

**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, 28 January 2009

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

Tuesday, 27 January 2009

Mid-Morning Session: Witness TF1-062 Concluded His Testimony; Witness TF1-174 Commenced His Testimony

12:00pm: Court resumed and witness TF1-062 concluded his testimony. Another prosecution witness TF1-174 commenced his testimony.

Cross-Examination of Witness TF1-062

Defence counsel Courtenay Griffiths QC continued and concluded the cross-examination of Witness TF1-062. Counsel referenced the witness statement made to prosecution in November 2004 in which he said he saw the RUF loot in Tongo, that he was personally a victim of looting and that no burning of houses took place in the first three days of the occupation of Tongo. The witness responded that these atrocities were not committed on the first day of the occupation of Tongo but that they did occur in the succeeding days. He said the rebels entered his room and took away his property. Asked whether he saw civilians being raped and amputated, the witness said he saw no such thing.

That ended the cross-examination of the witness.

Re-Examination

Prosecution counsel Kathryn Howart re-examined the witness. Counsel asked the witness about CDF mining at Cyborg pit. The witness responded that civilians did not mine there under the CDF. He said that civilians only mined there when the AFRC/RUF entered Tongo. Asked about why all the civilians moved to Kenema in 1994, the witness responded that it was because Tongo was attacked by RUF rebels. Counsel also took the witness through a portion of his statement of January 31, 2005 in which he said that he sent his workers to mine for the RUF and not the CDF, and that he had been misquoted otherwise in his earlier statement. Counsel also referenced the witness's statement during cross-examination that under the RUF/AFRC, civilians worked for the rebels for two days while they worked for themselves the rest of the week but under certain conditions. Counsel asked the witness to explain what conditions he meant. The witness explained that when they mined on days specified for civilians, the rebels would still come and stand over them with guns and that they forced them to share their gravels with them after mining.

That ended the witness's re-examination. There were no questions from the judges. Prosecution counsel requested that the transcript of the witness's testimony in the AFRC trial be admitted into evidence. Thus ended the witness's testimony.

Witness TF1-174 Commences His Testimony.

A new witness, TF1-174 was sworn in and he commenced his testimony. The witness was led in evidence by prosecution counsel Mr. Nicholas Koumjian. The witness testified with a pseudonym and with voice and facial distortion. Mr. Koumjian also informed the court that since the witness worked with many child combatants in Makeni, any mention of their names would disclose his own identity and therefore any mention of such names will be done in private session. Court went briefly into private session to record the witness's personal details. When court resumed in open session, the witness commenced his testimony. Counsel asked the witness what the population of Makeni was between 1996-2002. The witness said that he could not give any specific number of people who lived in Makeni at that time but that over 150,000 displaced persons were registered at one point in time. He said that in 1998, four agencies registered about 145, 000 people excluding displaced persons. He said that the majority of the

inhabitants of Makeni are Temnes, followed by Limbas and Lokos. He said that there were also settlers of Mendes, Fullas and Madingos in the town. He said that almost all the Lebanese people left before the war but he could remember one Lebanese man who stayed. Asked about the distance between Makeni and Freetown, the witness said it is about 115 miles and that using a private vehicle, one can drive for about 2 hours or less but that with a public transport, it will be about 3 hours.

Court adjourned for lunch break.

10:00am: Court resumed and witness TF1-168 concluded his testimony in closed session. The witness's entire testimony was heard in closed session.

Another prosecution witness, TF1- 062 commenced his testimony.

Examination of Witness TF1-062

The witness testified in open session but with a pseudonym and screen, meaning, his name and face were not disclosed to the public. Court went into private session briefly to allow the witness's personal details to be recorded. The witness was a Rule 92 bis witness whose testimony in the AFRC trial was tendered as his evidence. The witness was led in evidence by prosecution counsel Kathryn Howart. Ms. Howart informed the court that the witness's 92 bis evidence will relate primarily to Kenema District. The witness told the court that he was born on August 24, 1964 in Port Loko District. The witness informed the court that he testified in the AFRC trial on June 27, 2005. He said that the transcript of his testimony in the said trial has been read to him and he certified that the transcript contained his previous testimony in the AFRC trial. Prosecution counsel asked that the said transcript be marked for identification as the witness's evidence in the Taylor trial.

Cross-Examination

Defence counsel for Mr. Taylor Courtenay Griffiths QC cross-examined the witness. Counsel asked the witness whether he also testified in the CDF trial and he said he did testify in the trial. In response to counsel's question as to where he was when the war started in 1991, the witness said he was in Tongo Fields, Kenema District. He said he had been in Tongo for over 20 years. The witness said he was involved in mining and that he had six workers who mined for him. He said that he worked at Cyborg Pit in Tongo. He also agreed with counsel that diamond mining is very dangerous as people could die in the process and be buried in the pits. The witness said that when the CDF occupied Tongo, the CDF did not mine at Cyborg Pit. The witness explained that RUF rebels first attacked Tongo in 1994. He said he retreated with several other civilians to Kenema, where they stayed for about five months before returning to Tongo. He said that Kamajors later took over Tongo. While the Kamajors were in Tongo, the witness said he heard that they were involved in mining activities but that personally, he did not see them doing that. He said that he never saw Kamajors harrasing civilians to mine for them and that he was never asked by the Kamajors to send his workers to mine for them. He also told counsel that he has never said the Kamajors went to his house with guns and machetes threatening to kill him or his workers. Counsel referenced the witness's statement given to prosecution investigators in June 1997 that the CDF took control of Cyborg Pit and everyone mined under their control and that they forced people to mine for them. The statement also read that the witness sent his workers to mine for the CDF on over ten occasions and that the CDF would come with guns and machetes to his house and that with such threat, he had no option but to send his workers to mine for them. The witness responded that when he made that statement, he was referring to the AFRC soldiers who took over Tongo in 1997. He said that when he made his statement to the prosecution investgator who was a white lady, there was no interpreter and that because of the language constraints, the wrong things might have been recorded. The witness said he made clarifications to this staatement in his other statements even before he testified in the AFRC trial. Prosecution counsel objected on basis that defence counsel should also present the witness's statements in which he made corrections, saying his earlier statement had been wrongly recorded. The witness insisted

that he was completely misquoted. He said he saw the CDF kill people but did not see them involved in forced mining.

In response to a question about the AFRC coup, the witness said he was in Tongo when the coup took place. He said that RUF rebels later went to Tongo but no fighting took place upon their arrival. He said that after sometime, the rebels started looting but that Sam Bockarie later went there, summoned a meeting and told the rebels not to get involved in any looting.

On mining, the witness said civilians mined for the AFRC/RUF for two days in the week and on the remaining days, they worked for themselves under certain conditions. In January 1998, the witness said the rebels were driven from Tongo by the CDF. The witness said that the CDF killed 20 men and 4 women in his presence. The men were accused of being soldiers while the women were accused of being the wives of soldiers. They were hacked to death with machetes. The witness said that the RUF burned houses in both 1994 and 1997 when they occupied Tongo. He said the rebels claimed that the houses belonged to Kamajors. He said that the CDF also used child soldiers.

Court adjourned for mid-morning break.

BBC World Service Trust

Tuesday, 27 January 2009

Report from The Hague

For the first time in the year-old war crimes trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, a Liberian lawyer has joined the Defense team. Counsellor Lavala Supuwood has travelled to The Hague to help the Defence prepare its case. Meanwhile, a Prosecution witness has been telling the Court of a massacre committed by the government-supported Civil Defense Forces of Sierra Leone. Joseph Cheeseman reports

CHEESEMAN: After a week of closed session, the Special Court for Sierra Leone has heard the testimony of the Prosecution's 92nd witness, in a partially open session.

The witness, only identified by a number, testified behind a screen. He spoke in Krio with the aid an interpreter. He was asked by Defence lawyer Courtenay Griffiths to recall a massacre which took place in Tongo Field in Kenema District, when several soldiers and their wives were killed. Mr Griffiths said the killings were committed by the CDF or Kamajors.

GRIFFITHS: But when the CDF came, you remember they lined up 20 men and 4 women where were Limba, Temne and Lokos, and killed them in cold blood, didn't they?

WITNESS: The four women that I am sure of, it was not because they were Loko or Limba. They were killed because they were wives of soldiers. The 20 soldiers whom I saw, it was because they were SLA soldiers.

GRIFFITHS: They were hacked to death in cold blood by the CDF, weren't they?

WITNESS: Exactly. They were hacked with machetes. I did not see them fire a gun. I saw machetes.

CHEESEMAN: The Prosecution 93 witness, identified as TF1-174, later took the stand and testified to massive looting and raping in the Sierra Leonean town Makeni during what he called 17-day period by the rebels.

He testified that the rebels went on a looting spree after the West African peacekeeping force, ECOMOG, dropped a bomb in Makeni. For the personal security of the witness, he is testifying from behind a screen and his voice is distorted.

COUNSEL: Now you've mentioned looting during this period. Can you tell us in some detail what was looted?

WITNESS: All houses were looted, everywhere. The mission was looted. The seminary was looted. The schools in Makeni, primary, secondary and even the college were all looted. There was rampant looting, the Bishop's vehicles in the mission were looted.

COUNSEL: Now sir, were you aware of any sexual violence during this 17-day period?

WITNESS: It was very, very rampant, and all over, when night comes, from all the houses people were shouting, "Don't rape me! I have been raped!" Most girls.

CHEESEMAN: The witness said he took care of over 100 child soldiers captured by the joint RUF/AFRC Forces at the Teko military barracks in Makeni. The testimony of the prosecution 93 witness is expected to continue on Wednesday.

Meanwhile a Liberian lawyer has joined the Defense team of Charles Taylor in The Hague.

The appearance in Court of the first Liberian lawyer for the Defence is a sign that the Prosecution case is almost complete. Counsellor Lavala Supuwood was dressed in the black and white gown used by lawyers of the International Criminal Court. He sat close to lead Defense counsel, Courtenay Griffiths, as he carried out his cross-examination.

Counsellor Supuwood is the first Liberian lawyer to work at the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

United Nations  Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

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

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

Newspaper Summary

Corruption is the Greatest Challenge - Says President Sirleaf

(The Informer)

- The Analyst, Heritage, The News, Inquirer and Daily Observer newspapers report that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf delivered her 4th State of the Nation Address to the National Legislature addressing a wide range of national concerns including corruption which she says remains the greatest challenge to the administration.
- President Sirleaf said corruption which she has persistently declared as "Public Enemy #1" is a national malaise which is deeply rooted and entrenched in all level of the society. She said through investigations, whistle blowing and audit, government is uncovering and exposing acts of corruption. In her address, the President Sirleaf also reported on the economy, security, infrastructure among other things.

President Sirleaf Declares State of Emergency over Invasion of crop-destroying insects

(Heritage, The News, Daily Observer, The Inquirer, The Parrot)

- The media reports that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has declared a state of emergency over an invasion of crop-destroying insects that has affected thousands of people in the northern and central parts of Liberia. Delivering her State of the Nation address on Monday at the National Legislature, President Sirleaf said the Finance Ministry has been instructed to identify resources to effectively battle the pests' invasion saying the funds must be free from bureaucracy. The President said there are reports that parts of Guinea close to the affected area are also facing the problem of army worm invasion.
- The Liberian leader disclosed that government has taken immediate steps to respond to the crisis saying a task force under the Ministry of Agriculture with support of the Ministry of Health has been established.

Government Reports Cancellation of nearly US\$1.5Bn of Liberia's Debt

(Daily Observer, Heritage, The Inquirer)

- The Liberian Government says nearly US\$1.5 billion dollars of the country's debt has been cancelled since its debt cancellation campaign launched three years ago.
- This follows the cancellation of nearly US\$32.8 million owed the government of Norway.
- Announcing the debt waiver Monday, Norwegian Ambassador to Liberia, Murete Lundemo said the cancellation represent 90 percent of the total debt Liberia owes Norway.
- For his part, Finance Minister, Augustine Ngafuan disclosed that the remaining debt to Norway will be cancelled when Liberia reaches the completion point under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative which government aims to achieve by early next year.

Newly-recruited County Officers Embark Poised to lift Liberia Out of Poverty

(Heritage)

- The Government of Liberia (GoL) committed to a significant boost to the work in each of the fifteen counties by appointing County Development Officers (CDOs) and County Statistics & Information Officers (CSIOs) to work alongside the county officials.

- The United Nations supports the new effort and introduced its new Heads of Field Offices to the teams through a joint GoL/County Support Team (CST) workshop in Monrovia on 22 January where the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and County Development Agendas (CDAs) were on the agenda.
- The CDOs constitute of highly qualified technical experts that form part of the new Senior Executive Service within the Liberian Civil Service Agency while the CSIOs will assist county officials with the collection of statistical data and information needed for decision-making on development in the county.

US Ambassador Assures Support to Liberia's General Auditing Commission

(The News, Heritage, The Independent)

- US Ambassador to Liberia, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, on Monday paid a courtesy visit to the offices of the Auditor General of Liberia, John Morlu. Speaking during the meeting, Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield indicated that she was impressed with the level of performance of the Commission in the fight against fraud, waste and abuse of resources, graft and fiscal improprieties. In response, Auditor General Morlu reaffirmed the General Auditing Commission's commitment to safeguard public monies for public goods. This he said can be realized once there is effective and efficient system control at the various institutions of government.

US\$400M Earmarked for Rehabilitation of Liberia's Hydro Plant

(The Inquirer)

- It has been disclosed in Monrovia that an amount of US\$ 400 million has been earmarked for the rehabilitation of the Mount Coffee Hydro Plant in White Plains outside Monrovia. The Chairman of the National Investment Commission, Dr. Richard Tolbert said the China Union, a Chinese company which has been granted permission to operate the Bong Mines concession is Central Liberia budgeted the amount for the hydro under its expansion plan to operate Bong Mines.

Radio Summary

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

Liberian President declares State of Emergency to battle Pests' invasion

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

Government Says Nearly US\$1.5B of Liberia's Debt Cancel

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

President Sirleaf Wants Lawmakers Withdraw from Implementation of County Development Funds

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is calling on the National Legislature to withdraw its role in the direct implementation of the County Development funds.
- Giving her annual report to lawmakers yesterday, President Sirleaf said the withdrawal will enable the Executive to fully manage the implementation of the resources allotted to the county.
- There have been numerous reports of fraud in the use of the county development fund with County Superintendent and lawmakers being accused.

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

Residents Raise Concerns over Awarding of Forest Contract to Local Company

- Residents of Rivercess County have raised concerns over the awarding of a forest contract to the Liberia Tree and Trading Company.
- The residents claimed they were forced to sign a "social agreement" and warned that if the contract is not reviewed they will not cooperate with the company.

- Over the weekend, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf signed two forestry agreements covering a total area of more than 100,000 hectares.
- The Forestry Management Contracts were awarded to the Liberia Tree and Trading Company and another Liberian-owned company.
- The Liberia Tree and Trading Company have been awarded the contract to harvest 57, 000 hectares in Rivercess County.

President Sirleaf Says Police and New Army Reach Desire Strength

- President Sirleaf says government has achieved the target of recruiting and training 3,500 Police officers while barracks are being constructed around the country to house the new army which has reached its full strength.
- The President however said given the ratio of citizens to police officers it was necessary to recommend additional 2,500 police to beef up the strength of the current force.

The Liberian Dialogue

Tuesday, 27 January 2009

War Crimes Advocacy Group Writes Pres. Obama

27th January 2009

President Barack Obama

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington , DC 20500



Mulbah K. Morlu, Jr

Dear President Obama:

The greatness of the United States, and the lofty democratic ideas upon which the pillars of your country have come to rest strong, well-reflected in your historic inauguration as the first African-American President of the free-world. As we revel in this wonderful achievement, we congratulate you and the farsighted electorates of the United States who transcended color barriers to elect you as the 44th President of the United States of America .

The unmatched momentum that shrouded your campaigns, election and inauguration, unrestrictive to the United States, indicates the anchored hope in your presidency of billions of people around the world who look to you for wise leadership in resolving the critical challenges confronting the new world.

No doubt, your historic ascendance to the highest political office on earth speaks a million strengths into the minds of billions of humble-beginners scattered all over the planet, and gives you a dynamic opportunity to fashion a new meaning to America's fundamental beliefs of liberty, justice, equality and the pursuit of happiness.

With the understanding that the founding ideas (liberty, justice, and equality) of the United States are an inalienable component of the rights of all mankind, we believe your frequent quote on the campaign trail that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice" demonstrates your determination to recreate a world free of oppressions and injustices.

Interestingly, since your inauguration a few days ago, your recently signed executive orders establishing a single standard of humane treatment, end secret detentions, and a certain date for closing Guantanamo reaffirms your commitment to defend human rights and justice, irrespective of geography and demography.

As we agree with you in your quote "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice", an expression made famous by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., we wish to kindly draw your attention to the need for "The arc of the moral universe" to bend towards justice in Liberia due to the widespread commission of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and violation of international humanitarian law, the aftermath of a 14-year senseless civil war led by Charles Taylor and others.

Mr. President, the period between 1989 and 2003 has entered the annals of our history as the darkest era since the founding fathers of this country signed the declaration of independence in 1847. Charles Taylor's defunct NPFL rebels exerted all the strategies they could muster in ensuring the total dehumanization of most parts of Liberia after initiating a campaign of violence in 1989; districts and counties were transformed into killing fields, homes were desecrated with the remains of mutilated corpses after the slaughter, and child-soldiers were unleashed with carefully-taught lessons to decimate "Unwanted tribes".

Not even the presence of a West African Peacekeeping mechanism thereafter could deter the spread of violence. New warring factions soon emerged, all claiming to be "Freedom fighters coming to liberate the country from other warring factions". Unfortunately, not a single belligerent group distinguished itself from massacres, summary executions, rape, torture, ethnic cleansing and other forms of systematic abuses that left a quarter-million innocent people murdered in cold blood.

To cite an example in a thousand, the Tellewoyan hospital in Voinjama, Lofa County diametrically served as the roasting room for almost two hundred innocent people, mostly women and children; they were taken hostage, locked-up in the hospital and the building set ablaze. The anguish and distress of those innocent women and children, Mr. President, their cries of indescribable pains from the furnace of consuming fire is what that must awaken a new consciousness for "The arc of the moral universe" to bend towards justice in Liberia.

Mr. President, the ordinary Liberian, the international community, and regional leaders have been very eager to develop a workable architecture to resolve the cardinal issues pertinent to justice, lasting peace and genuine reconciliation in Liberia . This pivotal driving force created the need for the holding of the Accra Peace Conference in 2003, in Ghana where a mechanism was designed to lead Liberia from war to peace, and to democratic governance. The technical documented, or the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA), adopted during this conference, birthed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. Though the two institutions were ratified by the Liberian parliament in 2005, they are to serve the following goals and objectives, separately:

(a) The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia

The obligation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission evolves around three significant elements:

- **Truth** : establish the facts about violations of human rights that occurred in the past;
- **Justice** : investigate past violations and prosecute the suspected perpetrators;
- **Reparation** : provide full reparation to the victims and their families, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction and guarantees of non-repetition.

In the last two years, the TRC has substantively benefited from commendable international goodwill, including significant financial and logistical support from the United States ' government, the European Union, and other external partners. Even though former warlords were most influential in formulating this institution, all efforts by the commission to encourage truth-telling and reconciliatory steps failed to materialize; leaders of the almost ten warring factions allegedly responsible for the widespread commission of heinous crimes refused to admit their wrongs. Instead, contrary to the full disclosure objective of the commission, ex-warlords applied the travesty of pretending to be war victims while their victims helplessly looked on.

Consistent with 26g of the Act creating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, and in the face of the evidence of enormous atrocities committed in Liberia leading to the lost of nearly three-hundred thousand innocent souls, the TRC, under the signature of its Chairman, submitted preliminary recommendations to the National Legislature for the creation of a Special Court to prosecute those bearing the greatest responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity. In line with its legislated Act, Mr. President, all recommendations emanating from the TRC are "binding" and are not subject to legislative review or amendment.

To the astonishment of the Liberian people, several former warlords have rejected the TRC's recommendation of a Special Court , and are threatening the peace and security of our country if indictments for war crimes are contemplated. We hope this will attract your immediate attention as instability in Liberia may threaten regional and U.S interest.

(b) The Independent National Commission on Human Rights

Mr. President, this expected violent reaction and threat to national security, which has been vocalized by former warlord and now Senator, Prince Johnson, has been complicated further by the reluctance of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to constitute and make functional, the Independent National Commission on Human Rights; hence, though the Act setting up the Independent National Commission on Human Rights came into force in 2005, the Commission is not operating due to continued Government reluctance in appointing its commissioners. Of much disappointment, we assume that the President's reluctance to set up this very vital organ of reconciliation and justice, as well as her refusal to appear before the Truth Commission may be due to her well-documented partnership with Charles Taylor in destabilizing Liberia .

This reluctance and the President's decision to amend the prosecutorial powers of the Commission is intolerable and a serious national security risk. If this action is not prevented, the intents and purposes of the TRC shall be jeopardized because;

Under Article X, REPORTING AND RECOMMENDATIONS, Section 46. "The Independent National Commission on Human Rights shall be seized with the responsibility to ensure that all the recommendations contained in the Report of the TRC are implemented and that civil society organizations and moral guarantors of the CPA shall have the responsibility to monitor, and campaign for the scrupulous implementation of all recommendations contained in the report...all recommendations shall be implemented."

Therefore, Mr. President, we urge you to be a part of the voices calling for the unconditional and immediate setting-up of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights of 2005.

In furtherance, Mr. President, courageous men and women drawn out from our massive downtrodden bloc, have for the past years coalesced under the banner of the "FORUM FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A WAR CRIMES COURT IN

LIBERIA, relentlessly campaigning for the creation of a Special Court to prosecute those bearing the supreme responsibility for atrocities committed in Liberia .

Leaders of this grassroots organization have often been targets of reprisals and arbitrary arrests carefully plotted by the incumbent regime of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Like on other occasions, the head of this organization was arrested and detained to prevent the organization from petitioning President George W. Bush, when he visited Liberia in 2008. In spite of these challenges, the determinations of the organization and the macrocosm of the Liberian people to ensure prosecution for war crimes is unshaken, and has been strengthened by your historic inauguration.

Mr. President, unlike any country off the coasts of the United States , providence intertwined our country to yours from the very beginning of our existence; free American slaves seeking return to their homeland found a comfortable abode here, thereby jointly building a country with their indigenous compatriots, forming one body politics that traditionally stretched to the United States . Sadly, though our system of government is a direct copy of yours, our leaders for the most part, have failed to harness and redistribute our resources for public good. For too long, resources have and continue to be pillaged for the benefit of a few, while the ordinary citizens languish in the valley of utter despair. This practice of insensitivity, sadly enough, has not changed, even under the current regime.

For much of its history, Liberia has been ruled by a few; as a result, there is a feeling of entitlement within certain quarters. More often than not a pass is given to individuals that rob the national treasury in a suit and tie; while the poor and disenfranchised are arrested and jailed for stealing a loaf of bread.

After decades of immoral leadership, the concept of Justice is alien to most Liberians. We have been conditioned to believe that being gracious to our abuser is a sign of good citizenship. I tell you, this has been an evil manipulation intended for the sole purpose of dominating masses. And it has worked effectively. We consistently seek solution from the very same people responsible for 89% illiteracy, 85% unemployment, and a nation that lacks adequate health-care and school facilities.

Subconsciously, we behave as though there are stations within the larger society reserved for specific groups; and members of these groups have come to expect preferential treatment. This behavior is a direct consequence of the unjust system of governance that has been in place since the founding of this nation.

The resultant bankrupt mentality is so ingrained it has become the shackles holding Liberia down. While the rest of the world advances, we cling to antiquated laws and proudly sing a National Anthem that refers to our race as “benighted”. Laws regarding citizenship have earned us the unenviable title of racists, hindering the country’s growth and development. We hope to inspire you help us break free from these chains in order to be a true bastion of the freedom we claim to represent in Africa .

While we seek a way to move our country away from these excesses, our current body politics is largely influenced by ex-warlords in the three branches of government operating in the midst of spiraling corruption and impunity. Though the government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, to some extent, is making strides in road rehabilitation and has improved the image of Liberia internationally, peace-building, a good judicial system, reconciliation, the economy, unemployment, and violent crimes remain elusive. With threats of “Resisting arrest” coming from some ex-warlords led by Senator Prince Y. Johnson, leader of the defunct warring faction, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia; and the ascendance of a military junta in Guinea , the Liberian people are once again living in a state of uncertainty and fear. This reality looms large when considering the prevalence of war crimes perpetrators parading the corridors of power.

Mr. President, as the evidence indicates, it would be a travesty of justice to have indicted former president Charles Taylor and removed him from office; but yet allow other similarly cruel war criminals to continue dominating our political sphere even though they are also suspected of war crimes and crimes against humanity, especially now that the TRC is recommending the creation of a Special Court.

This is why we hope your historic presidency will be the first amongst global leaders to declare support for the formation of a Special Court in Liberia . In this light, Mr. President, we have an avowed interest in the establishment of a mix-domestic court that should independently exercised jurisdiction over war crimes issues, and yet should function within the framework of our judicial system. We believe, the presence of local and international judges, a jury, trial and appeals chambers will lend credibility to the process, and reduce threats of conflicts of interests. Further, the experiences and proceedings during the course of the trials will leave a long-lasting effect on our judicial mechanism and strengthen the abilities of local judicial officers.

Mr. President, the time to give justice to the Liberian people has indisputably come; and the coincidence between your inaugural declaration that “your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy” is so great that morality requires of us all the strong will to judge the actions of former warlords in Liberia.

To the credit of the United States , the UN, the European Union and others, the presence of United Nations’ troops has afforded us the opportunity to solidify the peace as well as find solutions to the ills plaguing this nation. Knowing full well these troops

will not remain indefinitely, it is imperative we lay the foundation for rule of law; because it offers the best remedy for corruption, rape, land dispute, armed robbery as well as other pressing issues. And there is no better way to stabilize the country than to utilize the legal process to hold accountable those responsible for atrocities perpetrated against the Liberian people during the war.

Evil has gripped this nation, and it must be soundly defeated. You have heard the stories, including that of former president Moses Blah who testified that killing and eating human beings was a common practice amongst those that waged the war. They also drank the blood of their victims. And without provocation, they smashed the heads of innocent babies; ripped open the stomach of pregnant women; and set families ablaze in their homes. Not seeking punishment for these acts of cruelty will not only be criminal on our part, but sinful as well. Along these ideas, we must be reminded by a wise quote that “All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.”

Mr. President, we are asking you to stand with those who believe Liberians deserve better...those who believe rule of law must take hold before UN troops depart...those who believe in personal accountability...as well as those who believe there can be no peace without justice. Besides, justice and accountability (which in a real sense means legal responsibility and punishment against criminal acts and omissions) have deep psychological impacts on individuals and, by extension, societies. When justice is done, and seen to have been done, it provides a catharsis for those who have been traumatized and physically abused.

Inclosing, Mr. President, we petition you to help us defeat the forces of evil which for decades have dominated this land, ensuring that justice is served in order to prevent a repeat of the senseless violence that reduced practically the entire population to beggars. And much of what you may desire to achieve in Liberia will be largely reliant on the existence of peace and security. This unequivocally requires us to ask you to take additional steps in calling for the establishment of a United Nations’ backed panel of experts on Liberia to investigate and document the level of atrocities committed in Liberia and those bearing the greatest responsibility for such widespread commission of crimes.

Mr. President, in this battle for the soul of this nation and its complete transformation, we have never retreated, and will not relent...never retreat now...and never surrender from the challenges, and have, in fact, solidified our hopes through your inspiring achievements. And because the children are counting on us, our friends ceaselessly praying for our success; and because future generations deserve better, with a CHANGE President as leader of modern democracies, we have found answers to our most confronting questions:

Will justice ever come? Is hope real? Is change a possibility? Do dreams come true? Here in another enclave of great impunity, with enormous challenges and injustices...are we close to justice? Do dreams come true? Is change a possibility? Is hope real? In this trance, the scales fall from our eyes to the conception that the Obama Presidency is a gift to all, including war victims of Liberia. Destiny, Mr. President, looks forward to the change you will bring, and may you excel to unimaginable heights to the proportions of global prosperity, peace and mutual coexistence.

Lastly, were you to designate or appropriate an administrative officer to have a follow-up meeting or receive supporting documents of the evidence of atrocities in Liberia, we will be gratified to supply the requested information and or participate in a fact finding conference about the situation in Liberia during and after the wars.

Thank you very much for the time you have taken to read this letter, especially one coming from the group that led your campaign in Liberia and encouraged oversea voters.

Wishing you our best,
Sincerely,

Mulbah K. Morlu, Jr.
National Chairman

The Liberian Journal

Tuesday, 27 January 2009

Ex-Rebel General Admits to Eating Human flesh For Meal

Monrovia, January 27, 2009: A commander of the defunct ULIMO-J faction has detailed grisly accounts of how he and men under his control carried out mass executions and committed acts of human rights abuses including cannibalism.

Phillip Wlue, a self-proclaimed death squad commander, Tuesday told commissioners of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) accounts of how he led a unit of fighters that beheaded enemy combatants using power saw.

Alias "Rambo," the former rebel general explained that after their victims were beheaded, they were disemboweled and their intestines used as strings to erect checkpoints. Wlue said that the unit was named and styled "Power Saw Unit." Mr. Wlue was testifying at the ongoing public hearings of the TRC at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in Monrovia.

He also admitted ordering fighters under his command to chop off the ears of 11 Tanzanian peacekeepers in 1993, justifying that they were in cohorts with Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front Liberia (NPFL).

Wlue also disclosed that ULIMO-J forces killed 800 Nigerian peacekeepers serving in the West African Peacekeeping Force, ECOMOG, in 1994 during a protracted war in Tubmanburg, Bomi County.

He said following the recapture of territories lost to their rival ULIMO-K faction in Bomi County, he and his fighters ate meals made of human flesh and cooked rice left behind by the fleeing fighters. He said in the soup was the hand of a Nigerian peacekeeper, whose head and uniform were discovered in the house where the meal was cooked.

"Rambo" confessed conscripting child combatants into the ranks of his fighting unit, saying that he accepted responsibilities for any deaths and injuries that resulted from their recruitment.

He expressed apology for his role in the civil conflict but said he is willing to avail himself to any future decision to prosecute members of the former warring factions.

Liberia is recovering from years of conflict that was characterized by horrific human rights violations, including arbitrary killings, use of child combatants, rape and sexual violence, separation of families, and looting and destruction of properties. Out of a population of 3 million, an estimated 300,000 Liberians were killed, with as many as 1.5 million displaced.

Under the theme: "Understanding the Conflict Through its Principal Events and Actors," the ongoing hearings are addressing the root causes of the conflict, including its military and political dimensions.

The hearings are focused on events between 1979 and 2003 and the national and external actors that helped to shape those events.

The TRC was agreed upon in the August 2003 peace agreement and created by the TRC Act of 2005. The TRC was established to "promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation," and at the same time make it possible to hold perpetrators accountable for gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law that occurred in Liberia between January 1979 and October 2003.

Justice Initiative

Tuesday, 27 January 2009

New Website Tracks Lubanga Trial

The Hague, January 27, 2009—A new website, <http://www.LubangaTrial.org> was launched today to provide news and expert analysis—updated daily—on the war crimes trial of former Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga Dyilo.

LubangaTrial.org will feature daily updates direct from the courtroom, as well as expert commentary, legal analysis, videos, background information, and other resources. The site is a joint project of the Open Society Justice Initiative, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, and WITNESS.

Lubanga, who is charged with conscripting, enlisting, and using child soldiers in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, is the first person to be tried by the International Criminal Court, located in The Hague. With the trial taking place so far from the location of the conflict, LubangaTrial.org will enable journalists from the Great Lakes region of Africa, as well as those who suffered in the conflict, to follow developments in the courtroom.

"LubangaTrial.org is intended to be a primary source of information on the trial, especially for people in the DRC and neighboring countries," said James A. Goldston, executive director of the Open Society Justice Initiative. "Lubanga's trial is a signal moment in the life of the ICC. This resource will help broaden awareness of, and engagement with, the court by those most directly affected by the crimes at issue."

Journalists and legal experts from the DRC will be featured in the site's daily reports, essays, and analyses. The site is currently available in English, and will be available in French later this week.

Contact: David Berry, Open Society Justice Initiative: +1 212 548 0385 (New York).

The URL for this record is: http://www.justiceinitiative.org/db/resource2?res_id=104199

Zimbabwe Star

Wednesday, 28 January 2009

From toy soldiers to boy soldiers



Hundreds of thousands of children have fought as soldiers in recent armed conflicts, but very few have seen their commander stand trial for sending them to the front lines.

On Tuesday, Thomas Lubanga became the first person prosecuted before the international criminal court, and on just such charges. He is accused of committing this war crime in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but the significance of his trial will resonate far beyond.

In 2002 and 2003, Lubanga was the head of an armed opposition group known as the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) in the Ituri region of eastern Congo. He claimed to have 15,000 troops under his command; local observers believed that at least 40% were children. Lubanga's soldiers routinely recruited children by force, including boys and girls as young as seven. In one incident in 2002, UPC soldiers entered a school and forcibly rounded up the entire fifth grade for military service. Children were so prevalent in the UPC that the force was known as "an army of children".

All parties to DRC's war used children as soldiers, including the government and militias supported by Uganda and Rwanda. At the height of the war, the United Nations estimated (pdf) that 30,000 children were fighting as soldiers in the DRC.

Children continue to fight there and in at least 14 other armed conflicts worldwide. Among the worst examples, Burma's national armed forces have recruited tens of thousands of children, abducting 12-year-old boys off the streets and deploying them against ethnic opposition groups. In Colombia, thousands of children fight in irregular armed groups, including the Farc and ELN guerrillas. Children who join "voluntarily" for money or prestige soon learn that the price of desertion may be execution. In Sri Lanka's long-running civil conflict, ethnic Tamil families are told that they must give at least one child for the rebels and that if they complain to authorities, they will never see the child again.

The recruitment and use of child soldiers is prohibited by several international treaties: 126 countries have ratified a treaty that sets 18 as the minimum age for any conscription or use of individuals in hostilities. But recruiters continue to prey upon children because they are easy targets, easily manipulated, and – significantly – because they rarely face any sanctions. In Burma, for example, military recruiters are rewarded for new recruits – regardless of age – with cash bonuses and bags of rice.

The prosecution of Lubanga, and other recent and pending cases, are beginning to chip away, finally, at the longstanding notion that there will be no penalty for sending children into battle. In 2007, four individuals were convicted of recruiting and using child soldiers by the special court for Sierra Leone. The international criminal court has also brought these charges against other commanders from the DRC and Uganda. Among them is Joseph Kony, the leader of the notorious Lord's Resistance Army, which has abducted more than 25,000 children as soldiers in Northern Uganda during the last 20 years, and is presently abducting and killing children in DRC.

In October 2008, the United States enacted a new law that enables it to prosecute child recruiters who set foot on US soil – even if the crime took place in another country.

Child recruiters are beginning to take notice. The special representative to the UN secretary-general on children and armed conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy, says that when she meets with leaders of armed groups about their use of child soldiers, they often express concern about possible ICC prosecution. Some – including armed groups in Cote d'Ivoire and Burma – no longer use child soldiers. Some fear actual prosecution, while others simply don't want to be associated with a practice increasingly condemned as a war crime.

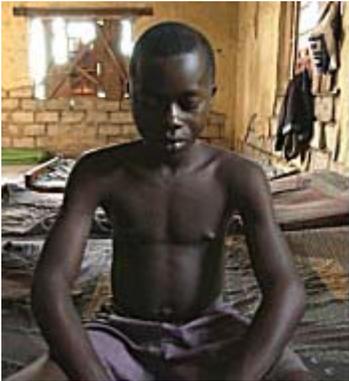
Lubanga's trial has special significance for his victims in Ituri. But its importance also reaches all around the globe. It sends a message to all commanders with children in their ranks that they cannot continue to exploit children this way without being branded war criminals and risking imprisonment. Countless children will be safer if military leaders heed this warning.

Voice of America

Tuesday, 28 January 2009

Lawyer: DRC War Crimes Suspect Cannot Get Fair Trial

Defense lawyers for a Congolese militia leader on trial for war crimes have slammed the International Criminal Court in The Hague, saying Thomas Lubanga cannot get a fair trial there.



AFP Photo

Lubanga pleaded not guilty on Monday to charges that he recruited hundreds of child soldiers to kill members of the Lendu ethnic group during the civil war in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo between 1998 and 2003.

Lawyer claims defense has not had access to all evidence

Defense counsel Jean-Marie Biju-Duval told the court Tuesday that Congolese President Joseph Kabila turned the case over to the international court to get rid of a political rival.

A Congolese boy, ex-rebel, in a center for demobilized war children, in Rutshuru, North Kivu Province of DRC (2006 file photo)

Lead defense counsel Catherine Mabilie argued that the prosecutors have abused the court's rules, making it impossible for Lubanga to get a fair trial. She said the defense team has not had access to all the evidence against its client.

Lubanga is the first suspect to go on trial at the International Criminal Court, which was established in 2002 to try the most serious cases of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide.

Former child soldiers will be among ICC witnesses

In the landmark case, the ICC says prosecutors will present 34 witnesses, including former child soldiers. The trial is expected to take months.

ICC prosecutors are investigating war crimes suspects from four African countries: DRC, Uganda, Sudan and the Central African Republic. The court is based in the Netherlands and was formed under a treaty endorsed by 108 countries, including the DRC.

Human Rights Watch

Wednesday, 28 January 2009

African Union: Press Senegal on Habré Trial

Chad Ex-Dictator's Victims Criticize Years of Inaction on Prosecution

(Addis Ababa, January 28, 2009) – More than 30 months after it asked Senegal to prosecute the former dictator of Chad, Hissène Habré, the African Union should ensure that the trial moves forward, five African and international human rights groups said today. African heads of state will come together in Addis on Sunday, February 1 for an AU summit.

At a summit meeting on July 2, 2006, the AU mandated Senegal, “to prosecute and ensure that Hissène Habré is tried, on behalf of Africa,” and called on the AU Commission, “to provide Senegal with the necessary assistance for the effective conduct of the trial.” Habré is living in exile in Senegal.

But Senegal has taken no action and the AU has given it no support, said a joint statement by the Chadian Association for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights (ATPDH), the Chadian Association of Victims of Political Repression and Crime (AVCRP), the African Assembly for the Defense of Human Rights (RADDHO), Human Rights Watch, and the International Federation of Human Rights (FIDH).

“We expect the African Union to respect its commitment to see that this prosecution moves forward,” said Dobian Assingar of the FIDH, who is also honorary president of the Chadian League for Human Rights. “The AU’s credibility is on the line. Both Senegal and the AU have just stalled and stalled.”

Habré ruled Chad from 1982 until he was deposed in 1990 by President Idriss Déby Itno and fled to Senegal. His one-party regime was marked by widespread atrocities, including waves of ethnic campaigns. Files of Habré’s political police, the DDS (Direction de la Documentation et de la Sécurité), which were discovered by Human Rights Watch in 2001 (<http://www.hrw.org/justice/habre/habre-police.htm>), reveal the names of 1,208 persons who were killed or died in detention. A total of 12,321 victims of human rights violations were mentioned in the files.

Faced with Senegal’s inaction, on September 16, 2008, 14 victims filed new complaints with a Senegalese prosecutor, accusing Habré of crimes against humanity and torture. The authorities have said they will take no action on the complaints, however, until they receive full international funding for all the costs of the trial, which Senegal puts at €27.4 million.

The rights groups note that such trials are usually funded year-by-year and the European Commission has already offered €2 million for the first stages of the investigation, but is waiting for Senegal to present a budget. Chad has offered €3 million. Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland have also agreed to help finance the trial. The African Union, however, has offered no assistance.

“The African Union and Sénégal risk being seen as accomplices in Hissène Habré’s efforts to escape punishment,” said Jacqueline Moudeina, the victims’ Chadian lawyer and president of the ATPDH. “This is a shame on Africa. We are still at point zero. Does the political will exist to bring Hissène Habré to justice?”

Speaking for the victims, Souleymane Guengueng, founder of the AVCRP, said: “First we were tortured by Habré’s dictatorship and now for 18 years we have been mocked by Senegalese and African leaders who refuse to hear our pleas for justice. Unless Senegal and the AU act soon, there won’t be any victims left at the trial.” Guengueng almost died of dengue fever during almost three years of mistreatment in Chadian prisons.

“The African Union gets upset when Africans face international criminal justice, but the real problem is that justice in Africa is totally powerless in the face of the crimes committed by African leaders,” said Alioune Tine, president of the Dakar-based RADDHO. “The Habré trial should be a precedent to show that African courts can deliver independent, fair, and effective justice for crimes committed in Africa.”

The five human rights groups urged the African Union to:

- Press Senegal to keep its commitment to try Habré;
- Provide Senegal with the necessary assistance for the effective conduct of the trial;
- Appeal to AU member states to assist Senegal; and
- Define the mandate of its special envoy to coordinate and promote financial and technical assistance to Senegal and send him to Dakar as soon as possible.

Background

Habré was first indicted in Senegal in 2000, but then Senegalese courts ruled that he could not be tried there for crimes committed in Chad. His victims then turned to Belgium and, after a four-year investigation, a Belgian judge in September 2005 charged Habré with crimes against humanity, war crimes, and torture.

Following a Belgian extradition request, Senegalese authorities arrested Habré in November 2005. The Senegalese government then asked the African Union to recommend how to try Habré. On July 2, 2006, the African Union, following the recommendation of a Committee of Eminent African Jurists, called on Senegal to prosecute Habré “in the name of Africa,” and Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade declared that Dakar would do so.