

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



Last Thursday's Outreach at Fadugu

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Tuesday, 27 March 2012

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Standard Times

Tuesday, 27 March 2012

A Look at the Issue of Granting Bail to Accused Persons

BY UNISSA BANGURA

It seems as if bad decisions in the courts this time around have prompted several observations made by litigants against the widespread disregard by Magistrates, including Justices of the Peace (JPs) who sit as Magistrates, in the various courts by giving a blind eye on the Provisions of Sections 79 of the Criminal Procedure Act of 1965. The Magistrates pay little attention to consistency of procedure when it comes to the question of granting bail.

The fundamental principle of the system of justice in Sierra Leone is that any person(s) charged with an offence of any type is presumed innocent until proven guilty. This presumption of innocence does not sit comfortable with the denial of bail to a person charged with any offence, even though in some jurisdictions bail is regarded as a matter for judicial discretion but not a way of punishing the accused as it appears in some cases before the courts. In Sierra Leone the Criminal Procedure Act 1965 establishes a general presumption in favour of bail and can only be withheld in prescribed circumstances.

This writer discovered that sitting Magistrates are hardly following the provision of Section 79 of the CPA, especially on offences which are said to be bail-able offences despite the frequent citing of this provision by members of the Bar. A case in question which forms the main crux of this article is presently pending at the Freetown Magistrate Court N0.3, before Magistrate Bankole Shylon.

Initially, the accused was charged to court on a single count of Conspiracy in early January this year and in his first appearance he was granted stiff bail with serious conditions including two sureties who are to be property owners in the Western Area. Since the Police Prosecutors started leading evidence into the matter for close to three months and found that the evidence adduced before the court can in no way constitute for the accused to stand trial in the High Court, the Police of their own accord decided not to offer any evidence into the matter and applied for the discharge of the accused, which the Presiding Magistrate did accordingly.

Court sources further intimated this Press that during the period under which the accused was standing Trial in respect of the first file he was always in compliance with the law and made himself available whenever the case came up for hearing.

Regrettably, in the new file which contains a charge of Conspiracy plus three other charges such as Unlawful Imprisonment which are yet to be proven beyond all reasonable doubt, Magistrate Shylon despite the application for bail made by Defence Lawyer I.S. Koroma on behalf of his client followed by convincing reasons that could have prompted the Magistrate to use his discretion in favour of the accused failed to grant bail. Taking into consideration that the accused was granted bail in the first case, it is but prudent for the presiding Magistrate to have done likewise since there were records to show that he has



never flouted the rules of the court. The accused was all the time willing and able to attend court even if he was sick and to this the Police Prosecutors can attest.

But what actually litigants and the general public seem not to understand is the continuous remanding of accused persons at the Pademba Road Prisons for which Magistrate Bankole Shylon is not an exemption, as he most times pay less attention to the issue of bail even though there are observations under the Bail Policy of the Sierra Leone Judiciary 2009 which serves as a guide.

After the accused have suffered some form of punishment by remanding him at the Central Prisons for close to ten days, the Principal Magistrate ingloriously found it necessary to grant stiff bail to the accused and among the conditions attached was that there should be three sureties who should be house owners in the Western Area and each of them to be scrutinized by the Master and Registrar of the High Court.

These conditions of bail imposed by

the Magistrate sound incredible in the minds of the general public, as it was said that such bail conditions should not be granted by a Magistrate taking into consideration his/her jurisdiction.

It is very clear under the Bail Policy justification of the Sierra Leone Judiciary which states that the grant or denial of bail cannot be used as a weapon, but a matter of judicial discretion which discretion must be exercised judiciously taking Constitutional, Statutory Provisions and all surrounding circumstances into consideration.

The Bail Policy further states that the decision to grant or deny bail to persons in custody is grave indeed and must be made in a way that can be seen to be justified and unbiased and that the Judicial Officers should be mindful of the jail capacity of the prisons and the need to avoid congestion, whilst at the same time weighing the danger of the accused if not granted bail.

BBC

Tuesday, 27 March 2012

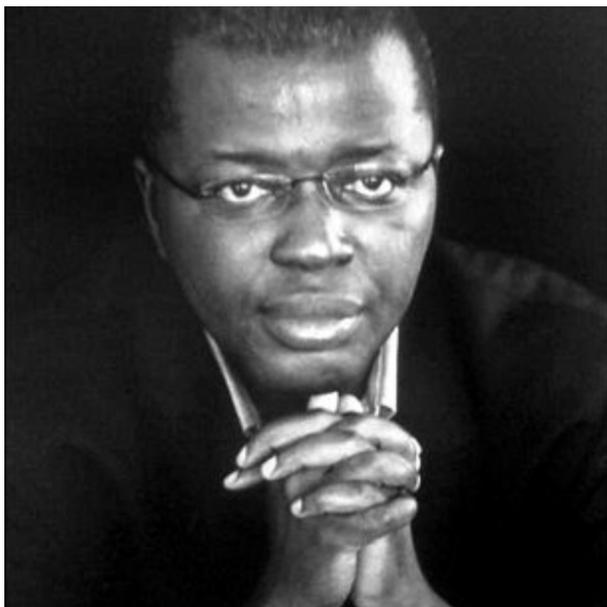
Is Africa on trial?

The International Criminal Court (ICC) was set up to try those responsible for the most serious crimes in the world - such as genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

So far, all 24 people facing charges - and the only person convicted - are from Africa, leading to accusations of bias. The African Union has said members countries should stop cooperating with the Court.

We asked two experts whether Africa is on trial.

NO



Abdul Tejan-Cole says the African victims of war crimes welcome the perpetrators facing justice

Abdul Tejan-Cole is a former prosecutor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Two weeks ago, the International Criminal Court (ICC) handed down its first judgment - finding Thomas Lubanga Dyilo guilty of war crimes in eastern DR Congo. While the decision was rightly hailed around the world as a landmark for international criminal justice and the fight against impunity for mass crimes, it also reignited the debate about the ICC and Africa - and particularly the notion that the continent is somehow "on

trial".

It is a version of events that has increasingly come to dominate the debate in Africa with political leaders past and present publicly accusing the ICC of anti-African bias and of persecuting the continent through its prosecutions. But it is almost certainly not the view of the majority of Africans, who want the political and military leaders responsible for international crimes brought to justice.

“Start Quote

It is farcical that we can equate the trial of 25 accused with the trial of an entire continent”

End Quote

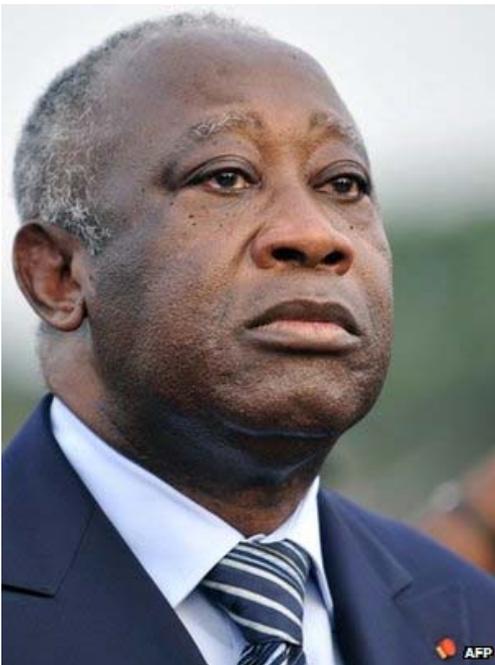
And it is definitely not the view of the victims of mass crimes - such as the 129 who participated in the Lubanga trial - who know that their national courts are invariably unable or unwilling to prosecute. And who celebrated when the ICC announced its landmark verdict.

Lubanga is the first person to have been convicted since the ICC was established in 2002. The Court found him guilty of enlisting, conscripting and using child soldiers between 2002 and 2003 when he was Commander-in-Chief of the notoriously brutal Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (FPLC). Multiple witnesses testified that Lubanga used these children as his bodyguards and that girl soldiers were subjected to sexual violence and rape.

But even as his victims were finally seeing justice being done, critics were condemning the ICC for taking so long and for costing so much, and castigating the prosecutor for not charging Lubanga with sexual violence crimes, despite allegations that women and girls were raped and abused by his forces. Others were wondering when some of Lubanga's co-perpetrators, notably his Rwandan deputy, Bosco Ntaganda, might face trial.

Until his conviction, Lubanga was one of 25 people facing trial in 14 different cases before the ICC. All 25 are Africans. This has generated increasing criticism. The African Union Chair, Jean Ping, has accused the ICC of targeting African leaders unfairly, while the Rwandan President, Paul Kagame, dismissed the Court saying it was made for Africans and poor countries.

'White man's Court'



Africa played a tremendous role in the establishment of the ICC, and only 11 African countries have not signed the Rome Statute while 33 have ratified its provisions, making Africa the most heavily represented region in its membership.

Ivory Coast's Laurent Gbagbo ratified the ICC treaty but is now on trial at The Hague

Three of the seven current situations under investigations by the Court - DR Congo, Uganda and the Central African Republic - were self-referrals to the Court by the respective governments. According to the Court's incoming Prosecutor, The Gambia's Fatou Bensouda, "the high rate of referrals in Africa could just as easily show that leaders on the continent were taking their responsibilities to international justice seriously."

Only two situations - Kenya and Ivory Coast - were opened at the instance of the prosecutor. The Kenya situation was opened after Kofi Annan, Chairman of the AU Panel of Eminent African Personalities, handed over a sealed list of suspects to the ICC and after the Kenyan parliament dithered over the establishment of a national tribunal.

In Ivory Coast, it was former President Laurent Gbagbo who accepted the jurisdiction of the ICC in April 2003 under the provisions of Article 12 (3) of the Rome Statute.

Like many other African leaders, Mr Gbagbo was quick to accept the jurisdiction of the Court so that it could prosecute rebels.

However, as soon as he was arrested and hauled off to The Hague, his supporters immediately began referring to the ICC as the "White man's Court" and complaining about its "neo-colonialist" and "imperialist" agenda.

'Western interests'

Contrary to popular opinion, the ICC is not a court of first resort. Entrenched in its statutes is the principle of complementarity - the ICC can only exercise its jurisdiction where the State Party of which the accused is a national or on whose soil the alleged crime was committed, is unable or unwilling to prosecute.

International Criminal Court (ICC)



- Set up in 2002
- Ratified by 114 countries - but not US, Russia, Israel, Iran, Egypt, China, India, Pakistan, among others
- Goal: To bring to justice those responsible for the worst crimes committed anywhere in the world
- Only verdict - against DR Congo warlord Thomas Lubanga
- 24 others facing trial - all from Africa
- Opened cases in Uganda, DR Congo, Sudan, Central African Republic, Kenya, Libya, Ivory Coast, Libya
- Studying at least five situations outside Africa: Afghanistan, Colombia, Georgia, Honduras and South Korea
- The Palestinian National Authority has asked the ICC prosecutor to accept jurisdiction over alleged crimes committed in Gaza

Many African countries will be unable to prosecute even if they want to because their judiciaries lack the capacity to prosecute the crimes in the Rome Statute and because their parliaments have failed to domesticate the relevant laws.

In the case of Kenya, even though Kofi Annan and others supported a "Kenyan-owned and Kenyan-led process", the country's parliament failed to pass the necessary laws to create a Special Tribunal thus giving the ICC jurisdiction.

Even though its criteria for selecting situations does not include geographical considerations, the perception that the Court is only targeting Africans will remain until it launches its first non-African prosecution.

And while it is true that the ICC can be lambasted for inconsistent case selection, there is not a single case before the Court that one could dismiss as being frivolous or vexatious.

They might all be African but they are also all legitimate. It is farcical that we can equate the trial of 25 accused with the trial of an entire continent.

Greater balance

In addition, the Court is currently analysing at least five situations outside Africa - including Afghanistan, Colombia, Georgia, Honduras and South Korea - all of which are awaiting determination by the prosecutor as to whether or not to open formal investigations.

“Start Quote

Ordinary Africans are not complaining”

End Quote

The Palestinian National Authority has also petitioned the ICC prosecutor to accept jurisdiction over alleged crimes in Gaza from 1 July 2002, when the Rome Statute entered into force.

The Court has certainly made some missteps in its first decade. For example, the judges in the Lubanga trial were far from impressed by the prosecutor's use of intermediaries during the investigation.

And there is clearly a need to ensure greater balance in the geographical scope of the ICC's investigations and prosecutions. But there is not a case before the Court that critics can honestly argue should not be there.

And ordinary Africans are not complaining. Many have suffered at the hands of the perpetrators of mass crimes - and know that there is little chance that they will see justice done without international tribunals like the ICC.

Victims of the alleged atrocities of Chad's former President, Hissene Habre, have for several years been lobbying the Senegalese government to ensure that justice is done - but to little avail.

Had Mr Habre's alleged crimes been committed after 1 July 2002, his victims may have had their day in court just like Lubanga's.

Kuwait News Agency

Monday, 26 March 2012

British additional funding for tribunals

Britain's Foreign Secretary William Hague announced Monday additional funding for the special international criminal tribunals for Lebanon, the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

In a written statement to Parliament he said: "In line with the Foreign Office's Strategic Framework priority of Safeguarding Britain's national security by countering terrorism and working to reduce conflict, and as a demonstration of the Government's continued support for international justice as a key pillar of our foreign policy, I am pleased to announce additional UK funding for these Special Tribunals". Britain will provide one million pounds to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, taking the UK's total contribution to 3.3 million pounds since 2009, Hague said.

This contribution underlines the UK's steadfast support for the Special Tribunal which is "key" to holding to account of those guilty of serious crimes and ending the climate of impunity for political assassination in Lebanon.

The UK is, and will remain, committed to working towards Lebanon's continued sovereignty and stability, he pledged. The UK will also contribute a further 750,000 pounds to the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, taking the UK's total contribution to around 4.4 million pounds since 2006. The minister affirmed that this demonstrates the UK's continued commitment to Cambodian reconciliation and development and bringing justice to the victims, and families of victims of the horrific atrocities and deaths of around 2 million Cambodians under the Khmer Rouge.

Finally, Britain will make available an additional 600,000 pounds for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, taking the UK's total contribution to around 27.6 million pounds since 2002. This will help allow the Special Court to complete the trial of Charles Taylor, former President of Liberia. The Special Court will be the first court to deliver judgement on a former head of state related to charges of war crimes for actions while in office, the statement noted.

The UK believes there should be no impunity for the most serious crimes at the international level. "The effective prosecution of those who commit these crimes is fundamental to preventing such crimes, which in turn is vital in the development of communities which are more stable and prosperous", Hague stressed.

He applauded the important continuing work of all of the international tribunals. (end) he.sd KUNA
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The Southern Times

Monday, 26 March 2012

Opinion

To hell with The Hague!

The International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague in The Netherlands is one of the greatest achievements of the international community.

It provided an opportunity to end widespread oppression of weak states by the powerful.

Unfortunately, that has not been the case.

The ICC serves as a tool with which to beat Africa while ignoring the excesses of the powerful and rich in the West.

Africa is still waiting for an explanation on why the ICC is preoccupied with the continent and yet Western countries continue to commit and fund atrocities all over the world.

Most recently, we have seen the recent conviction of Congolese warlord, Thomas Lubanga, for conscripting child soldiers in the DRC.

No one can, nor should, defend Lubanga's activities in Central Africa.

The continent does not need the likes of him.

Lubanga (51) was found guilty of enlisting child soldiers to fight for his militia in a gold-rich region of the DRC in the bloody four-year war that ended in 2003.

Prosecutors told the court that militia under Lubanga's control abducted and conscripted children as young as 11 from their homes, schools and football fields to serve as soldiers, and that young girls were used as sex slaves.

We are told that Lubanga's fate at the hands of the international justice system will send a strong and spine-chilling message to those associated with war crimes in the world.

What a laugh!

The ICC has been unnervingly silent about the roles that Uganda and Rwanda played in the deaths of millions of people in the DRC.

Is this because these countries were acting with the backing of the US, Britain, France and other Western powers?

Are they afraid that these Western powers and their leaders would be implicated in the murders of millions should Rwanda and Uganda be investigated?

This certainly seems to be the case.

After all, nothing has been done about George W Bush and Tony Blair's wars in the Middle East.

The Hague is also in the process of pinning down former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, for conscripting child soldiers, gross human rights abuses and the murder of innocent civilians in the sponsored civil war during his reign.

No right-thinking African would side with Taylor's atrocious killings in Liberia. But anyone with a sense of justice

would want the ICC to probe how the US and other Western countries created the monster that was Charles Taylor, how they abetted his rule and how they benefitted from his abuses.

That would surely set a benchmark for the world on what should be done to perpetrators of war crimes and killing of innocent civilians.

The media has quoted Zimbabwe's Minister of Justice, Patrick Chinamasa, as saying the ICC, although an important institution, has all too often lacked fairness. According to Chinamasa, the ICC is a "glorified kangaroo court lacking impartiality".

This is criticism that many people hold to be true.

The selective prosecution at The Hague that has seen the likes of Blair, Bush, Kagame and Museveni going scot-free does nothing to instil faith in the international justice system.

Just last year, the West was complicit in starting a war in Libya that resulted in the death of an untold number of civilians and forcing a change of government.

Nothing has been done about that, but the ICC is eager to prosecute members of the former regime led by Muammar Gaddafi, who was murdered in broad daylight.

Former US Secretary of State, Collin Powel, is on record confessing that the Bush regime that he worked for lied so that it could start the war in Iraq.

Powell told Al Jazeera late last year that: "It turned out, as we discovered later, that a lot of sources that had been attested to by the intelligence community were wrong.

"I understood the consequences of that failure and, as I said, I deeply regret that the information - some of the information, not all of it - was wrong.

"It has blotted my record, but - you know - there's nothing I can do to change that blot.

"All I can say is that I gave it the best analysis that I could."

Is that good enough when tens of thousands of civilians have been murdered by the US in Iraq to date?

Does that testimony not lay the basis for at least an investigation into the war on Iraq?

Many thousands more have perished in Afghanistan at the hands of the American and British governments.

The number of those dead in Libya has not been – and will likely not be – quantified.

Who is demanding justice for the people of Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and the DRC among other places where the West is committing crimes against humanity?

But complaining about the injustice of the system is not enough. Africa must retaliate. Namibia's Founding President, Dr Sam Nujoma, recently told The Southern Times that Africa must prepare for war because that is the only language that the West understands.

And he is right!

Zimbabwe's President Robert Mugabe has often called for Africans to stand together in defence of their own sovereignty.

He is also right!

What stops Africa from defending its own, from simply saying to the West we will not give you our diamonds,

gold, platinum, uranium etc if you keep on oppressing us?

They cannot bomb us all if we stand united.

The reason why African states are picked off and their leaders shipped to The Hague is because we stand aloof and allow such things to happen. The US has a law called the American Service members Act that allows Congress to declare war on The Hague if any American is taken to that court.

So why do we try and act more “democratic” than those who preach this “democracy” to us?

Los Angeles Times

Monday, 26 March 2012

Child soldiers: A worldwide scourge

Joseph Kony, Thomas Lubanga and Charles Taylor are just the tip of the iceberg. The use of children as soldiers extends far beyond Africa.

Last week in The Hague, the International Criminal Court, or ICC, found the Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga guilty of recruiting and using child soldiers in the armed conflict in that country, sealing his fate as the court's first convicted war criminal.

At the same time, the viral video "Kony 2012" has seemingly achieved its goal of making Joseph Kony, another rebel commander facing an ICC arrest warrant, notorious for his alleged crimes, including the abduction of an estimated 30,000 children for his Lord's Resistance Army. Millions of people have viewed the video, with millions more learning about Kony, who is still at large, through mainstream media coverage of the campaign.

Kony, Lubanga and Charles Taylor could be regarded as the three most infamous child soldier recruiters in the world today. Taylor, the former president of Liberia, is awaiting a verdict from the Special Court for Sierra Leone on charges of recruiting child soldiers and other crimes.

Together, the three may bear responsibility for forcing tens of thousands of children into brutal and deadly wars.

But the use of child soldiers extends far beyond Central and West Africa. Today, child soldiers are fighting in at least 14 countries, including Colombia, Myanmar (also known as Burma) and Afghanistan. In most of these cases, there have been no arrest warrants, no trials and no convictions for those responsible.

The United Nations has identified more than a dozen "persistent perpetrators," governments and armed groups that are known to have used child soldiers in active conflict for more than 10 years. The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC, rebels in Colombia, for example, have recruited children as young as 7 and forced them into combat. They execute fighters who try to desert.

In some cases, military recruiters not only escape punishment but are rewarded for bringing children into their forces.

On the Thailand-Burma border, I interviewed boys who had escaped from Burma's army. Some were only 11 years old when recruiters threatened or coerced them into joining the army. They said that when they arrived at the recruitment center, the commanders not only turned a blind eye to the boys' young age but gave the recruiters cash and bags of rice.

The situation in a few countries is becoming notably worse. In Afghanistan, the Taliban has stepped up its use of children for suicide attacks. In Somalia, the Islamist armed group Shabab has increasingly targeted children for forced recruitment, often abducting children as young as 10 from their homes or schools.

Lubanga's conviction is a landmark. But more action is needed to address the problem globally.

At the national level, governments need to crack down on commanders who recruit children. Burma has prosecuted some low-level soldiers but no high-ranking officers. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, not only is Bosco Ntaganda, one of six wanted by the ICC for recruiting child soldiers, still at large, but he has been promoted to the rank of general in the national army.

Other governments may be complicit in the use of child soldiers by other countries. The United States, for example, continues to provide military assistance to governments using child soldiers in their national forces, including the Democratic Republic of Congo and Yemen, despite U.S. laws prohibiting such aid.

Lubanga and Taylor are facing real consequences for their use of child soldiers. Kony, if apprehended, could also face decades in prison.

But the scourge of child soldiers reaches around the globe. To end the use of child soldiers, we can't stop with these three.

Jo Becker is the children's rights advocacy director for Human Rights Watch. She has investigated the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Uganda, Burma, Sri Lanka, India and Nepal.

United Nations News

Monday, 26 March 2012

UN Tribunal Refers Case of Fugitive Genocide Suspect to Rwanda Court

The United Nations tribunal trying key suspects implicated in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda today ordered the case of an indicted suspect who remains at large be referred to the Rwandan High Court for trial.

The referral chamber of the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) ordered that the case regarding Charles Sikubwabo, the suspect, be referred to the authorities in Rwanda who will in turn send it for trial by the High Court.

Mr. Sikubwabo, a former mayor of Gishyita in the western Kibuye prefecture, is charged with genocide or complicity in genocide, as well as conspiracy to commit genocide and crimes against humanity. In November 2010, the ICTR's Prosecutor had requested that the court refer the case to Rwanda.

In today's announcement, judges ordered that Mr. Sikubwabo's case be handed over to the Prosecutor-General of Rwanda, as soon as possible and no later than 30 days after the ICTR decision has become final.

The referral chamber expressed its hope that Rwanda, in accepting referrals from the ICTR, will put into practice commitments it has made about its good faith, capacity and willingness to enforce the highest standards of international justice in the referred cases.

The ICTR judges requested Rwanda to provide the tribunal or the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals with quarterly reports on efforts taken to apprehend Mr. Sikubwabo until the time when the accused is arrested or Rwanda receives news and confirmation of his death.

Based in the northern Tanzanian town of Arusha, the ICTR was set up after the Rwandan genocide, when at least 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and politically moderate Hutus were killed during three months of bloodletting that followed the death of the then-president Juvenal Habyarimana.

The New Times (Rwanda)

Monday, 26 March 2012

Rwanda: Is This the Cure for Genocide?

By Our Reporter

Children, refugees of the 1994 genocide (file photo) : The 18th Genocide anniversary will be held under the theme, "Let's learn from our history to shape a bright future". (Photo Courtesy United Nations)
Just days before Rwanda commemorates the Genocide that tore the country apart, the world community has been warned about the dangerous bond between racism, extreme ethnicity, reckless leadership and conflict, and how it can ultimately lead to genocide.

On April 7, Rwanda, which lost more than a million of its citizens during the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi, will commence a week-long series of events to commemorate the Genocide.

The 18th Genocide anniversary will be held under the theme, "Let's learn from our history to shape a bright future".

At the national level, a function will be held at the Amahoro National Stadium in Kigali, but commemorative events will be held across the country, at the village level.

As is always the case, survivors' interest groups are, however, expected to hold a three-month vigil - covering the span of one of the most brutal massacres in recorded history.

Last week's warning comes under the banner of "Never Again" as the world marked the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, focusing on racism and conflict. But the lessons of history are yet to be fully grasped as the world still struggles with issues of racism, across borders, within the same community and even in sports.

"Racism and racial discrimination have been used as weapons to engender fear and hatred. In extreme cases, ruthless leaders instigate prejudice to incite genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity," said Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in his message marking the day.

Early action

A cure for the vices and indeed, even genocide itself, which is the ultimate crime against humanity, is addressing any grievances that arise in a fair and firm manner.

March 21 was designated the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to commemorate the tragic events that occurred on the same day in 1960, in the South African township of Sharpeville when dozens of peaceful protesters were gunned down by police as they demonstrated against apartheid.

Legal experts in the fields of racism and minority issues issued their own statement, stressing the need for greater attention to prevention and early action in response to the first warning signs of tensions caused by racism and discrimination that may lead to violence and conflict situation with serious violations of human rights.

"All relevant actors should pay attention to early warning signs, including the marginalisation and social exclusion of specific groups of individuals; discriminatory legislation and policies; the persistence of

racial prejudice and negative stereotypes; hate speech by public officials and the media; and violent attacks and harassment targeting ethnic groups," says Kenyan lawyer Mutuma Ruteere. He is also the UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Jointly with Rita Izsák, a UN Independent Expert on minority issues, he drew attention to the important role of non-State actors, including civil society, the media, national human rights institutions, and political parties, who can serve as "watchdogs" for discriminatory government policies and play an important role in the promotion of tolerance, mutual understanding and respect for diversity.

Blind eye

In addition to a new website, this year's drive to eliminate racism has also moved to the world of social networking, where the UN has established a Facebook campaign with pages in English, French and Spanish and is encouraging followers to tweet their support against the scourge of intolerance.

But the vow of "Never Again" has lost all meaning. Between April and June 1994, at least one million people were killed, in the space of 100 days, during the Genocide against the Tutsi.

The UN as well as western powers, in particular, were guilty of turning a blind eye to the Rwanda's situation, even as the head of a small contingent of UN peacekeepers, Canadian General Romeo Dallaire, frantically pleaded for reinforcements as the intention to annihilate the Tutsi came to bear. Instead, the world body voted to withdraw the few men and officers it maintained in Kigali, leaving desperate Tutsis at the mercy of the marauding Interahamwe and government forces.

On July 4, 1994, the Rwanda Patriotic Front captured the capital Kigali, ending the killings and embarked on the difficult work of reconstructing both the country and the lives of its people.

But the scale and speed of the slaughter left Rwanda, the UN and the world community reeling.

A year later, in July 1995, in one of the last acts of the 42-month Bosnia war, the Bosnian Serb force, which for two years had besieged the Srebrenica enclave of 40,000 Muslims, attacked. It was an easy, bold and brutal conquest that again shamed the international community.

It earned Srebrenica its grim place in history. In just 10 days, almost 8,000 of them were rounded up and shot in an operation that required extraordinary levels of planning and logistics. It was the worst single crime of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s and the worst massacre in Europe since the Nazi era.

Inclusion, dialogue, human rights

As a result, the UN set up two war crimes courts, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia. Both established as a juridical fact that the massacres were acts of genocide, the gravest crime there is - and the hardest to prove.

"Racism undermines peace, security, justice and social progress," Mr. Ban added. "It is a violation of human rights that tears at individuals and rips apart the social fabric."

The Secretary-General further noted that the UN was contributing to the global fight against racism by fostering inclusion, dialogue and respect for human rights.

"Where societies have been shattered by conflict, the United Nations strives to promote peace processes and peace-building that foster inclusion, dialogue, reconciliation and human rights," he stated.

A survey has revealed that 55 per cent of violent conflicts between 2007 and 2009 had violations of minority rights or ethnic tensions at their core. The relationship between racism and conflict was "a deep-rooted, well-established one," says the survey.

It chillingly adds; "Leaving the dangerous societal problems of prejudice and racism to simmer on the back burner creates a real risk of explosive conflicts erupting, years or decades later."

Indeed, racism and prejudice can provide, propel, and perpetuate the narratives that create and sustain conflict - whether in the developed or developing world."

Whether the world has learned from past mistakes that culminated in unimaginable tragedies remains to be seen, with pressure groups often blaming the world community of failing to act decisively against regimes that visit brutality upon their own people.