

**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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CHARLES TAYLOR WAR CRIMES TRIAL **EXTENDED IN THE HAGUE**

The war crimes trial of Liberia's former President Charles Taylor has been extended after judges said they would decide on a defence appeal. Friday was due to be the last day of the trial, which began in 2007. But defence lawyer Courtenay Griffiths stormed out of court this week after judges refused to accept the late submission of a document. Mr Taylor denies 11 counts - including murder, rape, and using child soldiers during the civil war in Sierra Leone. He is accused of arming and controlling the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels during a 10-year campaign of terror conducted largely against civilians. The RUF became infamous for hacking off the limbs of their victims, and using rape and murder to terrorise the population. One of the reasons why Courtenay Griffiths missed the 14 January deadline for the submission of the final trial brief was that new evidence came to light. A Wikileaks cable that was published in December 2010, corroborated Charles Taylor's long-standing allegation that powerful Western countries, including the United States and Britain, were "out to get him", in the words of Mr Griffiths. The defence may be arguing that this has become a political trial, but the thrust of the prosecution's summing-up this week was that Mr Taylor was the central figure, "the critical actor" and "the godfather", during his support for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone during the "campaign of terror" there in the 1990s. The Open Society Initiative, a non-governmental organisation that has been monitoring this case, says the trial of Mr Taylor boils down to one question: Was the former Liberian president behind the mayhem and crimes committed in Sierra Leone? Mr Taylor and his lawyers were upset at the court's refusal to accept a 500-page written summary of the trial that was submitted late. "What we were trying to do is ensure we get some semblance of justice out of this and it's turned into this personalised attack on us," Mr Griffiths told reporters outside the court on Wednesday. "I find it totally despicable." The defence team has now been granted leave to appeal. The BBC's Peter Biles in The Hague says after that appeal has been heard - perhaps within the next two weeks - the defence will still need to discuss whether it will be allowed to present closing oral arguments. The separate issue over the apology demanded by the judges from Mr Griffiths is potentially a disciplinary matter and has been deferred until 25 February, he says.

BBC World Service Trust

Friday, 11 February 2011

Interview with Taylor's Lead Counsel

Following the recent development in the ongoing trial of former president of Liberia Charles Taylor in The Hague, Taylor's lead defence lawyer Courtenay Griffiths on the 8th February, walked out of court saying he will not be part of the final trial brief because according to him, the court has not been fair with his client as their final trial brief was not accepted.

Taylor's defence counsel was twenty days behind the schedule time of submission. The court says it is a violation of court order for failing to submit their Final trial brief on time

Mr. Griffiths says the court has not been just to his client. Via telephone interview, the BBC World Service Trust Mariama Khai Fornah asked Mr. Griffiths from The Hague to explain what the reason for their late submission

GRIFFITHS: Well the delay was due to the fact that after the timetable was set by the Court on the 22nd of October of last year, a number of issues arose which we brought up with the Court. And by the 14th of January none of those issues had been resolved by the Court. And it's normal practice that one doesn't submit a final brief or argument until such time as all outstanding issues have been resolved by the Court. And that's why we didn't file by the 14th. [Indistinct] the delay was only 20 day, and in the context of a trial lasting three years, we think it's totally unreasonable of the Court to say they won't receive our final written brief.

Now Mr. Griffiths, this was something you should have filed earlier, but you did 20 days outside the deadline set by the Trial Chamber in its 22 October scheduling order.

GRIFFITHS: Yes, I appreciate that, but there was good reason for us not filing on the 14th, because at that time the Court had not decided on a number of motions [indistinct] matters which we wanted to include in our final brief. How could we complete that brief when there were so many outstanding issues?

What are some of these issues you are talking about here?

GRIFFITHS: Well for example, we had asked for the Court to allow us to re-open our case to call four witnesses about whom fresh information had come to light as to inducements received by them from the Prosecution. Furthermore, some code cables had been released in December which suggested that the Special Court for Sierra Leone was less than independent of the US Government, which is a point we've been making from the word go. So I think that it was perfectly reasonable for us to say to the Court, let us wait until these issues have been resolved before we can move to any kind of final arguments.

Mr. Griffiths, the Court is now seeing your actions as a willful breach of Court orders.

GRIFFITHS: Yes, it's a matter of principle, because as far as we're concerned we are here to protect Mr. Taylor's interests, and his rights under Chapter 17 of the Statute which established this court guarantees him an adequate time and facility to prepare his case, and that is what we've been denied, which is why on that point of principle – it's not a question of ignoring a court order; it's a case of acting in the best interests of the Accused.

The Court's action, and remarks made by Justices Lussick and Doherty, was as a result of a response to your submission, that in the absence of your final brief you were not going to be part in the oral submission. How can you comment on this?

GRIFFITHS: Well the fact of the matter is, if the Judges are not prepared to listen to, or see our closing submission, it means then that they've totally rejected the Defence case. In that [aspect], why do I need to be in court? My presence there now serves no purpose, because they've already rejected our case.

Well now Mr. Griffiths, how is this going affect your client's case?

GRIFFITHS: Well, I mean, I think you should address that question to Justice Lussick and Justice Doherty, because effectively they're now going to decide on the guilt of Mr. Taylor without hearing an argument from us. So of course it's going to affect his case.

You are Mr. Taylor's Lead Counsel and you are speaking on behalf of your client. That's why I'm posing this question to you.

GRIFFITHS: Well, as I say, at the end of the day, when I was asked whether or not the position adopted by Justice Lussick and Justice Doherty reflects their view as to the guilt or innocence of Mr. Taylor. It may well be that they don't need to look at the Defence case because they've already decided he's guilty. I don't know.

Now the court is claiming that you are always in the habit of disobeying the court. Is that not a stain in your profession as Lead Counsel?

GRIFFITHS: No, no, no, Mariama, there can be no suggestion that I'm in the habit of disobeying the Court. I have always cooperated with this tribunal from the word go. That has always been the case. And when one compares the Taylor trial with other trials 4:15

That was the BBC WST Mariama Khai Fornah talking there to Taylor's lead defence counsel Courtney Griffiths from The Hague.

Agence France Presse

Sunday, 13 February 2011

S. Leone keeps watch as theatrics rage in Taylor trial

By Rod Mac Johnson (AFP)

FREETOWN — As Charles Taylor's war crimes trial was delayed Friday amid legal wrangling, victims of his alleged crimes in Sierra Leone watched from afar, hoping that justice will be done. Next month will mark 10 years since the start of the gruesome civil war in this west African nation, where rebels waged a campaign of murder, maiming, rape and looting in what was one of the most brutal conflicts in modern times.

"At precisely this time during the war, people were being killed, houses torched, amputation was everywhere and raping was the order of the day, all attributed to the works of Taylor," said Sulaiman Turay, a middle-aged mechanic in Freetown who was forced to flee the rebels and live in the wilds for four months in 1998.

Taylor, the ex-president of Liberia, has been accused by at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the Netherlands of arming the rebels in exchange for illegally mined so-called "blood diamonds." The three-year trial has seen glamour, with testimonies from model Naomi Campbell and actress Mia Farrow on dodgy diamond deals, and made-for-television drama with the former warlord storming out of court this week.

It was delayed indefinitely on Friday, as the court granted Taylor's lawyers leave to appeal an earlier decision refusing the late filing of a defence document.

Despite the drama and delays, Turay said the trial is a "reminder that the world should not forget the atrocities that were waged on the civilian population."

The 62-year old Taylor has pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity such as sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers.

Prosecutors have tried to prove he armed and supported Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in exchange for illegally mined so-called "blood diamonds" during the war which claimed some 120,000 lives in the 10 years to 2001.

Amadu Sankoh, a farmer before he was ambushed in the southern town of Pujehun in 1999 and had his left hand chopped off by rebels, has been following screenings of the trial at the UN backed Special Court venue in Freetown.

"I hope the trial will conclude soon so that all who suffered would put the incident behind us and move forward," he told AFP.

An executive member of the Sierra Leone Amputee Association, Thomas Lahai, has followed the trial impatiently, and has little pity for Taylor.

"Taylor is being haunted by his conscience," he says. "He knows that no means of wrangling would get him off the sword of justice and the net of retributive justice is slowly closing in."

A decade after the end of the war, the battered country remains one of the world's poorest despite its natural resources.

"I am struggling to find a means of survival and how I can stretch the Leones (the national currency) to cook a daily meal for myself and three children," said single parent Henrietta Samuels. "And you are asking me about a trial and Charles Taylor?"

But, despite waning interest in the trial as rising food prices become the main problem, the secretary-general of local NGO Justice for All, Dennis Foray, said "the mood has not dampened the demand for justice to prevail."

"Just mention the name Charles Taylor and people are apt to come alive to ask what is the state of the trial. Victims are living with the scars of the war which they blame on (Taylor's) quest for blood diamonds. His present manoeuvre is just a ploy."

Voice of America
Friday, 11 February 2011

Taylor War Crimes Trial Delayed



Photo: AP

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor awaits the start of the prosecution's closing arguments during his trial at the U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in Leidschendam, February 8, 2011.

Judges at the Hague have indefinitely delayed the war crimes trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor and allowed the defense to appeal a key ruling in the case.

Mr. Taylor's three-year trial accusing him of instigating murder and widespread crimes during the brutal civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone in the 1990s had been expected to end on Friday. Instead, the three judges at the Special Court for Sierra Leone adjourned the case.

The court ruled that Mr. Taylor's defense lawyers could appeal its earlier decision refusing to let them submit a nearly 600-page document summarizing the defense case because they filed it 20 days late. Defense lawyer Courtenay Griffiths later told reporters that he would file the appeal with the court's appeals chamber next Tuesday or Wednesday and he hoped to get a ruling a week later.

Mr. Taylor, the first African leader to stand trial for war crimes, is accused of overseeing a campaign of murder, rape, mutilation, sexual slavery and conscription of child soldiers during the civil war in Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002. The 62-year-old former head of state has denied the charges.

Prosecutors have alleged that Mr. Taylor, from his seat of power in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, directed Sierra Leone's Revolutionary Front to get "blood diamonds" illegally mined with slave labor. The rebels were notorious for hacking off the limbs of their enemies and more than 120,000 lives were lost during the civil war.

Prosecutor Brenda Hollis described Mr. Taylor this week as "a man with an insatiable greed for wealth and power."

A final ruling in the case is expected later this year.

Agence France-Presse

Friday, 11 February 2011

Judges delay end of Charles Taylor trial

LEIDSCHENDAM, Netherlands — Judges on Friday adjourned indefinitely the three-year-old trial of Liberian ex-president Charles Taylor on charges of arming rebels who killed and maimed Sierra Leone citizens.

Instead of closing the trial, as scheduled, the Special Court for Sierra Leone granted Taylor's lawyers leave to appeal an earlier decision refusing the late filing of a defence document.

"The trial chamber will stand over the proceedings until the appeals chamber will deliver their verdict," presiding judge Teresa Doherty said in Taylor's absence. "This hearing is adjourned sine die."

Taylor, 62, has pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

He sent a notice to the court on Friday waiving his right to be present. His lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, was in court as ordered by the judges after storming out of their courtroom earlier in the week.

"Reason has finally been able to prevail," Griffiths told journalists outside the courtroom in Leidschendam, near The Hague, of the decision to allow his appeal.

It was not clear by how much the process will delay the trial closure, but Griffiths said he intended to file the appeal by Tuesday or Wednesday next week.

"Hopefully, thereafter, we will have a result (from the judges) by the following week," he said.

"We do not want the trial lasting a day longer than it needs to," Griffiths' defence team colleague, Terry Munyard, told the judges earlier.

The prosecution said this week that Taylor armed Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels who staged one of the most brutal conflicts in modern times in exchange for illegally mined so-called "blood diamonds".

The Sierra Leone civil war claimed some 120,000 lives in the 10 years to 2001, with RUF rebels, Taylor's "surrogate army", mutilating thousands of civilians by hacking off their limbs.

He "was in charge of, put in place, directed, nurtured and supported the campaign of terror" against the people of Sierra Leone, prosecutor Brenda Hollis told judges on Tuesday, describing Taylor as "a man with an insatiable greed for wealth and power."

Taylor and his lawyer were absent from the court for most of Tuesday for the prosecution's closing arguments, and again on Wednesday, the day set aside for those of the defence.

Their absence was a mark of protest, with Griffiths storming out of the courtroom accusing the court of "injustice" for refusing to accept his filing, 20 days late, of a written summary of Taylor's defence.

This is the decision he has now been granted leave to appeal, though Hollis argued the defence should not be given another shot at closing, oral arguments.

The failure to have done so was due to the "wilful, knowing, conscious choices of the accused", said the prosecutor, accusing the defence team of trying "to assert their control over the proceedings ... to impose their conditions on the proceedings".

Friday was supposed to have seen final rebuttal arguments from both parties, followed by the closing of the trial and the judges retiring to consider their judgment -- which the court has stated is expected mid-2011.

Instead, most of the morning was taken up by a judges' directive for Griffiths to apologise for Tuesday's walkout or risk "sanctions".

His colleague, Munyard, asked the judges for a two-week delay of the disciplinary matter, saying the charges were "extremely serious" and Griffiths needed to find a "suitably qualified lawyer".

His request was granted.

Radio Netherlands

Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor trial extended

The trial of the former Liberian President Charles Taylor was extended on Friday. Additional time was given to the defence to appeal against the judges' decision to decline their final summary of evidence.

Additionally, the court adjourned for two weeks to solve the separate issue of Taylor's lawyer storming out of court last Tuesday.

"The trial chamber will stand over the proceedings until the appeals chamber delivers its verdict," presiding Judge Teresa Doherty said, adjourning the hearing.

Taylor did not appear at the Special Court for Sierra Leone at what was supposed to be the last day for hearing final statements by defence and prosecution.

"Mr. Taylor has waived his right to not appear before the court," said defence co-counsel Terry Munyard.

Taylor's lawyer Courtenay Griffiths was at the courtroom, but did not say a word. After walking out of the courtroom on Tuesday, opposing the judges' decision to not accept his late filing of the final summary of defence evidence, the judges expected him to apologize before the court.

Instead, the defence co-counsel Terry Munyard asked the judges to give the defence team time to find a "properly experienced counsel" for Griffiths and deal with the happenings of this week.

Munyard did not want to specify whether Griffiths will apologize to the court.

Prosecutor Brenda Hollis insisted that this is a "willing and knowing waiver" of the defence to present their evidence at the final stages of the trial.

Munyard insisted that the defence will "do everything to be as expeditious as possible."

Courtroom drama

Judges at the SCSL decided Monday they will not accept the defence's final summary of evidence because it was filed 20 days late.

After a heated row with the judges and leaving the courtroom on Tuesday, Griffiths claimed that it is not in his client's best interest to take part in the closing arguments.

Two hours later, Taylor refused to return to the courtroom after the morning coffee break.

Wednesday morning Taylor and his lawyer did not appear in court. After the hearing, Griffiths told the reporters the defence would not cooperate with the trial, "unless and until these judges are prepared to accept the defence final brief and so be in a position to consider our arguments."

"As far as we are concerned it would be totally illegitimate for us to get involved in this stage," Griffiths told journalists.

He filed a bid Wednesday to appeal against the ruling.

Griffiths insisted the defence will not show up at court today for the final day of the closing statements.

On Wednesday evening, judges issued an order for Taylor's lawyer to appear before them today. They demanded that Griffiths apologize for walking out of the courtroom, or "the Trial Chamber may impose sanctions" upon him.

Plea: not guilty

Taylor, 62, pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, claiming his trial was based on "lies" and an intelligence conspiracy.

The former Liberian president is accused of arming and controlling the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone during a 10-year campaign of terror.

He denied having received any blood diamonds, and rejected testimony that he had eaten human flesh. The court's verdict is not expected before the middle of the year.

Charles Taylor is the first African head of state to be tried by an international tribunal.

Reuters

Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor allowed to appeal over documents

THE HAGUE, Feb 11 (Reuters) - Former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who boycotted his war crimes trial for a third day on Friday, was granted the right to appeal over key documentation for a case that has drawn international interest.

Taylor, the first African leader to stand trial for war crimes, has denied 11 charges of instigating murder, rape, mutilation, sexual slavery and conscription of child soldiers during the civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s.

Prosecutors accuse Taylor of directing Revolutionary United Front rebels who raped, killed and hacked the limbs off women, men and children in a campaign of terror, and say he sought control of Sierra Leone's diamond mines, using so-called "blood diamonds" from the conflict zone for profit or to buy weapons.

The case is being followed closely in West Africa, Europe and the United States because of the political and security implications, and a final ruling is expected later this year.

A U.S. diplomat has warned that if Taylor is acquitted or gets a light sentence, his return to Liberia could "tip the balance in a fragile peace".

Taylor and his defence lawyer Courtenay Griffiths boycotted most of the hearings this week after the Special Court for Sierra Leone refused to accept the defence's almost 600-page final case summary because they filed it 20 days late.

But on Friday, the judges agreed to allow Griffiths to appeal that decision and postponed hearings for two weeks.

Griffiths welcomed the court's decision.

"I think that reason is finally beginning to prevail and that by granting or allowing us permission to appeal the decision to refuse our final brief, we are on track now hopefully to bring this trial to an appropriate ending," Griffiths told reporters outside the court.

"I am hopeful that we can file by Tuesday or Wednesday next week and then the members of the appeal chamber will deliberate on our application and hopefully thereafter we might get a result by the following week because I am sure everyone is anxious to bring these proceedings to a close, including us on the defence side."

Griffiths had requested an extension of the filing time limit before the January deadline.

He said he had been waiting for the judges to rule on eight legal matters and therefore had not been ready to file his summary.

Taylor's lawyer has questioned the Sierra Leone court's impartiality, citing leaked U.S. diplomatic cables which he says suggest Taylor's prosecution was politically motivated.

More than three years of testimony was due to end this week, but proceedings were briefly thrown into disarray on Tuesday when Griffiths stormed out of the court.

Justice Richard Lussick sharply rebuked Taylor and the defence, telling them: "You're not running the court you know." (Reporting by Svebor Kranjc; writing by Aaron Gray-Block; editing by Sara Webb)

Associated Press

Friday, 11 February 2011

Taylor trial adjourned pending defense appeal

LEIDSCHENDAM, Netherlands -- Charles Taylor's war crimes trial has been put on hold indefinitely after judges allowed his lawyer to appeal their decision not to accept a written summary of the defense case.

Taylor's lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, says "reason is finally beginning to prevail" after Special Court for Sierra Leone judges allowed him to appeal their earlier ruling rejecting the 547-page final statement because it was filed late.

Taylor's three-year trial had been due to close Friday, but it has been suspended until the appeals chamber issues its decision on the closing brief.

Griffiths had been ordered to apologize for storming out of court Tuesday, but he asked for two weeks to hire another lawyer to represent him in his heated dispute with two of the three-judge panel.

Associated Press
Friday, 11 February 2011

Taylor trial adjourned pending defense appeal

By MIKE CORDER

LEIDSCHEMENDAM, Netherlands -- Charles Taylor's war crimes trial was put on hold indefinitely Friday after judges allowed his lawyer to appeal their refusal to accept a written summary of the defense case.

The closing stages of Taylor's three-year trial for fuelling Sierra Leone's brutal 1991-2002 civil war were thrown into turmoil this week when Taylor and his lawyer Courtenay Griffiths boycotted a hearing Tuesday.

Griffiths called the proceedings "a farce" after judges at a U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone rejected Taylor's final written summary of the case because it was filed 20 days too late.

"I think reason is finally beginning to prevail," Griffiths told reporters outside the courtroom after judges allowed the appeal. "We are on track now hopefully to bring this trial to a proper ending."

The judges had been due to close the trial Friday and begin deliberating their verdicts, but it has been suspended until the appeals chamber issues its decision on the closing brief - a process likely to take weeks.

Taylor has pleaded innocent to 11 charges including murder, torture and using child soldiers for allegedly arming and supporting rebels notorious for hacking off the limbs of their enemies.

Prosecutors say that from his seat of power in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, he backed Sierra Leone's Revolutionary Front in return for "blood diamonds" illegally mined using slave labor.

Testifying in his own defense, Taylor has cast himself as a statesman who attempted to broker peace in West Africa.

Griffiths had been ordered to apologize for storming out of court Tuesday, but did not speak at Friday's hearing. Another member of Taylor's defense team, Terry Munyard, asked for two weeks to hire another lawyer to represent Griffiths in his heated dispute with two of the three-judge panel.

Presiding Judge Teresa Doherty scheduled a hearing for Feb. 25 to discuss whether Griffiths should apologize.

Taylor is the first African head of state to stand trial at an international war crimes court.

Deutsche Presse-Agentur

Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor lawyer granted additional time to present case

The Hague - A court in The Hague on Friday granted Charles Taylor's defence lawyers additional time to submit their closing arguments in the war crimes trial of Liberia's former president.

The three-year-long trial had been due to close this week, with judges retiring to consider their verdict.

But the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone allowed the defence team leave to appeal an earlier decision not to accept documents beyond the scheduled deadline.

The hearing was adjourned indefinitely.

Taylor and his British lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, had boycotted earlier hearings in protest at judges' refusal to let them submit a 500-page analysis of the trial proceedings.

Griffiths said he needed more time to show to the court that the United States and Britain had tried to influence the trial and push through a guilty verdict to prevent Taylor from returning to Liberia.

The lawyer has based his claims on diplomatic cables from both countries recently published by the WikiLeaks whistleblower website.

On Tuesday, Prosecutor Brenda Hollis asked judges to find Taylor guilty on all 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The 63-year-old, who served as president of Liberia between 1997 and 2003, is the first African leader to have been brought to justice by an international court.

He is accused of having fuelled a bloody 10-year civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone and pocketed a large amount of looted diamonds to deliver weapons to the Revolutionary United Front.

Taylor has dismissed the allegations as a 'pack of lies.'

The court had been expected to issue its verdict in the summer, but that could now be deferred.

More than 120,000 people died in the civil war until it ended with the deployment of West African peacekeepers in 1999.

BBC

Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor war crimes trial extended in The Hague

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor in court on 8 February 2011 Charles Taylor is accused of selling "blood diamonds" from Sierra Leone

The war crimes trial of Liberia's former President Charles Taylor has been extended after judges said they would decide on a defence appeal.

Friday was due to be the last day of the trial, which began in 2007.

But defence lawyer Courtenay Griffiths stormed out of court this week after judges refused to accept the late submission of a document.

Mr Taylor denies 11 counts - including murder, rape, and using child soldiers during the civil war in Sierra Leone.

He is accused of arming and controlling the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels during a 10-year campaign of terror conducted largely against civilians.

The RUF became infamous for hacking off the limbs of their victims, and using rape and murder to terrorise the population.

Mr Taylor also boycotted the opening of his trial in June 2007, arguing he would not get a fair hearing. 'Blood diamonds'

Mr Griffiths was in court on Friday but Mr Taylor was not.

Continue reading the main story

Analysis

Peter Biles BBC News, The Hague

One of the reasons why Courtenay Griffiths missed the 14 January deadline for the submission of the final trial brief was that new evidence came to light.

A Wikileaks cable that was published in December 2010, corroborated Charles Taylor's long-standing allegation that powerful Western countries, including the United States and Britain, were "out to get him", in the words of Mr Griffiths.

The defence may be arguing that this has become a political trial, but the thrust of the prosecution's summing-up this week was that Mr Taylor was the central figure, "the critical actor" and "the godfather", during his support for the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone during the "campaign of terror" there in the 1990s.

The Open Society Initiative, a non-governmental organisation that has been monitoring this case, says the trial of Mr Taylor boils down to one question: Was the former Liberian president behind the mayhem and crimes committed in Sierra Leone?

* Waiting game as trial extended

Mr Taylor and his lawyers were upset at the court's refusal to accept a 500-page written summary of the trial that was submitted late.

"What we were trying to do is ensure we get some semblance of justice out of this and it's turned into this personalised attack on us," Mr Griffiths told reporters outside the court on Wednesday. "I find it totally despicable."

The defence team has now been granted leave to appeal.

The BBC's Peter Biles in The Hague says after that appeal has been heard - perhaps within the next two weeks - the defence will still need to discuss whether it will be allowed to present closing oral arguments.

The separate issue over the apology demanded by the judges from Mr Griffiths is potentially a disciplinary matter and has been deferred until 25 February, he says.

The defence has argued that Mr Taylor tried to broker peace in Sierra Leone at the request of regional powers.

He is accused of selling "blood diamonds" for the rebels, in return for supplying them with weapons.

Last year supermodel Naomi Campbell and actress Mia Farrow were summoned to give evidence at the trial.

The prosecution was trying to establish a link between Mr Taylor and a number of uncut diamonds that Miss Campbell said she had been given in South Africa in 1997.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague has heard from more than 100 witnesses in what is the first international trial of an African former head of state.

The judges are expected to deliver a verdict later in the year.

If convicted, Mr Taylor would serve a prison sentence in the UK.

Al Arabiya

Thursday, 10 February 2011

Cassese says Bellemare slow in indicting Hariri assassins

Hariri court judge wants prosecutor to quit: sources

NEW YORK (Talal Al-Haj)

President of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, Italian Judge Antonio Cassese, has made extensive efforts to convince the Security Council's permanent members of the necessity of Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare's resignation from his position, well-informed sources told Al Arabiya.

The Special Tribunal for Lebanon in The Hague has been the subject of controversy not only in Lebanon, but also within its own walls.

The President of the Tribunal questioned the efficiency of Bellemare's work and argued that the prosecutor has been extremely slow in presenting his indictments against those responsible for the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri, reliable sources familiar with the situation told Al Arabiya.

Bellemare, according to Al Arabiya sources, indicated that he has three draft indictments to be submitted separately and consequently. The first indictment was submitted on January 17.

No Syrians

The sources also confirmed that each of these three indictments would contain two or three names, none of which are Syrian nationals. Judge Cassese argued that since neither the January indictment, nor the upcoming indictments contain a single Syrian national, there should be no such long delays in submitting all three indictments.

Cassese's concerns about the delays in issuing the indictments were shared by many senior UN officials prior to the submission of the January indictment. However, unlike these officials, the submission of one indictment has not removed Cassese's concerns.

Prosecutor Bellemare pointed out that indicting Syrian nationals would require resources not currently at his disposal, according to Al Arabiya sources.

But the United States, France, and the United Kingdom have rejected Judge Cassese's appeal to pressure Bellemare into resignation, the sources said.

The three western permanent Security Council members argued strongly against any major changes inside the STL at this time.

Meanwhile, Pre-Trial Belgian Judge Daniel Franssen is expected to issue his decision by the end of May or in June regarding the January indictment. At that time, the Court will issue arrest warrants for the accused.

If the accused do not submit voluntarily to the Court or get arrested, they will be tried in absentia at the end of September or in October of this year.

The tribunal's registrar, Herman von Hebel of The Netherlands, who gave Al Arabiya an exclusive long interview on January 18, the day after the submission of the indictment, will arrive to New York early next week for a series of important meetings with UN officials and western diplomats.

High costs

Diplomats are expected to raise the issue of the high cost of the Tribunal which stands at nearly \$70 million per year, despite the fact that it only deals with a single issue. In comparison, the International Criminal Court, which has opened investigations in several African, Latin American countries and others, costs around \$100 million per year.

These diplomats are expected to request von Hebel to reduce expenditures within the Tribunal by all reasonable means and to suspend further hiring of personnel. Lebanon funds 49 percent of the court's expenditures, with the international community funding the rest.

In his interview with Al Arabiya, von Hebel explained that the high cost of the tribunal at this stage was solely attributable to the high establishing expenses at this early stage of its work.

The renewal of the tribunal's mandate, which is set to expire in March 2012, is expected to be the subject of intense debate.

Von Hebel, in his interview with Al Arabiya in January, hinted what he would like to see happen, saying that the Special Court for Sierra Leone, of which he was also registrar, had an initial mandate of three years, like the STL, but then it was extended indefinitely.

He pointed out that the STL has been set up, not only to investigate and try the perpetrators of Hariri's assassination, but to investigate other related crimes as well.

Our sources indicate that several countries, including some in the west, argue strongly against an indefinite extension of the STL mandate, preferring a two to three-year time frame at first, because of their hesitation to commit to indefinite funding of the tribunal.

STL President Cassese

Tribunal President Cassese enjoys the respect of many in the field of international law. He was the first President of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia 1993-1997. In 2006 he served as Chairperson of the UN International Commission of Enquiry into Violations of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law in Darfur.

In 2009 he was elected President of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon. He had also several other important international legal positions. The judge cited his strong criticism of Prosecutor Bellemare in conversations with various international personalities, indicating to them that Bellemare should be replaced with his favorite choice, Norman Farrell.

Farrell, who was born in Canada in 1959, has worked as deputy to Prosecutor Serge Brammertz in the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague since July 2008.

Al Arabiya sources predict STL Prosecutor Bellemare to resign from his post before the end of the tribunal's mandate for health reasons. However, they do not expect his departure to be in 2011, but rather towards the end of 2012, after seeing the tribunal through this critical period of its history.