

**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

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

Tuesday, 23 December 2008

Sierra Leone: Focus On Community Reconciliation in Kono

Pel Koroma

Freetown — Representatives of all the fourteen chiefdoms in Kono district on Saturday converged at Tombodu, Kamaa chiefdom to host the executive director of Fambul Tok, a non governmental organization geared towards reconciling communities through dialogue. Executive director John Caulker explained to the people the origin of his organization.

"We all know what happened during the war. We are talking about victims and perpetrators but the truth is that we all belong to the same family long before the conflict. We have an adage in Krio which says 'bad bush nor dae for throw away bad pikin'. The TRC and Special Court did not operate at village level. I would have wished for the South Africa type of TRC. Our people did not benefit from the TRC and Special Court and have opted for village dialogue as a means of settling their conflicts", Caulker said.

He dilated on his effort in convincing his friends in New York that there was still a need for people to talk to themselves in their traditional ways as a means of bridging their differences even though the war is over. He said with the help of Catalyst for Peace in the USA and Forum of Conscience, they have been able to facilitate dialogue among communities in the country, training people in conflict management and trauma healing.

"It is not a court. It is not about right or wrong but why the conflict happened. We created our problems and for sure the solution should come from us.

"I am here to consult with the people of Kono district whether you people are ready to reconcile, forgive and willing to reconcile, how to go about the reconciliation and how do Fambul Tok give support to the people to reconcile at community level," said Caulker.

He added adding that Fambul Tok would have reached Kono last year but because of the election, and the organization is non political organization, Fambul Tok has decided now to come and reconcile the people of Kono.

He said it is only when there is peace before development would take place. He admonished the people for the formation of a district executive that will spear head the project in the district.

Chiefdom Speaker of Kamaa chiefdom, Aiah Raymond Komba welcomed Fambul Tok to Kono district.

"We have to reconcile among our selves in our various communities. Almost all of us have wounds in our hearts. We should meet under the big tree as it used to be in our traditional way to trash out our indifferences. I welcome Fambul Tok with kola nuts and ripe bananas to show our gratitude for trying to bring us together again. I want all of my people to relax as peace is quietness and this meeting is suppose to be informal. The tree we are seating under is older than all of us and have seen our ancestors and that is why we have chosen to converge under this tree in the interest of peace in the district," said chief Komba.

According to Tamba Sobgeh, the district should embrace Fambul Tok. "Fambul Tok is necessary because we have a lot of grievances that we need to lay to rest. We have harbored grievances for people who burnt our villages, mutilated our relatives, and abducted our children during the war. There are a lot of problems in the bottom of our hearts in our villages. Our villages are not settled," Sogbeh said.

Jespa Komba told the gathering that Fambul Tok is timely in Kono district. "The ex-combatants are still roving in our villages. We are divided because of politics and religion. A lot of atrocities were caused in Kono district and we need ritual cleansing," said Komba.

For Sahr Ngaoja of Lei chieftom, poverty brought war. "We accept the initiative of Fambul Tok. We need to heal the traumatized ex- combatants in our communities". He spoke of a mass grave and the necessity for reconciliation.

A district executive was formed with Chief Aiah Raymond Komba as chairman.

The Patriotic Vanguard

Saturday, 27 December 2008

Remembering January 6th, 1999

By Victor A. Massaquoi, USA.

January 6th, 1999 would continue to be a day that would always live in infamy. Just as American and Japanese historians will never forget December 7th, 1941 (Pearl Harbor Attack), so, too, the people of Sierra Leone would not easily erase the disturbing event(s) of January 6, 1999: the day the rebel war struck the heart of the capital city of Sierra Leone. On that fateful day hundreds died, including my former colleagues in the media, and academics/professionals that I had known for a long time. Their bodies riddled with bullets, on top of the thousands who had been killed already, in the rural areas, and those who had fled fighting in the interior. On that same day, others experienced and endured painful maiming (long han or short han, they asked) and physical torture, while houses and business structures were razed and other private and public possessions, estimated at millions of dollars, destroyed or looted by rebel forces and other fragmented, gun-totting, trigger-happy, drug-ridden insurgents (including Westside Boys) masking as members of the Revolutionary United Front and disgruntled members of the Sierra Leone Military. Civilized societies settle internal political difference(s) through non-violent means rather than butchering poor, innocent and defenseless people.



This basic yet short, clear and simple retrospection is designed to refresh the minds of young Sierra Leoneans, both at home and abroad, of the eerie carnage and other flourishes of anarchy that befell our country, 10 years ago. We should never again allow such butchery and acts of barbarism to recur! Almost seven years after the conflict was officially declared over, there are semblances of development after recent completion of the recovery/reconstruction phase—a process familiar to any post-war situation.

Earlier this week, I recalled January 6th, 1999 just like yesterday. I had just returned from London, in December, 1998, after spending 12 months at Cardiff University, Wales, receiving training in advanced feature writing and international political news coverage, a project funded by the Thomson Foundation and British Council. While in London, I was glued to the radio, especially the BBC, to keep abreast of developments back home. Few of my friends/relatives in London, and a Ghanaian colleague, had asked me not to return to Sierra Leone because of the grim news and recent rebel gains and advances (edging closer to the city). I was eager to return home.

I arrived in Freetown on 12/15/99, and two days later, one of our secretaries received a call from the US embassy informing her that a colleague and I were the lucky recipients of two journalism fellowships, we had applied for, two years earlier. Like everybody who had received positive news in the past, we were

elated, but our excitement was short lived. Two days to our departure (1/8/999) from Freetown, the rebels had attacked Waterloo, Hastings, Wellington, Portee, Kissy and Clock Tower. News of killings and indiscriminate torture of market women, my colleagues and people I knew was swarming in like a raging burning bush in the middle of March and April in rural Sierra Leone. Traumatic!

As an executive member of a Christian organization then, in the central business district of Freetown was helpful. Members of this group and some people I was good to over the years gave me cover, food and support. I witnessed, through multiple peeping holes, three harmless, hungry-looking, secondary-school age boys shot to death, after been accused of spying for ECOMOG (the West Africa Military Forces) by a unit leader who called himself "general wan yiy" (General One Eye). Also, two grown men, in their relative 50s, were beaten and molested because they looked healthy. Looking healthy then meant they were members of the government, and they should be punished. Horrific stories of young rape victims trickled in daily. Screams of girls been raped at night were depressing.

As they say, a trained and hardworking journalist possesses intense curiosity. After few intense days in hiding from gun shots and the sound of mortar fire (by ECOMOG Forces), and even as I frantically explored multiple avenues to exit the country to pursue my journalism fellowship in the US, the 'reliable' rumor-mill disclosed of multiple bodies lying in decay at the Lightfoot Boston Street Mortuary entrance. We could not resist. I was stringing for an International News Agency then. I had to get the story out. A friend and I rushed down to the main hospital on Perceval and Lightfoot Boston Streets intersection. While on our way, we observed houses that were on their last stages of burning. People were searching for food, while a massive, constant flow of people, from the East was trekking to the West to avoid the ensuing bloodshed. It was chaotic!

Finally, as my youngest brother, now 32, my younger sister, now 38, and my mother, finally found me, at my location, they informed me that our house in Kissy was set ablaze and my taxi was commandeered by a bunch of rag-tags. My family also informed me that my son and his mother escaped unhurt, but other family members were not so lucky. I was relieved but determined to leave the country. I left for The Gambia few days later, and ten years now in the US, I can say, very humbly, that God has been in control in all that I, and others who fled, have been able to accomplish, both in the US and in Sierra Leone. When one has been blessed assist thy brethren. I pray that Satan does not descend like that in Sierra Leone again, as I pray for peace for prosperity for our country.

Photo: Alex Tamba Brima(alias Gullit), one of the "Westside Boys".

Petersborough Examiner (Canada)

Friday, 19 December 2008

A child soldier's tale

Posted By BYNATALIE ISTEAD

The silent audience holds its collective breath as Kabba Williams begins to speak. "I am honoured, extremely delighted, to stand here today to express and share my soldier, captured and forcefully conscripted -stand." Kabba's voice is strong and resolved, but his eyes are wet with tears. Clearly his appreciation of the opportunity to speak with us today is fraught with pain and sadness.

Williams was only six years old when rebel forces attacked his village in Sierra Leone. He explains that before the war he lived in poverty but felt happy and peaceful as he was surrounded by a loving family. Everything changed when the rebels attacked. Kabba was captured by rebel forces who beat him and took him away from the village. Houses burned and gunshots rang out as he and several other speechless and crying children were kidnapped from their homes. At six years old, Kabba saw dead bodies for the ground with bullet marks all over their bodies" and "hanging like leaves from the trees".

Once they arrived at the rebel base, the children were assembled before the commander. He informed them that they would "corruption, greed, marginalization, and unequal distribution of wealth." The children did not know what many of these words meant, but were nonetheless given AK-47s and injected with cocaine in preparation for combat.

Just before an attack, the children were fed "the last supper", a mix of rice, marijuana, cocaine, and other drugs of which Kabba did not know the names. He says that it was "the last food that you eat so that even if you meet your mother, your brother, or your sister on the way, you can just kill them." Under the killed innocent people, raped, mutilated...did a lot of destruction that was really against the human race."

Tears still glitter in Kabba's eyes as he pauses for a moment to collect himself. "Sometimes memories are very fresh and chilling. But I am sharing them to inspire others." Silence grips the audience as he resumes his tale.

Kabba was sent to the front lines.

Before his eyes many of the others were shot and killed by government forces. As the few survivors walked back to the rebel base, Kabba decided to try to escape. The penalty for trying to escape was one hundred lashes: a death sentence. "If I am caught, if I am killed, let the Lord forgive me. But if I succeed, I'll continue to ask for mercy, because I have been used against my will."

Under the pretext of going for water, he escaped from the base. "Bushes tore at my body while trying to escape for my life". Kabba escaped from the rebels, but was captured by government forces.

After several more years of combat and to UNICEF. He was provided with informal education and counselling, but found the people in Sierra Leone rejected him as inferior and a terrorist. Frustrated and lonely, he Kabba fought for another year before going back to UNICEF. At the orphanage he was again mocked and isolated; he wanted to offer words of courage to help him persevere. Kabba was sent to school and studied hard. He was lucky to be able to attend secondary school and then university.

Kabba explains that he now devotes much of his time to raising awareness about the issues facing children in Sierra Leone and other African countries. He advocates for the recognition of the challenges faced by former child soldiers and for the healing of these individuals. The groups he has founded and worked with

have successfully lobbied politicians for the adoption of policies that will help African children learn and grow in a peaceful environment.

As he looks around the school cafeteria where we are resembled, Kabba remarks that "the world is not fair". He says that "Canadian young people should count themselves lucky to live in peace and security, getting a good quality education." We are given many opportunities, he says, that are unimaginable in other parts of the world.

We are asked to observe a moment of -sands of children in Africa who have lost understand," and the presentation is over. Kabba shakes hands and gives hugs to the saddened and inspired students as they thank him for sharing his story.

Kabba Williams will soon be leaving Peterborough for Sierra Leone, but the student body will remember his visit for a long time to come.

UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries 26 December 2008

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

Newspaper Summary

Armed Robber Killed in Gardnersville

(The Inquirer)

- The Emergency Response Unit (ERU) of the Liberia National Police (LNP) has shot dead an alleged armed robbery in a suburb of Monrovia.
- The gang of thieves early Christmas morning broke into the home of the Director of Operations at the state-owned Liberia Broadcasting System, Michael Kojo.
- In an interview, Mr. Kojo said the robbers carrying guns and other deadly weapons were strategically deployed in the neighborhood.
- The robbers succeeded in taking a number of valuables before the police engaged them in an armed battle that left one of them dead.

Radio Summary

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

President Sirleaf among Mourners attending Funeral of Guinean Leader

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is in Conakry, Guinea to attend the funeral of Guinean Leader, Lasanah Conteh.
- President Conteh died early Tuesday and is to be buried today.
- While in Guinea, President Sirleaf will join other Heads of State to mediate an end to the leadership crisis in that country.
- According to reports, Leaders of the African Union (AU) in collaboration with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) are already in Conakry to meet with the coup leaders in that country.
- Meanwhile, leaders of the Mano River Union (MRU) say they are worried about the current state of affairs since the death of the Guinean President.

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

Armed Robber Killed in Shoot-out with ERU

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

Star Radio (News monitored today at 9:00 am)

Construction Works on Moir Bridge Underway

- Construction works for a bridge over the Mouir Bridge in Bomi County has gotten underway.
- The government sponsored project will link several parts of Bomi including Klay and Suehn-Mecca District.
- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf expressed hope that the construction of the bridge will enhance economic activities in the country.

Guinean Coup Leaders Invite Foreign Diplomats For Talks

- Guinean military coup leaders have invited foreign diplomats to a meeting to ensure the international community of their intentions.
- The soldiers said the talks will be held in the capital, Conakry tomorrow.
- There has been international condemnation of Tuesday's coup but it was largely welcomed by some people in Guinea.
- Captain Moussa Dadis Camara led the revolt hours after the death of President Lasannah Conteh.

Voice of America

Wednesday, 24 December 2008

Uganda Plans for War Crimes Trials

By Joe De Capua
Washington D.C

In Uganda, while LRA rebel leader Joseph Kony is on the run -- and the peace process remains elusive -- plans are underway for war crimes trials and a truth commission.

Among those helping work out details is Professor Michael Scharf, director of the International Law Center at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland. Scharf is also managing director of the Public International Law and Policy Group. He spoke to VOA English to Africa Service reporter Joe De Capua about his recent 10-day visit to Uganda, where he worked with the government on its war crimes and truth commission legislation.

"We're basically trying to help the government be in a position where it can prosecute Joseph Kony, the other leaders of the LRA (Lord's Resistance Army) and other people on all sides of the conflict that have committed atrocities," he says.

Asked whether the legislative work would interfere with the peace process, Scharf says, "First of all, the peace process has been going on for a while in fits and starts, but Joseph Kony has made it pretty clear that he is not willing to sign the deal. And just last week, there was a joint operation by the Ugandan government army and the South Sudanese army and the Democratic Republic of Congo's army to basically track down Joseph Kony. They destroyed all of his bases and he's on the run. So, the peace process is sort of on hold now anyway. But in any event, whether Joseph Kony is captured through this military operation or he goes back to the peace table, he and a number of other people are going to have to be brought to justice. And right now the Ugandan system is not capable and ready to do that," he says.

If the LRA leaders are not prosecuted domestically, they will be sent to the ICC, International Criminal Court, at The Hague. But Scharf says that is not the preferred method of prosecution.

"The whole idea of the International Criminal Court in The Hague is that it's a court of last resort. And it is built [on] the premise that it wants to encourage domestic prosecution whenever possible. And so, it may be that someone like Joseph Kony, if he's captured, and the Ugandan government does not yet have a functioning war crimes chamber, then he'll have to go to The Hague. But there are many other people who need to be tried. The International Criminal Court is only equipped to handle a couple of individuals. And what they're going to want to do is keep the pressure on Uganda so that Uganda gets all of its act in order so it can do domestic prosecutions. And in particular, Uganda has become the most important case study for the International Criminal Court because next year the ICC is having its review conference in Kampala, Uganda. And this is the first review conference since the court was created 10 years ago and it's a moment like the Olympics where the whole world will be looking at Uganda," he says.

Such cases often raise the question whether it's more important to follow the rule of law or seek a speedy peace deal that might offer some type of amnesty to Kony. Scharf says, "What we've learned through other empirical cases, like the situation with (former Liberian leader) Charles Taylor, where they basically said, all right, we won't prosecute you before the Sierra Leone tribunal if you go into exile in Nigeria and are a good person, is that people like Joseph Kony and Charles Taylor, who have a long history of committing atrocities and corruption and being a warlord, cannot be trusted to be partners in a peace process."

He says that a "sorting mechanism" is needed "so that the worst perpetrators, like Joseph Kony, will face international justice. But other people, for example people who were kidnapped in their youth and turned into child soldiers, will be able to go through traditional justice or a truth commission approach so that there can be reconciliation and peace can take hold in the country. So you can have it both ways."

Besides draft legislation for a war crimes tribunal, another measure addresses the issue of a truth commission or, in Uganda's case, a truth forum. Scarf calls the idea of a forum "very innovative." He says, "It would have both people at the central government level and also in the region and it would also have some international representation. They're talking about 19 experts, who would then be there to take the testimony of people, who would come forward, much as they did in South Africa, and confess and act contrite, and they would have a historic record. And then most of those people would then be forgiven. If it turned out that some of those people had committed the worst atrocities imaginable, they would then be transferred over to the war crimes chambers for prosecution."

Professor Scharf and others will return to Uganda in February for more meetings on the tribunal and truth forum legislation. Uganda's parliament could approve the legislation that same month. "We're going to go back a subsequent time later in the spring to work with the judges and prosecutors and bring them up to speed in the kinds of unique law that applies to war crimes and the procedures and the due process that will be required so that their process is above reproach," he says.

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PRESS STATEMENT

The Chairperson of the Commission of the African Union (AU), Mr. Jean Ping, follows with grave concern developments in the Republic of Guinea, after the announcement of the death of President Lansana Conté.

In this regard, the Chairperson of the Commission strongly condemns the announcement of the seizure of power in that country by elements of the Guinean armed forces and their subsequent decision to suspend the Constitution and various institutions of Guinea. This seizure of power constitutes a flagrant violation of the Guinean Constitution, which, in such an instance, provides that the Speaker of the National Assembly assumes the interim. It constitutes also a violation of the Lome Declaration of July 2000, the Constitutive Act of the AU and the African Charter on Democracy, Elections and Governance.

The Chairperson of the Commission urges all Guinean stakeholders to work within the framework of legality, in a spirit of consensus and in the higher interests of Guinea, in order to ensure a smooth transition that will allow their country to meet the many challenges, both political and socio-economic, facing it.

In accordance with the provisions of the Lome Declaration, the Chairperson of the Commission has taken the necessary steps for the speedy holding of a meeting of the Peace and Security Council to examine the situation.

Similarly, the Chairperson of the Commission has initiated consultations with ECOWAS and the countries of the region to discuss with them the modalities of coordinated efforts in dealing with the situation and assisting Guinea overcome, in a legal and consensual manner, the crisis occasioned by the seizure of power by elements of the army, to maintain peace and security and allow the country to meet its various challenges, whose resolution is a precondition for the long-term stability and consolidation of the democratic process in that country.

Upon receiving the news of the death of President Conté, the Chairperson of the Commission addressed, this morning, a message of sympathy to the Speaker of the National Assembly, expressing to him and to the people and Government of Guinea, the sincerest condolence of the AU. In this message, the Chairperson of the Commission equally urged all stakeholders in Guinea to work together to ensure that the succession to President Conte is organized in peace and serenity, and in strict accordance with the Constitution of Guinea.

Addis Ababa, on 23 December 2008