

**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:

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
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Independent Observer
Friday, 16 January 2009

Taylor Trial: Horrible Tales at The Hague

Mariama Khai Fornah reporting from The Hague.

Horrible tales of mental and physical torture continue to characterize the testimonies of the Liberian Prosecution Witness testifying against Indicted Former Liberian President Charles Taylor for the second day in The Hague. Hassan Bility, a Liberian Journalist testified to being detained for a total of six months and interviewed on one occasion by Former President Taylor for two hours thirty minutes and then thrown at the back of the pickup like a bag of rice. Mariama Khai Fornah reports from The Hague

FORNAH: Hassan Bility has told the Judges of the Special Court for Sierra Leone that he was detained at a total of 13 places in and out of Monrovia.

Hassan, who is a witness of fact, said some of his detention centers contained human faeces and water.

He said Charles Taylor's government did not find anything incriminating evidence against him.

On direct examination, Hassan said former president personally seized his check book and passport found in his journalist bag and declared them fruits of the crime, or F.O.C., for the charge of subversion.

The prosecution witness testified that he was dragged out of Mr. Taylor's White Flower Residence on June 24, 2002, and subjected to various forms on inhumane treatments in Caldwell, Monrovia, and other places.

BILITY: Whenever Benjamin Yeaten came to Clay, they would pull me out of the hole, or the underground cell. They would take me to what was an administrative structure building at Clay. They would bring me there, and Benjamin Yeaten would sit in the chair behind the desk. Joe Towah would sit next to him. Benjamin Yeaten would ask Joe Tuah in my presence, "Has he said anything yet?" and Joe Towah would say "no." Then he would tell Joe to [indistinct] "You are being very easy on this guy...to talk something, because I need to report back to the president to tell him exactly what he said. The president is impatient." They would take me out of the building to the back of the building and they would take a prisoner behind the building. They would shoot, pretend as if they were killing somebody. At some point I would hear - cause I didn't see if they actually shot and killed those people or not - and then they would come back to me and say "well, do you want to follow these guys, these guys we just sent to hell? If you don't speak, we're going to do exactly what we did to you."

FORNAH: Hassan said in his presence, Mr. Taylor instructed the then Special Security Service Director, Benjamin Yeaten, to extract confession from him through any means that was necessary.

Mr. Bility told the Court Yeaten later took him to Clay in Bomi County and threw him in a

four-foot high prison cell that could not accommodate his height. The prosecution Liberian witness described to the court treatments given him in the town of Clay by one of Taylor's securities named Joe Towah under the directive of Benjamin Yeaten.

BILITY: I was electrocuted on my genitalia several times, probably over 20 times.

COUNSEL: Who was doing this to you?

BILITY: Specific instructions, I'm not sure whether the instruction was passed on to Benjamin Yeaten by the president, cause he instructed him to make me to talk. So Benjamin Yeaten in turn passed on instructions to a guy called Joe Towah. So Joe Towah was, like, the prison supervisor. He would come and ask if I were ready to talk about what they referred to as the truth. And on those occasions I would be [indistinct]. I was actually held in an underground cell.

FORNAH: The witness said whilst in detention, he also recognized a Sierra Leonean speaking fighter by the name of Gibril Massaquoi who told him that Benjamin Yeaten has ordered his torture.

Mr. Bility's testimonies in chief ended after one and the half days, and he came face to face with the head of Taylor's Defense team, Courtenay Griffiths, QC. Mr. Griffiths started on a rather emotional note by out-rightly declaring Mr. Bility as a liar.

GRIFFITHS: I make it clear, that so far as your testimony is concerned, I have the following suggestions to make. One, that you're a liar. Do you understand me?

BILITY: Yes sir.

GRIFFITHS: Secondly, that you are personally engaged in a crusade against former President Taylor. Do you understand that?

BILITY: Yes sir, I do.

GRIFFITHS: Thirdly, that that crusade upon which you have embarked is motivated, not by concerns about human rights abuses and Mr. Taylor's alleged involvement in Sierra Leone, but rather is motivated by ethnic and political loyalties held by you.

FORNAH: Mr. Griffiths accused Bility of being in constant contact with the American Central Intelligence Agency, the CIA, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI, during the presidency of Mr. Taylor, but the witness denied.

Hassan said Mr. Taylor set him free on December 7, 2002 through the intervention of the American Government, but he was not in constant communication with the U.S Embassy in Monrovia, neither the U.S. Government.

Hassan however, said the American FBI contacted him in 2004 after he had an interview with the Cable News Network, CNN, and was asked whether Charles Taylor was a member of the Islamic Terrorist Group, Al Qaeda.

For the BBC WST, this is Mariama Khai Fornah reporting from The Hague.

Independent Observer
Friday, 16 January 2009

Charles Taylor Trial: Liberian Journalist under Fire

The Defense Team of indicted former Liberian President Charles Taylor has told the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone that Liberian journalist Hassan Bility (photo) was a member two Liberian rebel groups, ULIMO-K and LURD, that fought against Taylor's government. The Defense team indicated to the Court that Bility has a personal hatred for the former President Taylor. The Defense also declared that Mr. Bility was a spy for several international groups during the presidency of Mr. Taylor. The BBC World Service Trust Mariama Khai Fornah now reports from The Hague.

FORNAH: Charles Taylor's lead Defense lawyer has told the Special Court that Liberian journalist Hassan Bility's desire to testify against Charles Taylor was motivated by ethnic animosity and political affiliation with leaders of two Liberian former rebel groups.

Defense Lawyer Courtenay Griffiths said Prosecution witness Bility was related to ULIMO-K leader Alhaji Kromah and LURD Leader, Sekou Damateh Konneh. The Defense Lawyer told the court that Mr. Bility was a member of defunct rebel group, ULIMO.

GRIFFITHS: The reason why ECOMOG chose you to go to Sierra Leone was precisely because of your ULIMO-K connections. That's why you were an attractive proposition for them. That's the truth, isn't it?

BILITY: Counsel, that is not the truth.

GRIFFITHS: Because it would have been easy for someone like you, Mandingo, connected to Konneh and other people, Kromah, high up in ULIMO-K, to gain access to places in Sierra Leone because there was a force of former ULIMO-K working in the junta government. That's the truth, isn't it Mr. Bility?

BILITY: Counsel, that is far from the truth. That is not the truth. My being Mandingo shouldn't be an issue here. [I said] because if I'm a Mandingo then I was generally report against a particular group who aren't Mandingo - no, I was doing my duty.

FORNAH: Mr. Griffiths also accused Mr. Bility of making a secret trip to Sierra Leone in August 1997, not in his capacity as a journalist, but as a spy.

Legal arguments ensued between the Prosecution and

the Defense about who facilitated Mr. Bility's trip to Sierra Leone at the time.

Bility disclosed that it was Nigerian ECOMOG soldiers who took him to Sierra Leone, but the Defense was interested in the names of the soldiers.

The Prosecution went to the Defence of the witness and said the witness as a journalist was protected by several international laws not to disclose his source.

Having listened to arguments from both sides, the Court said the matter was a serious legal issue, so the Defense should make a written submission to the Court on Friday January 23.

Mr. Griffiths insisted that Hassan's trip to Sierra Leone was a secret operation organized by ECOMOG.

GRIFFITHS: You were sneaked into Sierra Leone with the assistance of ECOMOG soldiers. They sneak you across the border between their control zone and the junta control, and insert you in Freetown. Why did they go to all that trouble unless you were a spy?

BILITY: Counsel, nobody sneaked me. I made a conscious decision to go into Sierra Leone, and I also want to remind the counsel journalist going into areas where they are forbidden to report is not anything subversive. For example, you have BBC journalists sneaking from South Africa into Zimbabwe even though they are barred. I was doing my professional and ethical duty I thought was necessary. So ECOMOG had absolutely no stake in it at all.

FORNAH: Mr. Griffiths said Bility's hatred for Charles Taylor was based on his affiliation with the All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP), which has Mr. Alhaji Kromah as its standard bearer. Hassan admitted he did some professional writings for ALCOP and was paid, but denied membership with the party. Mr. Griffiths pushed the witness on his association with ALCOP.

GRIFFITHS: And it's right, isn't it, that ALCOP was the political wing of the former ULIMO-K.

BILITY: That's correct.

GRIFFITHS: So you were a paid writer for the political wing of ULIMO-K.



BILITY: I was hired by them to write.

GRIFFITHS: And did you sympathise with their politics?

BILITY: Well, that was a matter of personal decision.

GRIFFITHS: That's why I'm asking you.

BILITY: I did appreciate all the politics in Liberia.

GRIFFITHS: Did you support them?

BILITY: What do you mean "support"? Support in what sense, counsel?

GRIFFITHS: In the sense that they were the party you would have preferred to vote for.

BILITY: I would have preferred to vote for the All Liberian Coalition Party. I would have preferred to vote for the Unity Party.

GRIFFITHS: So you would have voted for any of those three?

BILITY: Yes sir. Personally I did not have a preference as such.

FORNAH: The cross-examination of Hassan Bility who is testifying as a torture victim of Charles Taylor's administration continues here in The Hague on Thursday. For the BBC WST this is Mariama Khai Fornah reporting from The Hague.

Cocorioko

Friday, 16 January 2009

Bility defends Taylor defence team's portrayal of him

Written by Joseph Cheeseman reports

Liberian Journalist Hassan Bility has testified before four international courts regarding situations in Liberia during the presidency of Charles Taylor. Mr. Bility testified in the RUF case in 2004 in Sierra Leone. He also testified in a Dutch Court against a Dutch national, Gus Kouwenhoven in 2006. He testified against Chuckie Taylor in Miami in 2008, and now he is testifying against his Former President Charles Taylor.

But how accurate are Bility's accounts before the four international tribunals about events in Liberia during Taylor's regime? The Legal Team defending Mr. Taylor says Hassan Bility is a liar and all of his testimonies in the four courts are conflicting and contradictorily. Joseph Cheeseman reports.

CHEESEMAN:

According to Defense Lawyer Courtenay Griffiths, Mr. Bility told a Dutch Court in the Gus Kouwenhoven case that he was arrested in 1997 and detained by Taylor's securities and given a number of charges. But before the Special Court for Sierra Leone Mr. Bility said he was arrested and detained without any specific charge. Defense lawyer Griffiths asked Bility why he used the phrase a number of charges.

BILITY: Arrested for an article and then taken the president, and he tells me a number of things. He raises a number of concerns. One, I'm bent on undermining his government, he tells me about me working for other people, being an agent, being this, so as I said, a wide range of issues he discusses with me. I thought that that constituted, since he was the court and he was a judge, a number of charges in that particular circumstance. So that's why I used the phrase "a number of charges."

CHEESEMAN: In his testimonies at the Special Court in Freetown, Sierra Leone against the RUF, Mr. Bility said he was arrested and detained for two days for writing an editorial entitled "who's the Judas in ECOWAS?" Before the Judges of the Special Court in The Hague, Bility said he was arrested and detained at the Justice Ministry for one day and later released. Defense Lawyer Griffiths told the Court that the difference in Mr. Bility's testimonies constituted a conscious lie. But the witness disagreed.

BILITY: If I did say this, two days, I honestly don't remember.

GRIFFITHS: There's no "ifs" about it. This is a transcript of your evidence. What were you doing telling that lie to the Judges after you had taken an oath on the Que'ran to tell the truth?

BILITY: Counsel, I did not tell a lie. If I did say two days then I might have made an honest mistake. It's not a lie.

CHEESEMAN: The Prosecution Liberian witness told the Judges of the Special Court he was arrested for the fourth time by state securities in January 22, 1998. But according to transcript of the Dutch court obtained and produced in court by the Defense, Mr. Bility told the Dutch court in 2006 that he was arrested for the fourth time in March 1998. The Defense lawyer asked Bility to explain the difference.

BILITY: I do not remember an arrest in March, in either 1998, 1997 or whatever. This, I believe, must have been a mistake either in my in my [tape problem] specifically that I believed I was arrested in March 1998.

GRIFFITHS: Are you suggesting, Mr. Bility, that when you were giving evidence on oath before those judges in a Dutch court, somehow you meant to say to them "I was arrested after September 2000," but somehow you misspoke and March 1998 came out of your mouth instead. Is that what you're telling us?

BILITY: Counsel, I am telling this honourable court that I was not arrested in March 1998. Now if that appears in the transcript, of course I believe that could be attributed to my misspeaking.

CHEESEMAN: Bility, the Liberian journalist testifying against Charles Taylor, told the Judges that Taylor was the court and the judge during his days as president in Liberia, and whatever he said was the final. Bility said whatever Taylor told accused constituted a charge. Taylor's lawyer disagreed and said Mr. Bility was a liar. The cross-examination of Hassan Bility by Taylor's lawyer continues on Friday.

United Nations  Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

**UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries
15 January 2009**

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

Newspaper Summary

Presidential Legal Advisor Dismisses Email Links

(The Informer, The News, Daily Observer, Heritage, New Democrat, the Analyst, National Chronicle)

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Advisor on Legal and Security Issues has warned against character assassination in Liberia.
- Counsellor Estrada Bernard who was linked to some six hundred thousand dollar transfer from Cellcom in the Dunn Commission Report says the situation is now the order of the day.
- Cllr. Bernard warned that attempts of character assassination may seem right now but the time is nearing when victims would take legal actions.
- Cllr. Bernard also warned that anyone publishing a distortion of the Dunn Commission Report on him would be answerable in the proper forum.
- He denied knowledge of the transactions and every email that linked him to some dubious transactions in the email scandal.
- Cllr. Bernard also assured that he would submit to any further probe as recommended by the Dunn Commission but maintained he is innocent.
- His statement followed that of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf that her advisor had no knowledge of the transactions.
- Madam Sirleaf attributed the email found on the Hard Drive of a computer from her house to a friend from Sierra Leone, Finda Koroma.

Finda Koroma Comments on US\$600,000 Transfer in Commission's Report

(The News, Daily Observer, Heritage, The Informer, New Democrat, the Analyst, National Chronicle)

- The lady who reportedly carried out the transactions of the US\$600,000 transfer from Cellcom has confirmed the transfer but said it was not done on a computer in Liberia.
- Madam Finda Koroma in a letter said the transaction was contained in an email send on August 26, 2008 from her home in Texas, the United States of America.
- She said the transfer was for consultancy in the Democratic Republic of Congo as she served as a consultant for the Cellcom Holding Companies.
- Madam Koroma assured she would provide her Hard Drive to any investigative team to verify the reports.
- Earlier, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf clarified that the text concerning the transactions found on the Hard Drive of a computer at her home was by Finda.
- The President told reporters Finda spend three nights with her and use the computer

FLY Urges Government to Pass Youth Policy into Law

(Daily Observer)

- The Federation of Liberian Youth (FLY) is urging the Unity Party-led Government to speedily pass the National Youth Policy (NYP) into law. It has also declared this year as a 'year of advocacy' to change the conditions of young people in Liberia.

Radio Summary

Local Media – Star Radio *(News monitored today at 9:00 am)*

Presidential Legal Advisor decries character assassination

Finda Koroma breaks silence on US\$600,000 Transaction

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

Elections Commission confirms eight applicants for River Gee by-election

- The National Elections Commission says seven applicants have submitted nomination documents to the commission for the River Gee Senatorial by-election.
- According to a NEC statement, the announcement of the list of applicants is part of efforts to enhance transparency in the nomination process.
- The applicants include Conmany Wesseh of the Unity Party, Tarpowah Kear of the Alliance for Peace and Democracy and Nathaniel Williams of the Liberia Destiny Party.
- Others are Hixenbaugh Darbeh of the Liberia Action Party, Edmund Gibson of the National Patriotic Party, Patrick Johnson of the Congress for Democratic Change and Jonathan Sogbie, an independent candidate.
- NEC clarified the applicants are not yet candidates until they meet the qualifications and are officially announced as candidates to contest the polls.
- The final list of candidates would be announced on Saturday January 17 while campaign begins the same day.
- The River Gee Senatorial by-election is expected to take place on February 10.

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

Liberia Set to Resume Logging Activities

- The Managing Director of the Forestry Development Agency says 2009 is a year of implementation in the forestry sector.
- Mr. John Woods said three Forest Management contracts are currently on the desk of the President to be signed and forwarded to the Legislature for ratification.
- Mr. Woods said following the ratification of the contracts, the three logging companies would begin operation.
- According to Mr. Woods, two of the logging companies would be based in Rivercess while the other would operate in Gbarpolu and Lofa Counties.
- The FDA Managing Director said government has already awarded six timber sales contracts, three of which have gone into active production.
- He said by June this year, it is hoped that six concessions including three timber sales and three forest management contracts would be operational.
- Mr. Woods admitted there are many procedures involved in approving timber contracts under the National Forestry law and the Public Procurement and Concession Act.
- He said the procedures are necessary to ensure that timber trade takes a different dimension from the past, which prompted the imposition of sanctions.
- Mr. Woods clarified that the GEMAP agent at the FDA does not interfere with the awarding of contracts to timber companies.
- The FDA boss however, said GEMAP only assists with ensuring transparency and accountability in the process of awarding those contracts.

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

Government sets up team to inspect projects in counties

- Government says it has set up a five-man independent team of professional Liberians to visit the fifteen political sub-divisions of the country.

- According to a release the team would seek to validate the implementation of the County Development Fund being undertaken by the counties.
- A Ministry of Internal Affairs release said the exercise is intended to provide an outsider's view of the status of the county development projects.
- The five-man team would also verify how funds allocated by Government for use by the counties are being applied.
- The release said the team is headed by Economist Sam Jackson, assisted by a photo journalist, civil society representatives and a guide from Internal Affairs.
- The verification team will spend a total of twenty-four days in the field and will make its report public at the close of the exercise.

UN Police Chief Calls for Cooperation

- The Acting UN Police Commissioner in Liberia has called for community cooperation in the fight against crimes.
- Commissioner Gautam Sawang said the police would effectively protect lives and property if community residents cooperate with it.
- Commissioner Sawang said the communities could cooperate by exposing criminals and their hideouts to the police.
- He spoke early Thursday morning following a night tour of police zones and depots to access situation there.
- For her part, police inspector general Munah Brown said the night visit was meant to keep her men watchful in the discharge of their duties.
- Col. Brown used the occasion to announce the arrest of two armed robbers who shot and killed a Fula businessman in Monrovia.
- She did not however, elaborate.

Lightening kills man, 65 in Buchanan

- Report from Buchanan Grand Bassa County says lightening has killed a 65-year old man in the county.
- The incident occurred at the Monrovia Junction area outside Buchanan.
- The victim, Peter Garduah was hit by the lightning Wednesday evening while assisting his wife to pack their goods ahead of a heavy down pour of rain.
- According to eyewitnesses, Garduah was rushed to the government hospital in Buchanan where he was pronounced dead on arrival.

U.S. Ambassador raps on institution building

- US Ambassador to Liberia Linda Thomas-Greenfield has called on government agencies to take ownership of their institutional building process.
- Madam Greenfield spoke during a courtesy visit to the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs.
- The US envoy said it is much easier for her mission to support institutions with what she called clear and actionable plans than those without any.
- Madam Greenfield said her mission is committed to supporting the Ministry of Planning in implementing its strategic plan.
- The Ministry over the past month developed its three-year strategic plan intended to guild its efforts to enhance service delivery.
- The plan would also provide the framework for integrated thinking and action, efficient management and effective partnerships.

Liberians organize Inaugural Ball for President-elect Obama

- Liberians residing in the United States are to hold an inaugural ball to celebrate the taking of oath of U.S. President-elect Barack Obama.
- Obama, who is expected to be inducted in office next Tuesday, is the first African-American to be elected President of the United States.
- Report says hundreds of Liberians are expected to be joined by U.S. dignitaries and diplomats on January 24 near Washington D.C. in the Post Inaugural Ball.
- The event is being sponsored by the "Liberians For Obama", a group of strong Obama supporters of Liberian descent, who worked during the election.
- According to the report, Liberia's Ambassador to the U.S., Nathaniel Barnes and his embassy staff in Washington are expected to play key role at the occasion.
- A special statement from President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is also expected to be delivered at the "Black Tie" event.

AllAfrica.Com

Thursday, 15 January 2009

Liberia: Rape, Gender Violence the Norm in Post-War Liberia

Thalif Deen

When the West African state of Liberia was torn apart by 14 years of civil war, the victims of the brutal insurgency included mostly women and children who were subject to rape and sexual violence.

"Not only are the terrible consequences of this still felt by many Liberian women today, but violence against women and rape continue unchecked," says a new study on Liberia by ActionAid, an international development agency based in South Africa.

Rape is currently the most serious crime plaguing Liberia, with an average of eight cases reported per week, and many more never reported to the authorities.

Titled "U.N. Peacekeeping in Liberia: International Engagement in Addressing Violence Against Women", the study has been released to coincide with a two-week session of the U.N. Commission on the Status of Women, which ends Friday.

Asked if isn't ironic that sexual abuse continues unabated in post-war Liberia, the first African country with a female head of state, Ernest Gaie, ActionAid country director, told IPS: "The election of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf (in 2005) has given women's rights an unprecedented profile and momentum in Liberia and the president is personally committed to tackling rape and violence against women."

However, he said, Liberia's political system, government institutions and society have not been transformed overnight and the country is still emerging from 14 years of civil war.

Still, important steps have been taken, such as the introduction of a new rape law the day before the president's inauguration.

"But implementing these mean transforming the dysfunctional justice system. And to do this the government needs significant political and financial support from the international community," Gaie added.

Liberia's violent civil war was triggered by the National Patriotic Front, a rebel group headed by Charles Taylor, a former Liberian president, who is awaiting trial in The Hague on charges of war crimes.

Despite the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement by the warring parties three and a half years ago, "women continue to be dehumanised in many ways, and are often deprived of their universal and interdependent rights," Gaie said.

Since September 2003, the 15,200-strong U.N. Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has been overseeing peacekeeping operations in the country; monitoring a ceasefire agreement; and supporting humanitarian and human rights activities in the country.

The mandate of UNMIL ends Mar. 31. But the ActionAid study recommends that UNMIL's mandate be extended for at least a year in order to "develop regional security mechanisms, with the intention of keeping an effective military presence in the country for several more years."

"The Security Council should note that Liberia remains in a fragile state and should call on the international community to provide generous funds for long-term poverty reduction, peace building and promotion of just and democratic governance," the report said.

The study also said that UNMIL can and has played a significant role in tackling violence against women.

It also points out that UNMIL has been essential in restoring stability, state authority and the rule of law, and as such, has directly contributed to stemming rape and protecting women.

The U.N. mission has also helped establish "an effective criminal justice system to end impunity, deter and punish rape and provide a modicum of justice for survivors."

A report by the U.N. Security Council late last year said that despite considerable overall improvement, the security situation in Liberia "remains fragile and continues to be anchored on the presence of UNMIL, as the new police service is still in its formative stages and the recruitment for the new armed forces is just beginning."

Continued efforts are required to manage the internal potential threats to stability, in particular possible violent reactions from elements that stand to lose from the government's far-reaching reform programme, disgruntled ex-combatants, former members of the armed forces and police service, and frustrated unemployed youth.

Gaie said that rape will not be eliminated in a year or even during Sirleaf-Johnson's period in office or UNMIL's lifetime.

"But after 14 years of civil war, Liberia's women, with support of the new president and the international community are taking crucial steps towards eradicating this scourge," he added.

Alan Doss, the U.N. Special Representative for Liberia, told reporters last month Sirleaf-Johnson has "done a terrific job by anybody's standards."

"There was a sense she was in charge, but she has been in office for just one year out of a five-year term, so it was still early" to expect more from her, he added.

Asked if it was prudent to assign peacekeepers to stop the violence against women in Liberia, particularly at a time when U.N. peacekeepers are being increasingly accused of rape and sexual abuse in various peacekeeping missions overseas, Gaie told IPS: "Rape and sexual abuse by U.N. peacekeepers is a gross violation of their duty to protect the local population and must be urgently tackled."

Sexual abuse however is not just committed by the United Nations, but also by aid workers and local people, often in positions of authority, such as teachers.

It is therefore something that all actors must tackle together and the U.N.'s "zero tolerance" policy is welcomed and should be built on.

In Liberia only two cases of rape by U.N. personnel have been reported compared with eight cases per week across the country. The United Nations, in particular, can contribute significantly to tackling rape through supporting the local police and court system.

Furthermore, UNMIL's role in bringing stability to Liberia, and therefore ending widespread rape during the war, cannot be underestimated, Gaie added.

Inter Press Services

Thursday, 15 January 2009

LIBERIA: Life a Struggle for Ex-Combatants

Rebecca Murray

VOINJAMA, Liberia, Jan 15 (IPS) - Hajah Kamara's life of violence began when she was not yet a teenager. After rebels butchered her father and pregnant mother in their Voinjama home, they forced her to become a 'wife' and a fighter in their warring faction.

"They raped me and tattooed me," says 22-year-old Kamara, pointing to the dark markings on her arm. "I felt bad fighting, but when I thought of my father and mother not living, I needed to revenge them."

During Liberia's brutal civil war in the 1990s, Kamara switched between rival factions several times. Initially with Sierra Leonean fighters battling Charles Taylor along the border region, she escaped, but later fell in with the notoriously violent "Anti-Terrorism Unit" run by Taylor's son 'Chuckie' -- convicted of war crimes by a Miami court in October 2008. Kamara eventually ended up with the opposing Guinean-backed LURD militia, in the final struggle for the Liberian capital Monrovia in 2003.

"I saw her armed here after the war," says Eric Kolubah, field supervisor with the Voinjama branch of the National Ex-Combatant Peacebuilding Initiative (NEPI), a local NGO working to reintegrate former fighters back into their communities. "She was commanding a special group. She is someone very, very big."

Voinjama is an agricultural market hub in Liberia's rural Lofa County -- a day's drive north from the Monrovia capital on a rutted dirt road through dense tropical jungle -- bordering mineral-rich Guinea and eastern Sierra Leone. For over a decade, fighters backed by Liberian actors and neighbouring states devastated Voinjama.

Now the town is hampered by a lack of long-term development projects, soaring unemployment, and simmering tensions between two dominant ethnic groups, the Loma and Mandingo. Small quantities of rice and vegetables are grown here, and today Liberians easily cross the border into Guinea to scour for cheaper goods.

The town has the third largest number of ex-combatants in Liberia. Many of the residents and fighters have lost families and friends, and are psychologically traumatized.

Kamara now supports two children -- both named for her deceased parents -- and is pregnant with a third. They scrape by on her earnings as a cook, 30 dollars a month, small pay for Liberian standards.

"I have no problems with the community," she says. "I asked forgiveness from my relative here, she wants to forget the past."

These factors, compounded with the threat of regional political instability -- most recently the military coup in Guinea last month -- heightens the vulnerability of Lofa County and the potential re-recruitment



Credit: IRIN

Ex-combatants preparing to disarm in 2004 -- govt projects to employ ex-fighters have fallen short.

of impoverished ex-combatants.

"Liberian ex-combatants' most commonly cited reasons for considering a return to combat include poverty and economic disadvantage, followed by a lack of jobs, benefits or training," a September 2008 U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP) study of ex-fighters in Voinjama.

"A full 68 percent of Lofa respondents would not consider fighting now, or could they imagine circumstances that would lead them to fight in the future... [However] nearly a third responded that they could conceive of something that would lead them to fight again."

Initially after the Liberian war ended in 2003, a poll of fighting factions put the number of combatants at roughly 40,000. However, over 101,000 fighters, including women and children, registered with the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) process in the following months, induced by cash payments for guns and ammunition, as well as vocational training, tool kits and the promise of work.

Since then, complaints about DDRR programming include an over-saturation in the market of tailors, carpenters and mechanics, and ex-combatants reselling tool kits for food.

Andrea Tamagnini, the Italian head of the Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery unit with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), firmly believes short-term emergency employment, paired with a more long-term national development plan, is key to resolving conflict.

In 2006 the Liberian government and UNMIL kicked off an emergency job creation program, enlisting local communities to repair segments of Liberia's roads for salaries and food. The emphasis now in Lofa County is to expand the agricultural industry.

"Proof of the importance [of the road project] was an internal survey we did on illegal recruitment after the crises in Guinea in 2007," Tamagnini says. "The information from Lofa was that commanders who came across from Guinea -- sometimes Liberians, both -- to look for possible recruits, couldn't find anyone because the people were working on the road... So this is proof that if you have a job you don't go fighting."

Amara Kamara is a 37-year-old charismatic former general of the ULIMO militia's Alligator Brigade who trained in Cuba to fight Taylor's forces in the 1990s. He now serves as a de facto leader and counsellor for ex-combatants in Voinjama.

"I wouldn't fight again, but other people would, who are not busy 24 hours doing something," Kamara says. "That's why we are appealing to the Liberian government to facilitate more jobs -- for us to forget about the past. If I'm not busy and I'm a fighter, then the same thing I was doing yesterday I could do today."

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Int'l Crisis Group warns on stability in Liberia

New York, US - Progress on securing Liberia could unravel if international attention continues to wane, according to a report from the Belgium-based International Crisis Group. The group made this known in a report on Liberia released on Wednesday in Brussels and made available to reporters in New York.

It stated: "Five years since the civil war ended in Liberia in 2003, UN peacekeepers with support from the international community have worked to help secure the country from instability.

"Yet, despite the overthrow of President Charles Taylor and ongoing efforts to train and support a new army apparatus, major gaps in reforms remain."

The independent NGO also said the newly trained security personnel in the country faced widespread public dissatisfaction that had resulted in mob justice and a concern about the army's actual ability to protect the country.

"With the United Nations beginning to end operations in Liberia and the U.S. private contractors hired to train the country's security forces expected to draw down, critics say any progress made since 2003 could be lost," the group noted.

The report therefore called on the international community to continue to support Liberia and ensure lasting security there.

It said the police desperately needed a combination of managerial expertise, strategic vision and - once benchmarks have been set for its use - a major increase in resources," Francois Grignon, Crisis Group Africa programme director, said in the report.

"Unless partners, especially the U.S. and the UN, maintain their efforts to make Liberia more secure and stable for the next few years, the investment made since the end of the war could easily unravel," he added.