

**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

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Sierra Express Media

Monday, 29 November 2010

Aftermath of war... covert attacks and reprisals

Author: Ibrahim Samura - SEM

Sierra Leone's unforgettable war ended eight/nine years ago, but repeated ruthless conducts of former combatants continues unabated.

Reflection is drawn to incidences of attacks on the family of one of Sierra Leone's former warlords (now Special Court convict), Ibrahim Bazy Kamara (in photo), by ex-fighters, who, according to findings, alleged that the forenamed commander has something for them.



Of course, reports of uncountable attacks on the family resident of the wife of Bazy Kamara, is said to have been happening almost every month or two.

It has reached desks of this press that the mother of the wife of Bazy Kamara, has had restless days owing to repeated embarrassments meted her by individuals claiming to be former combatants.

Facts gathered disclosed how the unknown attackers claimed being members of Bazy Kamara's battalion.

That during periods of war, Bazy Kamara, collected from them valuables for safe keeping; and so wanted it back.

Yes, it is a phenomenon that Sierra Leonean rebels used to mine diamonds emblemmed as 'blood diamonds.' And that the diamonds were exchanged for arms by the rebels themselves.

This, to the international community, was the true reason for the prolonged and cunning behaviours of warlord Foday Sankoh down playing of Sierra Leone's disbarment process.

The United Nations have had the opportunity to skillfully disarm combatants and then later incorporated them into society; giving them everlasting skills.

To the UN, it was envisaged that combatants, after acquiring the skills, will go into the society and make for their living and not engage in things that demeans their credibility.

It was told to this press that the wife and mother of Ibrahim Bazy have had their way to unknown destinations due to fear for their lives.

Recently, it was reported that another set of attackers dashed at the resident of the family of Bazy Kamara to wreck havoc, but regrettably pulled out after observing that the wife and mother are at large.

Eyewitnesses account say the perpetrators angrily promised to get rid of Bazy Kamara's wife.

The wife's whereabouts, we are told, is unknown and cannot be traced.

Sources say she disappeared due to persistent threats from groups of individuals claiming to be ex-fighters /undermen of her husband Ibrahim Bazy.

Anifa Kamara, in 2005, alongside four others, was indicted for contempt by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Contents as read in the indictment, articulates Anifa Kamara's alleged disclosure of names of protected witnesses testifying against her husband Bazy Kamara.

It could be recalled that Bazy Kamara was one time minister in the Armed Forces Revolutionary Movement regime (AFRC), and was frontline commander in the January 6th attack of Freetown by soldiers of the AFRC/SLAs movement.

He was afterwards arrested alongside Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon, Tamba Brima and others for crimes against humanity.

Ibrahim Bazy, who now serves sentence in Rwanda, has had his family put under serious threats by colleague fighters.

Sources say Bazy Kamara is unwell about information concerning his wife and family.

Awoko

Wednesday, 1 December 2010

African Notebook

By Rod Mac Johnson

Two developments in Africa would be with us for the foreseeable future. The first is the case of Jean-Pierre Bemba whose alleged involvement is said to have been responsible for the deaths of thousands of civilians in the Central African Republic mostly women and children.

The trial also showed that no matter how long it takes leaders will always be brought to answer for their crimes.

It actually puts a break on leaders ruling with iron fists and walk away after trampling on the rights of nationals they are ruling. The Bemba trial will take some time to come to a conclusion but the overriding factor remains that it has started — and both perpetrators and victims are witnessing the drama as it is relived...sometimes to the agony of the victims.

But that also showcased for the issue of former Chadian leader Hissene Habre which is just a stone throw away in Dakar, Senegal.

He carved a reputation for himself of some 40 thousand deaths of political prisoners.

Unfortunately, Habre's lawyers thought they had the last laugh when the ECOWAS Court of Justice ruled that Senegal by itself cannot put Habre on trial for alleged crimes committed in the 1980s.

But the boot was on the other foot when the court in Abuja, the Nigerian administrative capital recommended that a Special Tribunal be set up to try Habre for murders, rapes and other harassment committed during eight years of his rule.

Now, 20 years after he fled to Dakar after rebels toppled him from power, the 68 year old leader has been under arrest, frail -looking and haggard.

The twist now is that Senegal has revised its penal code which paved the way to take in a Special Tribunal, making Habre, the first African leader to be tried for war crimes by an African country.

This should not be confused by the trial of Charles Taylor, whose prosecution is by a UN backed Special Court, observers explained.

However, there are indications that the Tribunal will be patterned like those conducted in Sierra Leone, Rwanda and Yugoslavia.

The cost of the pending trial which could start in the first half of 2011 is estimated at 8 million Euros.

Prosecutors said the evidence against Habre is watertight. Evidence-backing has come from the Belgians whose investigators have scooped up details of hundreds of atrocities during a four year investigation and are willing to turn over the document to the Tribunal.

For the time being, one thing is certain, Habre would be put on trial for his deeds which will not be a dodgy game.

Unlike the story of the famous scientist whose chauffeur had an idea?

Hey boss, the chauffeur said, since I've heard your lecture so many times, why don't I deliver your lecture tonight and give you a break?

Sounds great, said the scientist.

When they got to the auditorium, the scientist put on the chauffeur's hat and settled into the back row.

The chauffeur walked to the lectern and gave the lecture. Afterwards, he asked if there were any questions.

Yes, said one professor, launching into a highly technical question.

The chauffeur was panic stricken for a moment but quickly recovered.

That's an easy one, he replied. So easy, I'm going to let my chauffeur answer it.

Liberia Webs

Tuesday, 30 November 2010

<http://www.liberiawebs.com/index.php>

Taylor on Africa's worst dictators list

Ex-President Charles Taylor has been named among several African leaders both past and present as the continent's worst dictators over the last century.

Mr. Taylor, the first African leader to be indicted on a war crime charge, was named among several world criminals sometime in 2003 as the world most wanted criminals.

Mr. Taylor is currently standing trial at the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone sitting in The Hague. Lawyers representing Mr. Taylor presented their last witness this month bringing to a close the defense case. Final arguments in his trial are not expected until February 8, 2011, after which time a final verdict will be announced.



The report also named former DR Congo (Zaire) President Mobutu Sese Seko, Ethiopian Mengistu Haile Mariam and Equatorial Guinea's Theodoro Obiang Nguembo Mbongo as some of the continent's worst dictators.

The rest are Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan, Idi Amin of Uganda and Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic.

Mobutu Sese Seko

Joseph Désiré Mobutu (later Mobutu Sese Seko) seized control of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a 1965 coup. Mobutu ruled the country (renamed Zaire in 1971) for more than three decades, stifling political opposition and amassing huge sums of money while the country's economy crumbled.

Mariam, the Ethiopian dictator who directed the 'Red Terror' against supposed enemies of his Soviet-backed regime, was convicted Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2006, of genocide in a rare case of an African strongman being called to account by his own country. Mengistu had been living in exile in Zimbabwe since 1992 and was convicted in absentia after a 12-year trial. He could face the death penalty at his Dec. 28 sentencing, but Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe said he won't deport Mengistu if he refrains from making political statements or comments to the press.

Known as "El Jefe" (The Boss), Obiang is "in permanent contact with the Almighty", according to a state radio report. "He can decide to kill without anyone calling him to account and without going to hell because it is God himself with whom he is in permanent contact, and who gives him his strength," a presidential aide told listeners.

He has ruled Equatorial Guinea since 1979 when he overthrew his uncle and had him executed. His government has been described by several human rights groups as among the worst abusers of human rights in Africa. The tiny west African country has grown to become the continent's third largest exporter of oil, but despite the new-found wealth most of its 500,000 inhabitants still live in abject poverty. He is a very close ally of Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe.

Idi Amin was president of Uganda from 1971 until 1979. A former boxer, Amin rose through the ranks of the Army in the 1960's, and seized power in a military coup against Uganda's first president, Milton Obote.

His reign was marked by brutal repression, torture and other violence. Bodies were found with genitals, noses, livers, and eyes missing. Prison camps began filling up with common citizens, where prisoners were forced to bludgeon each other to death with sledgehammers. Most sources suggest that around 300,000 people were killed by Amin's forces.

Another 60,000 Kenyans of Asian descent were expelled from the country. In 1976, Amin declared himself president for life. Amin's Uganda was highly militarized, with 'Military tribunals placed above the system of civil law, soldiers appointed to top government posts, and civilian cabinet ministers informed that they will be subject to military discipline'.

Citing 'ancient tribal ownership, Amin invaded Tanzania in 1978, in an apparent attempt to deflect world attention from Uganda's impending economic collapse. This move failed, since Amin's troops were routed by the Tanzanians, who forced him to flee to Saudi Arabia, where he still lives today, reportedly with the aid of a monthly payment of US \$1,400 per month from Saudi officials. Amin left Uganda with an estimated debt of US \$250 Million. Amin has been proclaimed as 'Africa's Adolph Hitler'.

Al Bashir seized power in Sudan in a military coup against a democratically elected government in 1989. Since his ascendancy, Amnesty International claims some 1 million people have been killed in the Sudanese civil war, whilst another 9 million have either fled the country or been subjected to 'internal exile', which basically means 'stay inside or be shot'. Al Bashir has also dissolved Sudan's parliament, banned political parties and closed down all independent media outlets. He has imposed a strict version of Islamic law (shariah) and used it to brutally repress the predominantly non-muslim people of Southern Sudan.

Taylor was actually elected as president by the people of Liberia in 1997. Amnesty International says that Taylor's military forces regularly use rape and torture as instruments of terror and suggest that he used his civilians as virtual slave labour. Estimates suggest that Taylor's personal fortune is greater than Liberia's Gross National Product.

This fortune was amassed by looting Liberia's natural resources, including gold, diamonds, rubber and timber. According to Hybrid Culture Magazine, 'rape and mutilation are standard tactics of intimidation'. UN sanctions and an arms embargo are in place against Taylor's regime. Taylor has actively supported rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone by helping them to smuggle illegal 'blood diamonds' in order to finance their ongoing civil war against the Sierra Leone government.

Jean-Bedel Bokassa was president of the Central African Republic from 1966 until 1979. Bokassa had served in the colonial French army and helped establish the new army of the independent C.A.R. He seized power in a military coup against president David Dracko in 1966 and almost immediately abolished the country's constitution. In 1972 he declared himself president for life, and in 1976 he adopted the title of 'emperor' after a US \$30 Million coronation ceremony.

Whilst enriching himself to the tune of US \$125 Million, Bokassa brutalised and exploited his people with apparent flair. His 'hands on' approach led Bokassa to be personally involved in atrocities including torture, executions and even cannibalism.

Bokassa was ousted by a French backed coup in 1979, but arrogantly returned in 1986, only to be arrested, convicted and sentenced to death for crimes against humanity. This sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, and yet Bokassa was released in 1993. As if he wasn't busy enough, Bokassa apparently found time to have seventeen wives and around fifty children! He died of a heart attack in 1996.

Radio Netherlands Worldwide

Wednesday, 1 December 2010

Libya in the dock?

By Bram Posthumus



As the Special Court for Sierra Leone is wrapping up the case against Liberia's Charles Taylor over war crimes committed in Sierra Leone, critics maintain that others should also be held

accountable for war crimes in both countries. One name frequently mentioned is that of Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, although the likelihood of him facing justice remains remote.

Charles Taylor was an attendee. So was his fellow Sierra Leonean warlord, the late Foday Sankoh. One more name on the roster: Laurent Désiré Kabila, former Congolese president and the father of the current head of state. In his book about Liberia's civil war *The Mask of Anarchy*, Africa scholar Stephen Ellis calls the Libyan military training camps "the Harvard and Yale of a whole generation of African revolutionaries."

These camps were run by al-Mathab al-Thauriya al-Alamiya, or World Revolutionary Headquarters. The explicit aim was to foment violent struggle around the world, targeting every government that the Libyan leadership considered hostile. 'Libyan leadership' is synonymous with Gaddafi, in power since he staged a military coup 41 years ago.

The final report of the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) included testimonies by Moses Blah, one of Charles Taylor's confidantes and the man who briefly held Liberia's presidency when Taylor left the country in August 2003. Blah told the TRC that Libya was running training camps for guerrilla fighters. Blah, testifying at the SCSL in 2008, said the he and Taylor were in one of those camps.

The link between Taylor and Gaddafi is Burkina Faso president Blaise Compaoré, who felt indebted to the Liberians who helped him overthrow his former comrade-in-arms Thomas Sankara in October 1987. Through Compaoré's mediation, Libyan-trained men and Libya-financed arms found their way into Liberia through Charles Taylor's war organisation NPFL, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

“Colonel Muammar Gaddafi must pay for his crimes against humanity in Liberia,” demanded the Atlanta-based Liberian web paper *The Perspective* in December 2007. Liberia’s TRC is of the opinion that Gaddafi’s country has been complicit in the war in Liberia, even though “the extent of Libya’s involvement...may never be known”. There are also testimonies of Sankoh’s presence in the World Revolutionary Headquarters camps, and the Sierra Leonean warlord benefiting from the Libyan connection in the same way that Taylor did.

However, there are a number of reasons why it seems unlikely that Gaddafi would ever be summoned by an international court.

In May 2007, the US government under George W. Bush removed Libya from the list of states that sponsor terrorism. Libya has been suspected of sponsoring terrorist organisations such as the IRA in Northern Ireland and ETA in Spain. Most notoriously, Libya stood accused of bringing down PanAm Flight 103 over Scotland in 1988. Now that Libya has paid compensation for that attack and has abandoned its weapons of mass destruction program, it is “case closed” as far as Washington is concerned. Liberia and Sierra Leone do not figure in this calculation.

Libya was also suspected to have downed Flight UTA 772 over Niger in 1989. But as François-Xavier Verschave argues in his book *La Françafrique*, Gaddafi’s oil contracts for French companies like Total and his increasing influence in Africa count for much more than his alleged misdeeds. Libya is also quite close to France, both in its friendships with the likes of Compaoré and in its avowed anti-Americanism. There is no support for ‘making Gaddafi pay’ in Paris.

Finally, Libya helps to pay the bills of the African Union, headquartered in the Ethiopian capital Addis Abeba, and organises numerous AU meetings. There were two major ones in the space of one month: the European Union - AU summit last October and the AU-Arab League summit one month later.

Clearly, neither the United States, nor France, nor the African Union have any interest in hauling their friend before a court to atone for crimes he may have helped bring about in a small corner of West Africa.

Kenya Broadcasting Corporation

Tuesday, 30 November 2010

Kenya committed to ICC and judicial reforms

Written By:PMPS,



Prime Minister Raila Odinga Tuesday promised that the government will fully co-operate with the International Criminal Court in the intended prosecution of those suspected to have instigated the election violence in 2008.

Mr Odinga said that having failed to establish a local tribunal after Parliament ganged up against it, the government has no option but to implement Parliament's wish that the election violence suspects be tried at The Hague.

Speaking when he met US Undersecretary for Democracy and Global Affairs Ms Maria Otero in his offices, Mr Odinga said the government was still keen to set up a local tribunal to deal with cases that will not be taken up by the ICC.

"You know we tried to set up a local tribunal but MPs rejected it. That is how the envelope ended up with The Hague and we have no option but to co-operate with the ICC process," Mr Odinga said.

He said that as part of the needed judicial reforms, the government is keen to appoint a new Chief Justice and Attorney General, adding that the two critical offices may be filled earlier than the deadline set in the new constitution.

A reformed Judiciary would win the confidence of the people of Kenya and the international community and handle suspects.

Ms Otero, who is visiting the country for the second time this year, congratulated the government for steering the country into a new constitution.

She asked the government to ensure critical provisions of the new constitution are implemented ahead of the 2012 elections. She said appointment of a new Chief Justice and Attorney General would earn the government a strong reputation both locally and internationally.

"Only an efficient Judiciary, with a professional Chief Justice of good reputation and strong credentials will ensure this country does not go through the difficulties you had the other time and who effects you are still dealing with," Ms Otero said.

She said that appointment of key people in an open and transparent manner, within the shortest time possible usually has the impact of yielding good results and restoring confidence in countries moving out of a crisis.

Saying America was not keen to interfere in Kenya's internal affairs, Ms Otero said Kenya currently looks good in the eyes of the international community and the reputation should be sustained.

She said Kenya also needs to co-operate with the world on the ICC process and clean the Judiciary to help end the culture of impunity.

"There is concern that Kenya has people who have not been thinking about the country. They have amassed wealth for themselves and they have created the impression that Kenyans are corrupt. That is the reputation you need to discard by co-operating with the ICC and reforming the Judiciary," she said.

She pledged support for war on organised crime, including drug trafficking.

In response, Mr Odinga said the government is moving with speed on the issues. He said the Bill on setting up of the Judicial Service Commission and Vetting of judges is already in the House for Second reading.

He said the government will publish names of those tapped for appointment as CJ and AG for the public to have a say.

The Legal Times Blog

Tuesday, 30 November 2010

International Lawyers Debate U.S. Policy on International Criminal Court

International lawyers gathered today for a hard look at U.S. policy options following a landmark meeting of International Criminal Court members in Kampala, Uganda, in June.

After eight years on the sidelines, the United States is back in the ICC mix, with a new policy of "principled engagement" with the court, which is intended as a forum of last resort to punish crimes that shock the conscience.

The American Society of International Law commissioned eight expert papers on the direction that engagement should take, hosting the meeting today at the group's Washington headquarters (located fittingly enough between the embassies of Greece and Kenya).

A top concern is the issue of aggression. In June, ICC members agreed to add aggression to the short list of crimes prosecuted by the court, which also include genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. The ICC delegates defined aggression as a "crime committed by a political or military leader which, by its character, gravity and scale, constituted a manifest violation of the Charter."

The United States is not a member of the court (neither is Russia or China), but attended the Kampala meeting as a non-state party.

In Kampala, the U.S. delegation "arrived very focused on definitional issues" related to aggression, said David Scheffer, a professor at Northwestern University School of Law who served as Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues from 1997 to 2001. The problem was, the definition had "already been set in stone prior to Kampala."

John Cerone, professor of law and director of the Center for International Law and Policy at New England School of Law in Boston, described the reaction of one delegation to U.S. efforts: "How dare a non-state party come in and try to impose its will on a definition we worked on for a decade?" he said.

Cerone recommended that further U.S. efforts to narrow the definition of aggression should only be done in good faith and to address specific problems.

Still, he said, the United States "could not have done much better" on provisions related to consent to bring charges. Members agreed the court has no jurisdiction to bring aggression charges against nationals from non-ICC member countries, and even member countries have a way to opt-out.

The United States also wanted the U.N. Security Council to have an exclusive role in deciding when to bring aggression charges. The problem, said Scheffer, is that "most governments simply despise the Security Council."

The Security Council still has the main responsibility for determining if an act of aggression has occurred, but Scheffer noted that some details remain unclear. For example, he said, if the Security Council says yes to aggression charges, "the pathway is fairly clear for the court." But it's less clear what the role of the court's judges would be if the council says no.

"The U.S. was there primarily to talk about aggression," said David Tolbert, president of the International Center for Transitional Justice, but was "constrained greatly by the fact that the U.S. is a non-state party. If we were [members], we'd have been in a much stronger position."

Afrique en Linge

Wednesday, 1 December 2010

International Criminal Court must prove Al-Bashir's genocide charges – Ping

Tripoli, Libya - The International Criminal Court (ICC) must produce adequate evidence to prove its genocide charges against wanted Sudanese President Omer Al-Bashir, if justice is to be seen to be served, African Union Commission chief Jean Ping said here Tuesday.

'We are saying it is unacceptable for there to be justice for some and not all others,' Ping told a news conference on the sidelines of the EU-African Summit, underway here.

The Sudanese leader shelved the plan to attend the meeting, citing pressure from the European bloc to have him arrested for crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide over the civil war in Sudan's western region of Darfur.

Ping said an international panel of inquiry, formed by the UN in 2005, did not find evidence of genocide in Darfur, but reported evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

'There is a burden of proof and we are asking for proof. We are looking for equality,' Ping said, speaking on behalf of African leaders, who have consistently rejected attempts to have the Sudanese leader arrested for genocide.

In July this year, the ICC issued a second arrest warrant against the Sudanese leader and vowed to have him arrested for the crimes committed under his watch in Darfur.

The Court said there were 'reasonable grounds' to believe President Al-Bashir was responsible for three counts of genocide committed against three tribes in Darfur.

Macleans.Ca

Tuesday, 30 November 2010

<http://www2.macleans.ca/2010/11/30/children-in-war-and-in-prison/>

Children in war and in prison

By Michael Petrou



Anti-Taliban soldier Abdul Azam, 14, cleans his weapon in his barracks (Photo by Chris Hondros/Getty Images)

The first soldiers I met in Afghanistan were teenagers who had been fighting since they were 15 or 16 years old. There were three of them. They manned a machinegun nest on a lonely hill a kilometre or two from where the Taliban were dug in a short horse ride away. This was in October 2001. The kids belonged to the Northern Alliance militia, which had been fighting the Taliban for years and were on the verge of defeat when the Taliban's al-Qaeda guests bombed America and changed the course of the war.

Now it is that teenagers' allies who ostensibly run the government in Kabul. I have no doubt that their ranks continue to include minors, as do those of the Taliban. Children fight and kill and die violently in Afghanistan. The world would be a better place were this not the case, but it is. And in the course of battling the Taliban Canadian soldiers encounter and capture such minors, and must figure out what to do with them.

It's a difficult dilemma without easy answers. Those, such as the NDP's Thomas Mulcair, who implicitly accused Canadian soldiers of handing over children to be tortured, aren't offering any.

Despite claims to the contrary, by Ottawa law professor Amir Attaran among others, the age until which a soldier is considered a child under international law is not universally agreed to be 18. Article 77 of the Protocol 1 amendment to the Geneva Convention requires signatories to "take all feasible measures in order that children who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities ...". Article 38 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which Canada has ratified, similarly requires that signatories "take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities." We don't know how old were the suspected Taliban Canadians detained, and then released or transferred to Afghan authorities. According to Foreign Affairs Minister Lawrence Cannon, the Canadian Forces treats insurgents who appear to be under the age of 18 as juveniles. In both Canada and the United States, 17 year olds may enlist in the regular armed forces.

For what it's worth, I think there is a world of difference between an 11-year-old and a 17-year-old. I happen to know that a former member of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, who is allegedly guilty of horrific war crimes, is living in Toronto. I spent the better part of a year compiling evidence against a second NPFL member who allegedly committed similar atrocities and exposed him in a *Maclean's* article. I left the first guy alone. Why? At the time of his alleged crimes, he led a "Small

Boys Unit.” He was 11 or 12; those under his command were nine or ten, high on cocaine and gunpowder. I figure he deserves some peace.

Reading the briefing note that has sparked this latest round of outrage, I don’t see what Canada should do differently. The note explains that Canadian Forces have special provisions for captured children, housing them separately and processing them quickly. Those transferred to Afghan authorities were previously incarcerated in a special wing of the Sarpoza prison. But, the note explains, Foreign Affairs recently approved transfer to a new “Kandahar Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre,” after consultations with the United Nations Children’s Fund and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Neither of these organizations has a reputation for condoning child abuse and torture. The note says Foreign Affairs is “prepared to expand” its monitoring of transferred detainees at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Centre. The Afghan National Directorate of Security, which processes detainees transferred to Afghan authorities, has been accused of torture in the past. This risk can and should be mitigated by the careful monitoring of detainees who have passed through Canadian hands. But the treatment of prisoners is ultimately an Afghan responsibility.

One more thing, which may not seem immediately relevant, but bear with me: I spent some time in Haiti in 2008, before the quake, including at several prisons. Corrections Canada officers helped run them, and Canadian police mentored Haitian cops who brought those they arrested to them. Few prisoners had been formally charged. Fewer still had faced a trial. They lived in utterly overcrowded and inhumane conditions, worse than anything I had seen anywhere else — including refugee camps, war zones, and Afghan jails.

The Haitian prisons were also full of children. I met a 13-year-old girl who had been in prison for two years without trial. A Corrections Canada officer told me about finding a jailed eight-year-old who had been accused of murder because she had been left alone with an infant who died in an accident.

None of this is to say the Canadians mentoring the Haitian government, police, and prisons staff were guilty of abuse. I have no reason to doubt claims that they had in fact improved conditions in the prisons. One inmate told me as much. The prisoners might have been living like pigs in a feedlot, but at least they no longer had to defecate in tiny plastic bags, which they would then toss out their cell windows in order to keep excrement off the floor where people slept.

I have two points. My first is that Canadians working in broken countries must deal with situations that are often ugly and complicated and offer only imperfect options. This doesn’t excuse malice, cruelty, or neglect. But it does suggest the need to more readily acknowledge that reality.

Here’s my second point. I’m willing to bet inmates at Haiti’s national penitentiary, a prison at which Canadians exercised significant control, suffered conditions worse than anything a Afghan child might face in Canadian custody at the Kandahar Airfield. But because there isn’t political gain to be had by probing the issue, nobody in Ottawa really cares.