

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



Martin Royston-Wright and Joyce Johnson received a life sentence without appeal, and the congratulations of their Special Court colleagues, when they tied the knot today at St. George's Cathedral in Freetown.

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:

Tuesday, 24 February 2009

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Ernest Koroma Uncomfortable with International Justice but Special Court May Stay in Sierra Leone

President Koroma wants international justice mechanisms and other organisations that keep a keen eye on the government's human rights record out of the country as soon as possible. This comes as Sierra Leoneans from all walks of life are complaining loudly about the state of the nation and various other hardships being suffered under the current APC government. The APC government is therefore eager to fall back on its Plan B - violence, thuggery, and outright intimidation of citizens who express any form of dissent just as they did in the 1970s and 1980s. But the APC government can hardly afford to implement their violent Plan B with the keen eyes of international justice (in the form of the Special Court) focused ever so much on Sierra Leone. So President Koroma has resorted to asking the Special Court to round up and leave Sierra Leone.

On Wednesday 18th February 2009 Members of the Management committee of the Special Court who are in Sierra Leone visited President Koroma at State House where they discussed issues pertaining the Court proceedings. President Koroma raised concern about the trial and wants a speedy end to it. According to a press release from State House President Koroma noted that although the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor would have to continue in the Hague those within Sierra Leonean Jurisdiction would soon be ended hence the need for the Court to fold up. "When this happens, we will put the legacy of the war behind us and move as a Nation", President Koroma said. We the PEOPLE OF SIERRA LEONE will never forget a group of Political Gangsters in the APC Government of 24 years that forced our brothers and sisters into the bush to fight each other.

According to Awareness Times of 20th February 2009, Chairman of the Committee Keith Morrill of Canada the Court is rounding up activities but there are other issues like setting up of the archives, en-

forcement of sentences and the question of new evidences that should be dealt with. He continued by saying that the treaty that set up the Court would therefore need to be modified by Legislation and the Court's sponsors would continue with their contributions because the work is far from finish

According to a reliable source inside Special Court circles, the Court will con-

tinue in Sierra Leone for now maybe for another five years because certain activities within the Country are tantamount to civil unrest and the UN will not sit and see their good work go in vain in this beautiful country. The political intimidation of the opposition, the activities of the TASK FORCE who were members of the fighting factions during the war, and the recent letter to the President and other stakeholders in the country from certain

quarters of the National Army, to name but a few, are all cause for concern. "From what we saw in Sierra Leone nothing can be taken for granted", he lamented. He told our man that if Charles Taylor, the late Chief Hinga Norman, the late Foday Sankoh and others can be tried for crimes against Humanity, nobody regardless of your Political status will go unpunished.

*Called from The New People
Newspaper Online*

Agence France-Presse

Tuesday, 24 February 2009

War crimes court to rule on 'blood diamond' rebels

FREETOWN (AFP) — Sierra Leone's war crimes tribunal will hand down a verdict Wednesday against three rebel RUF commanders accused of carrying out a spree of killings, rapes and mutilations fueled by "blood diamonds."

The verdict is eagerly awaited by the victims, who still bear the psychological and physical scars of the rebels' atrocities.

"My expectation is to see justice done," 25-year-old Isatu Sillah, who was gang raped by teenage RUF fighters in 2001, told AFP.

The three senior commanders of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao, face 18 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The accusations include murder, rape, sexual enslavement, cruel treatment, using child soldiers and attacks on UN soldiers during Sierra Leone's 1991-2001 civil war.

By the time the conflict ended, some 120,000 people were killed while tens of thousands were mutilated, their arms, legs, noses or ears cut off.

The three men have denied the charges against them.

On Wednesday the court will only rule on whether the suspects are guilty or not. The sentences, if guilt is found, will be issued at separate hearings.

Sesay, Kallon and Gbao were among the "most senior members of the RUF" and involved in a joint criminal enterprise with former Liberian president Charles Taylor to control the diamond fields of Sierra Leone to finance their warfare, according to prosecutors.

RUF rebels terrorised the civilian population of Sierra Leone. They killed and raped at will and forced people to work in the RUF-controlled diamond fields.

During the trial the 75 witnesses presented by the prosecution told harrowing tales of atrocities.

One witness recalled how he and his children were forced to watch how his wife was first gang raped by eight rebel soldiers before being killed. Another witness said he saw rebels force a young boy to have sex with a woman.

When he was unable to perform rebels "started slashing this fellow's private (parts) and slitting the lady's privates so this lady would not meet with any other individual in her life", he told the judges.

Another tactic favoured by the rebels was amputating hands and arms or carving the initials RUF into the bodies of their victims.

The RUF was notorious for using so-called Small Boys Units, boys forcibly recruited and issued with AK-47's. The child soldiers had a reputation of particular cruelty among the civilian population.

The three RUF leaders were initially indicted along with the RUF's founder and close Taylor ally Foday Sankoh, who died in custody before the case ever came to trial.

Charles Taylor is currently on trial in a separate case before the Special Court for Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague for those proceedings. He faces 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Sesay, 38, Kallon, 45, and 60-year-old Gbao went on trial in June 2004. Their defence says they are not responsible for the atrocities.

Sesay's lawyers have tried to cast him as a peacemaker because he signed the Lome peace agreement which ended the war.

Kallon and Gbao have both attacked the prosecution case and witnesses saying there was no evidence they were directly involved in atrocities.

Human rights organisations in Sierra Leone stressed the importance of a balanced verdict in the case.

"We expect a fair judgment (and) for the RUF to be treated fairly. The verdict should be beyond all reasonable doubt," said Charles Mambu of the Coalition of Civil Society and Human Rights.

The RUF case is the last of the three special court trials held in Freetown. The only trial still ongoing before the Sierra Leone tribunal is Taylor's case, which was moved to The Hague for security reasons.

Reuters

Tuesday, 24 February 2009

Lack of funds may mean Liberia's Taylor freed: prosecutor



By Katrina Manson

DAKAR (Reuters) - Former Liberian President Charles Taylor may walk free because the global financial crisis has cut donations to the court trying him for war crimes committed in neighbouring Sierra Leone, its chief prosecutor said.

The U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, which is pursuing those held most responsible for atrocities during the country's 1991-2002 civil war, faces a budget shortfall of more than \$5 million from May, officials said.

"With the economic crisis continuing, to get funds is not easy ... If we run out, it is now possible the judges will have to release him. That's our real anxiety," Chief Prosecutor Stephen Rapp told Reuters in a phone interview late on Monday.

Taylor, a warlord in a civil war in Liberia and later president, is being tried in The Hague due to fears a local trial may threaten regional stability. He denies all 11 counts of crimes against humanity and other charges including rape, enslavement and conscripting child soldiers younger than 15.

The main section of the court sits in Sierra Leone's seaside capital Freetown and, together with the proceedings regarding Taylor in The Hague, is funded centrally.

Taylor's trial, which began in June 2007, involves the same Special Court judges and prosecutors and he would stay indicted even if freed for lack of funds for his detention. Rapp had said earlier this month a verdict could be expected early next year.

The Freetown session of the court is due to hand down its last verdict on Wednesday, in the trial of the three most senior surviving members of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

The defendants may become the first people in the world convicted for attacks against peacekeepers and forced marriage.

The Special Court has already scored several legal firsts, ensuring the recruitment of child soldiers is now recognised as a crime under international humanitarian law, alongside forced marriage and acts of terrorism against civilians, Rapp said.

"In terms of writing the law, this is one of the most active courts there's ever been," he said from Freetown.

"THE REALLY BIG ONE"

Of nine surviving indictees, five have already been convicted of war crimes. Four of the most senior indictees bar Taylor died or disappeared before they could be tried or judged.

"The really big one, we allege, is there in The Hague -- that's Charles Taylor," Rapp said.

"We allege he led the RUF into Sierra Leone in 1991 and was their effective leader for much of the conflict."

Drug-crazed rebels hacked off villagers' limbs with machetes and over 50,000 people were killed in Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 war, made infamous by the 2006 movie 'Blood Diamond'.

Officials fear lack of funds will jeopardise the court, the first of its kind, relying on voluntary contributions from donor governments to foot the entire bill for the proceedings, estimated to run to \$68.4 million for 2008-2010 alone.

"A few important donors have so far not been able to provide financial support to the Court or have provided less than in previous years," Court Registrar Herman von Hebel told Reuters.

"These countries include Ireland, France and Germany, as these have always been important donors to us, but there are other donors as well," he wrote in an email.

Britain's contribution of about 3 million pounds a year has slipped by \$1.6 million in value due to the pound's depreciation.

The court is now turning to "a few countries in the Middle East" for funding, as well appealing to U.S. President Barack Obama's new administration for speedy help to raise a further \$30m to see it through to the end of 2010, von Hebel said.

New Liberian

Sunday, 22 February 2009

Global Witness Says Charles Taylor Received 1M to Harbor Al Qaeda Operatives in Liberia

By Mambu James Kpargoi, Jr., Monrovia

Liberia's former President Charles Taylor received a US\$1 million payment for arranging to harbor two al Qaeda operatives in Liberia soon after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States, Global Witness said.

The men, Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani and Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, both of whom were on the FBI's Most Wanted List of Terrorists, Global Witness said, were hidden at the Gbartala Base in Bong County.

Testifying Friday at the Economic Crimes Hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC), Patrick Alley, one of the directors of Global Witness said Al Qaeda's interest in Liberia and Sierra Leone goes back to the late 1990s, when the Taylor-backed RUF rebels were in control of the lucrative diamond fields of Sierra Leone.

Global Witness said in 1998, soon after the attacks on US missions in Africa, a senior al Qaeda financial officer, Abdullah Ahmed Abdullah, arrived in Monrovia. The group said that Abdullah was introduced to RUF leaders including Sam "Maskita" Bockarie, by Ibrahim Bah.

According to Mr. Alley, the same two al Qaeda operatives traveled to Liberia in March 1999 in order to establish a diamonds for arms deal and spent a few days scouting the RUF diamond fields in Sierra Leone, as well as meeting with Bockarie and giving him US\$100,000 in cash for a parcel of diamonds.

"By January 2001, employees of Aziz Nassour, who is associated with the Antwerp based diamond trading company ASA Diam, had established control over RUF diamonds in exchange for arms, and his control continued until November 2001."

Mr. Alley said Nassour along with his business associate and cousin Samih Osailly, were named in international criminal investigations as being involved in dealing in diamonds for al Qaeda but all three men denied the allegations. But he said that Nassour, though denying any illegal wrongdoing, admitted to being involved in the diamond trade in Sierra Leone and elsewhere and also admitted to attempting to do other business deals with President Taylor.

"In fact Nassour and Taylor are quite well acquainted. Eyewitnesses put Nassour and Taylor together for a July 2001 meeting at Harper Port in Maryland County near the border with Cote d'Ivoire, where much of Liberia's illicit weaponry arrives. There Nassour allegedly gave Taylor US\$200,00 to ensure his support for the ongoing diamond dealing," he said.

He said Global Witness research and investigations found that since 1993, al Qaeda was buying diamonds to make money and to commodify its assets, shifting them away from traditional bank accounts that are subjected to surveillance by financial authorities and are under threat of being frozen to less traceable commodities such as diamonds.

Under the theme: "Economic Crimes, Corruption and the Conflict in Liberia: Policy Options for an Emerging Democracy and sustainable peace," the weeklong hearing addressed the contribution of economic crimes to the conflict including corruption and the illicit exploitation of natural resources.

The hearing also discussed the correlation between the extractive industry and the fueling of the conflict and appropriate policies aimed at reversing the unauthorized exploitation of the natural resources by individuals, groups and the government for purposes external to the national good.

Pursuant to the TRC Act of 2005, the commission is mandated to investigate gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law as well as abuses that occurred, including massacres, sexual violations, murder, extra-judicial killings and economic crimes, such as the exploitation of natural or public resources to perpetuate armed conflicts during the period January 1979 to October 14, 2003.

The commission is mandated to determine whether these were isolated incidents or part of a systematic pattern; establishing the antecedents, circumstances, factors and context of such violations and abuses; and determining those responsible for the commission of the violations and abuses and their motives as well as their impact on victims.

UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries 23 February 2009

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

Newspaper Summary

Ex-President Taylor Colluded with al-Qaeda...Witness Tells TRC

(Daily Observer, Heritage, The News, The Informer, and The Monitor)

- Testifying before the ongoing Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) hearings, Patrick Alley, of Global Witness said ex-President Charles Taylor received a US\$1 million payment for arranging to harbor two al Qaeda operatives in Liberia soon after the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.
- Mr. Alley said Ahmed Khalfan Ghailani and Fazul Abdullah Mohammed, both of whom were on the FBI's Most Wanted List were hidden at the Gbartala Base in Bong County.

GAC to Dispatch Auditors to 15 Counties

(The Inquirer, Public Agenda, The Monitor and Heritage)

The General Auditing Commission (GAC) says it will tomorrow begin dispatching its team of "supreme" auditors to the fifteen counties.

A GAC release said the action is to enable the commission reach the completion of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) audit which is part of Prior Actions for direct donor support to the Government of Liberia budget and also a benchmark to secure complete debt relief.

President Sirleaf Launches UNIFEM Flagship Report

(Public Agenda and The Inquirer)

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Development has launched its flagship publication, Progress of the World's Women 2008/2009.

The report entitled, "Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability," shows that realizing women's rights and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) depends on strengthening accountability for commitments to women and gender equality.

Speaking at the launch, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf highlighted a number of notable achievements made in favor of women's empowerment in Liberia.

President Sirleaf Reconstitutes Several Boards

(Heritage)

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has reconstituted the Board of Directors of six public corporations of the country.

The corporations are the Liberia Electricity Corporation, the National Oil Company of Liberia, Forestry Development Authority, National Housing Authority (NHA), Liberia Petroleum Refining Company (LPRC) and the Liberia Telecommunication Corporation (LTC).

Meanwhile, the President has dismissed the Deputy Director General of the General Services Agency, Mr. Richard Fallah replacing him with Mr. Alexander Kromah.

Senate Poise to Probe Jallah Town Road Project

(Heritage)

The Liberian Senate has mandated its Public Works committee to investigate circumstances surrounding the demolition and reconstruction of the newly constructed Jallah Town Road.

The road project cost government US\$1 million but less than 11 months following its completion the road has been declared faulty and is now being rebuilt by Chinese engineers.

The Jallah Town road project was designed and implemented by engineers from the Public Works

Ministry.

Radio Summary

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

GAC Dispatches Auditors Throughout Country

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

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

President Sirleaf Reconstitutes Several Boards

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

Truth F.M. *(News monitored today at 10:00 am)*

Over 20 Land Disputes Resolved in Nimba County

Over 20 land disputes in Saclepea, Nimba County have been resolved following the intervention of the Special Presidential Committee charged with settling the long standing land disputes in the county.

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