

**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.
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Local News

Charles Taylor's Verdict Expected by July 2011 / <i>Independent Observer</i>	Page 3
Human Rights Commission Set for International Human Rights Day / <i>Standard Times</i>	Page 4

International News

CAR Rape Victim Tells of Trauma / <i>IWPR</i>	Pages 5-6
Bemba Trial Opens with Harrowing Testimony / <i>IWPR</i>	Pages 7-9
Politicians in a Rush to Derail Ocampo's Mission / <i>The Standard</i>	Pages 10-12
Nizeyimana Trial to Commence at ICTR / <i>The Hague Justice Portal</i>	Page 13
Ngirabatware Blames Former Rwandan Genocide-Convict Premier / <i>Hirondelle News Agency</i>	Page 14
There is a Heavy Price to Pay for Dealing with Lord of War / <i>Herald Scotland</i>	Pages 15-16

Charles Taylor's verdict expected by July 2011

By Abubakarr Bah.CTN

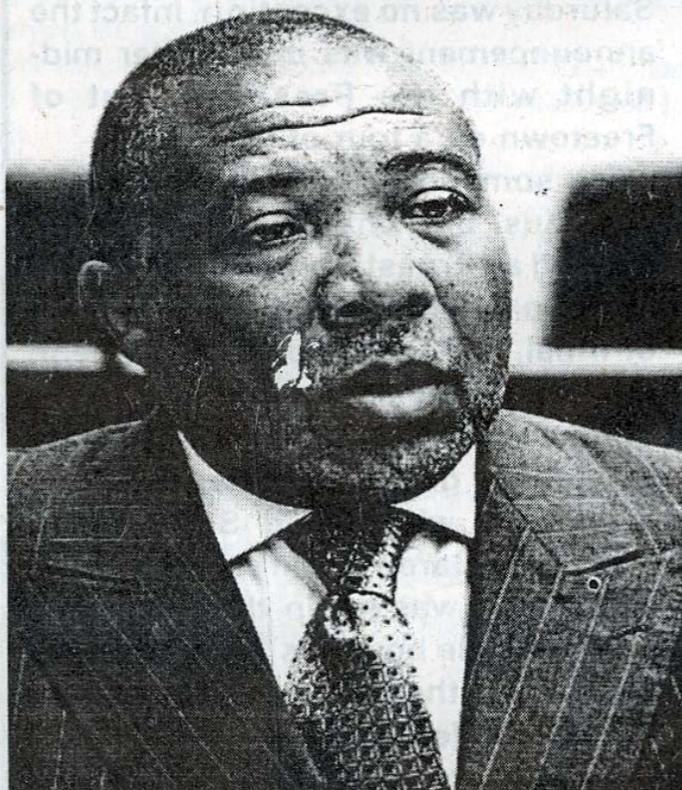
The Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone says the court hopes that there will be a judgment in the case of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, in June or July next year. Brenda Hollies made this disclosure at Fourah Bay College on Thursday during an interactive forum with students of the Mass Communication department on the legacy of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

She said the Special Court sitting in The Hague has concluded the evidence phase of the Taylor trial.

She pointed out that in January next year, both the Prosecution and the Defense would present written augments to the Trial Chamber for judgment.

On the legacies of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the Prosecutor said the court has helped to restore Justice and the Rule of Law, recognize fundamental human rights and fight against impunity, thus preventing a future occurrence of crimes against humanity.

Charles Taylor is charged with 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, allegedly committed during Sierra Leone's civil war. Mr. Taylor has pleaded not guilty to all the charges.



Human Rights Commission set for International Human Rights Day

The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone in collaboration with its partners is set to celebrate the International Human Rights Day.

The theme for this year's celebration is speak up and stop discrimination with special reference to and human rights defenders who act to end discrimination. Human rights defenders speak out against abuse and violations including discrimination, exclusion, oppression and violence. They advocate justice and seek to protect the victims of human rights violations.

They demand accountability for perpetrators and transparency in government action. In

so doing, they are often putting at risk their own safety, and that of their families.

Human Rights Day celebration will highlight and promote the achievements of human rights defenders and it will again emphasize the primary responsibility Governments have to enable and protect their role. The day is also intended to inspire a new generation of defenders to speak up and take action to end discrimination in all of its forms whenever and wherever it is manifested.

In view of that, the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone and its partners have lined up series of activities from December 7, 2010 to December 11. On December 7, they will

be having a symposium at the YWCA new hall and on the following day, a drama competition at the British Council. The Best Speakers contest will be on the 9th at the British Council to be followed by a football match on the 9th and a float parade on the day itself (December 10) to be climaxed by the official function at the National Stadium.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on December 10, 1948 that spells out certain rights and responsibilities of states including civil, political, economic social and cultural rights. It also sets out standard of achievement towards the protection of human rights for all states.

IWPR

Friday, 3 December 2010

CAR Rape Victim Tells of Trauma

Bemba trial hears of alleged attack by Congolese troops.

By Anjana Sundaram - International Justice - ICC

A woman from the Central African Republic, CAR, who claimed she had been gang-raped by troops led by Jean Pierre Bemba Gombo told the court this week of the long-term trauma she has experienced.

Bemba, commander of the rebel Movement for the Liberation of Congo, MLC, faces two counts of crimes against humanity and three counts of war crimes, including rape, murder, and pillaging. The most high-profile politician to take the stand at the International Criminal Court, ICC so far, Bemba has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The crimes were allegedly committed during the armed conflict in CAR between October 26, 2002 and March 15, 2003, when then CAR president Ange-Félix Patassé invited Bemba and his Congolese troops to crush the rebellion led by former armed forces chief Francois Bozizé, now the CAR president.

Although Bemba did not personally take part in the crimes, the court charges that he is still liable because he knew of the criminal activity taking place and did not control his troops to prevent them from committing atrocities.

Identified only as witness 22, the woman testified on November 30 with face and voice distortion and recounted how she had been staying in her uncle's house on the outskirts of Point Kilometre 12, a province near the capital Bangui, when the troops attacked on a rainy morning in late 2002.

Witness 22 said she recognised the soldiers as being from the MLC because they were speaking Lingala, a Congolese language, as well as French. She said it was between 4 and 5 am and she was still in bed, alone with her child, when she heard the troops tearing down the two entry doors to the house. More than 20 soldiers entered the house but only six proceeded to her room.

Once in the room, the soldiers asked the witness for money in both Lingala and French, but she responded that she didn't have any.

"Then they asked me to lie down on the bed," the witness recounted. "I said 'Pardon me?' I didn't want to." One soldier then held a Kalashnikov rifle to her neck and threw her on the bed.

"He pulled out a small knife and tore off my shorts and underwear and threw it away. Then he forcibly spread my legs and slept with me," the witness said.

"When the one who had been sleeping with me finished, he stood up and left. Another replaced him and slept with me," the witness continued. "After him, there was another one who slept with me, so out of the six of them who had entered my room, three of them slept with me."

The witness said that while she was being raped, the other three soldiers searched her room for clothes and other goods, and afterwards, they took her to the sitting room, where she rejoined her family and the rest of the troops. An MLC soldier told one of her uncle's wives to undress in front of everyone so he could rape her, but she was spared because she had scabies, a skin condition which made her "dirty" to the MLC soldier, according to the witness.

Another wife of her uncle was also spared rape because she was pregnant, the witness said, adding that this meant she was the only one raped in her household.

Continuing her testimony, witness 22 said that the MLC soldiers then threw one of her uncles, who was paralysed, out of his bed when he was not able to give them money, and dragged another uncle outside the house where they held him at gunpoint asking for money.

“They [the soldiers] said that Patassé had instructed them to ensure that they should start killing all children age 10 and over, and that everyone who had a fence around their house was someone who was harbouring rebels,” the witness recounted. The soldiers said the uncle would be spared only if he provided money, according to the witness.

But the soldiers let the uncle go eventually, the witness said, and instead shot one of the barking dogs outside which had frightened them. The soldiers left the premises after taking all the family’s animals, including ducks, chickens, goats, and geese.

Witness 22 described the long-term trauma she endured after her rape, saying she was ostracized and considered suicide.

“That day in my mind, when they brutalised me, after I got up and I found my entire family, we fled. That day, I wanted to commit suicide,” the witness said.

Assingambi Zarambaud, one of the victims’ representatives, who are considered a party to the proceedings and have the opportunity to question witnesses and read out statements, said, “Before the rape she had a fiancé and now she no longer has a fiancé. She stated that the breakup was linked to the rape.”

“I struggle to survive with my child,” the victim added. “If I succeed to find something to eat, I share it with him.”

Witness 22 said that in contrast to the MLC troops’ behaviour, those of Bozize did not commit crimes against civilians.

“When Bozize’s rebels came in, they did not assault the civilian population,” the witness said, adding that at the time, she and the other women of the house mostly did not go outside, but got their information from the men. “They were not aggressive at all. As soon as they came, they fired some warning shots in the air to free up the roads, and they said to the people to withdraw from the town. But they did not assault the civilians.”

However, during cross-examination by defence counsel Peter Haynes, the witness acknowledged that she had heard Bozize’s rebels say they were going to take the country by blood.

“I heard it said that there were some people who were injured because of the stray bullets,” she added. “But I heard about it, I didn’t see it with my own eyes.”

Before witness 22 gave testimony, the court heard from an expert on post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD, who described the lasting effects of sexual violence.

Psychologist Adeyinka Akinsulure-Smith said that the consequences were “devastating” and were manifested in both physical and psychological ways.

“Many patients say, ‘The physical scars heal, but the emotional scars stay with me.’ We see extensive PTSD, depressive symptoms, and anxiety related symptoms,” Akinsulure-Smith said, adding that victims also had to live with a stigma.

“It’s shame for men, there is a fear of being viewed as homosexual,” Akinsulure-Smith said. “For women, there is the stigma of having been used, being seen as damaged goods, if you will.”

The trial continues next week.

Anjana Sundaram is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

IWPR

Friday, 26 November 2010

Bemba Trial Opens with Harrowing Testimony

Protected witness describes violent acts allegedly committed by military force commanded by the accused.

By Anjana Sundaram - International Justice - ICC

The trial of former Congolese vice-president Jean-Pierre Bemba Gombo, which opened this week, heard harrowing testimony of violence allegedly carried out by his forces.

Bemba, commander of the rebel Movement for the Liberation of Congo, MLC, faces two counts of crimes against humanity and three counts of war crimes, including rape, murder, and pillaging. Bemba, the most high-profile politician to take the stand at the ICC so far, has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The crimes were allegedly committed during the armed conflict in the Central African Republic, CAR, between October 26, 2002 and March 15, 2003, when then-CAR president Ange-Félix Patassé invited Bemba and his Congolese troops to crush the rebellion led by former armed forces chief Francois Bozizé, now the CAR president.

Giving evidence this week with face and voice distortion, a man identified only as Witness 38 described how Bemba's rebel forces, known locally as Banyamulenge, allegedly harassed people on the street, robbing and beating them.

The witness indicated that he had participated in a group fighting Bemba's forces, but the exact nature of his role was unclear due to protective measures.

"They were very aggressive, wicked and bad," the witness said. "There was nothing human about those rebels of Mr Bemba at the time... their attitude was close to the behaviour of animals."

The witness said that, within three or four days of the MLC forces arriving in Point Kilometre 12, a province near the capital Bangui, he had met a mother whose nine-year old daughter had been raped by the soldiers.

"It was very difficult [to bear] this, she was a very small girl," the witness said. "What could I do when I was faced with such a situation? She was bleeding and I could just say, 'Make an effort to go to the hospital.'"

The witness also described another incident which occurred after a father tried to complain to soldiers about the kidnap and gang-rape of his daughter. In response, the witness said, the MLC troops tied the father up and raped his daughter in his presence.

Other forms of persecution took place as well, the witness continued, recalling one young man who was approached by a Banyamulenge soldier and asked to take out his penis. The soldier poked at the person's genitals with the barrel of his gun, according to the witness. "He was not physically assaulted but he was psychologically assaulted," Witness 38 said. "There were several such incidents."

Witness 38 said that the progress of Bemba's troops was rapid, recalling how he had seen MLC soldiers reach Point Kilometre 12 within hours of the withdrawal of Bozize's troops in October 2002. The troops

remained there until March 15, 2003, according to the witness, who estimated that there had been 800 to 1,000 troops stationed in Point Kilometre 12.

They were easily identifiable by their uniform insignia, knee-length boots and red and black-coloured berets, he continued, adding that he thought the facial features of Bemba's troops looked different to those of people from CAR.

The witness also recalled being taken aback at the age of some of the soldiers bearing AK-47 machine guns, rocket launchers, and other firearms, which were "being operated by a small boy of maybe 15, 16, or 14 years.

"The gun was on a tripod and the weapon was being fired and the person firing it was a small boy of 15 years old. This was a surprise for everyone."

As the troops set up four bases in the area, they would go through the neighbourhoods pillaging and looting, the witness said, adding that he had seen soldiers beating civilians with pieces of wood, reeds and canes attached with rubber and leather strips.

"There was robbery and rape in the houses. They would take everything they found. Radios, telephones, even the cushions for beds, everything," continued the witness, adding that civilians who did not have belongings such as a cell phone or jewelry when confronted by soldiers on the street were stripped down to their underwear.

In another incident, the witness recounted how a man was shot by Bemba's troops because they suspected him of being an enemy.

"They said he was a rebel because his hat was on a certain way," the witness said. The troops then put the young man on the ground and shot him from behind. "The bullet went through his anus and went through his head," the witness said.

The witness believes the MLC soldiers did not show remorse for their actions. "Such incidents amused them so much," the witness said. "Maybe they thought they had achieved some exploit or reached some sort of goal."

Bemba had visited his troops in Point Kilometre 12 at least once, according to the witness, when a parade was held, although the witness had not been able to attend it.

When asked by deputy prosecutor Fatou Bensouda whether he thought Bemba was aware of the crimes being committed by his troops at the time, the witness responded, "I believe that Bemba must have been aware of everything that was going on in our capital because many people spoke out, even on the radio. Radio France International gave a lot of coverage to what happened in Bangui, mainly in Begoua."

But the behaviour of the soldiers did not change after Bemba's visit, according to the witness.

"The acts of violence and abuse continued, and the people continued to suffer from the harassment of the troops of Bemba," he stated.

Defence counsel Nkwebe Richard Liriss then objected to the prosecution's line of questioning, saying he had counted 13 leading questions which he planned to complain about to the chamber before his cross-examination.

The witness also said that there were no CAR troops in the areas in which Bemba's rebel forces set up camps.

"I believe at that time Patassé had felt betrayed by his army and he had called on the Banyamulenge rebels of Bemba," the witness said. "So, in my opinion, I believe that he no longer trusted his army so he gave the rebels of Bemba all the leeway to act. This means that the rebels were sort of like the leader of our own army."

This is the first trial at the ICC to prosecute a suspect on the grounds of "command responsibility".

Bemba's defence argues that once the MLC forces crossed over from the DRC into CAR, they were under the control of Patassé and his army and that so many military forces were stationed in the area it would be impossible to pinpoint crimes by Bemba's troops.

Meanwhile, in a feature that is unique to the ICC, lawyers representing victims - in this case 759 - will be present during the trial to present the views and concerns of their clients. The victims' representatives, considered a party to the proceedings, will have the opportunity to question witnesses at the discretion of the judges, and read out opening statements at the beginning of this week's trial.

Victims' legal representative Marie Edith Douzima-Lawson read out the orders of one of Bemba's commanders, who allegedly told MLC troops, "You don't have any relative, you don't have any sister, brothers or wives, you are going there [CAR] and you will destroy everything. This is war. Bemba sent you to kill and have fun."

Another victims' legal representative, Assingambi Zarambaud, said, "You [the court] make it possible for not only the victims to rebuild their lives and the Central African Republic to get justice, but also for humanity, specifically Africa to make sure that those who want to continue in this path should know that impunity is no longer allowed. If people continue to perpetrate such acts, they will find themselves before the ICC and be punished."

Cross-examination of the witness by the defence will continue next week.

Anjana Sundaram is an IWPR reporter in The Hague.

The Standard (Kenya)

Monday, 6 December 2010

Politicians in a rush to derail Ocampo's mission

By STANDARD TEAM

As the International Criminal Court investigation reaches its penultimate stage in nine days time, MPs drawn largely from the Rift Valley and parts of Central Kenya are desperately doubling their efforts to sabotage the process.

After Attorney General Amos Wako's claim last week that cases pursued by Ocampo do not qualify as crimes against humanity, MPs plan to table a motion in Parliament this week to force the Government to denounce the ICC, and deny its prosecutor any legal jurisdiction under international law to operate in Kenya.

By Sunday, some 50 MPs had signed up to the plan. The motion is to be presented to Parliament on Wednesday by Chepalungu MP Isaac Rutto.

Short of pulling Kenya out of the ICC, there is little the Government can do to stop the prosecutor, Mr Moreno-Ocampo from seeking indictments on December 15, against the alleged masterminds of the violence that followed a disputed presidential election.

But time is against them. The process of withdrawing from the ICC would last between one and two years, time enough for indictments to be issued by the court, and alleged culprits summoned or arrested.

MPs pushing the motion claim the ICC investigation unfairly targets their communities and leaders, and that Moreno-Ocampo has no credible witnesses.

Kenya subject to Rome statute

But when it ratified the Rome Statute establishing the ICC, Kenya became subject to the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Criminal Court, which sets out clear guidelines on denunciation of the Rome Statute, and resolution of disagreements on its interpretation.

And even with Attorney General Amos Wako now on their side, for their motion to have any international weight, the MPs must garner a two-thirds majority in Parliament behind it, which looks like a long shot.

"All differences arising out of the interpretation or application of the present Agreement between two or more States Parties or between the Court and a State Party shall be settled by consultation, negotiation or other agreed mode of settlement," reads Article 32(1) of the agreement.

Furthermore, the ICC is also immune from legal suits.

ICC is immune

Article 6(1) reads: "The Court, and its property, funds and assets, wherever located and by whomsoever held, shall be immune from every form of legal process, except insofar as in any particular case the Court has expressly waived its immunity. It is, however, understood that no waiver of immunity shall extend to any measure of execution."

But despite the mood of the country generally being in favour of the ICC process due to a lack of trust in the local judicial system, there has been a continuous and deliberate attempt by this group of MPs to demonise the court and its investigations.

The same MPs shot down a motion two years ago that would have locked the ICC out of the process in favour of a local solution.

Their current change of heart appears rooted in getting one of their "own" into State House.

Dujis MP Aden Duale who is among those fronting for the motion say they want to force President Kibaki to form a special court to deal with cases emanating from the 2007-2008 post-election violence. He appeared to believe this would force Moreno-Ocampo to drop the cases he is pursuing.

"The motion will have several aims; to form a special court within the judiciary, and to review Kenya's membership of the ICC," he said.

Ocampo will on Wednesday next week seek indictments against six people he says have the highest level of responsibility for the violence.

But MPs opposing the ICC process fear he may indict leaders they have identified as their communities' best cards for the 2012 presidential race, throwing their best-laid plans into disarray.

Reliable sources have also told The Standard that Eldoret North MP William Ruto plans to dispatch lawyers to The Hague to file an application to block Ocampo, though his lawyer Mr Katwa Kigen declined to confirm or deny this.

Ruto was adversely mentioned in a report that was prepared by the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights whose commissioner, Hassan Omar, he accuses of coaching witnesses.

The report by the commission was part of documents given to the ICC by Justice Philip Waki commission that Ruto accuses of wrongly saying in its final report that he testified at its hearings.

Also today, former Central Province PPO Philip Ndegwa is expected to move to the High Court in Nairobi to ask for an injunction against the ICC.

Ndegwa is among ten security chiefs who served during the 2007-2008 post-election violence and was served with summons to give evidence to the ICC investigators, but declined to do so on grounds that he is no longer in government.

Ndwiga's move comes after nine serving security chiefs filed a case at the ICC at The Hague to get assurance from the judges that they would not be pursued for trial if they give any evidence to Ocampo.

Following Ocampo's revelation last week that he would file his case within two weeks, many leaders have made statements in an apparent sign that the ICC process was turning up the heat in Kenyan politics.

PM Raila Odinga told Ocampo and chief mediator Koffi Annan that the chaos was ignited by the disputed presidential election.

At the weekend, Lands Minister James Orengo he suspected he was in Ocampo's crosshairs.

"My name is there in ICC, but I'm not scared even though I was accused of calling for mass action at the height of post-election violence," said the minister.

ICC process was political

On Sunday, Duale alleged the ICC process was political.

"We want justice for the people who suffered the post election violence, but we do not want the ICC process, which we initially thought would be fair to interfere with the cohesion we have achieved so far," he said.

The MPs pushing the motion claimed on Sunday President Kibaki did not sign agreements the ICC reached with the Government recently.

"Ocampo is conducting his business like a politician. Why talk endlessly yet prosecutors only act in court? We are convinced he is out to mess our country," said Chepalungu MP Isaac Rutto, a close confidante of Eldoret North MP William Ruto.

Justice Minister Mutula Kilonzo said any hope the MPs have that Parliament can stop Ocampo is just "wishful thinking".

Lawyers Paul Muite and James Mwamu said that since the ICC judges already have the Kenyan file, the motion has no chance of changing anything.

"Already the three judges have given Ocampo a go ahead to investigate the Kenyan case. The case will continue to its logical conclusion regardless of the Kenyan politics," said Muite.

Mwamu said Kenya had failed in the past to try the PEV suspects and that the country cannot be trusted by anybody to handle the same cases.

"Kenya handed itself to the ICC and there is no room to withdraw from the ICC Act midway. It is unfortunate and those scheming better stop embarrassing themselves," warned Mwamu.

Reporting by Jibril Adan, Beattah Omanga and Peter Orengo

The Hague Justice Portal

Monday, 6 December 2010

Nizeyimana trial to commence at ICTR

The trial of the former Rwandan military commander, Idelphonse Nizeyimana is scheduled to commence at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) on 17 January 2011. Nizeyimana is charged with genocide or complicity in the alternative, as well as rape and other inhumane acts as crimes against humanity under an indictment dated 7 November 2000.



Nizeyimana is accused of conspiring with other military personnel, members of the government, political leaders, civil servants and others in Rwanda to work out a plan for the extermination of the Tutsi population. After fleeing Rwanda in 1994, Nizeyimana is alleged to have joined the ranks of the *Forces Democratiques de Liberation du Rwanda* (FDLR) rebels in eastern DRC.

On 5 October 2009, Idelphonse Nizeyimana was apprehended in Kampala, Uganda attempting to travel into Kenya with false documentation. Nizeyimana was transferred to the custody of the Tribunal on the following day.

Hirondelle News Agency

Thursday, 2 December 2010

Ngirabatware blames former Rwandan genocide-convict premier

Ex-Rwandan Planning Minister and genocide-accused, Augustin Ngirabatware, Thursday blamed his former boss, Premier Jean Kambanda for pleading guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity as he was closing his examination in chief before the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR).

"I am not happy with the guilty plea entered by my Prime Minister, Jean Kambanda. As a government, we did our best with the little resources available to us to put to an end to the massacres in our country," Ngirabatware explained.

The defendant said that as Minister in the government led by Kambanda he went to several countries in Africa and abroad, scouting for help to stop the killing spree, insisting that it was not true as pleaded by the Premier that "his government fuelled genocide and failed to take proper measures to control genocide."

Kambanda (now serving life imprisonment in Mali) pleaded guilty for six counts including genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, complicity in genocide, crimes against humanity (murder) and (extermination). He was sentenced to life imprisonment on September 4, 1998 and his appeal was dismissed on October 19, 2000.

According to Ngirabatware, the plea bargain entered by Kambanda with ICTR authorities, the tribunal's refusal to indict former Rwandan Patriotic Front-RPF-rebel officials (now ruling Rwanda) and the failure to order investigation on the assassination of Rwandan President, Juvenal Habyarimana made him believe he would not get fair trial.

"All these issues alongside others I did not mention, made me not to turn myself before the Tribunal," Ngirabatware elaborated as his lead defence Counsel, Peter Herbert demanded to know why he did not surrender when he learnt that he has been indicted.

The accused who was testifying on his own behalf, Wednesday denied that he ever distributed weapons in April 1994 to the population in his home commune of Nyamyumba in Gisenyi prefecture, Northern Rwanda in the presence of his wife and children.

"I would say that it is not true because it is degrading, insulting and would have tarnished my reputation," Ngirabatware said.

"Between April 13 and 14, 1994 I was in Gitarama attending two cabinet meetings whereas my wife and children were already in Bujumbura (Burundi)," Ngirabatware explained.

The government of Rwanda was compelled to shift from Kigali city to Gitarama, central Rwanda on April 12, 1994 following escalation of massacres and violence in the city.

Ngirabatware who commenced his own defence on November 16, concluded his 10-day examination in chief and will be cross examined by prosecution next Monday.

NI/FK/ER/GF

Herald Scotland

Monday, 6 December 2010

There is a heavy price to pay for dealing with Lord of War

He's been dubbed the Merchant of Death.

Viktor Bout, former Russian army officer turned international arms dealer extraordinaire, was this week extradited to the US from Thailand, accused of trying to sell weapons to Colombian rebels as well as supplying many of the guns, bombs and bullets used in conflicts across Africa and the Middle East.

Bout – pronounced “boot” – is very much a man who epitomises the dangerous and mercenary times we live in. Here we have a world-class 21st-century entrepreneur with precious few moral or ideological constraints, who sees war as the ultimate business opportunity. Bout, the global go-getter, makes those international bankers and brokers who play fast and loose with the law look like slouches.

But what they all have in common, of course, is an insatiable greed that needs to be fed, irrespective of the human cost to those caught up in the crossfire of wheeling and dealing. Think Bernie Madoff, the American broker who defrauded investors of billions of dollars, and apply that to Viktor Bout's air transport and arms dealing empire, and you get some idea of the ruthlessness, scale and sums involved. Not even Madoff's rapacious plundering, however, could give rise to the kind of wholesale butchery of communities that Bout's door-to-door arms delivery service made possible.

Flying under flags of convenience or registered in obscure failed states, Bout's fleet of ageing Russian transport aircraft ferried their lethal cargoes while his bank accounts and business locations remained equally fluid. His client list is said to read like a veritable who's who of the world's bogey men. Charles Taylor – of blood diamond notoriety – in Liberia. Sam “Mosquito” Bockarie – of hand-chopping infamy – in Sierra Leone. Mubutu in Zaire, Gaddafi in Libya, the Taliban, al Qaeda – you name the despot or regime and Bout is said to have given them the countless Kalashnikovs, land mines, rocket launchers and other weapons needed to wreak havoc and suffering.

Such was Bout's near legendary reputation that even a movie, *Lord of War*, loosely based on Bout's life, was made, starring Nicolas Cage. I remember once flying into the beleaguered Liberian capital, Monrovia, aboard one of the first humanitarian aid flights during the second civil war there in 1999. One of the Scandinavian crew recounted how a few days before, while landing, they had almost collided with another aircraft that arrived unscheduled and unannounced.

“People say it was one of Viktor Bout's that came from Libya carrying guns for President Charles Taylor,” the crewman told me. “Surely you must have heard of him. Every cargo pilot in Africa knows of Bout,” the pilot insisted.

Anecdotal as this evidence was, for years until then, electronic intercepts, phone taps, documents and eyewitness sightings of Bout's planes being unloaded on remote African airstrips, had been gathered by the world's intelligence services and law enforcement agencies. The United Nations, CIA, US National Security Agency, MI6, Russian FSB, Belgian and other intelligence services, all had Bout's activities on their radar. Yet, despite this, between them they could only scuttle along in the wake of his trail of destruction, never quite able to catch, let alone convict, him.

Why was this? Could it be that Viktor Bout, far from being some lone wolf, was, in fact, also part of a pack, closer to many of these same organisations than many realised? Certainly, the Kremlin fought long and hard to prevent Bout's extradition this week, with many believing that he knows all about Russia's

covert arms supplies, both official and unofficial, going back decades. And what about Bout's American and Iraq war connections? According to Douglas Farah, the Washington Post journalist who penned a penetrating investigative book on Bout's career, the Russian's air-freight services were used by the US military and by Halliburton, its subsidiary KBR, Federal Express and other contractors in Iraq, making Bout enormous profits, even though George W Bush has signed an executive order making it illegal to do business with Bout and his companies.

Then there is that 2006 Amnesty International report that details how a Moldovan-registered company linked to Bout obtained a US military contract in 2004 to fly 200,000 Kalashnikov rifles and millions of rounds of ammunition from Bosnia to Iraq, even though Bout was already on a UN and Treasury Department blacklist and was wanted by Interpol. The simple fact is that the international arms trade has always operated in this vague, murky, ambiguous way, where telling the difference between the legal and the illegal has proved problematic, to say the least.

Viktor Bout was a past master at exploiting this. Indeed, much of what Bout did would be difficult to deem illegal such was the mastery with which he manipulated governments, regimes, organisations and individuals alike. For decades, Bout and the world's weapons merchants have found it all too easy to profit from the shortcomings in international legislation when it comes to arms peddling.

Like mercenary soldiers and the plethora of private security firms that have sprung up as a result of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, those who run guns have proved as much a benefit to many states as they have a danger – Britain and the US being no exception. As activists such as those from groups like Action Network on Small Arms, and the Control Arms campaign rightly point out, there is a pressing need to tighten standards controlling the international trade in conventional arms. To that end, a tougher Arms Trade Treaty (ATT) that would establish strict rules for the international transfer of arms, and hold irresponsible arms suppliers and dealers to account, urgently needs to be realised.

Viktor Bout may know more than enough to embarrass, if not incriminate, a lot of people from Moscow to Washington and far beyond. In a New York City court on Wednesday, he pleaded not guilty to charges including terrorism and arms trafficking. Those who believe his trial will cast any real light on the shadowy world of illegal arms dealing and the extent to which nations collude in its practice may well be disappointed. If nothing else, Viktor Bout has shown himself in the past to be a consummate deal-maker and survivor, and for that reason alone some kind of legal chicanery or pact with America's spooks may yet get him out of another tight corner. As you read this, countless numbers of people are being killed, maimed, raped and forced to flee their homes as a result of the violence that arms dealers make possible. The so-called Lord of War may for the moment be behind bars, but his disciples are still busy spreading their insidious message.