

**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:

Thursday, 18 June 2009

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

Wednesday, 17 June 2009

Sama Banya Defends former German Ambassador Karl Prinz

In 1994, at the height of Sierra Leone's Brutal War which was funded and sponsored by the then-greatest enemy of Sierra Leone, Rebel Leader Charles Taylor; The German Ambassador, Karl Prinz, without informing his Host Country Sierra Leone, traveled to Liberia where he Socialised with Charles Taylor inside Taylor's Rebel Headquarters Base & Accepted Gift(s) from the Warlord

LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF AWARENESS TIMES

From Dr. Sama S. Banya (PUAWUI)

I refer to an article which appeared in the Awareness Times of Monday June 15 entitled 'Charles Taylor Had Crowned The German Ambassador'. I admire the fearless candour with which you and your columnists write from time to time and also give you credit because you have never failed to bring out the virtues of both President Koroma and his amiable consort Sia Nyama as well as the high marks of some ministers and government functionaries. You have at the same time brought out the occasional follies of the SLPP. I must however take issue with you over the contents of the above referenced article as it pertains to the visit of former German Ambassador Karl Prinz's to Charles Taylor then factional rebel leader in Liberia at his base in Gbanga.

In the first place Gbanga was and is not in a Liberia forest, but a city in the heart of the country which Charles Taylor had made his headquarter. In the second place Ambassador Karl Prinz did not sneak into Liberia nor could his action be described as cavorting with Charles Taylor. Thirdly and most importantly, the German government did not have an Ambassador in Monrovia and the German Ambassador to Sierra Leone had oversight of the Embassy there and of the situation in the country. I don't believe this was a secret at the time.

There was a cultural evening at the Ambassador's return on the day of his return; it was a fairly crowded affair as social events staged by the Envoy and his very charming wife Anna always attracted lots of their friends. On the particular evening Karl gave an account of his most recent visit to Liberia and of how he and others joined the then American Assistant Under-Secretary of State for Africa, I can't recall now whether it was Chester Crocker, and they all travelled up to Gbanga. We were not told of the discussions but Karl Prinz had on a country cloth woven gown which Taylor had presented to him and the other envoys who travelled up for the day.

Ambassador Prinz could not while at Gbanga, "have secretly visited" Charles Taylor because that was the purpose of the group visit. That during the secret visit to Liberia's jungles Ambassador was given lots of as-yet-undisclosed gifts/emoluments, then he was crowned as a Paramount Chief by Charles Taylor may be mere speculation on your part. Ambassador Prinz had oversight of his country's interests in Liberia.

He had not been assigned there by the NPRC and I repeat could not have sneaked meaning secretly, back into Sierra Leone. The Ambassador was everywhere including attending a joint political rally organized by the Economics department at Fourah Bay College. When Julius Spencer was arrested for publishing an article which had appeared in a Swedish newspaper about Strasser's fortune and asked the NPRC for comments, he was immediately arrested and whisked off to Pademba Road prison and later charged to court. Karl Prinz was very furious and not only condemned the action but endeavoured to get him released but to no avail. Then he was threatened with expulsion and a few of us braved it enough to warn the regime against such action which we knew would damage our relations with the German government, a very active donor partner. Our ambassador in Bonn at the time tried in vain to alert our government that the Ambassador's activities were endorsed by his government but no one listened.

When Karl Prinz was departing from government wharf, there was not a single Foreign office personnel to see him off. What followed is now history. Former President Tejan-Kabbah made mending fences with the German government the first priority of his Foreign policy. As a postscript, the German government posted Ambassador Karl Prinz to the Republic of Korea, ROK as deputy Ambassador; later on to the Republic of Male. Since then he has served in Guinea and Sierra Leone and in between, headed the West and Eastern horn of Africa division in the German Foreign office. I was a witness to much of the events and I can state categorically that Ambassador Prinz is certainly not the villain that your article has tried to portray him. Berlin Town was one of the four Houses of the Bo School at its foundation 1906. At the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 Manchester replaced the name Berlin. In the 1990s OBBA tried with Ambassador Karl Prinz's help to recreate a Berlin Town and had even invited him as Guest Speaker at our Speech and Prize-Giving Day ceremony. We resisted the NPRC's pressure to cancel the invitation until the Ambassador himself withdrew with regret. We got Charles Margai to substitute him at short notice and what a marvellous job he did too.

AllAfrica.com

Wednesday, 18 June 2009

Liberia: Unachievable Recommendations Must Be Avoided -Former Sierra Leonean TRC Chair Cautions

Monrovia — Unachievable recommendations to please victims or perpetrators of the Liberian civil conflict and sacrifice the Government on the altar of destructive criticisms must be avoided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia, the former chair of the TRC of Sierra Leone has cautioned.

But retired Bishop Joseph Humper said it is incumbent upon government to ensure that the recommendations of the TRC are given serious consideration they deserve.

Bishop Humper said taking the lead in considering the implementation of the TRC recommendations would go a long way in encouraging international partners to provide the support needed especially considering the enormous task facing the government for the rehabilitation and rebuilding of the political, social and economic infrastructures that had been destroyed as a result of the conflict.

Bishop Humper was speaking Monday at the Unity Conference Center in Virginia when he delivered the keynote address at the opening of the weeklong National Reconciliation Conference of the TRC.

He Said the TRC report is about life and death, saying it will constitute a road map to moving towards a brighter future.

“It is about rebuilding a new nation where justice, peace, tolerance (political tolerance), peaceful co-existence, love, forgiveness and unity must be embraced by all without exception. It is about nationals giving unsolicited support for the political, social, economic and infrastructural development of this nation.”

He warned that impunity must not be sacrificed for personal aggrandizement or undue disadvantage against innocent citizens. Bishop Humper however cautioned that the TRC should not pass the buck – give the government the unenviable task of doing anything that would in the long run “rock the ship of love, peace, unity and common solidarity.”

“I can say categorically that some if not many of the “perpetrators” are still alive and perhaps enjoying more luxury than the 85%-90% of innocent citizens who continue to struggle for survival,” he added.

He said the intensity with which the TRC conducted its activities would yield great dividend when the transparency, sincerity and confidentiality required by the TRC is maintained and respected.

Bishop Humper said that creating a semblance of discord among commissioners and giving an appearance of nursing interest groups would culminate in compromising the integrity of the commission and ultimately the credibility of the final report.

He cautioned delegates at the conference to deliberate with preconceived notions or ideas of seeking not the interest of perpetrators but mother Liberia.

TRC Chairman Counsellor Jerome Verdier urged Liberians to put aside the things that divided the nation and build on those things that unite the country.

“We need to respect the rights of all our people and uphold the rule of law so that justice is done to all persons without fear or favor.”

To succeed at reconciliation, he said, Liberians need to change the way we run our government and make sure that the resources and wealth of the nation benefit all the people in an equitable and fair manner.

“We cannot be content with the standards of living in our country and the way things are done. We need to build a functioning society where exclusion and marginalization and oppressive governments will be no more,” he said.

The National Reconciliation Conference is aimed at affording Liberians a final opportunity in the current TRC process to impact the TRC’s peace building initiatives, discuss the issues that led the nation to conflict and division and begin the process of reconciliation aimed at bringing closure to Liberia’s conflict past.

The conference will provide an occasion for soliciting the contribution of all Liberians to the reconciliation process and ensure that the TRC process is inclusive leading to its final report which will be representative of the views of a broad spectrum of the Liberian society.

The conference will also establish a national consensus on the implementation of the TRC recommendations and create a forum where victims and perpetrators will engage each other in public demonstration of reconciliation, healing and forgiveness, aimed at setting off the nation’s reconciliation agenda.

Liberians from the 15 counties, the Diaspora, government functionaries, stakeholders, TRC local and international partners and civil society organizations are represented.

New Democrat (Monrovia)

Wednesday, 17 June 2009

Liberia: Did Govt Boycott TRC?

As the much-hailed Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) winds-up its activities with reports that it could present many political actors for prosecution due to their war-time roles, one of its last conferences is being held without the presence of the President, her ministers and members of the Legislature.

TRC chairman, Jerome Verdier, confirmed Tuesday that invitations were extended the President, members of the National Legislature including the Speaker and the Senate Pro-tempt, but said they give no reason why they failed to attend or designate a proxy.

Contacted Monday as to why she did not attend the current conference that has brought together many international actors, the President's office said the invitation arrived too late and that it coincided with another meeting of the Methodist Church on climate change that the President had to attend.

Presidential Press Secretary Cyrus Badio, contacted for more details Tuesday, said the TRC also seemed disorganized, since at the time of the invitation, it had no idea who its guest speaker would be. He said the TRC was toying with a speaker from Nigeria and former Ghanaian President JJ Rawlings. Moreover, he said invitations to the President are given at least one month in advance due to many activities and schedules. The TRC invitation arrived at the Executive Mansion on June 1 2009.

He said a contributing factor for the President not attending is that the TRC conference seemed in disarray, and that she could not send a proxy because the process is too important to demand her presence. He also regretted that the letter inviting the resident came from the TRC's Executive Secretary, Mr. Nathaniel Kwabo, instead of its chairman, Mr. Verdier.

Asked why not a single minister of Government or legislator attended the reconciliation coherence, Mr. Badio said he could not speak for them.

At the National Legislature where an invitations were equally extended to members and its leadership, Senate Pro-tempt, Cletus Wotorson, according to his spokesperson could not also honor the invitation because according to him, it arrived two days to the program, meaning last Saturday. The program began on Monday.

Senator Wotorson's spokesman, Herbert Johnson said the Pro-tempt was also busy handling the funeral ceremony of his childhood friend, but questions whether the TRC held any consultation leading to the conference.

At the House of Representative, Speaker Alex Tyler could not be reached for comment because according to the House's spokesperson, Isaac Reed, Speaker Tyler was at the 2009/2010 budget hearing.

Also absence from the opening of the TRC Reconciliation Conference Monday were two Commissioners, Vice Chair Dede Dolopei and Commissioner Pearl Brown-Bull, Both Commissioners were two of three Commissioners who dissented on the TRC's first preliminary report recommending prosecution for various warlords.

The TRC's week long National Reconciliation Conference is expected to afford Liberians a final opportunity in the current TRC process to impact the TRC's peace building initiatives, discuss the issues that led the nation to conflict and division and begin the process of reconciliation aimed at bringing closure to Liberia's conflict past.

The deliberations will also complement issues that featured during the TRC Regional County Consultations and the TRC process in general. Delegates from the political subdivision of Liberia, civil society and other stakeholders will make presentations on how cohesiveness and national reconciliation can be attained in Liberia.

The opening ceremony was graced by foreign diplomats, amongst them the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL), and Ambassadors of some foreign missions here but some key national players such as the President, Speaker, and Senate Pro-tempt, were absence.

Voice of America

Monday, 15 June 2009

Hague Puts Spokeswoman On Trial

By Lisa Bryant

Paris

A former spokeswoman for the U.N. war crimes court for the former Yugoslavia has gone on trial on charges of disclosing confidential information in a book she published after leaving her job.



AP Photo

The trial of Florence Hartmann, an ex-spokeswoman for the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, is being cast as a battle between the right to free speech versus the importance of keeping sensitive information private.

Hartmann is a former journalist for France's leading *Le Monde* newspaper, who covered the Balkan wars in the 1990s before joining The Hague-based court. After leaving the spokesman's post in 2008, she published a book and wrote several articles on the court's activities.

The U.N. court argues the information she published, including allegations linking Serbia to atrocities in the Balkans, jeopardizes the court's ability to preserve the confidentiality of state secrets.

Florence Hartmann presents her book *Peace and Punishment* in Sarajevo (File)

But Hartmann's lawyer claimed the information had already been made publicly available by journalists, court judges and Serbian officials. Free speech advocates, including the Paris-based Reporters Without Borders, have also taken up Hartmann's cause.

Reporters Without Borders' Benoit Hervieux says the trial could set a dangerous precedent.

"The International Criminal Tribunal should be trying war criminals and not journalists. And what Florence Hartmann wrote was not a contempt of court. It was an explanation about the workings of the tribunal, and the content and desired effect of these decisions. It is absolutely unfair to put Florence Hartmann on trial for these reasons," Hervieux said.

Reporters Without Borders has posted the controversial parts of Hartmann's book on its Web site in a show of support. If found guilty, Hartmann faces up to seven years in jail and a fine of about \$140,000.

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 17 June 2009

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

International Clips on Liberia

International Clips on West Africa

Ports Workers Go Berserk

Freetown, Jun 17, 2009 (Concord Times/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- Work came to a halt yesterday at the Sierra Leone Ports Authority, Cline Town, as aggrieved casual and regular workers of the establishment went on the rampage because of what they referred to as the failure of management and government to address their concerns. The grievance of the workers was said to have stemmed from alleged partiality on the part of the management in granting permanent working status to the workers but also because of poor conditions of service. One of the irate workers, Mohamed Kamara told Concord Times that they have been deprived by the management of the opportunity to work as permanent staff, claiming that "the institution is employing people outside to work as staff."

U.S.\$5 Million for Poor Rural Women

Jun 17, 2009 (Concord Times/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- UNICEF Country Representative Tuesday disclosed that five million United States dollars have been donated by the Canadian government to the government and people of Sierra Leone to support programs aimed at improving access to healthcare services for impoverished and rural community women. Geert Capellaere, who made the revelation during commemoration of the Day of the African Child at the Miatta conference centre in Freetown, said it was not the responsibility of the Health ministry alone to cater for the survival of children in the country. He said Sierra Leone has a good policy that guarantees the rights of every child and pregnant woman to have access to proper healthcare services, but that in most cases pregnant women and children find it difficult to meet the demand of proper medical attention.

Local Media – Newspaper

Several Government Entities Call for Budgetary Increment

(The Inquirer, The Informer, Daily Observer, National Chronicle, Liberian Express, Heritage, Liberian Journal)

- Several entities of government have called for increment in their respective draft budgets for fiscal year 2009/2010.
- The entities include the Education Ministry, University of Liberia, William V.S. Tubman Technical College and Internal Affairs Ministry.
- The appeals by the ministries were contained in their presentations during a budget hearing.
- Education Minister Dr. Joseph Korto said the budget of the ministry does not meet both local and international requirements on support to education and said an additional eight million US dollars was required to recruit qualified teachers and cut down volunteer teachers.
- During the hearing, U.L. President Emmet Dennis said the University must be empowered financially saying academic malpractices at the State-run University were due to the lack of funds to hire qualified instructors and staff.
- Meanwhile, the University of Liberia Student Union (ULSU) has characterized the Draft National Budget as a 'filter sold for breeding corruption, which would leave millions of tax payers' hard-earned dollars in the hands of 'economic vampires and vultures'.

UNMIL to Have Nearly 8,000 Troops until 2011 Elections in Liberia

(New Democrat, The Inquirer, Public Agenda, The News, Liberian Express)

- The media reports that United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Mr. Alian Le Roy has announced that the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has forwarded to the UN Security Council the report of the Technical Assessment Team that recently visited Liberia.
- Addressing a news conference in Monrovia yesterday at the end of a three-day visit to the country, Mr. Le Roy said the report included recommendations for the second phase of the UNMIL drawdown process.
- In his recommendation, Mr. Ban proposed that the Council authorize the continuation of UNMIL's troop strength of nearly 8,000 until after the 2011 elections and that the Mission continue to "include the conduct of free and fair elections on the list of core benchmarks" for an eventual drawdown.
- Meanwhile, the U.N. Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations has decried the issue of corruption in the country saying it has the potential to scare away investors and donors.

135 Filipino Peacekeepers Get U.N. Medal

(The Informer, The Analyst)

- UN Envoy, Ellen Margrethe Løj has reminded military peacekeepers from the Philippines serving in the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to uphold the UN values of integrity, professionalism and respect for the people and communities they serve.
- Speaking when she awarded UN peacekeeping medals to 135 peacekeepers for their contribution to peace and stability in Liberia, SRSG Løj said the Philippine military officers have discharged their duties with discipline and rigor.
- Also speaking at the medals ceremony, the Contingent Commander, Lieutenant Colonel Arnel said the contingent's participation in UNMIL is a manifestation of their firm resolves to become active and committed partners of the UN in bringing peace and stability to Liberia and other nations.

Ex-Rebel Generals Beg For Clemency at National Reconciliation Conference

(The News)

- The leader of the defunct ULIMO-K warring faction, Alhaji Kromah and two former feared rebel generals are begging for clemency for their roles in the war.
- Mr. Kromah on Monday begged Liberians and those victimized by their fighters to pardon them saying the ongoing National Reconciliation Conference taking place in Monrovia did was not about identifying culprits.
- Also asking for forgiveness was the Taylor-led militia General, Roland Duo who cautioned delegates to put aside personal feelings so that the peace in the country can be sustained.
- Also expressing remorse for his war time role, Ex- General Boi Bleju Boi of the defunct Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) appealed for Liberians to put the past behind them and move ahead.

MOE Signs US\$1.4M Contract for 40 Schools

(Daily Observer)

- The Ministry of Education (MOE), in collaboration with Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment (LACE) have signed an agreement worth US\$1.4 million with 20 Liberian-owned firms for the construction of 40 public schools across the country.
- At the signing ceremony, Education Minister, Dr. Joseph D.Z. Korto called on the contractors to speed up the building projects as there was huge demand on Government for providing more public schools in the country.

Local Media – Star Radio (*News monitored today at 09:00 am*)

President Sirleaf Makes Additional Appointments in Government

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has made additional appointments in Government.

- Dr. Momo Rogers has been named Director of the Cabinet at the Ministry of State for Presidential Affairs while Mr. James Dorbor Jallah becomes Deputy Minister for Regional & Sectoral Planning, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs.
- According to an Executive Mansion release, the President has also named Mr. Samuel Brisbane as Director of the Special Security Service (SSS) replacing Mr. Victor Helb who has been appointed as the new Minister of National Security.
- Prior to his appointment as SSS Director, Mr. Brisbane served as the Deputy for Operations at the Special Security Service.

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

Expenditure Entities Call for Budgetary Increment

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

MSF Belgium Seeks More Support for Health Sector

- MSF Belgium Head of Missions, Mr. Charles Menya has called on international donors to give more support to the Health sector in Liberia.
- Speaking during programmes marking the celebration of the Day of the African Child, Mr. Menya said there was an urgent need to increase the capacity of the sector to assist sick children.
- He said the lack of beds was denying children access to health care in the country saying there are over 430,000 children in Monrovia age 0-15 years, with only 335 beds available to them.
- Mr. Menya also reminded Liberians that MSF was an emergency entity and would soon hand over its projects to the Health ministry.

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

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

War Victims with Disabilities Seek Reparation from Government

- A group of war victims is recommending to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRC) reparation for those made disabled as a result of the war.
- The group, War Victims Disability Association of Liberia said it will stage a march tomorrow under the theme "March for the Wounded" which is geared towards securing a better future for its members.
- The plea for the war victims reparation comes at a time the TRC is conducting a National Reconciliation Conference.

SOS Call for Government-owned Redemption Hospital

- A Montserrado County Lawmaker, Representative Edward Forh has issued an SOS call to rescue the Redemption Hospital on the Bushrod Island suburb from total collapse.
- In an interview, Representative Forh said the hospital needed an increase in its budgetary allotment to effectively run. He said MSF Belgium has begun scaling down its support to the hospital and would be pulling out in two months.
- The Montserrado lawmaker said the current allotment in the proposed 2009/ 2010 budget of over three hundred thousand dollars was very minimum to sustain the hospital saying the medical centre needed US\$3 million to provide effective medical services to the country's population.

The Analyst

Wednesday, 17 June 2009

Liberia: Former Warlord Cautions Liberians To 'Beware of History'

Monrovia — There is no doubt in the minds of most Liberians that peace and reconciliation will continue to be illusive national desires unless stakeholders identified the grey areas in Liberia's social order and destroy them through consensus-seeking dialogue. One such Liberians is Prof. Alhaji G.V. Kromah. He believes one hardened grey area is the Country-Congo Divide – a taboo subject some say is better served by the denial of its existence rather than by the acknowledgement of its damaging extent and the holding of national dialogue. He was out yesterday, treading this so-called forbidding and slippery ground. The Analyst reports.

Former Liberian Information Minister, Alhaji G.V. Kromah, has challenged the ongoing National Reconciliation Conference and all peace-loving Liberians to beware of history and endeavor to bridge the Country-Congo Divide. It was also imperative, he said, for these stakeholders in the Liberian peace and reconciliation process to, in the process, face reality and call a spade a spade so that genuine peace and reconciliation can be achieved rather than stage-managed.

The University of Liberia professor threw the challenge yesterday when addressed the reconciliation conference, which the organizers (Truth & Reconciliation Commission TRC) said was part of the final TR process designed to give delegates the opportunity to impact the peace building initiatives, discuss the issues that led the nation to conflict and division, and begin the process of reconciliation aimed at bringing closure to Liberia's conflict past.

Kromah said the Congo/Country people divide was sometimes conveniently brushed aside or intellectualized by individuals who do not want to face reality.

“This animosity has expressed itself in various political and economic attitudes and choices at the national and individual levels,” he told applauding delegates at the jam-packed Unity Conference Center in Virginia, outside Monrovia.

He said coalitions of people across these two groups have done some good, but at the end of the day; it boils down to who feels threatened as a group.

He observed that this was what President Sirleaf has tried to get rid of, establishing a broad-based administration, but like the late President William R. Tolbert, she may have collaborators who do not appreciate the historical demands that the transition must flow rapidly and freely, not bringing along the debris of marginalization staring stark.

“Beware of History,” he cautioned the delegates and all those involved in the search for peace in Liberia. He though fell short of saying what exactly about history that should be learnt and beware of in order to maintain peace in Liberia and ensure stability.

“It would be difficult for Liberia to have undisturbed development and durable reconciliation if we do not put the two opposing major Liberian groups to the conference table,” Prof. Kromah said, emphasizing that there was no historical account of Liberia that does not identify the conflict being principally between the two groups.

He said the two groups may not be exclusive of one another under some circumstances, the lingering mentality that “we must be in control” is found in every major activity of our national life.

Prof. Kromah, Standard Bearer of the All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP), said the schism between indigenous and so-called Americo Liberian/Congo people continues to breed quiet and sometimes open distrust among individuals in the Liberian community.

“The tendency for a certain group of people to continue to feel that they can better control or govern Liberia is injustice and is at the foundation of national disunity and underdevelopment,” he said.

He further noted that it was no secret that the nature of Liberia’s political and social prejudices scares its people away from one another and keeps them from collaborating with one another for national development.

“Liberia has still not achieved the political maturity and mindset required to get rid of the vestiges of anti-democracy,” he said.

Interrupted several times by claps of approval from the participants, Prof. Kromah said the need for reconciliation should not be confined to the ethnic groups.

“It is an open secret that there is still steep animosity between the indigenous and Americo-Liberians. This is why 1979 was set by the drafters of the TRC statute as the cutoff date for Liberia’s conflict, the period of the rice riots and grave challenge to the ruling hegemony,” he noted.

Prof. Kromah said some accuse the Americo Liberians of presenting themselves to the Western world as the best to govern Liberia because the indigenous people are filled with hate toward each other.

“Others say Americo Liberians have been behind all of the insurrections in Liberia, using their contacts and money to return to power since the removing the late President William R. Tolbert,” he said.

Continuing his anonymous observer references, Prof. Kromah said yet others allege that the Americo Liberians are active behind the split between and among a number of the country’s ethnic groups through their surrogates, patronage and tokenism as well as instigating religious fears.

Prof. Kromah, one of the most educated Liberians with at least five undergraduate and graduate degrees in economics, law, communication and international law, said he does not believe all of these allegations.

He emphasized however that all Liberians should have learned the lessons by now that no one group can rule the country at the top all the times.

He said marginalization has lived at the bottom of all of Liberia’s conflicts. There is a lot of progress today and the momentum for democratic empowerment will eventually crush the “upper-crust” mentality that has lingered on, he said.

According to him, a reconciliation conference between Americo/Congo Liberians and the indigenous will produce a soft landing for all Liberians once and for all from a period of distrust, marginalization to a collectivity of a nation for all with equal opportunity.

The former Information Minister said defending what is right does not mean you are against someone.

He told the Reconciliation Conference that there should be no room for hate and avarice in the new Liberia, noting that advocating for one’s rights should not mean that one is against someone else.

“This is one of the greatest defects in our country,” Prof. Kromah said. “Though I am married to an Americo-Liberian, I am painted as anti-Congo every time I talk about the rights of the indigenous people.”

He said the war should have made Liberians to realize that they were going to stay here, and that no group has monopoly over power if peace and development is the national objective.

On the issue of justice and reconciliation, the Law Professor said justice has multiple implications.

He then posed a number of rhetorical questions: “Is it justice to put this country through turbulence? Is it justice when certain public figures that control important corridors of power can be left out and a number of others are identified for prosecution even though all of them may similarly be liable? Is it justice that the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioners have continuously disagreed among themselves on fundamental issues and that may have affected the manner in which information has be wrongfully retained or deleted within the commission? Isn’t it justice that Liberians have continued to make amends, especially among the ethnic groupings as reflected through election results and peaceful co-existence?”

Professor Kromah ended his remarks by apologizing again to the Liberian people for any wrongdoing that may have been carried out during the war by people associated with him.

He said his erstwhile ULIMO-K faction did not adopt any unlawful policy, but that it was conceivable that lawless individuals could have been in the corridors.

He then “sincerely apologizes and asks for forgiveness for their misbehaviour and actions”.

Forward

Wednesday, 17 June 2009

<http://www.forward.com/articles/108004/>

When Bad People Want To Be Jewish

By Rebecca Dube

Can someone be too evil to convert?

That's one question raised by the reported conversion to Judaism of former Liberian dictator Charles Taylor, who is currently awaiting trial on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in The Hague. Taylor's wife, Victoria, told the BBC that the accused war criminal is "now a Jew. He's practicing Judaism."

The authenticity of Taylor's conversion is doubtful, to say the least. There is no evidence that he has been studying with a rabbi or that his conversion is anything but self-proclaimed. Victoria Taylor also told the BBC interviewer that her husband still believes in Christ's divinity, so the former warlord seems to be as unclear on the basic tenets of Judaism as he is on the principles of international human rights.

But what if Taylor sincerely wanted to become Jewish? What if the former dictator — accused of creating an army of child soldiers who went on murderous rampages — actually, genuinely wanted to convert? Would any rabbi take him on as a student? Should they?

The answer: Yes, no or maybe, depending on whom you ask. Questions of good and evil aren't always as black and white as they seem, and opinions varied widely among religious leaders contacted by the Forward.

"My first reaction is, we have enough natural-born Jewish bums, we don't have to import one from the outside," said Rabbi Mitchell Wohlberg of Beth Tfiloh Congregation in Baltimore, the largest Modern Orthodox synagogue in America. It's true that religion can change people for the better, Wohlberg said, but he added, "The Jewish community is not a recovery house."

Repentance and forgiveness are important concepts in Judaism, but occasionally a person commits acts so heinous as to disqualify him or her forever from conversion, said Rabbi Robert Levine of Congregation Rodeph Sholom, one of the largest Reform synagogues in New York City.

"You would not permit a Hitler or a Haman or a Charles Taylor to say, 'Hey, I want to change my ways [and convert],' when they've shown themselves to be a monster," Levine said. "Judaism is an interlocking system of rituals? and ethics.... There is a small group of people whose total lack of ethics and morality would dismiss them at the outset."

But not everyone would close the synagogue doors to Taylor.

"The whole idea of conversion is that one is changing radically," said Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of public affairs for Agudath Israel of America, an ultra-Orthodox umbrella organization. "An intelligent beit din would have to see some evidence of him wanting to change his ways, but crime in and of itself is not a bar to conversion."

One person who knows firsthand about the spiritual transformation of people with evil pasts is Rabbi Michael Weisser. When he was working in Lincoln, Neb., a white supremacist named Larry Trapp began threatening and harassing him and his family. Trapp, state head of the Nebraska Ku Klux Klan, had a long history of terrorizing black, Asian and Jewish families in the area.

Weisser decided to confront Trapp. He called the KKK leader's racist hot line and left messages, until one day, he finally got Trapp on the phone and managed to strike up a conversation. Eventually, Weisser and his wife met with Trapp and inspired him to renounce racism and antisemitism. Eventually, Trapp converted to Judaism at Weisser's Reform synagogue, B'nai Jeshurun — the very synagogue that Trapp once had planned to bomb.

Anyone can change, and therefore, anyone can be a candidate for conversion, Weisser told the Forward — even someone as bad as Larry Trapp or Charles Taylor.

“There’s a spark of decency in everybody, no matter how bad they’ve been,” Weisser said. “The truth is, human nature is good, not bad.”

In Trapp’s case, Weisser said, the former KKK Grand Dragon truly repented for his many sins and expressed remorse, asked for forgiveness from those he’d wronged and tried to set things right. Trapp called and met with people he used to harass to apologize and beg their forgiveness, and he spoke publicly to high schools and other groups about how he had repudiated bigotry and hate.

When Trapp first mentioned converting to Judaism, Weisser said he was concerned that guilt was the motivation. But Trapp studied hard, reading about 50 serious books on Judaism, and showed a genuine desire to join the faith for positive reasons.

“If we believe what we say we believe [as Jews], how can you go against it?” Weisser asked. “I think when Larry died, he died a good Jew.”

For someone with an evil past, the process of teshuva, or atonement, should happen before conversion is considered, said Rabbi Morley Feinstein of University Synagogue, a Reform congregation in Los Angeles, who pointed to Trapp’s conversion as an example — but a very rare one.

“I’m happy to study with anyone, but that doesn’t mean I’m going to take that individual on as a candidate for Judaism,” Feinstein said.

Both sides of the debate can point to precedents in the Talmud. The Roman Emperor Nero, known for his tyranny and debauchery, may be the most infamous convert: While historical sources say he committed suicide after the Roman Senate ordered his execution, the Talmud holds that Nero fled Rome and converted to Judaism.

If Nero did it, Shafran asked, why couldn’t Taylor? “The implication [in the Talmud] was that it was a good and laudable thing,” Shafran said.

But Wohlberg remembered another story in the Talmud, one about King David — himself the descendant of one of Judaism’s most celebrated converts, Ruth — telling a group called the Gibeonites that the Jewish people were compassionate and modest and performed acts of loving kindness. “Only he who cultivates these three characteristics is fit to join this nation,” the Talmud says.

Too bad for Taylor, Wohlberg said: “I think he’s out on three swings.”

Of course, most rabbis don’t have to worry about an international war criminal or a KKK leader showing up for conversion class. But what about everyday criminals, sinners and just-plain-bad people who might want to join the tribe? There’s certainly no background check required for conversion to Judaism. While most rabbis will get a general sense of a candidate’s moral and ethical grounding during the yearlong conversion process, the basic question, “Are you a good person?” is unlikely to be asked.

The “Guidelines for Rabbis Working With Prospective Gerim,” created by the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 2001, is silent on evaluating the moral and ethical history of would-be Jews, said Rabbi Jeff Goldwasser of Congregation Beth Israel, a Reform synagogue in the northwest Massachusetts town of North Adams.

In his experience with converts, Goldwasser said, “I feel confident in saying that the candidates who make it all the way through the process are those with a strong understanding of Jewish beliefs and ideals and who wish to apply those standards to themselves.” Still, he said, it might be a good idea for future guidelines to include something explicit about considering the character of potential converts.

Even if that happens, rabbis still will have to consult their own consciences for guidance if a Charles Taylor type knocks on their doors, seeking to join Judaism.

“Agreeing to bring someone into the covenant is not just a matter of checking off boxes,” Levine said. “It’s a question of, is this person really ready to stand at Sinai?”

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Vincent Signs Agreement with Najjar, Expects Tribunal Trials to Start Next Year

Special Tribunal for Lebanon Registrar Robin Vincent and Justice Minister Ibrahim Najjar signed an agreement to set up a bureau that represents the court in Lebanon.

Vincent, who resigned his post on April 21, said Wednesday that the office will be "the link between the tribunal and Lebanon because the court's headquarters is not in Lebanon."

"We need a presence in Beirut and an office that provides services five or six days a week. The staff will take charge of continuously providing the press with information," he told reporters and representatives of non-governmental organizations at Phoenicia hotel.

Vincent said the staff will enjoy diplomatic immunity but the court will guarantee that the employees do not misuse their immunity.

He said the court's budget for 2010 reached \$65 million, a \$14 million increase from the current year's budget. He also told reporters that he met with the representatives of the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council in New York asking them for more funding.

"There is a possibility they could increase their contributions," Vincent said, adding that the Lebanese government and people are interested in the contributions of other countries no matter how limited the amount was.

He also unveiled that trials are expected to start next year although he said he wasn't aware of investigation into ex-Premier Rafik Hariri's assassination.

The justice ministry's press office said in a statement that Vincent's follower will be appointed in the next few days and will assume his duties on July.

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Congo Denies Instigating ICC Charges Against Former VP Bemba

By Peter Clottey

The Democratic Republic of Congo government has denied involvement in the war crime charges against former Vice President Jean Pierre Bemba.

The denial follows the International Criminal Court (ICC) ruling Monday that Bemba should stand trial on charges of war crimes.



Bemba's militia group has been accused of raping women and children as well as killing innocent civilians during clashes with government forces, charges Bemba denies.

He was arrested on an ICC warrant during a visit to Brussels in May 2008.

Kikaya Bin Karubi, the Congolese ambassador designate to the United Kingdom, told VOA Kinshasa does not condone crimes against humanity.

Congolese army soldiers hold a position on a street corner in Kinshasa after clashes with soldiers loyal to Jean-Pierre Bemba.

"The government of the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as the population here would like to see justice do its work... and the President Joseph Kabila has said it clearly that there would be zero tolerance when it comes to perpetrators of crimes against humanity," Karubi said.

He said Kinshasa doesn't have the power to control a decision of the ICC.

"I don't think that the... government is that powerful to be able to manipulate international justice. Really, that is a big insult to the international community," he said.

Karubi said Bemba's followers should establish his innocence.

"Supporters of former Vice President Jean Pierre Bemba think that he is not guilty. Now the international justice system gives them an opportunity to go and prove it before the tribunal," Karubi said.

He said Kinshasa will contain any backlash from Bemba's supporters due to the ICC's ruling.

"The government will take up its responsibilities to stabilize the situation here," he said.

Karubi said Kinshasa does not wield the authority to shield the former vice president from the ICC's arrest warrant abroad.

"Let me tell you that the Congolese police have no powers in Brussels. That is a foreign country. If anybody has to protect him in Belgium, maybe it is the Belgian police. When he was in Congo he was protected. He was safe here," Karubi said.



Jean-Pierre Bemba faces war crime charges

Bemba was one of four vice-presidents in a transitional government in Congo between 2003 and 2006. But he lost the 2006 election to President Joseph Kabila.