

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



**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:**

Wednesday, 11 June 2008

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

May 2008

## Special Court Appeals Chamber Delivers Dramatic Judgment in CDF Case



Former President of SCSL Justice George Gelaga King  
(Photo Courtesy of SCSL)

By Joseph A K Sesay

The Appeals Chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), before Honourable Justice George Gelaga King presiding and Raja Fernando, Emmanuel Ayoola, Renate Winter and Jon Kamanda, on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> May 2008 delivered its judgment in the appeals case of The Prosecutor against Moinina Fofana and Allieu

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Kondewa, former leaders of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF). The Appeals Chamber, after dismissing most of the Prosecution's grounds for appeal and allowing most or in part of Kondewa's grounds for appeal, reversed the Trial Chamber's judgment and subsequently increased the sentences of 2<sup>nd</sup> August and 9<sup>th</sup> October

2007 respectively. The Trial Chamber's judgment convicted Fofana on four of the eight counts charged and sentenced him to a separate six years in prison for counts 2 and 4, three years for count 5 and four years for count 7. Kondewa was convicted on five of the eight counts charged and was sentenced to a separate eight years in prison for counts 2 and 4, five years for count 5, six years for count 7 and seven years for count 8. The Appeals Chamber by a majority with Justice George Gelaga King and Justice Jon Kamanda dissenting, reversed these decisions and enter guilty findings for count 1 charging murder, a crime against humanity for both accused. They therefore increased the sentences to fifteen years in prison for counts 1, 2 and 4 and five years for count 5 in the case of Fofana and twenty years in prison for counts 1, 3 and 4 and seven years for count 5 in the case of Kondewa. A not guilty finding substituted the Trial Chamber's initial guilty finding for count 8 in the case of Kondewa and he was subsequently discharged on that count. These sentences will be served concurrently with credit for the time they were detained pending trial.

The summary of the appeals judgment was read in court by Justice King, and included issues relating to the background of the CDF, the position of the convicted persons, the Trial Chamber's judgment and sentences, the grounds of appeals, the Appeals Chamber's findings and a general deposition. The Appeals Chamber noted that only the Prosecution and Counsel for Allieu Kondewa appealed against the judgment of Trial Chamber I of the SCSL pursuant to Article 20 of the Court's Statute and Rule 106 of the Court's Rules of Procedure and Evidence. The Appeals Chamber, in making their findings, noted that Moinina Fofana and Allieu Kondewa became members of the CDF with the former being the director of war and the latter a high priest responsible for initiation into the Kamajor society. The appellants' grounds for appeal touched on issues relating to enlistment of child soldiers, cumulative convictions, superior responsibility, aiding and abetting the commission of crimes, burning and pillage, acts of terrorism, decision to amend the indictment, admissibility of evidence of sexual violence and sentencing procedure. These grounds for appeal suggested that the Trial Chamber, in reaching its decision, had erred in fact and in law thus invalidating the judgment. The prosecution in their appeal noted

*inter alia* that the CDF had directed a widespread attack against civilian populations and the Trial Chamber erred by not convicting the accused for the commission of these crimes.

Kondewa's first ground for appeal touched on superior responsibility, arguing that the Trial Chamber erred in determining the proper control test to prove a superior/subordinate relationship. A majority of the Appeals Chamber, with Justice King dissenting, found that Kondewa was in a position of trust and had power that would amount to effective control. The second ground for appeal argued that the finding of murder should be reversed since the only evidence to corroborate that fact was skeletal and hearsay. The Appeals Chamber noted that the evidence which the Trial Chamber evaluated did not establish the elements for the conviction of murder, and subsequently granted the appellant's request. The prosecution succeeded in their request to the Appeals Chamber to enter guilty findings for both counts 1 and 3 charging murder and inhumane acts respectively, as a crime against humanity. The Appeals Chamber substituted the Trial Chamber's judgment of not guilty with guilty findings for these counts in relation to Kondewa and count 1 for Fofana. The Appeals Chamber also noted that the Prosecution did not attempt to prove that the Trial Chamber erred in fact and law and that only such error would invalidate their decision. While it rejected in part or entirely all their remaining grounds for appeal, it granted them their tenth ground of appeal. This touched on the issue of sentencing and requested the Appeals Chamber to impose heavier sentences that would reflect the true deterrence aim of International Humanitarian Law. With Justices King and Kamanda dissenting, the Appeals Chamber upheld the Prosecution's submission and reversed the Trial Chamber's sentences for counts 2, 4 and 5 and imposed a new set of sentences for counts 1 and 3.

In their judgment, the Appeals Chamber noted that it dismissed the findings of both Justices King and Kamanda and upheld the majority decision of the Trial Chamber. They noted that they replaced the not guilty finding for count 1 and 3 with guilty findings and increased the prison sentences from six years for Fofana to fifteen years and eight years for Kondewa to twenty years, with credit for the time in detention

pending trial. These sentences are to be enforced immediately and the convicts are to remain in the Court's custody.

The Prosecution indicted Fofana and Kondewa in June 2003, after Norman's indictment in March 2003. On 31 May, 2004, the Appeals Chamber ruled that the recruitment of child soldiers had codified as a crime under customary international law before the beginning of the period covered by the Special Court's mandate, a key decision allowing the recruitment of child soldiers to be charged as a crime by the Special Court. In June 2004, the Chamber joined the three trials. The Prosecution opened its case on the 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2004, calling on 75 Prosecution witnesses including 3 expert witnesses over 131 trial days. On the 20<sup>th</sup> September 2005, the Trial Chamber convened for oral arguments on the Motion for Acquittal as the Defence teams submitted that they had no "case to answer". The Chamber subsequently ruled on the 21<sup>st</sup> October 2005,

ordering the Defence Teams to prepare and present their cases. Upon Norman's death in February 2007, the Trial Chamber terminated proceedings against him on the 21<sup>st</sup> of May 2007 after the objection of his Counsel. Judgments were handed down on 2nd August 2007 with a sentencing hearing on the 19th September 2007. Sentencing judgments were subsequently handed down on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2007 and the Appeals Chamber convened for oral hearings and submission on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> March 2008. In January 2006, the Defence started their case and collectively presented 44 Defence Witnesses over 112 trial days. After Norman's death in February 2007, the Trial Chamber terminated proceedings against him on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2007 on the objection of his Counsel. Judgments were handed down on 2nd August 2007 with a sentencing hearing on the 19th September, 2007. Sentencing judgments were subsequently handed down on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2007 and the Appeals Chamber convened for oral hearings and submission on the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

## Admissibility of Statement Made by Issa Hassan Sesay

By Joseph A k Sesay

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2007, Trial Chamber I of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) unanimously ruled to exclude a statement made by Issa Hassan Sesay, First Accused in the trial of alleged former leaders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), The Chamber first conducted a *voir dire*<sup>1</sup> proceeding to consider the admissibility of a statement made by Sesay to investigators from the Office of the Prosecutor (OTP) following his arrest in 2003. Having considered all the evidence and legal submissions from both the Prosecution and Defence during the proceeding, the Chamber found that the statement obtained from Sesay had not been made voluntarily and therefore was inadmissible. The Chamber thus ruled that the statement could not be used by the Prosecution to impeach the credibility of the First Accused during cross-examination.

Issa Hassan Sesay chose to testify in his own defense as the first witness pursuant to Rule 85(c) of the Court's Rules of Procedure and Evidence (The Rules). Following the conclusion of his direct examination, the Prosecution filed a notice that it planned to cross-examine Sesay using the statement he made to the Prosecution's investigators after his arrest in March 2003. The Prosecution intended to use the statement to show inconsistencies in Sesay's testimony, thereby impeaching his credibility and showing that he was not reliable or truthful. However, it appeared that the investigators from the OTP had casually violated the rules that govern voluntary confessions by suspects, including the waiver to counsel. This article analyzes

the underlying legal issues in relation to the conduct of the investigators and the violation of Sesay's rights as a suspect, which led the Chamber to declare that his statement had been made involuntarily.

Rule 95 of the Court's Rules provides that any evidence that would hinder the administration of justice should not be admitted.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Rule 92 *bis* provides that the Chamber may receive information in evidence if it considers such information relevant for the purpose for which it is to be tendered.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Issa Sesay's Defence objected to the admissibility of the statement that Sesay made because they believed that the statement was not voluntarily obtained and that if the statement were admitted as evidence it would prejudice the Accused. In response, the Prosecution asserted that the Accused had volunteered to speak with its investigators and during their interviews he had waived his right to legal assistance. Accordingly, the Prosecution had the burden to prove that the statement was voluntarily made and that Sesay had voluntarily waived his right to legal assistance and expressly consented that he understood his rights as a suspect as set out in Rule 42. According to Rule 42, before the Prosecutor questions any suspect, he should inform the suspect of his rights, including the right to remain silent and the right to legal assistance, in a language which the suspect understands. This is to ensure that the cooperation of any suspect who decides to make a confession to the Prosecutor is completely voluntary.

<sup>1</sup> *Voir dire* is a proceeding conducted to determine the admissibility of controversial evidence.

<sup>2</sup> See Rules of Procedure and Evidence as amended in Freetown on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2003 (pp58)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* (pp57)

Subsequently, the Chamber conducted a *voir dire* proceeding to determine whether the statement made by Issa Sesay as submitted by the Prosecution was voluntary, and if so, whether it would be eligible to be admitted for the purpose of cross-examination. During this proceeding, the Chamber investigated the circumstances surrounding the interviews conducted by the Prosecutor in order to determine whether the Accused had made the statement of his own volition, and whether the investigators had acted as custodians in protecting the rights of a suspect as set out in the Rules. The Chamber also sought to determine whether there were any forms of threats, inducements or coercion during the course of the interviews.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June 2007, the Prosecution called its first witness for the proceeding, Gilbert Morissette, who is the Chief of Investigation of the SCSL and has occupied that position since October 2005. The witness stated that on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2003, OTP investigators, with the assistance of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of Sierra Leone, arrested members of the RUF, including Sesay and his co-accused, Morris Kallon. He requested that the arrestees be taken into the custody of the SCSL. He further recalled that one John Berry, who was representing the Prosecution during the transfer of the arrestees, informed him that Issa Sesay had consented to speak with the OTP. However, details were not given as to why and how Sesay consented. Morissette stated that at the OTP, which was situated at Spur Road, he introduced a team consisting of a court reporter, an officer of the SLP and himself to Sesay. The court reporter was there to record any information that the suspect would want to give the investigators as provided in Rule 43.

The Prosecuting Attorney tendered into evidence a package which was identified by the witness as a warrant of arrest and rights advisement forms. As set out in Rule 42, the Prosecutor must explain the rights of suspects to any suspected individual in a language he/she understands during investigations in order to have willing cooperation in terms of voluntariness. On the audio recording of the meeting between Morissette and Sesay on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2003, it was observed that the rights of suspects were not

explained in detail; instead the suspects were only read their rights, and the process was done in English without corresponding interpretation. The witness testified that he asked the Accused to provide the OTP Investigators with information that would assist them in their investigations to prosecute alleged leaders of the RUF. He claimed that he did not make any statement that could be perceived as a threat or inducement. Still, generally speaking, it would be very controversial for someone to make a statement that would implicate himself/herself. In that regard, it is very likely that Sesay would not do or say something that would implicate himself had he understood the implications of his confessions. In any case, if Sesay wanted to help the Investigators, there was the opportunity for him to implicate others in order to exonerate himself. Hence the truthfulness or falsity of his confession might be based on what he aimed to achieve. Implicitly, eliciting such confessions might be tantamount to inducement.

During cross-examination, counsel for the First Accused, Wayne Jordash, suggested to the witness that the First Accused was a survivor who had been in the bush fighting guerilla warfare for 10 years, and just when he thought that he had been liberated, he was arrested by the Special Court. Counsel therefore suggested that the Accused would only cooperate in order to secure the protection of the OTP. The witness stated that he had perceived that Sesay had clearly stated his intention to collaborate with the OTP. Counsel then asked the witness whether he provided an inducement before eliciting information from a suspect. The implication of this argument is that the witness might have solicited evidence by using some form of incentive. The witness replied that no such promise was made to Sesay about what would happen if he volunteered evidence. Sesay only requested protective measures for his family, and the OTP investigators promised to grant them temporary protective measures. Mr. Jordash alleged that there was a form of inducement when the Prosecution promised that the First Accused would become a witness for the Prosecution if he cooperated with them. The witness stated he believed that it was clear to the Accused that he could be a witness but that his testimony would not relieve him from being prosecuted. Counsel alleged that the Accused will face

the indictments had not been explained to the Accused, and he ordered that the indictment be explained to Sesay and that Sesay be asked whether he was willing to waive his right to legal representation. In the video recording of his initial appearance, when he was asked if he wanted to waive his right to counsel, the Accused replied that he would make that decision after his charges had been read to him. It was not clear, however, whether the indictment had been explained to the Accused during the time of his arrest. If the charges had not been explained, Sesay's statements to the OTP may be found inadmissible, as the Accused would not have had a clue about what the charges against him were and may not have known whether he needed legal representation before speaking to anyone.

The Chamber therefore unanimously ruled that the statement were not voluntary in that they were "obtained by fear of prejudice and hope of advantage."<sup>6</sup> In other words, the accused made the statement to the OTP because he was convinced he needed their help. The Chamber ruled that the Prosecution failed to prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the statements were voluntary and consistent with Rule 92, read conjunctively with Rules 43 and 63.<sup>7</sup> The Chamber therefore ruled that the alleged statements were inadmissible under Rule 95, which provides that "no evidence shall be admitted if its admission would bring the administration of justice into serious disrepute."<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Prosecution cannot use the statement for the purpose of cross-examination to arraign the credibility of Issa Sesay as first defence witness.

It appears that during the 2003 interviews, the investigators casually violated the rights of the suspect simply because they lacked a standard

operating procedure. The Chief of Investigations testified that they promised to grant Sesay's family temporary protective measures, which would appear to be a clear manifestation that the OTP used some form of Incentives to elicit information from the Accused.

Furthermore, the request for the admission of the statement begs the question of how can a suspect or accused be a witness for a party that is prosecuting him/her? The OTP failed to communicate to the suspect that it was seeking a genuine confession that would not relieve the suspect from being prosecuted. This failure was highlighted again by Mr. Jordash when he questioned the credibility of Mr. Morissette. Jordash alleged that Morissette took Defense witness TF1046 for lunch in a bid to persuade the witness to collaborate with the Prosecution. He stated that Morissette has an ethical duty to always adopt the role of an Investigator when dealing with issues relating to a case. Mr. Jordash requested that the Prosecution disclose all materials relating to that meeting between Morissette and TF1046, and the Chamber ruled in Jordash's favor. Overall, the voir doir proceeding revealed that the Prosecution could not prove that it had obtained voluntary statements from Issa Sesay in 2003. The Defense did not object to the fact that Sesay spoke to investigators but rather questioned the credibility of the methods employed by the investigators in trying to elicit information. In doing so, the Defense successfully prevented Sesay's statement from being admitted as evidence against the First Accused.

## BBC World Service Trust

Tuesday, 10 June 2008

A new Prosecution witness who took the stand late Monday has been telling the court RUF had connection with the government of former President Charles Taylor.

The witness is protected and testifies with a distorted voice.

BBCWST/SFCG Alphonsus Zeon reports for the court room in The Hague.

ZEON: TF1-539 said during his stay at the home of Special Security Service Director Benjamin Yeaten, the SSS Director told him to await the arrival of RUF commander Sam Bockarie before finalizing discussions on travelling to Burkina Faso to find the ammunition for the 40-barrel machine gun and other artillery weapons the RUF captured from Guinean and Nigerian ECOMOG troops in Sierra Leone. The witness also said Bockarie brought diamonds from Sierra Leone to Yeaten in Monrovia.

TF1-539: All of those diamonds were taken by Sam Bockarie and handed over to Mr Benjamin. After they had been handed over to Mr Benjamin, not long after I and Zigzag Marzah went out of the veranda and out into the compound where the securities sat. Mr Bockarie, Mr Benjamin, the two Lebanese, including Mr Mohamed Saleh, entered Mr Benjamin's vehicle and they went.

ZEON: TF1-539 said when he moved to the home of Taylor's Chief of Protocol, Ambassador Musa Cisse in Monrovia, he saw a radio room being run by an RUF operative called Memuna Jalloh.

TF1-539: Yes, Memuna Jalloh...was an old time RUF, that she was a kind of daughter to Pa Sankoh. They started the RUF and she knew a lot about communication... Memuna was the liaison between RUF and the Ghankay government, she herself told me that... I even was made to understand that Memuna herself lived in Ivory Coast with Foday Sankoh.

COUNSEL: Where was it that she worked in Liberia?

TF1-539: Well, most of the time she was in her radio room, but at times she would come to the mansion. That was the radio room that was in Musa Cisse's house.

ZEON: TF1-539 told the Court before moving to the home of Ambassador Cisse, he briefly stayed with Col. Joseph Marzah, alias Zigzag Marzah, where a lady having a relationship with Sam Bockarie was killed on grounds that she was attempting to spy on RUF and Liberian government security operatives.

TF1-539: we were sitting, myself, JR, Sam Bock, Foday and some other Liberians who I cannot recall now, when Marzah came.... and he took out something from his pocket, opened it up and dropped it on the table and I observed that it was a hand...the lower palm of the hand. Why I knew that it was a female hand it had a lady's ring and a nail polish on the fingers, and he dropped it on the table and he said, "Master, mission accomplished", and they all burst out laughing. I too laughed because I had no option, but I was concerned

Taylor sat listening as the witness narrated. The former Liberian president denies connections with the RUF.

## Legalbrief Africa

Wednesday, 11 June 2008

### **A window into gripping war crimes trial**

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Liberians and Sierra Leoneans are taking a close interest in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor through a mixture of radio programmes and blogs.

While eight trials are being conducted at the Special Court in Freetown, Taylor's trial is taking place in The Hague, to reduce the possibility of destabilising West Africa. Balancing Act notes that a blogger called Zeon, and his Sierra Leonean counterpart Adolphus Williams, are temporarily based in The Hague to create locally-driven news reports on Taylor's trial. Every week they develop 30-minute radio programmes providing an overview of the trial's highlights. These reports are sent to Freetown and the Liberian capital Monrovia. After being translated into local languages, call-in discussions are added, and the programmes are distributed to community radio stations throughout both countries. Live video feed of the trial, streamed through the Special Court Web site, has engaged many Liberians and Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora. In West Africa, though, this tool's usefulness is limited. Lack of Internet access, combined with high illiteracy rates, has meant that using the Internet to raise awareness about the trial in Liberia is a 'complete flop,' according to Zeon. He seems determined to continue spreading reliable and relevant information about the trial in his home country. 'If we don't do our job,' he said, 'Taylor's people will manipulate public opinion.'

Full Balancing Act report

[View Charles Taylor's trial on a live video feed](#)

[Read unofficial real-time transcripts from the trial](#)

United Nations  Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

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**UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries  
10 June 2008**

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

**Newspaper Summary**

**Another land dispute claims 10 lives – 20 others missing**

(The News, New Democrat, The Informer)

- Land disputes are becoming common in recent times, with contestants resorting to violence. The latest of such case is in Margibi County where 10 persons are presumed dead and more than 20 others missing in action following bloody clashes over land in Kakata between Senator Roland Kaine and a Ministry of Commerce official, Charles Bennie during the weekend.
- Police authorities confirmed the incident and dispatched a team of investigators to the scene to probe the cause of the fracas. The incident in Margibi follows a similar violent protest in Maryland over a land dispute between two districts.

**Auditing Commission accuses Finance Ministry and Central Bank of Non-cooperation**

(New Democrat, The Informer, The News, the Inquirer, The Analyst)

- Reports in many dailies continue to suggest the apparent refusal of the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Liberia to comply with an ongoing audit conducting by the General Auditing Commission (GAC). However, the Ministry of Finance in a press release published in the Daily Observer denied the claims saying it has submitted original processed vouchers and other supporting documents to the General Auditing Commission.

**Two suspects charged with murder in connection with bishop's death**

(The Informer, The News, Daily Observer, The Inquirer, National Chronicle)

- Police in Monrovia have forwarded to court two men linked to the killing of Bishop Alfred Quao of the Salvation Church of God in Logan Town some two weeks ago. The two men, a Ghanaian (Samuel Amofa) and a Liberian (Rev. Brima Fartoma) appeared in court Monday and were charged with the murder of the Bishop.
- Police said during preliminary investigation, Amofa revealed that Rev. Fartoma accused the Bishop of being a cheat and threatened to teach him a lesson.
- The latest revelation contradicts earlier information that the bishop was killed after a woman begged him to come out and pray for her ailing son.

**Government line up witnesses against ex-public officials**

(National Chronicle, The Informer, Daily Observer, The Inquirer,)

- Several news items said the corruption case involving five former government officials will continue unabated as State lawyers on Monday presented a list of witnesses to the court to be qualified for the trial. State witnesses are due to begin testifying today.

**Radio Summary**

**Star Radio** *(News culled today from website at 8:35 am)*

**Auditing Commission Reports Hitches**

*(Also reported on Truth F.M. and ELBC)*

### **Trial of 5 Former Finance Ministry Officials Opens in Monrovia**

*(Also reported on Truth F.M. and ELBC)*

### **Suspects in Bishop's Murder Case Sent To Court**

*(Also reported on Truth F.M. and ELBC)*

### **UNDP Constructs Health Centre in Gbarpolu County**

- The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has sponsored the construction of a clinic in Jallah Lone Town, Gbarpolu County.
- In an interview, Paramount Chief Jallah Lone said the lack of a health centre have made residents to walk for hours to seek medical attention at the nearest health centre or in other counties.
- Chief Lone commended the UNDP for constructing the clinic, but pleaded with the organization to consider constructing a school and market buildings in the area.

### **Harvard Interns identify Rebuilding as A Challenge facing Liberians**

- In an interview, interns of the Harvard University in the U.S. who are currently in the country say the rebuilding of Liberia is a challenge for every citizen.
- They said though the reconstruction effort was well on course, it required the active participation of all.
- The students are assigned at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and are assisting with the development of a peace-building office in the country. Others are working on urban planning and national identification cards.
- The Harvard interns are working on their Masters Degrees in Public Administration, International Development and Business.

### **MCSS Teachers Want Government Honour Deal**

- The Monrovia Consolidated School System (MCSS) Teacher's Association has called on government to honour its promise regarding an increment in teachers' salaries.
- The President of the association, Mr. Nathan Suah said government had promised to increase teachers' salaries as part of a deal to end a strike action last year and warned that failure to adhere to the bargain would suggest that the authorities were not taking teachers seriously.
- Mr. Suah however ruled out the possibility of teachers laying down their chalks to press for their demands.
- He said they would rather engage government constructively until their demands are met.

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## Associated Press

Wednesday, 11 June 2008

### **US attorney general urges prompt extradition of alleged Russian arms dealer from Thailand**

BANGKOK, Thailand: The United States has a strong case against alleged Russian arms dealer Viktor Bout and is optimistic he will be extradited from Thailand promptly, Attorney General Michael Mukasey said Wednesday.

Bout, dubbed "The Merchant of Death," was arrested in Thailand on March 6. He has been indicted in the U.S. on four terrorism offenses and is awaiting extradition proceedings that were scheduled for this week but then delayed until July 28.

"I'm very optimistic that the proper course will be followed and that Victor Bout will be extradited," Mukasey told reporters at the end of a two-day visit to Bangkok for meetings with law enforcement officials.

He said he believes the case for Bout's extradition is "very strong" and that "it will proceed expeditiously."

Bout is accused of trying to sell weapons to a U.S.-designated terrorist organization with the goal of killing Americans, according to a U.S. indictment made public May 6.

American prosecutors say Bout was offering a deadly arsenal of weapons to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, including more than 700 surface-to-air missiles, thousands of guns, high-tech helicopters, and airplanes outfitted with grenade launchers and missiles.

The charges were based in part on a covertly recorded meeting in Thailand on March 6. He was arrested after a sting operation in which undercover U.S. agents posed as Colombian rebels.

The 41-year-old Russian faces charges of conspiring to kill Americans, conspiring to kill U.S. officers or employees, conspiring to provide material support to terrorists and conspiring to acquire and use an anti-aircraft missile.

Bout, who had eluded arrest for years, is regarded as one of the world's most wanted arms traffickers.

He was purportedly the model for the arms dealer portrayed by Nicolas Cage in the 2005 movie "Lord of War."

Bout's alleged list of customers includes African dictators and warlords such as former Liberian President Charles Taylor, Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi and both sides of the civil war in Angola. He has been accused of breaking several U.N. arms embargoes.

He has declined to comment to reporters in Thailand, but has long denied being involved in illicit deals.

Mukasey noted that his birthday was July 28, the same day as Bout's extradition hearing, and called it a "fortuitous day for me."

"I can think of no better gift than for the extradition proceeding to go forward on that day and to be concluded successfully," he said.