

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Outreach and Public Affairs Office

as at:

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
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CharlesTaylorTrial.org (The Hague)

Wednesday, 17 February 2010

Liberia: Charles Taylor Dismisses ECOMOG Commander's Allegations As "Nonsense"

Alpha Sesay

Claims that Charles Taylor secretly smuggled arms and ammunitions into Liberia in 1997 without informing the West African peacekeepers were dismissed as "nonsense" today by the former Liberian president in his trial in The Hague.

During cross-examination, prosecutors had raised allegations of Mr. Taylor's involvement in arms smuggling in Liberia, pointing to a book written by Nigerian General Victor Malu — the head of West African peacekeeping forces in Liberia during Mr. Taylor's presidency. In his book, General Malu reportedly claimed that in 1997, Mr. Taylor secretly smuggled arms and ammunition from South Africa through the Free Port of Monrovia without informing Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) peacekeepers. The former ECOMOG commander said that before his forces were alerted, Mr. Taylor had removed the arms and ammunition from the Free Port. As Mr. Taylor continued his re-examination today, Mr. Taylor dismissed the allegations as nonsense.

"Since ECOMOG arrived in Liberia in 1990, they maintained full control of the Free Port of Monrovia. So to say at this particular time that arms are being brought into the Free Port, the Navy of ECOMOG is based there," Mr. Taylor told the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

"Even through my presidency, ECOMOG was deployed fully in Monrovia and its environs by this time. So this is total nonsense that someone could have brought a shipload of arms into the Free Port, the Navy of Nigeria is running this port, it's totally, totally crazy here, it's not possible."

Asked whether General Malu had confronted him with intelligence that shiploads of arms and ammunition had been brought to Liberia through the Free Port, Mr. Taylor responded that "never, so help me God, never, Malu never discussed this with me."

Prosecutors have alleged that even with an ECOMOG presence in Liberia and with the West African country under a United Nations arms embargo, Mr. Taylor smuggled arms and ammunition into the country. These arms, prosecutors say, were then sent to Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone, a rebel group that Mr. Taylor is alleged to have provided support to during the 11-years conflict in Sierra Leone.

While maintaining that his country did not have arms to supply rebel forces in Sierra Leone, Mr. Taylor has admitted that at some point in his presidency, he secretly bought arms and ammunition solely for the purpose of fighting rebel forces which were threatening to unseat his government in Liberia.

Also in his re-examination today, the former Liberian president dismissed General Malu's accounts that during Mr. Taylor's rebel days, he had acquired about 20 armored personnel carriers, four tanks, tons of artillery and anti-aircraft rifles for use in 'Operation Octopus' — a 1992 operation by Mr. Taylor's rebel forces to capture the Liberian capital, Monrovia.

Mr. Taylor maintained that during the entire period of the Liberian conflict, his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group never had access to armored personnel carriers, tanks and anti-aircraft rifles.

He explained that Operation Octopus was a military operation which was aimed at capturing Monrovia and bringing the Liberian conflict to an end.

Mr. Taylor, who has previously testified that he had several disagreements with General Malu, today told the court that when he was elected as president of Liberia in 1997, he called for the replacement of the Nigerian General. Referring to General Malu as "abrasive" and "rude," Mr. Taylor added that ECOMOG soldiers were not loved by the Liberian people.

"Liberian citizens complained seriously about the treatment that ECOMOG meted out to ordinary citizens. At check points, they would beat the people, they would take away their items, I mean, they were wild," Mr Taylor said. "And I was the person that always talked about the sovereign rights of Liberians in their country, unruly behaviors on the part of ECOMOG troops — Liberians were really, really angry," he said.

In his re-examination, Mr. Taylor has been seeking to clarify certain issues that were raised during his cross-examination by the prosecution. His defense counsel, Courtenay Griffiths today informed the court that Mr. Taylor's re-examination will likely be concluded by tomorrow. If that happens, both prosecution and defense will tender several documents to be admitted in evidence and then Mr. Taylor's witnesses will start testifying in his defense immediately after.

BBC WORLD SERVICE TRUST
 Wednesday, 17 February 2010

John Kollie

NEWS ITEM

A Former Commander of the West African Peace Keeping Force, ECOMOG, General Victor Malu, in a book entitled ECOMOG- A Sub-regional Experience In Conflict Resolution, Management and Peacekeeping, Liberia, accused Mr. Taylor of smuggling arms into Liberia in 1997. General Malu also accused Mr. Taylor of amassing huge quantity of arms and ammunition as well as mercenaries in 1992 to launch the infamous Operation Octopus in Monrovia. Mr. Taylor denied the allegations and described the ECOMOG Forces as being rude. John Kollie transcribes reports for the BBC World Service Trust...

In his book, for West African ECOMOG General Malu accused Mr. Taylor of smuggling a consignment of arms and ammunition from South Africa into Liberia in 1997. General Malu said the Former Liberian President brought the arms and ammunition through the Free Port of Monrovia without informing the Peacekeepers.

The Former ECOMOG Commander further stated that Mr. Taylor quickly removed the smuggled arms and ammunition from the Free Port before ECOMOG was alerted. Continuing his re-direct examination, Mr. Taylor strongly denied General Malu's allegation.

General Malu further accused Mr. Taylor of mobilizing 70-thousand fighters to launch Operation Octopus in Monrovia. The ECOMOG Commander also alleged that Mr. Taylor then a rebel leader acquired 20 armour personnel carriers, four tanks, tons of artillery pieces as well as anti-aircraft raffles for the operation.

Mr. Taylor told the court that Operation Octopus was a military operation intended to take over Monrovia, and bring the Liberian Civil War to an end. He said there was nothing factual about the ECOMOG's account. But Lead Defence Law Courtenay Griffiths pressed Mr. Taylor about arms.

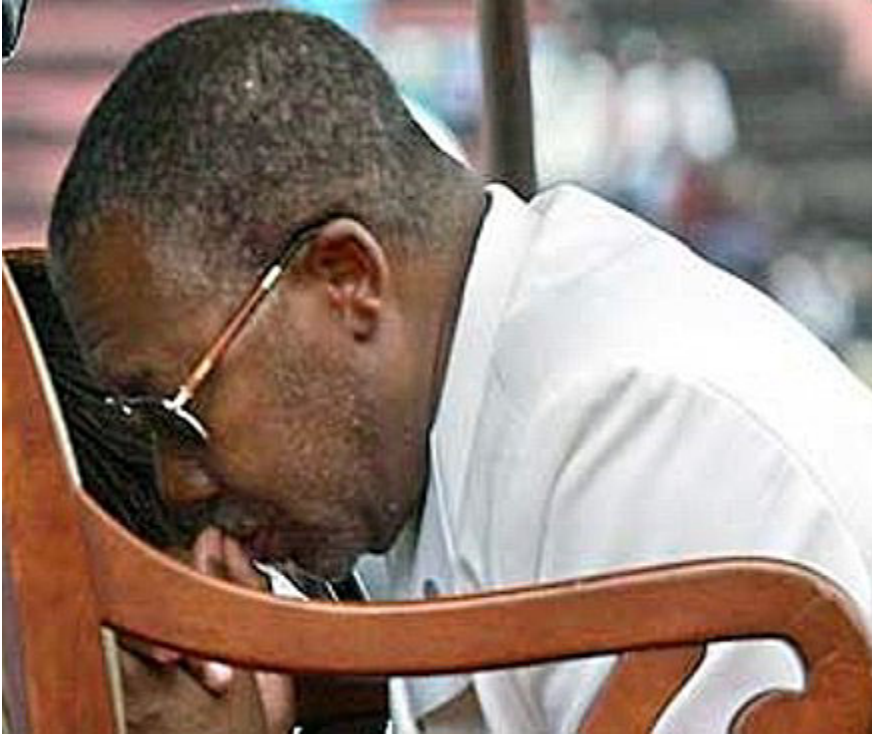
The Former Liberian Leader said after his election as President, he called for the replacement of General Malu. Mr. Taylor told the court that General Malu was what he called very abrasive or rude. He also said ECOMOG Solders were not loved by the Liberian People.

According to Lead Defence Lawyer Courtenay Griffiths, Mr. Taylor's re-direct Examination is likely end on tomorrow, Thursday. In a court of law, re-direct examination takes place after the cross-examination of a witness has been completed.

During re-direct, the Lawyer of the witness is given an opportunity to clarify the testimony of that witness, in an attempt to minimize potential damage.

Daily Observer (Liberia)
Wednesday, 17 February 2010

‘Covert Account’ Helped Taylor Evade UN Arms Embargo



*Accused former warlord and president, Charles Taylor
He Explains During Re-Examination*

THE HAGUE – Former Liberian president, Charles Taylor, has described how he evaded a United Nations arms embargo by funneling millions of dollars through a secret personal bank account to buy arms and ammunition in an effort to defeat rebels threatening to oust his government.

Taylor made the disclosure when his trial for war crimes continued in

The Netherlands on Monday, February 15.

“The largest disbursement from this account went to arms and ammunition,” Taylor said, asserting that the purchase was necessary to fight against Liberians United for Reconciliation and Development (LURD) rebels, since his country was under a United Nations arms embargo.

The bank account, opened in his name at the Liberian Bank for Development and Investment (LBDI) in 1999 and into which millions of US dollars were deposited during his time as president, was a major focus for prosecutors’ cross-examination of the former warlord.

Prosecutors have alleged that the money in this account was not used for official purposes but instead provided a way for Taylor to divert money away from state coffers in order to enrich himself. Taylor had dismissed the claim during his cross-examination, and today his defense team helped give him the opportunity to explain the existence of this account during his re-examination.

He said that the Liberian legislature authorized him to open the secret account in his name, and that it was used both for arms supplies and for other purposes benefiting the Liberian government.

“This account is a covert account opened by the government of Liberia at this time. It had to be opened in my name,” Taylor said.

“The largest disbursement from this account went to arms and ammunition. Out of this account, we paid salaries for special units, the ATU [Anti-Terrorist Unit] was paid, the SSS [Special Security Services] was paid, and various presidential projects in dealing with goodwill within that period were paid out of this account. These are the four categories that we paid out of this account,” the former president explained.

He also told the judges that his former defense minister, Daniel Chea, had been wrong when he told the American-based Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) television series, *Frontline World*, during a May 2005 interview, that the disarmament process in Liberia in 1995 was a fiasco.

“I fully disagree with Mr. Chea to say that that was a fiasco; I totally disagree. The United Nations, ECOWAS [Economic Community of West African States], the African Union, all of the observers said that the disarmament, while it was not total – in fact no disarmament can be total – the statement used during that period, there was substantial disarmament sufficient to carry out the elections, and so for him to say that it was a fiasco is total nonsense,” Taylor asserts.

In the May 2005 interview, Chea told *Frontline World* that Taylor had disappointed the people of Liberia because he opened too many fronts that he could not contain. In Monday’s re-examination, Taylor dismissed the assertion as ‘untrue’.

The accused former president, on trial for war crimes in The Hague, concluded his cross-examination by prosecutors on February 6, 2008. He is now responding to questions from his lawyers in a second direct examination.

The former Liberian president is on trial for his alleged support to Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, who waged an 11-year rebel war on the people of Sierra Leone. He has denied all allegations against him, saying that his association with the RUF rebels was purely for peaceful purposes in the neighboring West African country.



United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 17 February 2010

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

International Clips on Liberia

Liberia: Expose Unpunished Sex Violence, Says UN

Wednesday, 17 February 2010, 11:25 am

Press Release: United Nations

The United Nations is urging media practitioners in Liberia to play a major role in creating public awareness about gender-based violence, one of the most frequently committed serious crimes in the country, as part of a wider UN push in West Africa to increase media spotlight on sexual violence. "It is at the local level where they have a cardinal and direct bearing on influencing listeners to stop settling in their homes rape and other issues related to Sexual and Gender-based Violence," said Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for the Rule of Law, at a ceremony marking the first anniversary of the Association of Journalists against Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV), on 12 February in the capital city, Monrovia. Under the theme of "Together We Will Report Gender-Based Violence", Ms. Mensa-Bonsu commended the Association of Journalists for "taking a strong stand against the scourge of sexual and gender-based violence" and for taking the message of eradicating SGBV in Liberia on radio, television and even onto campuses.

International Clips on West Africa **Guinea**

Guinea soldiers join expanded transitional government

CONAKRY, Feb 17 (Reuters) - Guinea has expanded its transitional government, adding two soldiers accused of serious rights abuses and three more civilians to a team meant to lead the top bauxite producer to elections by mid-2010. The nomination of two leading members of the military junta that has ruled Guinea since late 2008 is seen as a move aimed at keeping the military involved in the long-delayed transition to civilian rule. But it also drew criticism as the soldiers are accused of a litany of abuses and coincided with a visit by team from the International Criminal Court (ICC), which may launch a formal investigation into a Sept. 28 massacre of opposition members. Junta members Captain Claude Pivi and Lt Col Moussa Tiegboro Camara, both of whom have been implicated to various degrees by reports into the killing of about 150 people in September, were named ministers of state in a statement read on television. Pivi remains in charge of presidential security while Tiegboro also retains his job running the influential elite anti-drugs and criminality brigade.

Ivory Coast

Ivory Coast sees protests against dissolved govt

The Associated Press
Wednesday, February 17, 2010

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast — Protesters torched a city bus in Ivory Coast's economic capital in the latest daily demonstration of violence since the president dissolved the government last week. Witnesses said 10 young men who identified themselves as opposition supporters forced bus riders off before setting it alight on Wednesday. No one was hurt. Shortly afterward, riot police used tear gas to disperse some 200 protesters marching nearby.

Small opposition protests started Friday, when President Laurent Gbagbo dissolved the government. Opposition Prime Minister Guillaume Soro says he is meeting with all parties to start a new government and to organize presidential elections as soon as possible. Five years after Gbagbo's term ended, Ivory Coast has yet to hold a ballot.

Local Media – Newspaper

Senate Splits over Residency Clause for Presidency

(The Inquirer, Liberia Journal, In Profile Daily and The News)

- Division has emerged in the Senate over the Joint Resolution proposing a Constitutional referendum to amend certain provisions of the Constitution.
- The division relates to the controversial residency clause contained in Article 52c of the Liberian Constitution, which provides that no person shall be eligible to hold the Office of President unless that person is resident in Liberia ten years prior to his election.
- The Senate is debating whether to concur with the House of Representatives for the controversial residency clause to be changed to the word 'domicile'.
- During Tuesday's session, seven senators voiced support for the clause to be maintained while four others said the clause should be changed to domicile.
- The Senators said if the clause is maintained it would ensure presidential contestants reside in Liberia, interact with the people, and identify their problems and solutions.
- However, Senator Blamo Nelson warned that if the residency clause is not changed it would affect many Presidential candidates including President Sirleaf.
- Also, the Senate has opened discussion on Article 56(b) to provide for the elections of local Chiefs and City Mayors who may be removed for proof of misconduct.

President Sirleaf in Abuja, Nigeria for ECOWAS Summit

(Liberian Express and The Inquirer)

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is in Abuja, Nigeria attending the 37th ECOWAS Summit.
- The summit is among other things discussing issues of regional security, energy and transportation.
- Presidential Press Secretary Cyrus Badio said while in Nigeria, the President will also respond to a long-standing invitation from the Abeokuta State University.
- Mr. Badio said the President will also pay a two-day state visit to Ghana Friday and is expected back home Saturday.

Opposition Liberty Party Advances "Compromise" For Threshold Bill

(The Inquirer and The Analyst)

- The Executive Committee of the main opposition Liberty Party (LP) has proposed what it calls an alternative to resolve the saga surrounding the controversial Threshold Bill.
- The Party in a statement said it was providing this alternative in an attempt to resolve what appears to be an impasse between the two political branches of government.

- Liberty Party requested that the Legislature accepts the President's limit of 73 electoral constituencies and that the President accepts the Legislature's minimum of two electoral constituencies for each county saying there is a difference of only three electoral constituencies that are at issue not many.

US\$2.4B Israeli Investment for Western Cluster

(New Democrat)

- Elenilto, a unit of Israel's Engelin-vest Group, will spend US\$2.4 billion developing Liberia's Western Cluster iron ore deposit, according to a Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy statement.
- The statement also said that the investment will allow Elenilto to produce as much as 1.1 billion metric tons of ore.
- Elenilto was last month awarded the rights to develop the Western Cluster project by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.
- As part of the agreement, Elenilto will pay Liberia a one-time fee of US\$25 million and an annual tax equivalent to 21 percent of the company's profit from the deposits, according to the ministry's statement.
- It will also pay US\$3.1 million a year towards community development, the statement indicated.

IMF Deputy Boss Cautiously Optimistic On Recovery

(Liberian Express, New Democrat and The Analyst)

- The First Deputy Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Mr. John Lipsky, has predicted that Liberia could reach its Heavily Indebted Poor Countries and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiatives (HIPC/MDRI) later this year, a point necessary for it to tackle crucial development initiatives.
- In a statement released following talks with government officials and the private sector, Mr. Lipsky said he based his prediction on continued strong performance.
- The authorities have made significant progress in implementing the triggers to achieve the completion point under the HIPC/MDRI.

Star Radio (News monitored today at 09:00 am)

President Sirleaf Is In Abuja For ECOWAS Summit

Senate Splits Over Residency Clause For Presidency

(Also reported on Radio Veritas, Sky FM, and ELBC)

Liberia May Reach HIPC Completion Point In July...Government Assures

- Government says it is confident that Liberia will reach the HIPC Completion Point by July this year.
- Deputy Information Minister Cletus Sieh said after the audit of the HIPC required ministries, which include Finance; Lands, Mines and Energy; Education; Public Works and Health and passage of some key legislation, Liberia will reach the HIPC completion point.
- According to Deputy Minister Sieh, some key legislation that needs to be urgently passed are the task and national investment codes of Liberia.
- Mr. Sieh commended the IMF delegation which is currently assessing the country's progress in its search for debt waiver in the tune of about four billion dollars.

LBS Boss Charles Snetter Apologizes For 'Bias' Reportage

- The Director General of the Liberia Broadcasting System (LBS) has apologized to the Senate amid complaint of biased reportage by the State-owned radio.
- Mr. Charles Snetter said he would ensure that such unfortunate incident does not occur again.
- He particularly made reference to complaint by Margibi Senator Clarice Jah over the refusal of LBS to air her views which represented the opposition.

- The LBS Director General told the Senate Committee on Broadcasting and Information the situation involving Senator Jah was the issue of technical problem which he described as very unfortunate.

(Also reported on Truth FM, Sky FM, and ELBC)

Trial Of Murdered PPCC Boss Opened Today

- The Keith Jubah murder trial opened today at Criminal Court A.
- Nine men indicted for allegedly killing Mr. Jubah appeared in court for the first time since their indictment.
- Prosecution in its three-count indictment charged the men with criminal facilitation, criminal mischief and murder.
- The accused were workers of the American Rubber Company, MARCO, which Mr. Jubah managed prior to his death.
- According to the indictees they murdered Mr. Jubah because he deprived them of their benefits and ignored their plight.

(Also reported on Radio Veritas, Sky FM, and ELBC)

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

Margibi Lawmaker Wants Special Committee To Review Constitution

- Margibi County Senator Roland Kaine is calling for the setting up of a special constitutional review committee to carefully review the Liberian constitution in its entirety.
- Senator Kaine said the constitutional referendum must not be done on the basis of pressing national issues to appease certain political actors.

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

Former Internal Minister Says He Was Never Mandated By The President To Step Down

- Former Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson has clarified that he was never mandated by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to resign his post.
- The former Internal Affairs Minister who did not mention what he and the President discussed, however pointed out that Presidential Press Secretary Cyrus Badio will have to clarify his statement that he was mandated by President Sirleaf to step down.

Agence France Presse

Thursday, 18 February 2010

ICC prosecutor arrives in Guinea for massacre probe

CONAKRY — The deputy prosecutor of the International Criminal Court arrived in Guinea on a three-day visit to assess whether it can try those responsible for a 2009 opposition massacre if the government fails to do so.

Fatou Bensouda is set to visit the Conakry stadium where rights groups say more than 150 people died and 1,200 were injured when troops attacked opponents of Guinea's military junta gathered for a rally on September 28 last year.

The junta says 63 people died.

Soldiers shot, stabbed and beat up protesters and publicly raped women. A UN report said regime leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara and his aides were responsible for crimes against humanity.

In a brief statement at the airport Bensouda said: "The aim of our visit is to observe what has been done about the painful events of September 28 2009 here in Conakry so that justice should be done to the victims."

She was welcomed by Guinea's Justice Minister Colonel Siba Lohalamou.

The deputy prosecutor will visit military camps and hospitals and meet Guinea's interim President General Sekouba Konate, transitional Prime Minister Jean-Marie Dore, cabinet ministers, judges and representatives of victims' groups, prosecution aide Beatrice le Fraper told AFP ahead of the visit.

"Cooperation is good," she added. "The Guinean authorities were not obliged to show us the places where potential crimes were committed but they have been transparent."

The Netherlands-based ICC said in October it had launched a "preliminary examination" of the violence to determine whether the alleged crimes fell within the court's jurisdiction and whether the facts warranted a full-scale investigation.

To this end, the court has to examine the nature and gravity of the crimes, whether or not there were national criminal proceedings, and the interests of justice in general, said le Fraper.

Guinea is a state party to the founding Rome Statute of the court, the world's only permanent tribunal for the adjudication of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It only acts when a member state is unwilling or unable to try individuals accused of serious violations.

A junta-appointed commission this month absolved Camara, who is convalescing in Burkina Faso since a December assassination attempt, of blame over the stadium incident.

Guinea has insisted it has the will and the means to prosecute those responsible for the killings.

"We are going there to tell them that by virtue of the Rome Statute, which they ratified, they are obliged to do so," said le Fraper.

News24

Wednesday, 17 February 2010

Another day, another crisis

By Michael Logan

Nairobi - It seems like hardly a day goes by without Kenya's coalition plunging into a crisis, sparking fears that the East African nation will be pitched into a repeat of the tribal violence that followed the disputed 2007 presidential election.

This time, the parties are squaring up over two ministers suspended by Prime Minister Raila Odinga on Sunday pending corruption investigations, only to be re-instated by President Mwai Kibaki a few hours later.

Kibaki said the power-sharing deal did not give Odinga the necessary authority to suspend ministers, further enraging his premier. Ministers loyal to Odinga announced they were staging a cabinet boycott and the attorney general warned of a "political and constitutional crisis".

While such warnings sound ominous, last year saw several blow-ups, including one in which Odinga threatened to call for early elections. But the coalition held together, and analysts feel this time around is likely to be no different.

"I think both parties may not find it strategic for the coalition to collapse," James Shikwati, analyst and CEO of the Inter Region Economic Network, told the German Press Agency dpa.

The fact that the quarrels have focused on issues, although with personalities in the background, and that Odinga and Kibaki's rival tribes have not returned to violence shows Kenya is slowing maturing politically, he said.

ICC investigations

The larger concern is that the latest round in the ding-dong battle will further hold up Kenya's reform process, which is already limping weakly along.

At least 1 300 people died and hundreds of thousands were displaced during almost three months of violence following the December 2007 poll, which supporters of Odinga accused Kibaki's party of rigging.

Analysts and observers say reforms recommended by independent investigations into the violence - including changes to the electoral process, land policy, the police and the constitution - are crucial to avoid violence at the next elections, due in 2012.

Little concrete has been achieved, however, and the government has also avoided setting up a local tribunal to try those accused of orchestrating the violence, forcing the International Criminal Court to begin investigations.

Former United Nations chief Kofi Annan, who brokered the power-sharing deal, warned in December Kenya only had until the end of 2010 to implement the reforms.

Benefits of competition

"If you go beyond 2010, and basic reforms are not in place, the election in 2012 will cast such a long shadow, there will be such heavy politicking, that I don't think you are going to get anybody to focus on reform," he said at the end of visit to Nairobi.

Less than two months into the year, Anna's warning appears to have gone unheeded.

Shikwati believes the latest battle is part of the electioneering and that by attempting to act on corruption in such a forceful manner, Odinga is carving out his own identity for the 2012 polls.

But unlike Annan, he thinks the political maneuvering could work in Kenya's benefit.

"We should not overlook the benefits of competition, we have two centres who have to compete to show they are working," he said. "I think it is still possible to have reforms finished by the end of the year."

Another problem with the squabbling is that it often overshadows the issue at hand, in this case the corruption that has long blighted the East African nation.

Investigation in scams

Odinga's move to suspend Agriculture Minister William Ruto, a former close ally, and Education Minister Sam Ongeru was a bold one, as top-level politicians are never brought to book despite being implicated in Kenya's many scandals.

The ministers were suspended pending investigation into scams involving maize and primary school education.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers audit recently revealed that \$26m of government money had been diverted in the maize scam, while government auditors said \$1m went missing from a scheme to provide free primary school education.

Britain and the US have suspended aid to the education programme over the scandal.

Both ministers protest their innocence, but Kenyans are tired of seeing their politicians emerge unscathed from scandals.

Shikwati believes Kenya, led by the media and government, should seize the moment and root out corruption rather than being sucked into political drama.

"I think this is the best opportunity the country has to push focus onto the issue of corruption, rather than power plays," he said.

- SAPA

Agence France Presse
 Wednesday, 17 February 2010

Millions of landmines still scattered across Cambodia

By International Justice Desk



*Phnom Penh,
 Cambodia*

Cambodia's
 Prime
 Minister Hun
 Sen warned
 on Wednesday
 that thousands

of families are living at risk from millions of landmines still scattered across the kingdom.

Around 670 square kilometres still needs to be cleared of explosives left over from a long-running civil war, Hun Sen said during a ceremony to hand over demining equipment from the Japanese government.

"This is the legacy of civil war," Hun Sen said. "Thousands of families are directly and indirectly exposed to the constant threat posed by these hazardous war remnants."

The murderous Khmer Rouge regime was toppled in 1979 but civil unrest continued until 1998, and left impoverished Cambodia one of the world's most heavily mined countries along with Afghanistan and Angola.

Landmines and unexploded ordnance remain buried around villages and farmland, despite the destruction of 2.7 million explosive objects across 200 square miles over the past 17 years, the prime minister said.

But the number of related casualties has dropped to 200 victims per year in 2008-2009, down from 800 annually in the period 2005-6, according to the Cambodian Red Cross.

At Wednesday's ceremony, the Japanese government donated 588 mine detectors and 44 deep-search detectors, along with spare parts and a mobile repair unit for mine clearance machines.