

**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, 7 January 2010

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
Martin Royston-Wright
Ext 7217

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Concord Times
Thursday, 7 January 2010

AFRC spokesman defends January 6

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By Mohamed
Massaquoi

invasion

Former spokesman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, AFRC, Wednesday recalled that the infamous January 6, 1999 invasion of Freetown by a combined group of AFRC and RUF rebels was appropriate as the attack led to the signing of the Lome peace agreement between the Revolutionary United Front and the then ousted Sierra Leone Peoples Party, SLPP-led government.

Aliou Kamara, now national coordinator of President Koroma's attitudinal and behavioural change campaign, charged that though the attack saw the destruction of lives and properties, yet it was significant as most of them were on the death penalty row.

"I worked with the AFRC junta in the interest of my country because at that time, our territorial integrity was seriously bombarded by ECOMOG forces. The then

government was not prepared for peace talks but after the January 6 invasion and the

atrocities committed, the politicians decided to dialogue with the rebels. It is incumbent on all

Sierra Leoneans to observe

Contd. page 3



Former AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma
... still at large

AFRC spokesman defends January 6 invasion

From page 1

this day because a lot of destruction was done but it was a prize for the peace we are now enjoying," he said.

Kamara condemned the establishment of the Special Court for Sierra Leone to try those who bear the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed during the war, as according to him, it was not the best way to harmonize peace and stability in the country.

"Most of those who committed serious crimes are still living within our communities and only few of them have been tried by the Special Court. It was a wise decision to spend more money to set up the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC to actually know the root causes of the conflict instead of creating job opportunities for people by establishing the Special Court.

"I worked for the very SLPP government that sent me to the Pademba Road maximum prison for judiciously working for my people. The reason was that I wanted them to know that working for the AFRC was a national sacrifice. The current government is working to ensure that there is peace and stability.

"The ABC campaign is the solution to all the difficulties we went through in this country," he concluded.

United Nations  Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 6 January 2010

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

International Clips on Liberia

Ansar Burney Trust secures release of 6 Pakistanis in Liberia

LONDON, Jan 6 (APP)- Six Pakistani men arrested and accused of terrorism in Liberia have been released through the efforts of Ansar Burney Trust International (UK) after a three month legal campaign by the human rights organization. The Vice Chairman of the Ansar Burney Trust, Syed Fahad Burney, said in a statement Wednesday that the 6 men, all Pakistani nationals, were travelling on forged American passports from Liberia to Germany in search of better employment opportunities when they were arrested at Monrovia airport in September 2009. However, the men were not charged with travelling on forged documentation as they should have been, but were instead charged with terrorism once the Liberian authorities discovered they were Pakistani nationals and Muslims. According to Fahad the families of these men in Pakistan contacted Mr. Ansar Burney, Chairman of the Ansar Burney Trust and Expert Advisor to the United Nations on Human Rights, in Geneva, who launched a legal and moral campaign to have the men released. After a three month long legal battle and the lobbying of Liberian authorities, the Ansar Burney Trust successfully arranged for the release of Pakistanis from terrorism charges.

Liberia debates logging its tropical timber

By Myles Estey — Special to GlobalPost

Published: January 6, 2010

MONROVIA, **Liberia** — Liberia is about to restart logging of its valuable tropical hardwood timber, but environmental activists warn that even with strict regulations the new commercial activity may cause terrible ecological damage. The United Nations placed an embargo on timber from Liberia in 2003 to stop former president Charles Taylor's use of illegally logged "blood timber" to fund his violent rule. The international sanctions effectively prohibited the commercial logging or exporting of any timber products. Previously the export of hardwoods was estimated to make up 60 percent of Liberia's GDP. The U.N. ban has now been lifted and new, innovative regulations for domestic forestry have been implemented. Seven companies are in the final stages of getting permission to start cutting down one of West Africa's most valuable natural resources: untouched rainforest. This does not come without controversy. Proponents argue that logging will produce as many as 40,000 much needed jobs and jump-start a multi-million dollar industry in Liberia's fledgling economy. Critics question how accurate the projected employment statistics are, how the new regulations will be enforced and if the financial benefits will balance against the loss of pristine forests, an increasingly rare commodity in Africa.

International Clips on West Africa

Guinea

U.S. Wants Guinean Leader to Remain Abroad, Allow Civilian Rule

Jan. 6 (Bloomberg) -- The U.S. said Guinean junta leader Moussa Dadis Camara, who has been in a Moroccan hospital since an attempted assassination last month, shouldn't return to the West African nation to allow the restoration of civilian rule. U.S. Assistant Secretary for State Johnnie Carson yesterday met with Guinea's interim leader, General Sekouba Konate, in the Moroccan capital,

Rabat, to push for "a civilian-led transition government leading to free, fair and transparent democratic elections," the U.S. State Department said in an e-mailed transcript of a media briefing yesterday. Such a transition would be more likely if Camara didn't return to Guinea, the State Department said. Camara has had head surgery in Morocco after being shot by a presidential guard in Conakry, the capital. The army captain has struggled to maintain his grip on power after staging a bloodless coup in December 2008, a day after the death of President Lansana Conte, who ruled the nation for two decades. At least 156 civilians were killed or went missing and 109 women were raped or otherwise sexually violated when Guinean troops in September crushed a protest by people opposing Camara's plans to run in elections slated for this month, according to a United Nations investigation.

Ivory Coast

Chelsea ace Droghba hopes fans recognise charity work

06.01.10 | tribalfootball.com

Didier Droghba hopes his fans around the world soon get to know about his charity work away from football. The first major project of the Didier Droghba Foundation is to build a new hospital in the city of Abidjan. "When I am in England we are only playing games, people don't have time to ask what we do when not playing football, and questions are about the games. It is difficult to know what we are doing, it is sad that people don't understand me but it is never too late," he said. "To open the hospital would be the best achievement of my life that would be my contribution to Ivory Coast. The minimum I can do is to make them feel important. "I left Ivory Coast when I was six. When you leave when you are young it makes you stronger, you always think about going back, about your country when you left. Every time I had the chance to come back, even if I spent seven years without coming, I missed it. That's why I'm really proud of my country.

Sierra Leone

S. Leone levies 15 pct tax on high-value diamonds

FREETOWN (Reuters) Jan 5- Sierra Leone has imposed a new 15 percent tax on exports of high-value diamonds, a government official said on Tuesday. The West African country, which is attempting to reverse years of economically debilitating mismanagement and corruption after a 1991-2002 civil war, charged as of December 28 an export tax of 15 percent of the value of stones worth more than \$500,000. "The new tax of 15 percent is a windfall," said Abdul Ignosse Koroma, deputy minister of mineral resources. "Diamonds exported under the former 6.5 percent (tax) were not in the interest of the country." Diamonds, many of which are dug in dangerous conditions by amateur miners, are the poor country's main source of foreign currency. A mining act passed last November raised taxes on diamonds to 6.5 percent from a previous 5 percent, and on gold and other precious metals to 5 percent from 4 percent. The former British colony aims to attract investors as it tries to rebuild its economy. As well as diamonds and titanium ore rutile, Sierra Leone has the potential to be a source of gold and iron ore.

Local Media – Newspaper

Suspended Minister Bropleh Disparage GAC's Draft Audit Report

(Heritage, The Inquirer, Public Agenda, In Profile, Daily Observer, The Analyst, The Informer, FrontPage)

- Suspended Information Minister, Dr. Laurence Bropleh has described as substandard, unprofessional and shrouded in inconsistencies the General Auditing Commission (GAC) draft audit report that indicted him for alleged financial impropriety.
- Addressing a news conference Tuesday, Dr. Bropleh challenged the GAC to prove he was culpable of misappropriating over US\$200,000 and vowed not to retribute the amount.

- He accused the commission of playing to public sentiments by unprofessionally releasing the draft report to the media even before those who sanction the probe received the copies.
- Meanwhile, Presidential Press Secretary Cyrus Badio said President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf will officially respond to the GAC's findings when the final report has been submitted to her.

Indian Government Grants Scholarship For Advance Studies to Police Officer

(The Inquirer, The Analyst, Daily Observer, Heritage)

- The first Liberian and nominee of the Government of Liberia to benefit from Indian Government scholarships for advanced studies, Mr. Vally M. Sheriff has left the country for India.
- Mr. Sheriff an employee of the Liberian National police (LNP) departed the country for New Delhi over the weekend to pursue studies in Advanced Finger Print Science and Computer at the National Crime Records Bureau in New Delhi.
- Three other applicants are due to leave the country next month to undertake graduate studies in Human Resource Planning and Development and international training Programme on Wind Turbine Technology and Application.
- A release from the India Honorary Consulate General in Monrovia said the training scholarships is the Indian Government's way of identifying with the Government of Liberia in its efforts to build the capacity of its human resources, particularly in support of its Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS).

USAID Gives Money for Girls' Education

(The Inquirer)

- The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has made available scholarship assistance grant to the Liberian Education Trust-Monrovia.
- The assistance will provide 450 scholarships for girls in primary and secondary schools.
- A Liberia Education Trust statement said the scholarship targets girls in Montserrado County but will include girls from Grand Cape Mount, Nimba, Margibi and Grand Bassa Counties.
- The statement said the scholarships assistance valued at US\$71,369 will cover the second semester of 2009/2010 and the first semester of 2010/2011 tuition of the beneficiaries.
- The Liberia Education Trust-Monrovia was launched in 2006 and one of its major focuses is to provide scholarships to boost girls' education.

Press Secretary Badio Dispels Media Reports Targeted Against President Sirleaf

(Daily Observer, National Chronicle)

- Presidential Press Secretary Cyrus Badio has dispelled media reports that President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is building a hospital in South Africa.
- Mr. Badio said the President and her children have no hospital in South Africa as reported in a local daily.
- He described the publication as a statement of imagination and a fabrication meant to defame the character of the President.

GAC Begins Audit of Ministry of Gender Today

(Public Agenda, The Informer, Heritage)

- The General Auditing Commission (GAC) today commenced a comprehensive audit of the financial statements and other related records of the Ministry of Gender and Development.
- In a release issued in Monrovia, the GAC said the audit would cover the period from July 1, 2006 to December 31, 2009.
- Sources say ahead of the commencement of the audit today, an audit-scare had hit the ministry and senior officials were holding "secret" meetings in preparation for the exercise.
- Some reports suggested that as a result of the audit-scare, Gender Minister Vabah Gayflor had been admitted to a local hospital although other reports hinted otherwise.

- A local radio station quoted insiders as saying that the Minister returned from the Belle Yellah Christmas visit- along with President Sirleaf- sick. The reports have not been independently verified.

Over 100 Public School Teachers in Kakata, Margibi County Set Up Road Block to Demand Salary Backlog

(The Inquirer)

- Troops of the United Nations Mission in Liberia intervened yesterday to remove a roadblock set up by angry public school teachers in demand of salary backlog.
- More than 100 teachers from nearby public schools joined others at the Booker Washington Institute in Kakata, Margibi County and set up a road block contending that local banks had failed to encash salary checks issued them by Government.
- Correspondents say traffic along the highway came to a standstill for nearly an hour before UNMIL move in to quiet the situation.

Former President War Crimes Trial Re-Starts Next Week

(New Democrat, Liberian Express)

- The trial of former President Charles Taylor is scheduled to begin a week from now as he continues his cross-examination.
- Mr. Taylor has been testifying in his own defense since July 14, 2009, trying to fend off 11 charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during Sierra Leone's civil conflict.
- He has pleaded not guilty to all charges against him.

Public Works Ministry Meets Liberian Engineers

(The Analyst, Public Agenda, National Chronicle)

- The Liberian Building Law Project Team charged with the responsibility to create building laws for the country has begun work with the holding of its first meeting at the Ministry of Public Works on Tuesday.
- The Team is revisiting the Liberian Zoning Laws and coming up with a system referred to as a 'Building Code' that would properly regulate the construction of buildings and other structures in an orderly manner in the city and other parts of the country.
- The Building Code, according to stakeholders when completed would direct and determine where factories, entertainment centres and residential buildings would be erected without combining storey buildings with ordinary buildings.
- Public Works Minister, Attorney Samuel Kofi Woods in his opening remarks said, the forum provided the opportunity for them to exchange views, adding that the 1955 zoning laws have seen massive disorder, increased of population and a constant violation of the zoning laws.

Local Media – Star Radio *(culled from website today at 09:00 am)*

Senate Makes Fresh Commitments To Pass Threshold Bill And Act On TRC Report

- Senator Wotorson said the Senate was prepared to promptly address concerns raised by Liberians on issues including the 'controversial' Population Threshold Bill and Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report.

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

Top Female Lawyer Wants Gender Minister Suspended

- A prominent Liberian female lawyer Cllr. Pearl Brown Bull has called for the immediate suspension of Gender Minister Varbah Gayflor.
- Cllr. Bull believes the allegation against Minister Gayflor is grave and deserves equal treatment as done to Information Minister Laurence Bropleh.
- A Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission investigation linked Minister Gayflor to the illegal disbursement and expenditure of about US\$23,000 representing allowances of employees at the ministry, some now dismissed.

- The former commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission said no crime should be viewed as lesser than the other contending that Minister Gayflor has transgressed.

Montserrado Lawmaker Meets LACC Deadline

- Montserrado County Representative Alomiza Ennos has clarified that she has declared her assets in line with the mandate of the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC).
- Representative Ennos said her assets were declared on December 29, 2009 before the assets declaration deadline.
- According to her the move to declare her assets was in line with best international practices.
- The Representative's clarification comes amid allegation by the LACC that the Legislature was not cooperating with the asset declaration requirement.
- Meanwhile, the Montserrado lawmaker has called on her colleagues to declare their assets as part of the promotion of good governance.
- But a fellow lawmaker of Montserrado County, Representative Kettehkumuehn Murray says there exist no law that compares lawmakers to declare their assets.

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

Public Works Ministry Meets Liberian Engineers

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

Guthrie Workers Frustrated Over Severance Pay

- Thousands of workers of the Guthrie Rubber Plantation have expressed frustration over the manner in which government is paying their severance benefits.
- The workers said they were expecting their four months back-pay but received only one month.
- According to them, each tapper was to receive US\$375 as back-pay but received only US\$52 each vowing to cease operation if government fails to pay them the full amount.

Radio Veritas *(News monitored today at 09:45 am)*

Suspended Minister Bropleh Dismisses Draft GAC's Audit Report

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

Police Probes A Man Who Sneaked Into President Sirleaf's Foreign Ministry Kitchen

- Reports say police are questioning an unidentified man who reportedly sneaked into President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Foreign Ministry Office kitchen.
- A source said the President's office staff and security personnel are still wondering how the man entered the kitchen.
- The reports have not been independently confirmed.

Amid GAC Audit, Gender Minister Falls Sick

DEA Arrests Nine For Possession of Illicit Drug

- Agents of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) in Margibi County have arrested nine persons in possession of narcotics.
- According to reports, the drug has a street value of more than twenty-two thousand Liberian dollars.
- DEA Margibi Commander said the nine suspects will be forwarded to court following preliminary investigation.
- He said the suspects were travelling to Monrovia from Bong County when the DEA agents were tipped-off that they had illicit drug in their possession.

Truth FM *(News monitored today at 10:00 am)*

Press Secretary Badio Dispels Media Reports Targeted Against President Sirleaf

Voice of America

Wednesday, 6 January 2010

ECOWAS Planning Guinea's Return to Democracy, Says Official

Peter Clottey | Washington, DC

The political director of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) says the regional bloc is negotiating with Guinea's military junta to establish a transitional government.

Abdelfatau Musah contends that ECOWAS does not want the predicament of the ailing junta leader to delay Guinea's transition to democratic rule.

General Sekouba Konate addresses troops at Camp Alpha Yaya Diallo, Guinea, 11 Dec 2009

"Our position has been to accompany the people of Guinea, including the CNDD (National Council for Democracy and Development) itself, as it moves rapidly to the restoration of a constitutional rule in the country," he said.

Guinea's interim leader, Sekouba Konate pledged a return to constitutional rule following his trip to Morocco where he visited junta leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara.

Captain Camara is still receiving medical treatment in Morocco, where he was flown soon after being shot by the former head of the presidential bodyguard on December 3.

Musah said the junta should not hinder Guinea's return to democracy.

"We do not want his predicament, his situation now to delay the transition to constitutional rule because there is CNDD and there is somebody who is acting for him. So all we have been fighting for all along is exactly what the U.S. and the European Union have asked Sekouba to do, that is, move rapidly towards the establishment of the transitional authority which will then work towards the restoration of constitutional rule in Guinea," Musah said.

The regional bloc imposed an arms embargo against Guinea and accused the junta of "mass human rights violations" after soldiers shot dead at least 150 unarmed opposition protesters. Musah says ECOWAS wants democracy in Guinea.

"The (ECOWAS) president (Mohammed Ibn Chambas) is putting forward a new proposal for the establishment of a transitional authority," Musah said.

Radio Netherlands Worldwide

Thursday, 7 January 2010

Lubanga trial: "This monster stole my childhood"

By H el ene Michaud

Trial of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo



Thomas Lubanga Dyilo:

Alleged founder of *Union des Patriotes Congolais* (UPC) and *the Forces patriotiques pour la lib eration du Congo* (FPLC); Alleged former Commander-in-Chief of the FPLC, since September 2002 and at least until the end of 2003. Alleged president of the UPC.

Charges:

1. Enlisting and conscripting of children under the age of 15 years into the FPLC and using them to participate actively in hostilities in the context of an international armed conflict from early September 2002 to 2 June 2003.
2. Enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 years into the FPLC and using them to participate actively in hostilities in the context of an armed conflict not of an international character from 2 June 2003 to 13 August 2003.

The trial of ex-congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga Dyilo resumes today at the International Criminal Court (ICC). The founder and leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC) who was a key player in the Ituri conflict is accused of enrolling children in his militia and making them take part in combat.

Here's the story of Yolande, an ex-child soldier in the DRC's Ituri District, told by RNW's H el ene Michaud. "This monster who stole my life should be jailed"

It is 5 pm when I enter the compound: dozens of radiant young girls, gathered with their toddlers, are ready to return home after a day at school. Most of them are single mothers, ex-child soldiers in the bloody war in Ituri district at the turn of the century.

In a small office nearby, Yolanda tells me how she became a soldier against her will at age 13. While attempting to flee the advancing militias her parents, she was raped by a soldier who then took her as his "wife". Her "husband" has taught her how to wield almost any type of weapon - gun, pistol, automatic rifle - and took her out with to pillage in neighbouring villages. She was forced to shoot people, she said, "otherwise he would kill me."

When I ask her if she has killed, she replies with a nervous laugh: "Yes, but only with stray bullets". The drugs she was forced to take "caused disturbance in the head, just like going crazy. »

Lost youth

In all, around 13,500 children were enrolled in the Ituri militias. Among the 5,500 girls, 70% are now child mothers.

Outside, we hear voices of young men. These former child soldiers have also been demobilized and are staying here temporarily. The girls are afraid, because, as Yolande says, after what happened to them, they fear any military.

During the day, when the girls are at school and their toddlers are taken care of at the nursery, some of the young men play with the little ones, "with great affection," according to one of the attendants. Probably to regain their lost youth.

The interview continues in the dark, there is power cut. The darkness helping, Yolande carries on telling her story without hesitation, with defiance even.

"They accuse us for everything bad that happens. When there's pillaging in the villages and neighborhoods, it is us. Anything bad is us."

For some, former child soldiers are victims of war, for others, they are criminals. In their communities, they are viewed with suspicion.

Project supported by the ICC

The girls are unaware of that the school rehabilitation program in which they take part is supported by the International Criminal Court that has put three former Iturian warlords on trial in The Hague.

"Until all the damages sustained by the victims are made good, the justice we seek to achieve is just half done," explains the ICC President, Sang-Hyun Song.

The ICC's Trust Fund for Victims provides financial assistance to 16 projects in the DRC, discretely, because in the region, anyone associated with the victims can be suspected of siding with one of the militias. This is why, to prevent retaliation, Yolande's real name will never be revealed to me.

Yolande's biggest grudge against the militia members is the fact that she was robbed of her childhood during her three years in captivity.

"They have destroyed the children because they taught them to do adult things. Who can imagine a child who rapes an old lady, who rapes his mother?"

Traumatised

In the house where they lived with the soldiers, the girls often revolted against the rapes of adult women, the "mothers". Many fights broke out as a result.

One day, Yolande's parents came to fetch her, but when her "husband" threatened to beat her up before their eyes, they did not insist further. When she became pregnant at age 14, he gave her a choice: "Either you put on your uniform and come and fight, or you go home." Yolande chose to return home.

Her friend "Tatine", did not have to fight: she became pregnant shortly after being raped and reunited with her family.

It is hard for me not to think about my own 14-year old girl who had a protected childhood.

Yolande and other girls who returned home pregnant were not welcomed "as a child should be welcomed", as she puts it. Her parents insisted she go back to the father of her child, but her brother, seeing how traumatised she was, said: "Let her give birth to the child first."

At peace

Yolande's parents refused to accept her daughter and even expressed animosity towards their grandchild. In their culture, babies born out of rape are considered a curse to the family.

Since Yolande's return to school, her parents' attitude has improved. Yolande, now 19, hopes to pursue her studies and dreams of becoming a mathematician.

Regarding the leaders who are being tried in The Hague, "they should be jailed," she says, "once in prison they can't fight anymore." And the man who raped her and took her as his "wife"? Even he must be imprisoned, "because it was he who destroyed my life."

"Salam," she replied in Swahili, her mother tongue, when I ask how she feels after having told her story for the first time. "She feels at peace in her heart," says the interpreter.

The Canadian Press

Wednesday, 6 January 2010

As Rwanda genocide docket grows in France, ministers aim to create war crimes Paris court unit

By Jamey Keaten (CP)

PARIS — France wants to speed up the way it prosecutes genocide and crimes against humanity, creating a special investigative unit in a Paris court as more suspects allegedly linked to Rwanda's genocide are turning up in the country.

Human rights advocates say the French move is welcome, though overdue in a country long criticized for harbouring foreign despots and for cushy relations with strongmen in its former African colonies.

Justice Minister Michele Alliot-Marie and Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner announced plans Wednesday to create a special judicial investigative service for crimes against humanity and genocide committed abroad.

The "judicial centre" would handle such crimes that involve anyone - French or not - who lives in or travels to France, Justice Ministry spokesman Guillaume Didier said.

"The homeland of human rights, France will never be a sanctuary for those behind genocide, war crimes, or crimes against humanity," the ministers wrote in a column in the daily Le Monde newspaper.

They are planning to establish the service as part of a legal reform bill to be presented in parliament in the first half of the year.

The ministers wrote that the goal is to speed up judicial treatment of war crimes and genocide cases, which can drag on for years. The unit - a sort of judicial task force - would pool resources and create a one-stop-shop for genocide claims that are currently filed in courts across France.

French investigators of genocide or claims of war crimes abroad face problems because information often is scattered geographically, the ministers said. Many cases are complex and require technical expertise.

The ministers said the proposed investigative section would not seek to compete with the "universal" jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, but would rely on national jurisdictions authorized as part of the 1998 Rome Treaty that created that court, Didier said.

Alain Gautier, president of the Collective of Civil Parties for Rwanda legal action group, said French judges are now examining 16 separate lawsuits linked to the Rwanda genocide.

In one recent case, the group in November accused Charles Twagira - now a doctor and pastor based in the northeastern city of Rouen - of crimes against humanity and genocide.

"The rising number of pending cases, notably involving more than 15 Rwandans awaiting trial, is prompting us to act quickly," the ministers wrote in the newspaper.

Separately, Rwanda has maintained that French soldiers there bore responsibility for the slaughter of minority Tutsis by Hutu extremists. The Justice Ministry says the new judicial investigative unit would respond to any claims of genocide - whether from inside France or from abroad.

Some other countries have similar structures to the one France has planned, but only a few have won convictions. Denmark and the Netherlands have had special prosecutor's offices that focus on war crimes since 2002; Sweden and Norway have special police units devoted to war crimes.

Spanish courts operate on a doctrine of universal jurisdiction, allowing for particularly grave crimes to be prosecuted in Spain even if the suspected atrocities were allegedly committed elsewhere. The government cut back that court power in October amid complaints from some countries investigated, like China and Israel. Now, such probes require a clear link to Spain.

Famed Spanish judge Baltasar Garzon used the law to have former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet arrested in London in 1998, trying - in vain - to put him on trial in Spain on terrorism, torture and other charges.

For France, which had a vast colonial empire across Africa and retains tight - and at times, controversial - ties to many countries there, the debate over genocide has particular resonance.

France and Rwanda restored diplomatic ties in November, three years after relations were severed when a Paris judge accused Rwandan President Paul Kagame of ordering his predecessor's assassination. The genocide broke out after the previous president, Juvenal Habyarimana, died in a plane crash.

The case still has not been resolved. France insists its justice system is completely independent and the case did not figure in the negotiations leading to restored ties. France grants immunity to serving heads of state like Kagame.

Kouchner leaves Thursday for a three-day African trip starting in Rwanda, his first since the bilateral diplomatic ties were restored.

William Bourdon, a French lawyer specializing in human rights and terrorism cases, said some legal defence teams have been seeking a genocide task force for three years.

He is among critics who say President Nicolas Sarkozy's call in 2006 - before he was elected - for a new era in relations between France and its former African colonies hasn't materialized.

In October, a French court ruled out further investigation into three African heads of state for money laundering linked to their assets in France, saying there was not enough evidence of wrongdoing.

A preliminary probe centring on Gabon's late leader Omar Bongo, the Republic of Congo's President Denis Sassou-Nguesso, and President Teodoro Obiang of Equatorial Guinea and their families found luxury cars and other signs of wealth - some paid for in cash.

In France, all genocide cases have been brought by non-governmental groups or individual claimants - never by state prosecutors themselves, said Bourdon.

"There have always been ulterior motives politically," Bourdon said. "There has to be greater transparency, and (those motives) need to disappear."

Capital News (Kenya)

Wednesday, 6 January 2010

Kenya violence victims get ICC extension

BY BERNARD MOMANYI



NAIROBI, Kenya, Jan 6 - Victims of the post election violence now have until next Wednesday to make representations to the International Criminal Court (ICC) pre-trial chamber through the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR).

The Commission's Vice Chairman Hassan Omar Hassan said the victims can make submissions physically or send emails to haki@knchr.org or directly to The Hague via vprs@icc-cpi.int.

The move follows a petition by some of the victims who felt locked out when the deadline expired last month.

"Following our discussions with the ICC, I wish to advise that notwithstanding the lapse of deadline for victims to make representations to the Pre-Trial Chamber pursuant to article 15 of the Rome Statutes, the victims may still make such representations," he said.

"Victims wishing to make such representations to the Pre-Trial Chamber must therefore, do so in the next couple of days," he said and added that "these representations are not evidentiary, but intended to give a victims perspective with respect to the request by the Prosecutor to initiate investigations in Kenya."

He said victims were also allowed to submit memoranda, affidavits or use other effective means to make representations to the Pre-Trial Chamber.

In this case, he said, community or village elders and leaders can make representations on behalf of the victims. Mr Hassan said the commission would forward the representations to the ICC's Victims Participation and Reparations Section.

He said the commission was also concerned about threats and intimidation some of the victims had reported, including some of those who have previously testified in a commission of inquiry.

"The Pre-Trial Chamber must take note that there are increasing instances of threats and intimidation of witnesses," he said and added: "The commencement of investigations by the Prosecutor will serve as an avenue to provide for witness protection through the ICC."