M Drugs in Kakata, Margibi County

- The Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in Kakata, Margibi County will this Friday burn over 1200 kilograms of marijuana seized in the county.
- The local DEA commander, Francis Daypay put the value of the drugs at over LD\$3 million which were seized from smugglers and traffickers over the past six months.

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth F.M. and ELBC)

Health Authorities Begin New Health and Social Welfare Policy Document

- Health Ministry authorities have started the process to produce a new health and social welfare policy document for Liberia.
- Deputy Health Minister for Social Welfare, Joseph Geebro said the document would address in critical terms all social welfare related matters and also seeks to monitor and regulate the activities of various welfare institutions in the country.

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth F.M. and ELBC)

Star Radio *(News culled from website today at 09:00 am)*

President Sirleaf Breaks Grounds for Alan Doss Park

Liberian refugees Appeal for release of Colleagues

- Liberian refugees in Ghana have appealed to the Government of Liberia to intervene for the release of 22 Liberian refugee women they claimed are in detention.
- The females were among nearly 1000 Liberian women held in isolation by Ghanaian authorities.
- Ghanaian immigration authorities picked the 22 Liberian women from the group and they have been in detention since March 31 alleging that they were living in that country without proper document.
- They appealed to government to intervene for the Ghanaian government to either deport the female refugees or release them.

Voice of America

Friday, 11 April 2008

Liberia's Truth Commission Under Siege

By James Butty
Washington, D.C.

The Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), charged with investigating crimes committed during the country's civil war, is claiming that elements in higher places of society are trying to discredit its work. But TRC chairman Jerome Verdier told a news conference in Monrovia Thursday that all those who committed crimes during Liberia's civil war from 1979 to 2003 would be brought before the commission irrespective of their status.

The latest episode stemmed from an allegation that the commission or one of its members might have bribed a witness to testify that Liberian singing sensation Sundaygar Dearboy committed war crimes while he was a member of Charles Taylor's rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Dearboy, who now works in President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's government, admits being a rebel commander but denied committing atrocities.

John Stewart is a member of the Truth Commission. He told VOA the TRC believes there are some people in President Sirleaf's government who are working with Dearboy to thwart the commission's work by applying political and financial pressure.

"This press conference was prompted by stories surfacing in the media by a witness (David Sayweh) who had appeared before the TRC months earlier that his sister was gang raped on the orders of Sundaygar Dearboy, and she died as a consequence. Since that testimony, we have received reports that Mr. Sundaygar Dearboy had sent a team of people to the town in Grand Bassa County from which the boy comes. And this is being orchestrated by Mr. Dearboy and some of his supporters, some of whom work in high places because they fear that the TRC is uncovering things that they will not want to bring before the public," he said.

Stewart reiterated that there are some people in the Sirleaf government who are trying to discredit the work of the TRC.

"I'm not saying that it is the Liberian government as a government. But there are individuals within the government. You see, one must not lose sight of the fact that we have still lingering with us the cult of the presidency, and there are people who are trying to make themselves appear favorable in the eyes of the government or the president, that they are doing a good job in protecting the image of the government. The line they are pushing is that because the Sundaygar Dearboy had made songs which praise the president, therefore embarrassing Sundaygar Dearboy is tantamount to embarrassing the president, particularly so when Sundaygar Dearboy works at the Executive Mansion. I don't know whether he is still there because I understand that he has been withdrawn. I'm not sure," he said.

Stewart said the commission is not out to embarrass anybody, but that it was committed to bring to justice all those who played a leading role in the Liberian civil war from 1979 to 2003 irrespective of the status.

He said Dearboy, who has admitted being a part of Charles Taylor's rebel movement must face the consequences of his past actions.

“He was a commander in the National Patriotic Front. He has not denied that. There are scores of villagers who have affirmed, who have appeared from his own village before the TRC affirming yes indeed Sundaygar Dearboy did commit atrocities. So all of this is designed to bring the TRC into disrepute to stop its work because they know that on the TRC there are people who are committed to seeing to it that the mandate of the TRC is fulfilled, that the TRC is looking at not only crimes against humanity but we are also looking at economic crimes,” he said.

Stewart said Dearboy showered David Sayweh, the one had previously testified against Dearboy with money and gifts to recant his story. But commissioner Stewart said Sayweh could be charged with perjury.

“He took an oath and he is saying in his letter that he is lying and alleging that Commissioner Massa Washington gave him money to induce that (his previous) statement which is a preposterous statement, a lie. The commission does have powers of contempt, and as I told you this young man, David Sayweh, testified to the commission under oath. Now that he has written a letter saying that he has lied, he’s subject to a charge of perjury, and the commission would not hesitate employ all means at its disposal, including charging with perjury,” Stewart said.

BBC

Thursday, 10 April 2008

Uganda rebels delay peace signing

The leader of Uganda's rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) is refusing to sign a final peace deal until some key issues are clarified, officials say.

Joseph Kony was expected to come out of hiding to sign the deal in a ceremony in southern Sudan on Thursday.

But he did not appear. His chief negotiator later resigned, calling the whole process into question.

The Ugandan-LRA conflict has cost tens of thousands of lives and is notorious for atrocities against children.

Two million people have been displaced in the conflict, which has lasted for more than 20 years, and during which the LRA has allegedly abducted thousands of children to serve as child soldiers.

Communication breakdown

News agencies reported that Mr Kony wanted further reassurances about the mechanisms that would be used to try LRA members for war crimes.

Mr Kony, who has been in hiding since an arrest warrant was issued against him and two of his top commanders by the International Criminal Court (ICC), has been reluctant to emerge from the jungle until those indictments are lifted.

LRA negotiators have already said their fighters will not disarm unless the ICC arrest warrants are removed and they can be tried on war crimes charges in Uganda instead.

Announcing the delay to the signing, South Sudan's Vice-President Riak Machar sounded upbeat, and said he hoped it would still happen before the end of the week.

But the resignation of rebel chief negotiator David Matsanga threw some doubt on proceedings.

He admitted he had not spoken to Mr Kony in four days.

Dr Matsanga has signed a number of interim deals on behalf of Mr Kony since he joined the LRA's peace team in January.

The BBC's Sarah Grainger in Nabanga, in southern Sudan, says those agreements have now been called into question as it seems there has been little communication between the various sections of the LRA.

Elaborate camp

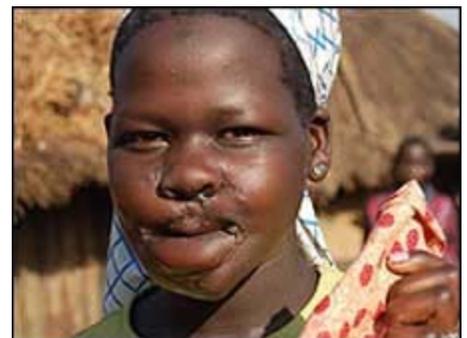
The signing ceremony was supposed to go ahead last week but was postponed at Mr Kony's request, when he told the southern Sudanese mediators he was too sick to attend.

The signing was rescheduled to take place on Thursday at a camp in the jungle town of Ri-Kwangba in southern Sudan.

Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni was then due to sign separately on Monday in southern Sudan's capital, Juba.



The signing was put off last week after Mr Kony said he was sick



The LRA are notorious for mutilating victims

The two sides have been in peace talks there since 2006.

Our correspondent says mediators and the United Nations transformed the bush close to the venue of the planned signing ceremony into an elaborate camp, complete with electricity and a hot buffet.

They flew in dozens of journalists to report on the event and had already taken several members of Mr Kony's family to the meeting point.

But there had been fears Mr Kony might not show up, because of the threat of war crimes charges.

If the deal is signed by the rebels and Mr Museveni, the rebels will then have 30 days to gather in southern Sudan before disarmament and demobilisation are scheduled to begin.