

**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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Taylor Verdict Says No One Is Above The Law

“The conviction of Charles Taylor by the Special Court for Sierra Leone sends out a clear message to leaders the world over that no-one is immune from justice,” said Amnesty International, adding that while the verdict brings some satisfaction for his victims, more must however now be done.

“There is no doubt that the verdict sends an important message to high-ranking state officials; no matter who you are or what position you hold, you will be brought to justice for crimes,” said

Brima Abdulai Sheriff, Director of Amnesty International Sierra Leone.

“This verdict can also be seen as a reminder for Taylor's home country,

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Taylor Verdict Says No One Is Above The Law

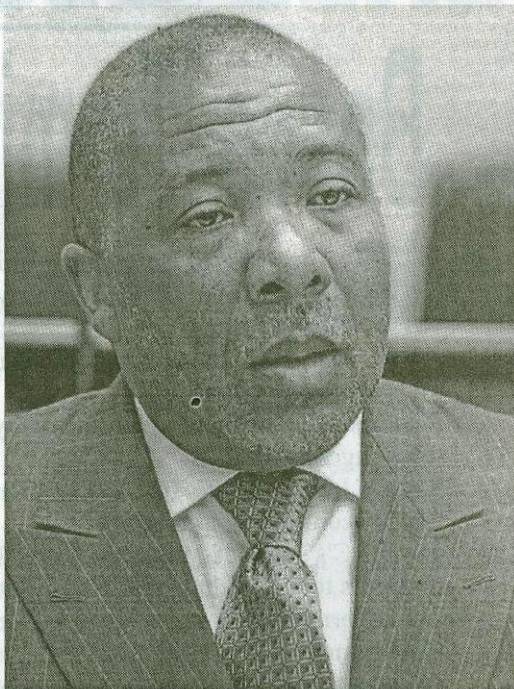
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Liberia that those responsible for the crimes committed during Liberia's conflict must be brought to justice.”

Sheriff was speaking after he attended the televised pronouncement of the verdict at the seat of the court in Freetown with hundreds of Sierra Leoneans.

The Trial Chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague because of security concerns, found Taylor guilty of 11 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in the West African country between 1996 and 2002.

Taylor will be sentenced soon in a separate hearing, but the judgment can be appealed by the defence or the prosecution.



The presiding judge said the Prosecution had proved beyond a reasonable doubt that Taylor was responsible for planning crimes committed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) in Sierra Leone and aided and abetted these crimes taking place.

Victims: Still waiting for justice

While the conviction is a milestone, Amnesty International remains concerned that thousands of people who suffered atrocities during a decade of armed conflict are yet to see their perpetrators brought to justice.

Due to the Special Court's limited jurisdiction mandated only to investigate and prosecute those bearing the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law committed on the territory of Sierra Leone, only 12 individuals aside from Taylor were charged with crimes.

Three of them died and one suspect remains at large. Thousands of other suspects belonging to the RUF, AFRC and Civil Defence Forces (CDF) have not been brought to justice in the SCSL or national courts.

"While today's conviction brings some measure of justice to the people of Sierra Leone, Taylor and the others sentenced by the Special Court are just the tip of the iceberg," said Sheriff.

"Thousands of persons suspected of criminal responsibility for incidences of unlawful killings, rape and sexual violence, mutilations and the use of children in Sierra Leone's armed conflict have never been investigated, much less prosecuted."

"Sadly, only a limited number of Sierra Leone's thousands of victims who bear the terrible scars of the conflict have received reparations, despite the Lomé Peace Accord and the clear recommendations by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)," said Sheriff.

"Reparations are integral to achieving justice for the victims and assisting them to rebuild their lives."

In 2004, the TRC's report made detailed recommendations for the provision of reparations to those who had suffered throughout the conflict, but more needs to be done to ensure long-term sustainable plan is in place so that all victims receive full and extensive reparations.

One survivor of a double amputation to the arms told Amnesty International, "There are no plans to make reparations for victims. We have been asking them for

years throughout the court proceedings to find ways and means to compensate us but victims are still languishing in the streets and begging for a living."

Amnesty International continues to call for the repeal of the amnesty provision in the 1999 Lomé Peace Accord and the enactment of legislation defining crimes against humanity and war crimes as crimes under Sierra Leone law.

Until then, the thousands of alleged perpetrators not tried by the Special Court can never face trial in Sierra Leone.

In addition to repealing the amnesty law, the authorities of Sierra Leone must bring the country's criminal laws into line with international law and provide the domestic criminal justice system with the capacity to investigate and prosecute all crimes under international law in fair trials without the death penalty, and it should allow survivors to seek reparation directly against a convicted person.

Liberia: climate of impunity

Today's judgment against Taylor also served as a reminder of the legacy of crimes in the former head of state's native Liberia.

"The political and legal obstacles to bringing perpetrators in Sierra Leone to justice are only matched by the prevailing climate of impunity in Liberia," said Sheriff.

During the 14-year Liberian civil war that raged while Taylor was first the leader of one of the numerous armed opposition groups and later the President, all parties to the conflict committed war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murders along ethnic lines, as well as torture, rapes and other crimes of sexual violence, abductions, and recruitment and use child soldiers.

The recommendation of the Liberian TRC that a criminal tribunal be established to prosecute people identified as responsible for crimes under international law is yet to be implemented, as are most TRC recommendations on legal and other institutional reforms, accountability, and reparations.

"The lack of justice for the victims of the Liberian conflict is shocking. The government of Liberia must end the reign of impunity by enacting the necessary legislation and acting on its duty to investigate and prosecute alleged perpetrators."

Editorial

Paying The Price Of War

The long awaited judgement in the matter of Charles Taylor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone finally came on Thursday last week, confirming what every Sierra Leonean has known all these years, that as President of Liberia, Charles Taylor sponsored the rebel war in our country.

He was found guilty on all eleven count charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including rape, pillaging, murder and recruiting child soldiers.

In a months' time, he is expected to be sentenced, and depending on his appeal case, which is soon to be filed, he will be transferred to an English jail to spend the rest of his life as convict.

How he found himself in jail for crimes committed in another country other than his, is hard for many outside this country to understand, but for us Sierra Leoneans, it is very clear that he sponsored the war in our country initially to punish us for accommodating the regional military group, ECOMOG (Economic Community Monitoring Group) at the height of the war in Liberia, by making us taste the bitterness of war.

Indeed he said it on the radio for the whole world to hear and know, that he intends to bring the war in his country, Liberia, to us, because the presence of ECOMOG in our country was hindering his rise to power by force of arms.

He was also in our country's war because of diamonds sent to him by the rebels in exchange for arms and ammunition.

We appreciate the fact that inspite of all his denials, the court was able to see through his lies and establish his complicity in the entire ugly affair, and we hope that the matter will be proved beyond all reasonable doubts that indeed, he was responsible for the war in our country.

We also hope that the case of Charles Taylor will be a lesson to all who are in positions of authority, that no one is above the law and that no matter how high you go, the law will catch up with you if you do things with impunity.

The government must also note that the judgement in the matter sets a precedent in the country's treatment of cases of impunity, which are still common in the country, with politicians, security and government officials taking advantage of their positions in the government to deny and abuse the rights of people especially in opposition.

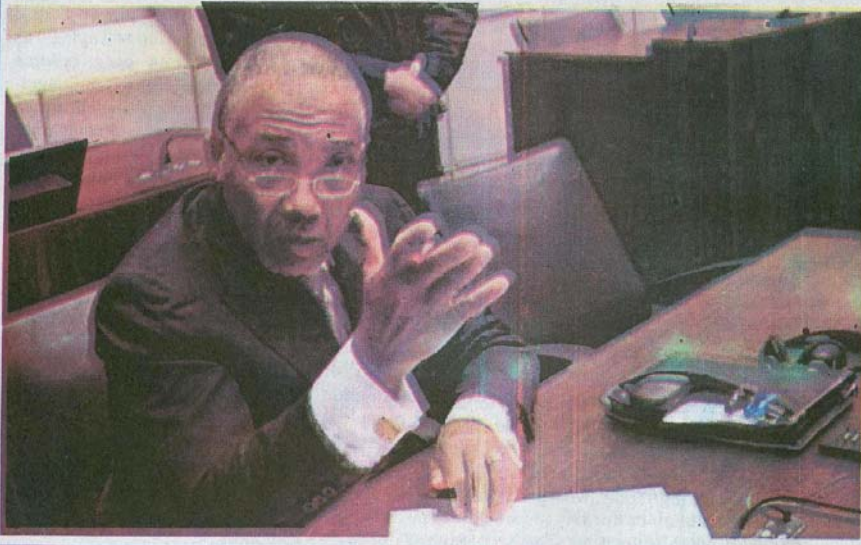
The Special Court for Sierra Leone will not be extended to pursue those who were also heavily involved in the rebel war and are today walking free while their victims continue to suffer, but our courts can be strengthened and upgraded to ensure that all cases of impunity are adequately addressed to the satisfaction of the aggrieved party.

It is only by emulating the success of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the administration of justice in this country that it could be said to have helped to turn the country around, which is necessary for the country to forget the past and move forward.

Once again, we commend the judges at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, for doing a great job.

Concord Times
 Tuesday, 1 May 2012

America welcomes Taylor verdict



The United States of America has welcomed the guilty verdict handed down by the Special Court for Sierra Leone on former Liberian president Charles Taylor for aiding and abetting Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels during the country's decade-long civil war.

"[The] judgment was an important step toward delivering justice and accountability for victims, restoring peace and stability in the country and the region, and completing the Special Court for Sierra Leone's mandate to prosecute those persons who bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone," said Victoria Nuland, Spokesperson of the U.S. Department of State. "The Taylor prosecution at the Special Court delivers a strong message to all perpetrators of atrocities, including those in the highest positions of power, that they will be held accountable."

According to Nuland, the trial of Taylor was of enormous historical and legal significance as it was "the first of a powerful head of state to be brought to judgment before an international tribunal on charges of mass atrocities and serious violations of international humanitarian law".

Over 90 witnesses testified during the trial, bringing to light the range of crimes committed during the war in Sierra Leone, and affirming the importance of justice for the victims.

Nuland said the United States has been a strong supporter and the leading donor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone since its inception, and therefore the successful completion of the court's work remains a top U.S. government priority.

The Torchlight

Tuesday, 1 May 2012

The Charles Taylor Trial-Taking Solace from a Verdict that can't bring back loved ones

By Mustapha Dumbuya (IPS)*

Saffa Momoh Lahai was just two years old when his father was killed during Sierra Leone's civil war. Rebels attacked their family home in Kailahun District, in the eastern reaches of the country, and shot Lahai's father when he tried to resist. More than a decade later, Lahai went to the local seat of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown to hear the verdict read out in the trial of Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia (1997-2003) who was convicted on Thursday Apr. 26 of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity and war crimes in Sierra Leone. The verdict, which was read out by Judge Richard Lussick from The Hague, was televised live across Sierra Leone.

"I am so happy that Taylor has been found guilty," Lahai told IPS after hearing the verdict, which was handed down in The Hague. "It cannot bring back my dead father, but it feels good that justice has now prevailed over injustice and evil, and that makes me very happy."

Many victims of the war in Sierra Leone were quietly pleased with the ruling, though the response was muted. Thousands across this West African country sat glued to TV sets or transistor radios to hear the court's findings. Most simply went back to their daily lives after the verdict was read.

Haja Bintu Mansaray's husband was killed by rebels in Koinadugu District, northern Sierra Leone, right in front of her.

"This verdict cannot bring back my husband, but my children and I can take solace from it," said Mansaray, who added that she would never forget seeing her husband murdered.

Like many Sierra Leoneans, she said she has struggled to survive since the war, finding it difficult to pay her children's school fees. While the conflict ended in 2002, the country has remained near the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index, and much of the damage done is yet to be repaired.

Taylor was convicted of supporting the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel



Charles Gbankay Taylor ex-President of Liberia

faction led by FodaySankoh, which invaded the east of the country in 1991. The RUF unleashed 11 years of suffering on the civilian population, with mass amputations, rape, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers characterising its campaigns. The RUF sought control of the rich alluvial diamond fields in the eastern part of Sierra Leone.

In Kono District, one of the longest-suffering regions during the war, survivors said they were happy with the guilty verdict, but were anxious to know what the sentence would be.

"I would give him a slow agony of a death, because he was the one responsible for the amputations, the killings, the destruction of lives and property," said Eric Kellie, in Kono's capital town of Koidu. Kellie's brother and mother were killed during the war, and his home was destroyed. More than a decade later, he is still trying to pick up the pieces.

"It has been very difficult for a long time," said Kellie.

An estimated 50,000 people were killed during the war, with

thousands more raped or suffering amputations. And since the war's end, Sierra Leone has seen far less international support than neighbouring Liberia, which suffered a 14-year war after Taylor invaded the country with a small rebel faction in 1989. Taylor has not been indicted for any of the atrocities committed during the Liberian war.

Eldred Collins, the former RUF spokesman and current spokesman for the political party of the same name, said that Taylor was not to blame for the war, which he attributed instead to Sierra Leone's long history of corrupt and unjust governance. In order to prevent another conflict, those conditions need to change, said Collins.

Abdul Rahim Kamara, director of Manifesto 99, a human rights organisation following the special court, said the trial had "sent out a loud and clear message, not only to Sierra Leone but to the whole continent: that the days of impunity are over."

"This should be a warning to all sitting officials that one day they will be held accountable for what

they do," said Kamara.

In Freetown, Alhaji Jusu Jakka, the director of the War Amputees Victims' Association, said he was "happy" and "relieved" after the verdict. But he pointed out that the Taylor trial cost a great deal when little has been done for the victims of the war. The trial reportedly cost 50 million dollars.

"The international community has spent more money on perpetrators, rather than victims, who suffered the atrocities perpetrated by these people," said Jakka.

He said the judgment was a victory for victims, but he expected more reparations.

The verdict represents the first time a head of state has been found guilty of war crimes since the end of the Second World War. Taylor is the first former African head of state to be tried for crimes against humanity, and the case has been hailed as an end of impunity for African despots.

A sentence is expected on May 16. Taylor's lawyers have said they will appeal.

Culled from Newstimeafrica.

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African Young Voices

Tuesday, 1 May 2012

Thoughts on the Charles Taylor Verdict

By Lansana Gberie

I have been asked by many people about my views on the conviction on 26 April, of Charles Taylor, Liberia's former President, for aiding and abetting Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF). He is the first Head of State-after Admiral Doenitz, who very briefly led Germany after Adolf Hitler committed suicide, and was convicted by the Nuremberg Court after World War Two-to be convicted by an international court for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The RUF that Taylor supported waged a nasty bush war against successive Sierra Leonean Governments from 1991 to its defeat by a combination of forces, mainly foreign, in 2001. Throughout that war, Taylor mentored the RUF and provided it with weapons and fighters; in turn, the RUF gave him diamonds looted from Sierra Leone's mines. This is the sum of the judgment against Taylor, and it narrowly reflects the argument that I have been making for over a decade now.

Sierra Leone's war started on March 23, 1991 when Foday Saybanah Sankoh, a self-adoring former Army Corporal, led a petty Army from territory controlled by Taylor, then an insurgent leader in Liberia, into southern and eastern Sierra Leone. Like Taylor, Sankoh had trained in Libya and, according to the trial judgment, met Taylor there. The Judges, however, rejected the Prosecution's overdrawn argument that Taylor and Sankoh "made common cause" in Libya to wage wars in West Africa. The judgment accepted the Prosecution's submission that Taylor facilitated the training of RUF recruits in Liberia and helped launch the RUF's war, noting that Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) forces "actively participated" in the RUF's initial invasion in March 1991. (Witness to Truth, Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation report of 2004, estimated that

as many as 1,600 NPFL fighters were involved in the early phase of the Sierra Leonean war, or about 80% of the RUF forces. This grew to 2,000 within a few months of the invasion).

However, striking a balance between the Prosecution's claim that Taylor "effectively controlled" and led the RUF at this point, and Taylor's claim that only former NPFL members joined Sankoh and that he had nothing to do with the RUF after the Sierra Leone invasion, the judgment delicately noted that the Prosecution did not prove beyond reasonable doubt that Sankoh took orders from Taylor - or that Taylor participated in the planning of the invasion.

This point was always a difficult legal one, not least because the trial was not about the crime of aggression (which had not even been defined by the time Taylor faced the Court). The indictment period did not even cover the origins of the war - the temporal jurisdiction of the Court is from November 1996 to the official end of the war in 2002.

Compounding this problem was the fact that the most credible person that would have definitively testified to this would have been Sankoh, but he died long before Taylor faced the Court. In fact, it is a testimony to the tenacity and industry of the Prosecution that it was able to sufficiently prove even the crime of aiding and abetting, since Taylor had effectively eliminated key witnesses to that crime. He had Sam Bockarie, his key link to Sankoh and the RUF during the period of the indictment, murdered in Liberia shortly after Bockarie was indicted. Johnny Paul Koroma, a notorious Sierra Leonean coup maker who also dealt intimately with Taylor, simply disappeared: he was also

allegedly murdered either in Liberia or Ivory Coast on Taylor's orders after his indictment. These events must count as the most comprehensive and effective evidence-tampering in an international war crimes trial ever.

I have always thought that the prosecution's invocation of the notion of 'joint criminal enterprise' (JCE) was ill-advised, and successive judgments by the Court rubbished the concept. This concept was first used by the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (1991-1999). It considers each member of an organized group individually responsible for crimes committed by that group within the "common plan or purpose."

The Appeals Chamber of the ICTY decided on 21 May, 2003 that "insofar as a participant shares the purpose of the joint criminal enterprise (as he or she must do) as opposed to merely knowing about it, he or she cannot be regarded as a mere aider and abettor to the crime which is contemplated."

The concept was roundly rejected by the Court in the trial of the leaders of the admirable Civil Defence Forces (CDF), since "the evidence led by the Prosecution in this case to show a joint criminal enterprise [is] insufficient to prove its existence against those named persons beyond reasonable doubt." Conviction around the concept was entered only in the case of the leaders of the RUF, and even here the judgment involving the pathetic and roguish Augustine Gbao was problematic, looking very much like guilt by association. Though the Prosecution did not establish Gbao's direct involvement in crimes during the war, the Judges concluded that because he was the RUF's 'ideological trainer', Gbao "significantly contributed to the [Joint Criminal Enterprise], as the leadership of the RUF relied on the RUF ideology to ensure and to enforce the discipline and obedience of its forces to the RUF hierarchy and its orders, this being a factor which contributed to the furtherance of the Joint Criminal Enterprise."

Justice Shireen Fisher dissented, noting that Gbao's conviction "abandons the keystone of JCE liability as it exists in customary international law."

The Satellite

Tuesday, 1 May 2012

Ambassador Leigh's Claims of his role in Charles Taylor's indictment is "Diplomatic Disgrace" and "Political Arrogance"

Written by Tamba Korgba-Faiduwoh

Now that Charles Taylor has been found guilty on all the 11 counts for crimes against humanity in the bloody civil war in Sierra Leone, some people in the diplomatic circus are egotistically praising themselves of not only being responsible for forwarding the warlord to the International Criminal Courts but personally helped draft the modalities and legal formalities in the indictment. One of these egoistic praise-singers is the former Ambassador to the United States Of America, Mr John Leigh.

He wants to be nationally recognized, rewarded and praised for his efforts: "Guess who's diplomacy sent the international community after Charles Taylor for War Crimes and Crimes Against Humanity?", he asks.

In a heated debate on the "Konos For Progress" homepage on Facebook, Mr John Leigh attacks a participant: "Mr. Kassaywah, the war against the AFRC/RUF Junta and the ID of Taylor as a war criminal was entirely initiated by me. Period. I led the whole endeavour from Washington, DC. It was me that reframed and redefined the "Taylor/Sankoh War" as not a civil war at all but as a fake civil war and a criminal enterprise to steal gemstones and other natural resources. Your party people in government were all going about it with the mistaken belief that Sankoh's war was a civil war. Regarding Taylor's prosecution, do you think any African Head of State would happily prosecute another African Head of State? You need to find out what happened rather than get that war all mixed up with your election politics. You people will have to learn to give credit where credit is due."

The question at hand is whether the verdict is victory for Mr John Leigh or victory to all the victims of the bloody war. A good number of mannered Sierra Leoneans believe it is not only a golden victory to the people of Konoland who suffered the most of the atrocities, but victory to the people of Sierra Leone and the Mano- river union at large.

Mr Leigh still fails to give credit to the then Head of State, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. He points out: "Kabbah was hiding in Lungi for his life as the rebels ransacked Freetown in January 1999". Mr Leigh fails to understand that it was President Kabbah's UN connections that help indict Charles Taylor. He was only a messenger of the people of Sierra Leone. I could remember when Tejan Kabbah addressed the United Nations saying: "Our war was not a civil war. It was not a war based on ideology, religion or ethnicity nor was it a class war... It was a war of Proxy aimed at permanent rebel control of the rich diamond fields for the benefit of outsiders." Were those the words of Ambassador Leigh?

As other Sierra Leoneans fail to recognize him as the sole player in the prosecution of Charles Taylor, Mr Leigh gets confused and disappointed with the country and its people. He goes on: "others will not ring my bell, no matter what. Our country is full of selfish, jealous people who are invariable low producers. They do not give credit where credit is due. That's my experience. I also named Muammar Ghaddafi as being behind Taylor. I was roundly condemned by that".

A Kono academician, Mr Aiah Kassaymah in the USA refutes Mr Leigh's self-praise statement and jumps in: "Mr Leigh you have no bell for others to ring because you have this self-absorbing personality of 'if not me who else'. This is not the first time you are claiming to be the most important personality in a public discussion. Let me bring your attention to the discussion in 2010/2011 about the issue of taking Ghaddafi to court to pay reparation to the victims of the civil war in Sierra Leone. You claimed then that you were the first person to raise the issue and you had been in the forefront of the fight but people were not giving you credit."

"Sir, I am sure you are familiar with the Sierra Leone Truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) report of 2000 in their conclusion identifying Gadhafi as one of the external actors in the cause of the war and then recommended that he and Charles Taylor pay reparation to Sierra Leone. As "External Actors in the Armed Conflict" the Commission explores the roles of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), Charles Taylor and Libya in bringing bloody conflict to Sierra Leone. The Commission calls on Liberia to make symbolic reparation to Sierra Leone and calls on Libya to make financial contributions to the War Victims Fund". Don't you think sir it was disingenuous ten years later for you to claim that having Gadhafi to pay reparation was your idea? Sir I am reminded of the castigating you received on the list service for this claim and do not think for a minute that you are going to get away this time either. By the way, this is no mixing of facts with election politics; I have been following you for a long time so I know what I am talking about.

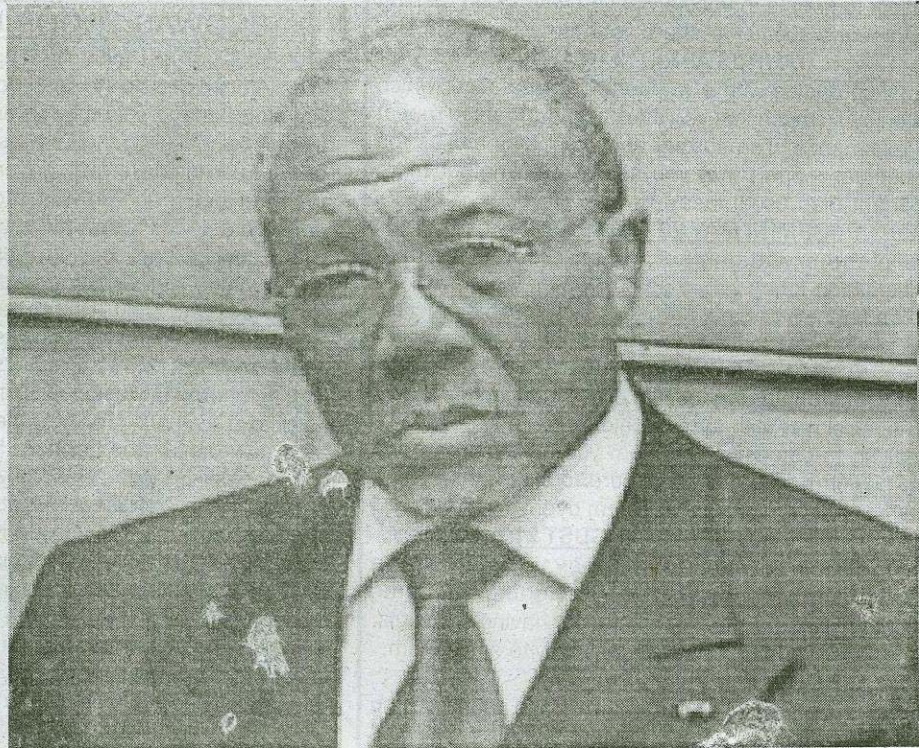
"You may have been the Ambassador to the U S then but you were subject to the orders, directives and orders from your Head of State. Claiming that it was your diplomacy not as one of the contributors that brought Charles Taylor to justice is shameful and arrogant. By the way you made no response to the postings about your friend at the head of the ACC by the Sierra Express Media".

The Voice-Of-Binkongoh's Chief editor, Tamba Musa Saquee respectfully addresses Mr Leigh: "I very much agree with your assertion that we must give praise to where it is due, in which case you, being the ambassador of Sierra Leone to the U.S. at the time the charges were brought against Mr. Taylor deserve to be commended for your role in the enterprise. However, I will be very happy if you can also give the praise to former President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah as the President whose government made it possible for the prosecution of all those who bore the greatest responsibility for the mayhem in Sierra Leone. Infact, it is generally known that it was the government of Sierra Leone, led by President Kabbah that urged the United Nations Security Council to constitute the special court of Sierra Leone. So I find it difficult to agree with you that you played a greater role in the venture than the President, Mr. Leigh. I consider it unreasonable for you to cast innuendo on President Kabbah fleeing Freetown for the relative safety of Lungi during the rebel onslaught on the capital in January 1999.

I don't believe you were expecting him to take risks that would have resulted into something sinister to his person. That was indeed a tactical move that made it possible for him to be in a safe haven while successfully coordinating the repelling of the rebel advance. As well informed Sierra Leoneans, we are all aware that our war was indeed a civil war that was caused by the several years of A.P.C. misrule, although along the way, it was hijacked by Charles Taylor and transformed into a war over diamonds. We know that the preparations for a war against the A.P.C. had been in the pipeline way before the Liberian Civil war, so it is not true to assert that it was not a civil war".

Seeing reason in Mr Saquee's statements, the honourable diplomat fine-tuned his words in a supporting tone: "You are correct, Mr Saquee. Pres. Kabbah did a lot but he has his own spokesperson who can speak for him. I intervened here only because I am aware that much has been done to suppress my work and the ignorance shows up from time to time."

Keeping the conversation going on, Mr Saquee becomes satisfied and reiterates: "John Leigh, I am happy you have acknowledged that President Kabbah deserves credit for the



prosecution of Charles Taylor, so that is why it has to be proclaimed by one and all and not just his spokesman. Sierra Leoneans and the international community are very grateful for his efforts. Your intervention in order to salvage your 'work' from being suppressed is acceptable but it must not be done at the expense of that of your former boss, under whose directives you were working. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and Give to Jah what belongs to Jah."

With some acts of diplomatic acceptance, Mr Leigh gives in to Mr Saquee but attacks another participant:" Mr. Kassewah, I need not waste more time with you to discuss the same things over and over again. You have two problems I can't solve as follows: (i) You are ignorant of many things. (ii) You are part of a culture that will never give someone like me credit when due. The TRC came into being after the war. I have been after Taylor and Ghadafi since 1998. I began pressing Prez Kabbah since 1999 for war reparations from Taylor, Campaore, Ghadafi and the Diamond merchants in Amsterdam. You won't know these things because they are not in the public domain."

What was or is not in the public domain should never remain private when it is or was in the interest of the people of Sierra Leone. Was Mr Leigh acting alone when he insists accumulating credit that is due him or did he operate with other political players of the then SLPP regime with special orders from the Head of State? What is he hiding here with the statement:" You won't know these things because they are not in the public domain"? His reluctance to unearth these hidden secrets surrounding Charles Taylor's indictment and reparation demands from Blaise Campaoré and late Muamar Ghadafi produces a negative result to the Voice Of Binkongoh and all Konos For Progress wherein he finally bowed out: " With this said, I will ignore all Postings on this subject. Good Bye" Can Wikileaks help us find out the truth of Mr Leigh's final words?

German Government welcomes Guilty Verdict against Charles Taylor

BY APO CALVIN KAY

The German Government's Minister of State Cornelia Pieper issued the following statement in Berlin on the verdict announced today (26 April) by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the case against Charles Taylor: "With its guilty verdict against Charles Taylor today, the Special Court for Sierra Leone is sending an impor-

tant signal: not even former heads of state can escape their responsibility under criminal law for war crimes.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone has already made legal history with its judgement on the forced recruitment of child soldiers. Now, having completed proceedings against Charles Taylor, it is the first of the special courts to have fulfilled its mandate."

Charles Taylor, the former Presi-

dent of Liberia, was indicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in 2003; today the court of first instance reached a verdict of guilty. Taylor is accused of being one of those who bore the greatest responsibility for the civil war in Sierra Leone. Sentence will be passed in separate proceedings.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established by an agreement

between Sierra Leone and the United Nations dated 16 January 2002. It is mandated "to prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996".

Since 2002 Germany has contributed just under eight million dollars to the Court's budget.

Sierra Leone: Charles Taylor Judgment - From the Public Gallery

By Taegin Stevenson

April 26, 2012, marked the conclusion of a nearly six-year long saga. A three-judge panel at the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) sitting in The Hague, the Netherlands unanimously found the former Liberian president Charles Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting 11 crimes, including murder, rape, sexual slavery, and forced labor.

He was further convicted of planning, with Sierra Leonean rebels, attacks in three different areas of the country, including the capital Freetown and diamond-rich district of Kono. Taylor, wearing a dark, tailored suit, white shirt, and maroon necktie, sat solemnly--often gazing down--as he listened for nearly two and a half hours as Judge Richard Lussick read the summary of the judgment.

The 80-seat public gallery, which is perched high above the courtroom, was filled with NGO representatives, civil society groups, including victims of the conflict from Sierra Leone and Liberia, former SCSL staff, diplomats, journalists, and members of Taylor's own family. They sat quietly listening closely to the judgment awaiting the final verdict. After two hours, there was a short break while the tape recording the hearing had to be replaced. The gallery erupted into a quiet murmur discussing what had been pronounced up to this point. After 420 days of trial, 115 witness, over 50,000 pages of testimony, and 1,520 exhibits presented, the world was finally about to know the verdict. Taylor was asked to stand. He listened with his hands clasped in front of him as Judge Lussick read the guilty verdict.

In a trial that featured many dramatic moments, including testimony about human cannibalism, British supermodel Naomi Campbell giving evidence of "blood diamonds," and lawyers storming out of the courtroom, the judgment did not come without its moment. After the verdict was read, Alternate Judge Malick Sow began to read a statement disagreeing with the outcome of the case. As Judge Sow read aloud, the three judge panel rose and exited the courtroom. The microphones and cameras were shut off and the screen lowered in the public gallery. The public did not hear the completion of Judge Sow's statement. As the screen closed on the courtroom, the observers filed out of the public gallery--many with a look of satisfaction--no one seemingly surprised.

In the media room, reporters from Europe and Africa clamored around former prosecutors David Crane, who signed the 2003 indictment against Taylor, and Stephen Rapp. About half a dozen television cameras were set up at the front of the room to record the press conferences of the prosecution and defense. Current Prosecutor Brenda Hollis hailed the historic conviction, Taylor was the first head of state to be convicted in by an international criminal tribunal since the Nuremburg trials in 1946, and paid deference to the victims of the decade-long civil war: "Today is for the people of Sierra Leone who suffered horribly at the hands of Charles Taylor...This judgment brings some measure of justice to the many thousands of victims who paid a terrible price for Mr. Taylor's crimes."

The civil war in Sierra Leone between the government and rebel groups claimed up to 50,000 lives with many thousands more devastated by being forced to serve as child soldiers and sex slaves and by having limbs amputated--a trademark of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group. The judges ruled that Taylor knowingly assisted the commission of these crimes by providing a continuous flow of arms and ammunition to the RUF in exchange for diamonds.

During the defense press conference, Taylor's lead counsel Courtenay Griffiths said that the verdict was inevitable and that it sets an "unwelcome precedent." He also expressed concern that Judge Sow was not

able to put his statement of disagreement on the record. Griffiths stayed on message, as he has throughout the trial, suggesting it was political in nature and that double standards in international criminal justice mean that only African leaders are subjected to judicial scrutiny. He said the decision could constrain leaders of smaller countries who may need to protect their borders. Others did not feel this way.

Patrick Pokawa, who traveled from Sierra Leone representing civil society, said that he "saw the process as a very fair trial...I think our people will be happy when they hear this kind of news." He said only a couple thousand people may have heard about the verdict, so he will be traveling to the villages and provinces throughout the country to explain what he saw and heard at the court. He predicted, "The fact that justice has been done; they will be happy."

Readers of the website that has monitored the Taylor trial since 2008 and who ardently followed the proceedings expressed similar reactions in response to the verdict. One comment [vem] expressed, "We waited patiently for this day hoping that the dead will get justice through the determination of the civilized world and that the victims, even though they cannot get back what has been taken away from them, can finally see the man who crucially contributed to their carnage behind bars." Another [swizz] noted that "the time for impunity is over."

Voices from Taylor supporters were also heard on the Taylor trial website. One longtime reader [Aki] wrote a personal note to Taylor, "The people in Liberia know that you [Taylor] are innocent no matter what the judges say. History will treat you much kinder than the international conspiracy is doing today." Another [Harris K Johnson] expressed outrage, "If this is what you call justice, then there shouldn't be a court. All one needs is to wage war on little and powerless nation, kill their leaders and steal all of the counties' oil, diamond, and timbers like America and their big brother have always done."

Regardless of opinions, the Taylor judgment is monumental and puts heads of state on notice that their illegal actions as leaders are no longer immune from justice.

In the coming weeks, the prosecution and defense will be submitting filings on sentencing. The prosecution and the defense will make oral submissions at a sentencing hearing on May 16 and the judges will read out Taylor's sentence on May 30, 2012. At this time, Taylor will also have the opportunity to address the court, possibly his final opportunity to make a public statement before his jail term begins. Both the prosecution and defense have the right to appeal the judgment. Any prison term he receives will be served in the United Kingdom.

This article also appears on the Open Society Foundations blog.

Daily News (South Africa)

Tuesday, 1 May 2012

Opinion

Despots take heed of Taylor verdict

By Peter Fabricius

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor is seen at the U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in Leidschendam, the Netherlands. Picture: Reuters/Vincent Jannink

The Special Court for Sierra Leone's conviction last week of former Liberian president Charles Taylor near The Hague for helping rebel groups in neighbouring Liberia commit terrible atrocities against their own people was historic.

It was the first time a current or former head of state had been convicted of war crimes by an international court since Nuremberg.

Taylor's conviction sent a powerful message that even leaders of countries are not above the law.

That message is growing stronger. Former Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo, awaiting trial before the International Criminal Court, (ICC) could be the next head of state convicted.

The ICC has also indicted current Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir but he remains a fugitive and will probably remain one, at least for a while.

At a lower level, the ICC secured its first conviction in March of Thomas Lubanga, militia leader and recruiter of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).



The ICC is also to try top Kenyan politicians accused of masterminding the post-election inter-ethnic violence in 2007.

Meanwhile the US and four central African states seem to be closing in on Joseph Kony and other leaders of the Lord's Resistance Army, indicted by the ICC for their atrocities against civilians in all of those states over the past 25 years.

And in Arusha the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda is still grinding its way laboriously through the prosecutions of the ringleaders of the 1994 genocide.

So the net of international justice does seem to be closing around war criminals.

But it must be said that the net is closing very slowly, selectively, expensively and against considerable resistance. Convicting Lubanga alone cost the international community almost one \$1 billion.

Securing Taylor's conviction, then, surely cost a lot more.
Copy of ND Laurent Gbagbo

Former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo waits for the judges to arrive as he appears for the first time at the International Criminal Court to face four charges of crimes against humanity in The Hague, Netherlands.





The ICC has encountered huge resistance in Africa. The African Union has instructed its member states not to cooperate with the court, which it accuses of picking on Africans.

Ordinary African citizens, though, particularly those living in communities where atrocities have been committed, hold a much better opinion of the ICC. And the imminent replacement of the ICC's Italian prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo with Gambian advocate Fatou Bensouda should elevate the court's standing even at the AU level.

It will be hard even for the AU to accuse an African prosecutor of being anti-African.

So are nasty dictators across the continent shivering in their Gucci shoes?

One wonders.

Because of the immense difficulties in pursuing international justice, these dictators must feel their chances of ever ending up in the dock at The Hague are rather remote.

Nonetheless they are real. Al-Bashir seems effectively immune from ICC justice now, protected by a strong and loyal state and by the AU.

However the fortunes of leaders in unstable countries like Sudan, can change suddenly.

Giving up South Sudan as an independent state last July was not popular among Sudan's hawks and the current growing war with the new state could aggravate opposition against Al-Bashir.

If he fell from grace, his immunity from the ICC could evaporate.

Taylor probably thought himself safe from the Special Court for Sierra Leone, perhaps even after his fellow West African leaders persuaded him to step down from power in 2003 and go into exile in Nigeria.

Whether he was ever formally offered amnesty for doing so is not clear. But if so, that undertaking was soon rescinded, supposedly because he continued interfering in Liberian politics which annoyed the new President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. So the Taylor arrest and conviction might in the short term have a negative impact on human rights in Africa, discouraging other nasty leaders, like Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe, from surrendering power in exchange for amnesty.

But the growing spread of justice across the continent might provide some deterrence against even those who have committed atrocities from committing more.

And, over time, it should diminish human rights violations by deterring future leaders from grave crimes. – Daily News Foreign Service

Huffington Post

Monday, 30 April 2012

Opinion

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-f-schulz/charles-taylor-convicted_b_1459690.html

Monrovia, Here I Come!

In May of 1997, in the middle of the Liberian Civil War, I led a mission to Liberia on behalf of Amnesty International (AI). Elections were going on at the same time in that damaged country and Charles Taylor, among others, was running for president. It was said that his campaign slogan was "Vote for me or I'll kill you!"

At the opening press conference that the AI mission held in Monrovia, one of the reporters from a newspaper that opposed Taylor asked me whether Amnesty believed that war criminals should be allowed to run for president, implying, obviously, that Taylor fell into that category. I replied that Amnesty took no position on who should be allowed to run for president but we naturally believed that all war criminals should be brought to justice. The next day that newspaper carried a banner headline, "War Criminals May Not Run for President," and attributed the statement to me.

That afternoon I went into the office of the editor and explained my position again, asking for a correction. "Oh, no problem," the editor assured me. The next day's headline was even larger: "YOU WILL BE BOOKED!" It quoted me as making that declaration.

That afternoon two of my Amnesty colleagues had an appointment to meet with Millie Buchanan, one of Taylor's "aides." "My Taylor has a message for Dr. Schulz," she said. "Mr. Taylor is very concerned about Dr. Schulz's health. He says that Dr. Schulz will be booked with a bullet if he ever returns to Liberia and he should keep an eye out for his back in New York."

Needless to say, I took more than a passing interest, then, in the recent news that Charles Taylor had been convicted on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, meeting in The Hague. On trial since 2006 and on the witness stand for seven months, Taylor was found guilty of supporting and guiding the notorious rebel movement in Sierra Leone that hacked off limbs and heads with wild abandon. He was paid for his troubles in so-called blood diamonds.

Though Taylor still retains support in Liberia, that country is a far different place today than in 1997, having held two elections generally recognized as legitimate and headed as it is by Africa's first female president, Ellen Sirleaf-Johnson. The importance of this verdict goes far beyond either Liberia or Sierra Leone, however.

Victims of human rights crimes sometimes lament the international community's ragged attempts to establish a regimen of international accountability. I was in Cambodia a few weeks ago and heard repeatedly that the trials of the aged Khmer Rouge leaders now going on there were failing to address the "real" perpetrators of atrocities and would never bring back loved ones, in any case.

But the point of these trials is not just to bring justice to crimes past; it is to persuade would-be future perpetrators to think twice before they act. That message is circulating slowly and haltingly simply because international legal mechanisms are slow and halting. But as the first head of state to be convicted by an international court since Nuremburg, Taylor has become a powerful symbol of the fact that sovereign immunity is a concept that is starting to tatter.

The 1999 decision of the British Law Lords that Augusto Pinochet could be extradited to Spain to stand trial for his crimes as President of Chile started it all. Since then Slobodan Milosovic was extradited to

The Hague and escaped his fate only by dying in 2006 before the trial ended. Former Cote d'Ivoire President Laurent Gbagbo has been transferred to the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the sitting President of Sudan, Omar Hassan al-Bashir has been indicted by the ICC though he is not yet in custody.

What a wonderful world we would live in if everyone who committed a crime was arrested, promptly given a fair trial, and, if justifiably convicted, received an appropriate sentence. But no justice system is perfect, particularly one as complex as an international system which lacks even so much as an enforcement arm to take those accused of crimes into custody.

Perfect or not, however, the image of Charles Taylor -- warlord, embezzler and escapee from a Massachusetts prison, by the way -- booked, tried and convicted by judges from Ireland, Samoa and Uganda cannot help but be a satisfying one for many people. Monrovia is looking better and better for my next vacation!

William F. Schulz, President of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), served as Executive Director of Amnesty International USA from 1994-2006.

CNN

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Opinion

Taylor verdict: Why peace must accompany justice

Charles Taylor arrives at Rotterdam Airport in June 2006 for his war crimes trial following his arrest in Nigeria.

Millions of people will breathe a sigh of relief that Charles Taylor has finally been held to account for the years of violence, misery and suffering that he brought to the people of West Africa.

Taylor, a former president of Liberia, was found guilty after a lengthy trial by a special court sitting in The Hague for aiding and abetting rebels during the bloody conflict in Sierra Leone between 1996 and 2002.

The violence in Sierra Leone shocked the world as thousands of civilians were caught up in the fighting. Limbs were hacked off as punishment, mass killings and gang rape were common and thousands of children were forced to fight or become sex slaves. The survivors still struggle with the mental and physical scars of their ordeals.

Incredibly, despite the tens of thousands of cases of documented atrocities, only 13 people have been held to account for these crimes. And, under a 1999 amnesty agreement drawn up in a desperate bid to end the fighting, Taylor may be the last to stand trial for what happened. Everyone else -- his commanders and lieutenants and fighters on all sides -- remain free to go about their lives as if nothing happened.

Taylor's conviction brings some measure of justice to the people of Sierra Leone, but it is only the first step in a long journey back to normalcy for the people. Years after the end of the war, people are still grappling with the challenges and the legacies of the violence. Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission published its report in 2004, only a limited number of recommendations on reparations have been implemented. Without a long-term, sustainable plan and sufficient funds to assist survivors to rebuild their lives, many are begging in the streets for a living.

Failing to prosecute the perpetrators of crimes under international law gives the impression that they will not have to face the consequences of their actions. It ignores the distress of the victims and creates a risk of further violations. The failure to address impunity weakens state institutions, denies human values and debases the whole of humanity.

Prosecutions serve to clarify the truth about what happened, establish accountability for human rights abuses and contribute to building confidence in the rule of law. Without them, victims are left to suffer without official acknowledgment of the crimes committed against them or assistance to rebuild their lives.

The Daily Beast
Saturday, 28 April 2012

Liberia Rethinks Its Past in Wake of Charles Taylor War-Crimes Verdict

The country's mixed response to the Taylor verdict indicates the soul-searching has just begun.

In a small classroom at Monrovia's prestigious College of West Africa, Victor W. Birch, a young history teacher, stands in front of a class of students in blue-and-white uniforms. Behind him, the theme for the day's lesson is written in neat cursive: "The territorial expansion and encroachment of Liberia."



With sweeping hand gestures, Birch speaks of the creation of Liberia, that small West African nation founded by freed American slaves who subjugated the land's original inhabitants in the style of their former masters while enriching their own political and economic fortunes.

Ever since Liberia declared independence in 1847, it has faced a heated internal battle over its national identity, which culminated in a 14-

year civil war from 1989 to 2003 that left more than 250,000 dead and the nation's infrastructure in tatters.

Liberia's fractured history was again in view last week when The Hague announced a guilty verdict in the trial of Charles Taylor, the warlord turned elected president. Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity in neighboring Sierra Leone during that country's brutal civil conflict. In Monrovia, the verdict was welcomed by some Liberians and condemned by others, particularly former child soldiers for whom Taylor is a father figure—a sign that the verdict marks only the beginning of soul-searching for the country.

Charles Taylor

A group of men break into heated debate over the trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor on a sidewalk in downtown Monrovia, Rebecca Blackwell / AP Photo

For most of its history, Liberian society and political life were dominated by the Americo-Liberians, descendants of the freed slaves, who mimicked the lives and culture of their onetime owners in the U.S. Citizenship was denied to natives until 1946, when then-president William V.S. Tubman granted them the right to vote, and it wasn't until the 1960s that tribesmen won legislative representation. For 102 years, Liberia was a one-party state, with the True Whig Party enjoying a monopoly.

It was a state of affairs that many before the war described as "apartheid," says Togba-Nah Tipoteh, a native Liberian and founder of the Liberian branch of the Movement for Justice in Africa.

That history was abruptly shattered in April 1980, when a 28-year-old noncommissioned officer, Samuel K. Doe, led a coup, slaughtering President William Tolbert in his mansion and executing most of Tolbert's cabinet on a beach behind the Army barracks. Doe's bloody reign precipitated two decades of violence.

But Liberia's notorious modern history—from Doe's coup and his own torture and death at the hands of rebels; through Taylor's presidency, his exile to Nigeria, and his war-crimes trial; and up to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's reelection late last year—is conspicuously absent from the textbooks that circulate in Liberian schools. When the prewar generation, including Johnson Sirleaf, was growing up, young Liberians read the civics books of A. Doris Banks Henries, a Yale-educated Methodist missionary whose *The Liberian Nation: A Short History* starts in 1839, when freed American slaves sailed to Africa to bring “civilization” and Christian values to a “savage, primitive, belligerent people.”

Henries's books effectively erased the oral history of the migrants from Sudan and North Africa who traveled to Ghana in pursuit of gold and settled in Liberia, and of the descendants of great sub-Saharan empires. The books also ignored the multiethnic, multilingual, multifaith complexity of the societies that existed when the settlers arrived.

Little has changed in Liberian education since then, as seventh grader Israel Lewis can attest. Lewis, a student at the J.J. Roberts School—named for Liberia's first president—was taking a break from an afternoon game of football on the same pitch where, in 1980, 13 of Tolbert's cabinet members were stripped, tied to wooden stakes, and shot one by one.

“I learned about how the Europeans came to Africa. The Normans from France came. Then the Portuguese ... The English and France began with the trade of gold for salt. Our own people started to give our brothers away to work on cocoa plantations,” Lewis says, keeping the ball moving between his feet.

Of the war years, which ended with the signing of the Accra peace accord in 2003, Lewis only says, “We were fighting among ourselves, and it shouldn't be like that.”

Across the unpaved road from J.J. Roberts, young men with photocopiers—the country's makeshift office suppliers—hawk prints of history books by Prof. Joseph Saye Guannu, one of the country's most respected political historians. The tomes—bound with staples and partially paid for by UNICEF—begin by recounting the formation of a migrant tribal system before the Americans' arrival in the 19th century and end with the coup of 1980. Now many Liberians say that coming to terms with the more recent past will be an essential project—and part of a larger movement to understand the historical conditions that created the civil war.

“Many do not identify with our national motto, ‘The love of liberty brought us here.’ It's a historical fallacy,” says Guannu.

“Before the coup, there were people around challenging this one-dimensional view,” says Elwood Dunn, a professor at Sewanee, the University of the South, in Tennessee and a former minister—one of the few, along with Johnson Sirleaf, to escape execution following Doe's coup. “But the movement was hijacked by revolutionaries of entitlement. We never got a chance to digest what we were talking about in the 1970s, and so we are still trying to figure out who we are.” This is no small task, says Michael Keating, a Liberia expert at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. “In a place like Liberia, where you never really had an honest history, it's going to be a long journey to construct one.” Complicating matters are the fact that 65 percent of the country is illiterate and tens of thousands grew up during the war years, when schools were closed, making them a “lost generation.”

Still, the project is essential for the nation's survival, says Nobel laureate Leymah Gbowee, now the head of the Liberian Reconciliation Initiative, which will be working in conjunction with a range of government bodies on unity.

“Liberia has a serious identity crisis,” says Gbowee. “Every war has an agreed-upon narrative, and what is the narrative of the war that we fought? Every ethnic group will explain the war to their children from their perspective. Then those children internalize it, depending on who was the victim or victor, which is cause for future conflict.”

Johnson Sirleaf also addressed the need to rehabilitate Liberia's “national spirit” in her January inaugural address, after a tense election that followed the boycott of the main opposition party and a deadly face-off between security forces and protesters.

Johnson Sirleaf wore a traditional lapa suit and headdress and stood on a stage draped in red, white, and blue outside Capitol Hill in Monrovia. Cannons were fired, brass bands played, and American-inspired pomp and pageantry abounded.

“Healing with the past is a means to an end, and that end is to be able to move forward as one people, united,” she said. “To be able to look forward and steer a clear path, we must renew our sense of self and nationhood, of what it means to be Liberian, of our common destiny. This is the spirit of patriotism.” The Liberian government is attempting to create new patriots and a new Liberia through a national “visioning” exercise, Vision 2030, that will consult with people at the national and district levels.

The national steering committee for Vision 2030 is chaired by Tipoteh, the founder of the Movement for Justice in Africa. He also chaired Vision 2024, initiated by Taylor and held in Monrovia in 2001. That was shut down personally by Taylor after four days when its resolutions—including doing away with the national motto—were deemed too controversial.

But with the collapse of Taylor's regime and the second democratic election since the end of the civil war, Tipoteh thinks Vision 2030 will be different. Tipoteh grasps for a phrase and ends up with something more sober than optimistic.

“The essence of it for Liberians is to come out to say what kind of Liberia they want to see tomorrow and in the future ... Having only a few people run the show has led to war and violence.”

Back in the classroom at the College of West Africa, Birch launches into a discussion on the fairness of Liberia's Constitution, which decrees that only those of “Negro descent” can be citizens. “Liberia has the most racist constitution in the world,” Birch says. “I hope that it will change.” Some agree, and others object. But inside and outside the classroom, the question of who is a Liberian continues.

Clair MacDougall is a journalist based in Monrovia. Emily Schmall is a journalist based in Buenos Aires and formerly the Liberia country director of New Narratives.

The Daily Beast
Saturday, 28 April 2012

Liberian Nostalgia for War Criminal Charles Taylor

This week, Charles Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes. But in Liberia, he still has some support. Finlay Young reports.

They sat stock-still on the hardwood benches of the dank makeshift cinema in Monrovia. All eyes were fixed on their former President Charles Taylor, broadcast from the dock at the Hague courtroom of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. For almost three hours, Presiding Judge Richard Lussick rendered in sober monotone the court's judgment on Taylor's involvement in Sierra Leone's brutal late 1990s war. One of Africa's most infamous warlords and the man who oversaw Liberia's descent to dystopia was, at last, found guilty.

It took more than five years, 50,000 pages of convoluted testimony and approximately \$250 million for the UN-backed court to reach its conclusion. Fragmented conflicts involving loosely affiliated militia-gangs operating across porous national borders do not distil neatly into watertight international prosecutions. The court, while unconvinced of prosecution claims that Taylor was the mastermind of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), found him guilty of aiding and abetting their atrocities with financial, military and logistical support.

On hearing the news, the watchers sat quietly for a few moments before filing out into the late morning sun. No celebration, just contemplation. Taylor's pariah status abroad was never reflected at home, where he occupies a curious place in the national psyche. All in Liberia are painfully aware of the suffering Taylor caused. Still, there remains to varying degrees a lingering sense of dissatisfaction about his fate.



Liberia was a novel idea conceived in the United States in the early 1800s, an experiment in sending freed slaves "back" to Africa. In thrall to the US culturally, perennially reliant on its aid and investment, "America's step-child" has never really controlled its own destiny. Consequently, there exists among many a prevalent belief in an amorphous, omniscient "international community", spearheaded by the US, holding the puppet strings. Taylor's downfall, they believe, is what happens when an impudent Liberian leader starts to lead his own dance.

"We feel there are heavy, heavy hands behind this." Robert Lupu, 30, is one of

those who spy a conspiracy. "It was always to happen to Taylor."

Taylor's ascent began in 1984 when he mysteriously walked out of a high security Massachusetts prison. His escape is widely believed to have been facilitated by the US government. (Earlier this year long suspected links between the US intelligence services and Taylor were finally confirmed). After undergoing guerilla training in Gaddafi's Libya with a collection of other aspiring African dissidents, Christmas Eve 1989 saw Taylor re-enter his home country from the north with around 100 revolutionaries.

The Liberia he entered was already well on its way to ruin, seething with ethnic strife thanks to the increasingly brutal policies of President Samuel Doe. This former army-sergeant had been plied with US aid while a valuable pawn in Ronald Reagan's African cold war game. But by the end of the 1980s, he had outlived his usefulness. Taylor, an ever-ebullient presence, was viewed as a liberator by suffering Liberians, and had strong support from those exiled in the Diaspora.

This dissipated as the anticipated quick revolt turned into an astonishingly brutal and prolonged war. Other warring factions formed, seeking a slice of the pie. And President Clinton's administration, chastened by recent events in Somalia, did not intervene. It was not until a 1997 election, with ten peace agreements having come and gone, that Taylor would finally take power. A country tired of war voted overwhelmingly to give him what he wanted. The warlord had become a democratically elected president.

Taylor the President filled his pockets with Sierra Leonean "blood diamonds," stymied freedom of speech and reportedly shielded Al Qaeda operatives. The US lost patience, finally deciding to "twist" the errant Liberian leader from its ever-shifting card hand of favored autocrats. Embassy cables confirm that in 2001 the US began a concerted campaign to oust Taylor. By 2003, two former Pentagon officials had unsealed an indictment against Taylor. Congress would pass a bill offering \$2 million for his arrest. Amid vicious fighting with rebels who had reached the capital, Taylor was on his way. Standing up from a gold-painted throne to say farewell before going into exile, he told the nation he had "accepted this role as the sacrificial lamb. . . I am the whipping boy." But for Taylor there would be no cozy end in exile as Idi Amin had. In 2006, ahead of a planned meeting, pressure from George W. Bush on Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo saw him extradited to stand trial.

While only 20 years old, Prince Valentine laments the selectivity inherent in international justice. "Lots of leaders do the wrong thing, especially in Africa. But not all go to the court." And glancing across the continent, many of Taylor's contemporaries have fared rather better. Former rebel Yoweri Museveni was declared one of a new type of African leader, before he started to look like rather an old type of African leader. His friend to the north, Paul Kagame, is another authoritarian with grubby hands, feted nonetheless.

"I feel sad he be going to jail, even though he committed atrocities," says Paye Sendolo, 42, from Monrovia. "Why does Liberia never get to have ex-president? They are all killed and now he's in prison, taken from us too." In Liberia, sadly, patriotic shame about the country's bloody past only seems to afflict those who had no control over it. What most Liberians yearn for is a normal past, present, and future. Normal countries have former presidents as statesmen. "Great men like Bush and Blair," Sendolo adds, sadly, perhaps not aware of the calls from some quarters for the western leaders of the Iraq war to be prosecuted.

Alice Yekeh, 45, originally of Lofa County, while seemingly content with the verdict, is more concerned with realities closer to home. "I don't think he meant it to be this way, but Taylor brought the war here". She is angry that Liberia's other warlords are, as she puts it, "still eating".

The Liberian civil conflict was a bewildering alphabet soup of acronyms, each a rebel group led by a warlord. All are acknowledged to have committed similar atrocities. Yet as Taylor heads for prison, the other rebel leaders thrive. Most notably, Prince Yormie Johnson, who split from Taylor and formed his own rebel group early in the war, is a Senator who came third in the country's recent presidential election. Alhaji Kromah, founder of the ULIMO-K group, is a University Professor who President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf recently appointed Ambassador-at-Large. Dr. George Boley, formerly head of the "Liberia Peace Council" (LPC), returned to Liberia from the US last month under a removal order made by a US judge using the 2008 Child Soldiers Accountability Act.

All were recommended for prosecution by the country's post-war Truth and Reconciliation Commission. But they have little to fear in Liberia, where Nobel Prize winner Sirleaf has swept the report under the carpet.

This is probably because she's mentioned in it too, recommended to be barred from office for 30 years due to her early support and financing of Taylor. The internationally popular President, understandably, avoids the topic. When travelling across Liberia reporting on her re-election bid last year, I was struck by how frequently I was told that life was "better in Taylor-time." Liberia's poor majority have, in recent years, been badly hit by spiraling global food costs. Taylor, while accruing millions of dollars for himself through high-level racketeering, was keenly aware of the significance of affordable foodstuffs in maintaining order, and subsidized them accordingly.

However, financial realities are only one aspect of a sort of "Dictatorship Nostalgia" that one often hears expressed in Liberia. By all accounts, there is just something about Charles Taylor.

"The old ladies would crawl to the road, just to put eyes on Taylor. Can you imagine?" Alfred Sargbah, a longtime devotee of Taylor, tells me. "Now, President car goes past, nobody care. Is that right?"

Paul, 31, was close enough to Taylor that he must speak in anonymity. He joined Taylor's fledgling rebel movement as an 11-year-old, and quickly became a favored bodyguard to the man himself. As a fly on the wall throughout Taylor's rise, he is able to provide an intimate portrait of the warlord he still calls "The Chief."

"It was all about his personality. Taylor was the man who could meet you once, then see you in a line of 1,000 and call your name out. He always had time for anyone, he was never unfriendly." Paul smiles at the memory. "He always had something for everyone that came to him. Everyone from the outside got something. He was kind, he was so kind. You know, Taylor paid all of the other rebel leaders' hotel bills at the peace talks."

This "kindness" was actually an intrinsic part of Taylor's strategy, a counterpart to his ruthlessness. Patronage is a deeply embedded social norm in Liberia, a potent strategy in a place where so many have so little. I look after you, so you belong to me. Academic William Reno, in his 1999 book *Warlord Politics and African States*, describes how Taylor ran a "shadow state" based on personal links. Formal administrative institutions were largely impotent. Taylor was perfectly formed for the intuitive, opportunistic life of a rebel, but not for the stolid bureaucracy of government. Paul remembers how "everything collapsed as soon as he left (for exile in 2003). Because everything was built on him."

Even amid the pressure of maintaining such an unstable power base, Paul recalls an unflappable leader. "He was never afraid, always normal, playing tennis at his house. When you see your leader like that, you follow, you believe. He was incredible."

It was not only young lieutenants like Paul that were enchanted by Taylor. For a period, the BBC became his loudspeaker to the world, and the Reverend Jesse Jackson, Clinton's special envoy to Africa, his cheerleader. Far from a crude warlord, he was a chameleon, equally comfortable as a preacher or a warrior. His light skin and east coast US inflection allowed him to project the superior suaveness of Liberia's Americo-Liberian elite, while simultaneously taking on the Gola middle name "Ghankay" to inflate his grassroots appeal.

For those who campaigned against this formidable opponent, his downfall is sweet. Tiawan Gongloe, one of Liberia's foremost human rights activists and lawyers, is cracking open a bottle of champagne. He was tortured for his outspoken criticism of Taylor's regime. "This is an absolute landmark decision. People thought he was invincible, that no-one could deter him. He thought that. This is a decision that can change the mindset of our people." For Gongloe, the dividends of the verdict dwarf the \$250 million cost of the trial. "I don't believe there is any monetary value can be put to anything that brings about sustainable peace for us."

Any conversation on future peace in Liberia inevitably turns to the country's thousands of ex-combatants, many of them Taylor's child soldiers now grown. They are his most poignant, potent legacy.

When researching a recent article on the post-war experience of some of these young men, I was struck by the fact that the only person who escapes blame for their present predicament is the man who bears greatest responsibility: Taylor. For many, the coming of peace signaled the permanent loss of respect. In Monrovia, they squat in the crowded spaces between lavish compounds, the towering walls of which are a reflection of the mistrust which corrodes post conflict reconciliation in Liberia.

When I was last here, in the old GSA slum on Monrovia's 25th street, I brought up the impending trial verdict. One by one they made me write down their names in my notebook, insisting I "tell the whole world and Barack Obama that Charles Taylor should be free." These young men continuously mythologize Taylor. They tell fables of his bravery, of his sexual exploits, of a blue diamond he had that was "almost the size of your head, I swear!" For them, most from poor country families, the lavish Taylor with his absolute power was no ordinary man.

On the afternoon following the verdict, amid their melancholy, they are taken by a strange phenomenon that appeared in the Monrovia sky around mid-day. Around the sun, a perfect circular halo has formed. "It's from him!" says Sam Hassan, 31. "He is telling us all will be fine."

Arcon Beacon Journal

Monday, 30 April 2012

<http://www.ohio.com/editorial/justice-comes-slow-and-short-1.303970>

Justice comes, slow and short

By Laura Ofobike

Beacon Journal chief editorial writer

The wheels of justice grind slowly, it has been said. So slowly that in many cases the impact is muted by the passage of time.

On Thursday last week, an international tribunal sitting at The Hague convicted one Charles G. Taylor on 11 counts of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Reports of the judgment invariably noted that the conviction is the first of a head of state by an international court since the Nuremberg trials following World War II.

So Taylor earns an asterisk in the annals of human cruelty.

If the name rings no bells, that's because justice rarely is swift or certain or blind — at least not in relation to those who wield the power of nations. The warrant for Taylor's arrest was issued first in 2003. His trial began in 2006. The panel of three judges in the Special Court for Sierra Leone were in deliberation for 13 months. An appeal is almost sure to follow the judgment.

Taylor was the elected president of Liberia from 1997 to 2003. But before that, he had distinguished himself as the leader of a vicious rebel force in a civil war that would shred Liberia over 14 years until he was forced into exile in 2003. Taylor's rebels specialized in terrorizing civilians, in blind murder, in rape and in turning children into crazed killers.

The dead from the civil war are estimated to be more than 200,000. The number of physically, mentally or emotionally maimed? Who knows? The displaced victims of Liberia's war are scattered across West Africa and beyond.

That was Taylor's path to power. In Liberia.

But it was not for his part in Liberia's nightmare (it takes two sides inured to brutality to keep a civil war going for 14 years) that put Taylor on trial these past six years. The former warlord and president was held responsible for crimes committed during the civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone by different rebel leaders, though he was not there himself.

"There is nothing in any language that could describe the horror story that was Sierra Leone in the 1990s and early 2000s," said David Crane, a leading prosecutor against Taylor.

That story turns the stomach. In it, you find fiends and unimaginable atrocities: child soldiers trained to sever emotional and familial bonds through rape and massacre; male and female rebel soldiers who would chop off hands and arms or smash heads to send a message or just for the fun of it. It is a story of wanton destruction of life and of property, of everything that calls for respect and dignity.

The special court could not prove Charles Taylor was the puppet master, in direct command from afar and thus responsible for the atrocities laid at the feet of the rebel leaders in Sierra Leone. But it put Taylor in the middle of the story — as the one who offered Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front sustained

and significant support and guidance, supplying arms and ammunition and receiving in payment diamonds mined with slave labor in the areas controlled by the rebels.

For more than a decade, Taylor was a principal actor in a violent pursuit of wealth and power that cost the lives of tens of thousands of people in Liberia and Sierra Leone. He stirred up conflicts that upended the countries and rippled through several West African countries. They lost lives and the talent of those who managed to flee the chaos. They lost time. They lost scarce resources.

Taylor is scheduled for sentencing this month and could draw a life sentence in prison. It would be good riddance. He is not a figure for sympathy. After all these years, his name rises in the headlines like a ghost out of a fading nightmare.

And yet, there's something deeply unsatisfying in the workings of justice. Is Taylor guilty of war crimes in Sierra Leone and not in his home country, Liberia? Are there not Liberians also navigating what's left of their future without limbs, without homes, without families? Surely, there are others in Liberia and Sierra Leone who are as culpable as Taylor for the destruction in those countries?

There have been plenty of wars fought and atrocities committed in the world since World War II. (How many wars, civil and otherwise, can you count since 1945?) The extent of atrocities are determined, I imagine, by the extent of the power the perpetrators control. How is it that Taylor is the first convicted of war crimes since Nuremberg? (Perhaps Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic, who died before the end of his war-crimes trial, would have earned that historic note.)

Convictions like Taylor's do send a serious message to political and military leaders about justice and war crimes. It seems they'll remain safe if they can manage to hang on to power. Case in point: Sudan's President Omar al Bashir, indicted for war crimes in Darfur in 2009.

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The Guardian

Monday, 30 April 2012

Imperialism didn't end. These days it's known as international law

A one-sided justice sees weaker states punished as rich nations and giant corporations project their power across the world

George Monbiot

The conviction of Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, is said to have sent an unequivocal message to current leaders: that great office confers no immunity. In fact it sent two messages: if you run a small, weak nation, you may be subject to the full force of international law; if you run a powerful nation, you have nothing to fear.

While anyone with an interest in human rights should welcome the verdict, it reminds us that no one has faced legal consequences for launching the illegal war against Iraq. This fits the Nuremberg tribunal's definition of a "crime of aggression", which it called "the supreme international crime". The charges on which, in an impartial system, George Bush, Tony Blair and their associates should have been investigated are far graver than those for which Taylor was found guilty.

The foreign secretary, William Hague, claims that Taylor's conviction "demonstrates that those who have committed the most serious of crimes can and will be held to account for their actions". But the international criminal court, though it was established 10 years ago, and though the crime of aggression has been recognised in international law since 1945, still has no jurisdiction over "the most serious of crimes". This is because the powerful nations, for obvious reasons, are procrastinating. Nor have the United Kingdom, the United States and other western nations incorporated the crime of aggression into their own legislation. International law remains an imperial project, in which only the crimes committed by vassal states are punished.

In this respect it corresponds to other global powers. Despite its trumpeted reforms, the International Monetary Fund remains under the control of the United States and the former colonial powers. All constitutional matters still require an 85% share of the vote. By an inexplicable oversight, the United States retains 16.7%, ensuring that it possesses a veto over subsequent reforms. Belgium still has eight times the votes of Bangladesh, Italy a bigger share than India, and the United Kingdom and France between them more voting power than the 49 African members. The managing director remains, as imperial tradition insists, a European, her deputy an American.

The IMF, as a result, is still the means by which western financial markets project their power into the rest of the world. At the end of last year, for example, it published a paper pressing emerging economies to increase their "financial depth", which it defines as "the total financial claims and counterclaims of an economy". This, it claimed, would insulate them from crisis. As the Bretton Woods Project points out, emerging nations with large real economies and small financial sectors were the countries which best weathered the economic crisis, which was caused by advanced economies with large financial sectors. Like the modern opium wars it waged in the 1980s and 1990s – when it forced Asian countries to liberalise their currencies, permitting western financial speculators to attack them – the IMF's prescriptions are incomprehensible until they are understood as instruments of financial power.

Decolonisation did not take place until the former colonial powers and the empires of capital on whose behalf they operated had established other means of retaining control. Some, like the IMF and World Bank, have remained almost unchanged. Others, like the programme of extraordinary rendition, evolved in response to new challenges to global hegemony.

As the kidnapping of Abdul Hakim Belhaj and his wife suggests, the UK's foreign and intelligence services see themselves as a global police force, minding the affairs of other nations. In 2004, after Tony Blair, with one eye on possible contracts for British oil companies, decided that Gaddafi was a useful asset, the alliance was sealed with the capture, packaging and delivery of the regime's dissenters.

Like the colonial crimes the British government committed in Kenya and elsewhere, whose concealment was sustained by the Foreign Office until its secret archives were revealed last month, the rendition programme was hidden from public view. Just as the colonial secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, repeatedly lied to parliament about the detention and torture of Kikuyu people, in 2005 Jack Straw, then foreign secretary, told parliament that "there simply is no truth in the claims that the United Kingdom has been involved in rendition".

Reading the emails passed between the offices of James Murdoch and Jeremy Hunt, it struck me that here too is a government which sees itself as an agent of empire – Murdoch's in this case – and which sees the electorate as ornamental. Working, against the public interest, for News Corporation, the financial sector and the billionaire donors to the Conservative party, its ministers act as capital's district commissioners, governing Britain as their forebears governed the colonies.

The bid for power, oil and spheres of influence that Bush and Blair launched in Mesopotamia, using the traditional camouflage of the civilising mission; the colonial war still being fought in Afghanistan, 199 years after the Great Game began; the global policing functions the great powers have arrogated to themselves; the one-sided justice dispensed by international law. All these suggest that imperialism never ended, but merely mutated into new forms. The virtual empire knows no boundaries. Until we begin to recognise and confront it, all of us, black and white, will remain its subjects.

Newstime Africa

Monday, 30 April 2012

Thoughts on the Charles Taylor Verdict

Written by Lansana Gberie

I have been asked by many people about my views on the conviction, on 26 April, of Charles Taylor, Liberia's former president, for aiding and abetting Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF). He is the first head of state – after Admiral Doenitz, who very briefly led Germany after Hitler committed suicide, and was convicted by the Nuremberg court after WWII – to be convicted by an international court for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The RUF that Taylor supported waged a nasty bush war against successive Sierra Leonean governments from 1991 to its defeat by a combination of forces, mainly foreign, in 2001. Throughout that war, Taylor mentored the RUF and provided it with weapons and fighters; in turn, the RUF gave him diamonds looted from Sierra Leone's mines. This is the sum of the judgment against Taylor, and it narrowly reflects the argument that I have been making for over a decade now.

Sierra Leone's war started in March 1991 when Foday Saybanah Sankoh, a self-adoring former army corporal, led a petty army from territory controlled by Taylor, then an insurgent leader in Liberia, into southern and eastern Sierra Leone. Like Taylor, Sankoh had trained in Libya and, according to the trial judgment, met Taylor there. The judges, however, rejected the prosecution's overdrawn argument that Taylor and Sankoh "made common cause" in Libya to wage wars in West Africa. The judgment accepted the prosecution's submission that Taylor facilitated the training of RUF recruits in Liberia and helped launched the RUF's war, noting that Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) forces "actively participated" in the RUF's initial invasion in March 1991. (Witness to Truth, Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation report of 2004, estimated that as many as 1,600 NPFL fighters were involved in the early phase of the Sierra Leonean war, or about 80% of the RUF forces. This grew to 2000 within a few months of the invasion.)

However, striking a balance between the prosecution's claim that Taylor "effective controlled" and led the RUF at this point, and Taylor's claim that only former NPFL members joined Sankoh and that he had nothing to do with the RUF after the Sierra Leone invasion, the judgment delicately noted that the prosecution did not prove beyond reasonable doubt that Sankoh took orders from Taylor – or that Taylor participated in the planning of the invasion.

This point was always a difficult legal one, not least because the trial was not about the crime of aggression (which had not even been defined by the time Taylor faced the court). The indictment period did not even cover the origins of the war – the temporal jurisdiction of the court is from November 1996 to the official end of the war in 2002. Compounding this problem was the fact that the most credible person that would have definitively testified to this would have been Sankoh, but he died long before Taylor faced the court. In fact, it is a testimony to the tenacity and industry of the prosecution that it was able to sufficiently prove even the crime of aiding and abetting, since Taylor had effectively eliminated key witnesses to that crime. He had Sam Bockarie, his key link to Sankoh and the RUF during the period of the indictment, murdered in Liberia shortly after Bockarie was indicted. Johnny Paul Koroma, a notorious Sierra Leonean coup maker who also dealt intimately with Taylor, simply disappeared: he was also allegedly murdered either in Liberia or Ivory Coast on Taylor's orders after his indictment. These events must count as the most comprehensive and effective evidence-tampering in an international war crimes trial ever.

I have always thought that the prosecution's invocation of the notion of 'joint criminal enterprise' (JCE) was ill-advised, and successive judgments by the court rubbished the concept. This concept was first used

by the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (1991-1999). It considers each member of an organized group individually responsible for crimes committed by that group within the “common plan or purpose”. The Appeals Chamber of the ICTY decided on 21 May 2003 that “insofar as a participant shares the purpose of the joint criminal enterprise (as he or she must do) as opposed to merely knowing about it, he or she cannot be regarded as a mere aider and abettor to the crime which is contemplated.”

The concept was roundly rejected by the court in the trial of the leaders of the admirable Civil Defence Forces (CDF), since “the evidence led by the Prosecution in this case to show a joint criminal enterprise [is] insufficient to prove its existence against those named persons beyond reasonable doubt.” Conviction around the concept was entered only in the case of the leaders of the RUF, and even here the judgment involving the pathetic and roguish Augustine Gbao was problematic, looking very much like guilt by association. Though the prosecution did not establish Gbao’s direct involvement in crimes during the war, the judges concluded that because he was the RUF’s ‘ideological trainer’, Gbao “significantly contributed to the [Joint Criminal Enterprise], as the leadership of the RUF relied on the RUF ideology to ensure and to enforce the discipline and obedience of its forces to the RUF hierarchy and its orders, this being a factor which contributed to the furtherance of the Joint Criminal Enterprise.” Justice Shireen Fisher dissented, noting that Gbao’s conviction “abandons the keystone of JCE liability as it exists in customary international law.” Gbao was nevertheless given a global sentence of 20 years and flown to jail in Rwanda. Many observers feared that the same approach would be used to convict Taylor.

The prosecution had argued that Taylor had made a “common cause” with Sankoh to invade Sierra Leone and loot its diamond reserves, and that the RUF’s terror campaign was a direct result of this blood pact. Taylor’s Defence made no effort to deny Taylor’s support for the RUF, but it stated that “diamonds only financed the procurement of arms and ammunition” for the RUF between 1998 and 2001. The Defence denied that diamonds were the reasons why Taylor supported the RUF, stating in the Final Brief what no one has challenged: that the RUF diamond mining began “post the invasion” which happened in March 1991. It stated: “There is no evidence of any discussions relating to diamonds pre the Sierra Leonean invasion to suggest that the invasion might have been motivated by a desire to pillage Sierra Leone’s diamonds.” The point was that the Defence’s key argument was not that Taylor did not support the RUF, but that he did not do so either as part of JCE or with “an underlying intention to cause terror.” The Defence contends that there was a “purely political motive” for Taylor’s support of the RUF war, which may be immoral but certainly not illegal in international law (since the law of aggression was not at issue).

The judgment on 26 April broadly agrees with this, dismissing the notion of JCE as it involved Taylor’s role. But while the judgment agreed with Taylor that he and Sankoh had “a common interest in fighting common enemies” – the Liberian anti-Taylor insurgent group ULIMO and the Sierra Leonean government supporting ULIMO – this is actually tangential to the case, since the period (1991-1992) falls outside the temporal jurisdiction of the court.

Of profound importance to many people in Sierra Leone and elsewhere is the finding involving Taylor’s role in the events surrounding the Johnny Paul Koroma coup in 1997, and in particular the resurgence of rebel forces leading to the devastating attacks on Freetown in January 1999. Close to 6,000 people were killed, including hundreds of Nigerian peace-enforcement troops, and the hands of dozens of people were crudely amputated by the rebel forces during those attacks. The judges established Taylor’s direct role in instigating the attacks on diamond areas of Kono as well as the subsequent attack on Freetown. Here the judgment uses the word “instructed” to describe Taylor’s orders to Johnny Paul Koroma and Sam Bockarie. With his eyes ever on diamonds, Taylor “emphasised” to Bockarie that taking over Kono in late December 2008 was more important than attacking Freetown at that point. He also told Bockarie to make the attack “fearful”. As a result, the demented Bockarie, who called himself Maskita, announced ‘Operation No Living Thing’, with predictable results. More crucially, the judgment establishes that Taylor arranged “a large shipment of arms and ammunition from Burkina Faso” to the rebels in Makeni; these arms were instrumental in the attacks on Kono and later Freetown. It is important to note that the

UN Panel of Experts on Liberia had established in 2000 that the arms were supplied by Victor Bout, recently convicted on unrelated charges in the US, and that they were presumably paid for by diamonds from the RUF in Sierra Leone.

It is of interest that a number of names appearing in the judgment as playing a facilitating role in this sordid and murderous business were neither indicted by the court nor even invited as witnesses: Gaddafi, Ibrahim Bah, and, of course, Blaise Campaore (who as president Burkina Faso surely knew and supported it all).

Also of interest has been the unenthusiastic – sometimes even hostile – reaction of a good number of Liberians to the conviction of their former president. This is partly because Taylor was not charged with his many crimes in Liberia but for his role in supporting a foreign war. But there are quite a few Liberians who actually do not think that Taylor should have been held accountable for his crimes at all, local or international. This reflects a deep-rooted culture of impunity in the country. I lived in Liberia for nearly two years during its truth and reconciliation process, and attended dozens of testimonies there. Many of these, by former commanders in Taylor's NPFL, proudly narrated how they participated in attacks inside Sierra Leone, and how they were fully supported by Taylor to do so. None of them to my knowledge expressed remorse about what they did – but then none of them, with the quirky exception of General Butt Naked, apologised to Liberians for the atrocities they committed in Liberia itself.

Was it all necessary, this expensive and long trial? I think that the proceedings were unnecessarily prolonged by overpaid judges and lawyers, and I think that the court erred very badly in indicting and convicting the leaders of the CDF. The Taylor trial alone reportedly cost \$250 million, nearly six times more than the total revenue officially generated by Liberia in 2003 (\$44.2 million), the year that Taylor was forced to relinquish power. Still, I think that the conviction of Taylor – as nasty a gangster as ever become president in Africa – is a signal event, something we should all celebrate in our region. As I write this, I remember the day that Taylor was helicoptered into the Special Court compound in Freetown. I stood among the small crowd of people there that evening. A woman in the crowd turned to me after Taylor was sent to his cell and said, apropos of a statement made by Taylor in 1990, “Well, he told us that we in Sierra Leone will taste the bitterness of war. We did. But now he will taste the sourness of justice.” The sourness of justice: that indeed is a lovely phrase there.

The writer is author of A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone (London, 2005)

Peace FM (Ghana)

Friday, 27 April 2012

<http://elections.peacefmonline.com/politics/201204/111030.php>

Taylor Trial: Africans Aren't The Only Savages; Bush, Blair Did Worse - Pratt

The Managing Editor of the Insight newspaper, Kwesi Pratt jnr. has taken a swipe at the International Criminal Court trying former Liberian leader, Charles Taylor, describing it as unfair to Africans.

He is unhappy that Western leaders who have committed graver atrocities have been left off the hook while their African counterparts are hauled to face justice at the ICC.

Mr. Pratt was reacting to the verdict of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, which found Charles Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity on all eleven counts.

Mr Taylor has been on trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone for almost five years. He was accused of helping Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels wage a terror campaign during a civil war that claimed 120,000 lives between 1991 and 2001.

But Mr Pratt speaking on What's New on Radio XYZ said prosecution of former African leaders must cease if the ICC is not prepared to try leaders of the Western world.

“Africans are not inferior; Africans are not the only savages; there are many savages in the capitals of the Western world and they also must be held accountable,” he counseled.

The unrepentant Nkrumahist said the “so called international community is still suffering from residual racism; [they are] still suffering from the complex which says that Africans are inferior and therefore we can treat Africans anyhow.”

“How come that African leaders get sent to the International Criminal Court and other leaders who commit worse offenses than the African leaders do don't get sent to the ICC?... So where is the fairness?” adding, “this is not about whether Charles was good or bad.”

He said available facts clearly indicate that the CIA in the United States of America sponsored the overthrow of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in 1966 and that officials of the US who masterminded the dastardly act should have also been sent to the ICC.

“We know the atrocities which were committed. None of those responsible for the overthrow of the Nkrumah government has gone to the court. We know that Belgian intelligence and US intelligence and British intelligence collaborated to overthrow the Congolese leader, Patrice Lumumba. He was killed, he was assassinated; his body was dissolved in acid [and] many people were killed [but] nobody has gone to the criminal court,” he lamented.

Mr. Pratt however blamed African leaders for the current situation. According to him, these leaders are not speaking up against the atrocities being meted out to their counterpart, which is why they are consistently hauled to such courts.

“What did Charles Taylor do that George Bush did not do ten or fifteen times over? What did Taylor do that Tony Blair did not do ten or fifteen times over? Who has been taken to court over the establishment of the Abu Ghraib prison and the Guantanamo Bay prisons? Nobody!”

Mr. Pratt affirmed that “any justice system must ensure fairness. It ought to ensure the equality of citizens before the law. I don't see that in the international criminal court.”

Sky News

Friday, 27 April 2012

Ban says Charles Taylor verdict historic

The guilty verdict against former Liberian president Charles Taylor was a 'significant milestone for international criminal justice', UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon says.

'This is a historic and momentous day for the people of Sierra Leone, for the region and beyond,' Ban said in a statement.

Earlier on Thursday, UN human rights chief Navi Pillay said in Geneva that the verdict was a strong warning to other leaders who are involved in similar crimes against humanity.

'The days when tyrants and mass murderers could, even when they had been deposed, retire to a life of luxury in another land are over,' she said, calling the decision by the UN-backed court in The Hague a 'historic moment'.

'That is immensely significant and a stark warning to other heads of state who are committing similar crimes, or contemplating doing so,' said the United Nations high commissioner for human rights.

The court found Taylor guilty of planning, aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during a conflict in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Children were recruited as combatants during the conflict.

The UN Children's Fund as well as UN officials responsible for children in armed conflict said the verdict was a groundbreaking move in the prosecution of those who commit crimes against children.

UN News Centre

Friday, 27 April 2012

Security Council welcomes conviction in war crimes trial of Charles Taylor



Former Liberian President Charles Taylor (rear) awaiting verdict. UN Photo/SCSL/AP Pool/Peter DeJong

The Security Council today welcomed the guilty verdict handed down against former Liberian President Charles Taylor for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed during Sierra Leone's civil war.

Mr. Taylor, who was found guilty yesterday by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), was on trial on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including pillage, slavery for forced marriage purposes, collective punishment and the recruitment and use of child soldiers.

"Serious crimes and violations of international humanitarian law, including murder, rape and enlisting children into armed forces, are of particular concern," the 15-member Council said in a statement issued to the press.

"This verdict is an important step in bringing to justice those individuals who bear the greatest responsibility for such crimes, regardless of their official status," it added.

Mr. Taylor is the first former head of State to be convicted by an international criminal tribunal since the Nuremberg trials in 1946. Although the SCSL is headquartered in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, Mr. Taylor's trial – which opened in June 2007 – took place in a chamber of the Court sitting in The Hague in the Netherlands for security reasons.

The SCSL's verdict was welcomed by a host of UN officials, including Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, High Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay and the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy.

Salone Post (Online)

Thursday, 26 April 2012

TAYLOR - GUILTY ON ALL 11 COUNTS

Reporting from Freetown

Former president of Liberia, Charles Ghankay Taylor, was found guilty of crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague today Thursday, April 26, 2012 and is scheduled to be sentenced on May, 30.

He was found guilty on all 11 of the counts he faced in connection with the invasion of Kono and Makeni in 1998 and again in February, 1999 during the 12-year Sierra Leonean civil war. Taylor is, on account of this verdict, one of those bearing the greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity, war crimes and other violations of international humanitarian law committed by rebel forces after 30 November 1996 (the date of the Abidjan Peace Accords between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF) until the end of the war in January, 2002.

It could be recalled that Charles Taylor was one of 13 persons indicted by the Special Court in 2003 including 5 from the RUF; 4 from the AFRC and 3 from the CDF.

THE ACCUSED

The 5 from the RUF were RUF Leader Foday Saybana Sankoh; Battlefield Commander Sam Bokarie (AKA "Maskita"); RUF Interim Leader Issa Hassan Sesay; Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao.

From the AFRC were AFRC Chairman Johnny Paul Koroma, Alex Tamba Brima, Ibrahim Bazy Kamara and Santigie Borbor Kanu (AKA "Five-Five").

From the CDF, CDF National Coordinator Sam Hinga Norman, Director of War Moinina Fofanah and High Priest/Initiator Allieu Kondewa.

Foday sankoh was in poor health when he was transferred to the court and died in hospital in August 2003. Sam Bokarie was killed in Liberia in May 2003. Sam Hinga Norman died of natural causes after the end of witness testimony but before judgment. All proceedings against these men were terminated, since the law does not allow a court to try someone who has died. Johnny Paul Koroma fled from Sierra Leone in early 2003. Although some evidence suggests that he is dead, the case against him remains open. If he were to appear after the Special Court closes, arrangements will be made for him to be tried. All of the others were tried by the court.

THE CONVICTS

All of the accused who were brought to trial were convicted but only Taylor was found guilty on all counts.

In the RUF case, Issa Sesay was sentenced to 52 years in prison; Morris Kallon to 40 years, and Augustine Gbao to 25 years. In the AFRC case, Alex Tamba Brima and Santigie Borbor Kanu each received sentences of 50 years and Ibrahim Bazy Kamara received a 45-year sentence. In the CDF case, Allieu Kondewa was sentenced to 20 years and Moinina Fofana to 15 years. The sentences give credit for time served in detention, so effectively each sentence starts from 2003. A prisoner must serve two-thirds of his sentence before he is eligible for parole.

All the convicts are serving their sentences at Mpanga Prison in Rwanda, in a wing of the prison built for the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda Court (ICTR). Mpanga Prison meets the international standards required for security and for conditions of detention which are currently not available here.

Below is the verdict on Charles Taylor as it was read in court today at 11 A.M.:

1. Acts of Terrorism – Guilty
2. Murder – Guilty
3. Violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder – Guilty
4. Rape – Guilty
5. Sexual slavery – Guilty
6. Outrages upon personal dignity – Guilty
7. Violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular cruel treatment – Guilty
8. Other inhumane acts (particulars include mutilations, amputations and beatings) – Guilty
9. Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups, or using them to participate actively in hostilities – Guilty
10. Enslavement – Guilty
11. Pillage - Guilty

The Analyst (Liberia)

Monday, 30 April 2012

Opinion

'Triumph For Justice'-Verdier Comments on Taylor's Conviction, Imperative for Justice

The UN-backed tribunal in The Hague has passed guilty judgment on former President Charles Taylor for "aiding and abetting" war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone, provoking both ire and celebration in both Liberia and Sierra Leone. As the debate on the merit and demerits of the tribunal's opinion heats up, the man who presided over the placid version of transitional justice in Liberia known as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has hailed the Sierra Leonean court's judgment, not only describing it a victory for justice but also as a rallying call and instructive awakening for justice and end to impunity in Liberia. The Analyst reports.

The former Chair of the Liberia Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Jerome Verdier, has issued yet another thought-provoking annotation on Liberia's quest for justice and peace following years of brutal civil conflict.

Verdier and his team of experts issued voluminous reports on two-years of investigation into atrocities and their perpetrators characterizing the 16 year civil inferno in Liberia but the reports and their recommendations remain shelved owing to disagreements amongst the citizens about how veracity of those recommendations and how they should be pursued.

While the bickering over justice continues entirely endlessly in Liberia, the Sierra Leonean counterparts have been producing concrete results and bombshells, including the conviction of Liberia's former President Charles Taylor on "aiding and abetting" the brutal civil conflict in neighboring Sierra Leone.

It appears the outcome of the Taylor trial resonates what the likes of Liberian TRC's head Jerome Verdier had sought to be done in Liberia, calling spade a spade.

Verdier issued his reaction on the Taylor conviction as follows:

Victims of Charles Taylor's war, millions (dead or alive) in Sierra Leone and Liberia, are thanking GOD ALMIGHTY for hearing and receiving their cries for justice. When justice is done, it brings joy to the righteous and those who do good but it brings terror to evildoers (Prov 21:15). Today, all peace and justice advocates around the world join the victims in celebrating the conviction of Liberia's Former President on eleven counts of "aiding and abetting the commission of war crimes or crimes against humanity" in Sierra Leone—a genuine triumph for justice and the rule of law against impunity in both countries, especially Liberia.

Taylor's Conviction is Significant

Taylor's conviction by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), convening in the Hague at the International Criminal Court (ICC), has reaffirmed and maintained a fundamental principle of international criminal law against head of state immunity. The significance of this development has far reaching implications for justice and the rule of law in Liberia. We commend the Special Court and the team of prosecutors for living up to their mandate to combat impunity and ensure that justice is done—a victory indeed for the rule of law!

Taylor's conviction as the first ever head of state to be convicted of war crimes by an international court in the post cold-war era closes the gap on other perpetrators who bask in the ignominy of impunity by shielding themselves from justice under the cloak of officialdom. It means also that no head of state or president is immune from future prosecution for crimes they committed prior to, during or after their tenure as head of state or president. The Prosecutor vs. Charles Taylor is certain to set a landmark precedent in international criminal law and justice by dealing a deadly blow to political immunity from prosecution and impunity generally. The decision of the SCSL raises the prospects that perpetrators of war crimes, irrespective of their social or political standing, will never find safe haven outside the dark confines of their conscience and will never know peace or rest until the long arms of justice catch up with them. Fundamentally, the international community is well settled in saying to the world that:

1. There is no time limit to prosecution for international crimes or crimes against humanity or war crimes;

There is no amnesty for war crimes or crimes against humanity;

There is no immunity from prosecution for war crimes or crimes against humanity for heads of state, presidents or very important persons for crimes committed by these persons before, during or after they have left office; and

People in high stature, authority, presidents, heads of states, politicians and other personalities, who support the commission of war crimes and issue orders from board rooms and the comfort of their executive offices without ever stepping on the battlefield, firing the lethal bullets or commanding the perpetrating forces are, in fact, culpable as superiors or principals or allies and can be convicted directly for committing or aiding and abetting the commission of war crimes or crimes against humanity;

Justice in Liberia is Imperative

While former President Taylor has come face to face with justice and is awaiting his sentencing, many others may be frustrated that justice has not taken root in Liberia, because several of his war partners, collaborators, allies and patrons in Liberia and others similarly situated are roaming with impunity without any credible threat of justice.

With the successful prosecution, conviction and sentencing of President Taylor, we expect that the voices of justice in Liberia will increase and become louder in calling and advocating for justice in Liberia for war crimes or crimes against humanity committed in territories of Liberia. Justice in Liberia is imperative, without which Liberia is sliding a slippery slope. Without justice in Liberia, peace and development remains fragile and unsustainable. And reconciliation, impossible!

No Peace, No Reconciliation without Justice

As children of GOD it is our duty to work for justice if we want peace. Liberia, as a nation of laws founded on Christian principles, must embark upon a credible process of justice seeking accountability mechanisms that will eventually take root and build a new culture of respect for the rule of law and justice in the land brought to its knees and near annihilation by lawlessness and impunity. The Final Report of the TRC of Liberia is instructive. If Liberia continues to ignore it, the country will be doing so at its own peril.

Unlike Sierra Leone, the hands of Liberia's political leaders and elites, including the head of state, are resisting justice at all cost mostly because their hands are stained with the innocent blood of Taylor's war victims and their contributions to the mayhem are outstanding.

We remained assured, however, that our LORD and SAVIOR Jesus Christ will defend the cause of weak victims and war orphans, and maintain the rights of millions of poor, needy and oppressed members of our society who suffered and were victimized by the war without redress and are still waiting for justice. Only fools (Proverbs 14:9) make fun of their guilt but the godly acknowledge their guilt and seek reconciliation.

Justice is Slow but Sure...

Justice may seem elusive, but it is a certain reality; the wheels of justice may seem to be turning too slowly, but we know they are not stopping; they are rolling...

Calgary Herald

Monday, 30 April 2012

Opinion

Kotarski: Taylor's trial doesn't mean justice for all

By Kris Kotarski, For the Calgary Herald

"He killed my ma, he killed my pa, I will vote for him."

That, believe it or not, was the election slogan of Charles Taylor when he campaigned for the presidency of Liberia in 1997 by intimidating a war-weary country that had just emerged from a brutal civil war where he played one of the leading parts.

After making what Human Rights Watch has characterized as "an implicit threat that (he) would resume the war unless he was elected," Taylor won 75 per cent of the vote. Yet, war came to Liberia anyway, and Taylor, who was already supporting a war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, was right in the middle of a tangle of looting, murder, severed limbs and blood diamonds.

Last Thursday in The Hague, the United Nations-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone wrote one of the final chapters of Taylor's bloody story when judges convicted him of crimes against humanity.

While this has been touted as a lesson to all tyrants, it was still a victory of sorts for Taylor. The court found that he did not directly command rebels during Sierra Leone's civil war (1997-2002) as the prosecution had argued, and found him guilty of a lesser crime of "aiding and abetting" instead.

The group that he was aiding and abetting were his longtime allies, the Revolutionary United Front, an armed group notorious for hacking off the hands and legs of civilians during the conflict. The court ruled that by selling diamonds and buying weapons for the group while fully aware of their actions, Taylor was guilty on all counts.

Taylor sat in the court-room stone-faced when Judge Richard Lussick of Samoa read out the 11 charges against him; an 11-point list containing years of sorrow for West Africa's beleaguered civilian population:

- Acts of terrorism;
- murder;
- violence to life;
- rape;
- sexual slavery;
- outrages of personal dignity;
- cruel treatment;
- other inhumane acts;
- use of child soldiers;

- enslavement;

- pillaging.

The evidence presented against Taylor on each of these charges was horrific enough, but together it painted a picture of monstrous proportions. Yet his trial, which resulted in the first international war crimes conviction of a former head of state since Karl Doenitz, who briefly served as Germany's leader after Hitler's suicide, still leaves a lot of unanswered questions about international justice and accountability for humanity's worst crimes.

After the verdict, Brenda Hollis, chief prosecutor in Taylor's trial, argued that the conviction was a victory for principles that humanity holds dear.

"Today's historic judgment reinforces the new reality that heads of state will be held to account," she said. "No person, no matter how powerful, is above the law."

Yet, few believe this to be true. Across town from the Sierra Leone tribunal stands the International Criminal Court, where Russia, China and the United States refuse to participate, fearing that their own citizens could be held accountable for crimes committed in other countries.

"I suspect it will be a long time indeed before three Africans in black robes sit in judgment of the likes of Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld for their endorsement of torture, or Vladimir Putin for his war in Chechnya, or Chinese officials for their actions in Tibet," argued journalist Adam Hochschild in December 2009.

And he is right - the docket at the International Criminal Court is overflowing with cases from Africa, while those enjoying the protection of the world's great powers continue to evade justice.

Does this mean anything in Taylor's case? Pending his sentencing hearing on May 30 and any appeals, the 64-year-old will likely live out his days in a British prison, though that hardly seems like restitution for the thousands of victims whom he left in his wake.

That is reason enough to celebrate his conviction, but the fact that he finally faced a courtroom does not mean that no one is above the law.

Kris Kotarski's column appears every second Monday.

Foreign Policy

Monday, 30 April 2012

Opinion

Congratulations and Condolences

The conviction of Charles Taylor is welcome news. But don't be fooled: The international criminal justice system is in deep trouble.



Celebrations were muted in the windswept streets of the Hague last week at the war crimes conviction of former Liberian president Charles Taylor. The first guilty verdict for a head-of-state in the history of UN war crimes courts is an important milestone to be sure, but it masks a deeper malaise for war crimes justice, which is finding it harder to win cases as political support drains away.

The center for these anxieties is not the Sierra Leone Special Court, which is expected to give Taylor a long jail sentence next month, but the gleaming skyscraper across town that houses the International Criminal Court.

The ICC was designed as the successor to half a dozen temporary UN courts that are now, like the special court that convicted Taylor, winding up their affairs. Lost amid the triumphant headlines about the Taylor story are some grim figures. The ICC, which has been open for ten years now, has cost more than \$1 billion, employs 750 staff, and has a grand total of one conviction. That solitary conviction, of Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanda, who was jailed earlier this year for use of child soldiers, seems like a poor return on so much investment.

In the bars and restaurants of The Hague, the lawyers and activists who cluster around the half-dozen courts that make their home here argue about the reasons for this lack of success.

Some blame mistakes by ICC chief prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo, seen by some as lacking bite by virtue of a background spent in academia rather than battling in the world's courtrooms. Others say it

simply takes time for a court which such an ambitious mandate to get its act together. What all agree on is that the number one problem for the ICC and for war crimes justice is political support. Or rather, the lack of it.

The ICC was originally designed by the UN to replace ad hoc courts that have brought justice to the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone. But objections from the United States, China, and Russia, among others, saw it divorced from the UN apparatus. It exists, instead, as a curious free-standing organization, governed by its 121 member states.

Its long-term aim is to win integration into the UN, but for the moment it is stuck halfway down the road. It can police its own members, but most states who commit war crimes do not join the ICC. Instead, it encourages the UN's Security Council to refer cases to it.

This has happened twice, with the Security Council ordering it to investigate Darfur in 2005, and last year, Libya. Both cases are stuck in the mire. In 2008, Ocampo indicted Sudan's president Omar Al Bashir for genocide. Bashir, not surprisingly, chose not to turn himself in and, to date, the Security Council has put little pressure on Sudan to change the policy.

Inter-Press Service

Monday, 30 April 2012

The Charles Taylor trial – Taking solace from a verdict that can't bring back loved ones

FREETOWN, Mustapha Dumbuya* (IPS) – Saffa Momoh Lahai was just two years old when his father was killed during Sierra Leone's civil war. Rebels attacked their family home in Kailahun District, in the eastern reaches of the country, and shot Lahai's father when he tried to resist. More than a decade later, Lahai went to the local seat of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown to hear the verdict read out in the trial of Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia (1997-2003) who was convicted on Thursday Apr. 26 of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity and war crimes in Sierra Leone.

The verdict, which was read out by Judge Richard Lussick from The Hague, was televised live across Sierra Leone.

"I am so happy that Taylor has been found guilty," Lahai told IPS after hearing the verdict, which was handed down in The Hague.

"It cannot bring back my dead father, but it feels good that justice has now prevailed over injustice and evil, and that makes me very happy."

Many victims of the war in Sierra Leone were quietly pleased with the ruling, though the response was muted. Thousands across this West African country sat glued to TV sets or transistor radios to hear the court's findings. Most simply went back to their daily lives after the verdict was read.

Haja Bintu Mansaray's husband was killed by rebels in Koinadugu District, northern Sierra Leone, right in front of her.

"This verdict cannot bring back my husband, but my children and I can take solace from it," said Mansaray, who added that she would never forget seeing her husband murdered.

Like many Sierra Leoneans, she said she has struggled to survive since the war, finding it difficult to pay her children's school fees. While the conflict ended in 2002, the country has remained near the bottom of the United Nations Human Development Index, and much of the damage done is yet to be repaired.

Taylor was convicted of supporting the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a rebel faction led by Foday Sankoh, which invaded the east of the country in 1991. The RUF unleashed 11 years of suffering on the civilian population, with mass amputations, rape, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers characterising its campaigns. The RUF sought control of the rich alluvial diamond fields in the eastern part of Sierra Leone.

In Kono District, one of the longest-suffering regions during the war, survivors said they were happy with the guilty verdict, but were anxious to know what the sentence would be.

"I would give him a slow agony of a death, because he was the one responsible for the amputations, the killings, the destruction of lives and property," said Eric Kellie, in Kono's capital town of Koidu.

Kellie's brother and mother were killed during the war, and his home was destroyed. More than a decade later, he is still trying to pick up the pieces.

"It has been very difficult for a long time," said Kellie.

An estimated 50,000 people were killed during the war, with thousands more raped or suffering amputations. And since the war's end, Sierra Leone has seen far less international support than neighbouring Liberia, which suffered a 14-year war after Taylor invaded the country with a small rebel faction in 1989. Taylor has not been indicted for any of the atrocities committed during the Liberian war.

Eldred Collins, the former RUF spokesman and current spokesman for the political party of the same name, said that Taylor was not to blame for the war, which he attributed instead to Sierra Leone's long history of corrupt and unjust governance. In order to prevent another conflict, those conditions need to change, said Collins.

Abdul Rahim Kamara, director of Manifesto 99, a human rights organisation following the special court, said the trial had "sent out a loud and clear message, not only to Sierra Leone but to the whole continent: that the days of impunity are over."

"This should be a warning to all sitting officials that one day they will be held accountable for what they do," said Kamara.

In Freetown, Alhaji Jusu Jakka, the director of the War Amputees Victims' Association, said he was "happy" and "relieved" after the verdict. But he pointed out that the Taylor trial cost a great deal when little has been done for the victims of the war. The trial reportedly cost 50 million dollars.

"The international community has spent more money on perpetrators, rather than victims, who suffered the atrocities perpetrated by these people," said Jakka.

He said the judgment was a victory for victims, but he expected more reparations.

The verdict represents the first time a head of state has been found guilty of war crimes since the end of the Second World War. Taylor is the first former African head of state to be tried for crimes against humanity, and the case has been hailed as an end of impunity for African despots.

A sentence is expected on May 16. Taylor's lawyers have said they will appeal.

**Additional reporting by Jessica McDiarmid in Kono District, Sierra Leone.*

The Informer (Liberia)

Monday, 30 April 2012

U.S. Lauds Taylor Guilty Verdict

The United States has said it welcomes the issuance of the judgment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, convicting Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

It described last Thursday's judgment as "an important step toward delivering justice and accountability for victims, restoring peace and stability in the country and the region, and completing the Special Court for Sierra Leone's mandate to prosecute those persons who bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone."

The Liberian ex-president was criminally responsible for arming Sierra Leone's rebels in return for blood diamonds, the UN special war crimes court of Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague, ruled last week after nearly a decade long trial.

Taylor could face a maximum of life in prison, to be served in Great Britain. He has a May 16 hearing, and will learn his sentence on May 30.

Hundreds of thousands of people in Liberia thronged homes of those who had television, offices and nearby entertainment centers including shops and video clubs to watch the verdict being read live.

"The Taylor prosecution at the Special Court delivers a strong message to all perpetrators of atrocities, including those in the highest positions of power, that they will be held accountable," a US Government statement issued in Monrovia said.

The trial of Charles Taylor is of enormous historical and legal significance as it is the first of a powerful head of state to be brought to judgment before an international tribunal on charges of mass atrocities and serious violations of international humanitarian law, it noted.

Over 90 witnesses testified during the trial, bringing to light the range of crimes committed during the war in Sierra Leone, and affirming the importance of justice for the victims.

The United States has been a strong supporter and the leading donor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone since its inception. The successful completion of the Special Court's work remains a top U.S. Government priority, the statement concluded.

Meanwhile, Global Witness said the verdict by the Special Court for Sierra Leone that Charles Taylor is guilty of 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity delivers justice for the people of Sierra Leone and marks a momentous step in international efforts to end impunity. It also highlights the crucial role natural resources played in fuelling the country's conflict, said Global Witness today.

Taylor was a warlord and later President of Liberia, which shares a border with Sierra Leone. During Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 war, Taylor trained and armed the Sierra Leonean rebel group the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The RUF became notorious for horrific abuses, including sexual violence, cutting off limbs and forcibly recruiting child soldiers.

"One of the key architects of Sierra Leone's brutal war, which killed tens of thousands and displaced many more, has finally been brought to justice," said Global Witness Director Patrick Alley. "Heads of state

who commit grave human rights abuses, whether at home or abroad, are no longer beyond the reach of the law."

Taylor's trial highlighted the way in which he systematically used natural resources to fund his campaign of regional destabilisation. Under Taylor's sponsorship, the RUF seized control of Sierra Leone's diamond fields, funnelling diamond exports through Liberia to international markets. This trade generated massive revenues for the RUF and provided Taylor personally with millions of dollars. Taylor also used Liberia's logging industry to fund and provide logistics for armed forces in both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

"Blood diamonds and conflict timber were the fuel for Taylor's war machine in both Sierra Leone and Liberia," said Alley. "This verdict sends a clear signal - that those who steal a country's natural resource wealth and use the proceeds to terrorise its people - can be held to account. It is essential that those international companies and individuals that helped finance Taylor's activities, by trading in the resources that he stole, are now brought to justice."

The Taylor verdict comes as both West African countries struggle to restructure their natural resource industries. Sierra Leone is again exporting diamonds and has recently found oil off of its coast. Liberia - which emerged from conflict in 2003 - has adopted new forestry laws and is starting to establish its own oil sector. But reforms in both countries have met considerable difficulties. In Liberia, massive new logging and plantation concessions have been awarded, several in violation of the country's laws, which risk mass displacement of local people. Sierra Leone has also attracted big investments in plantations, as well as mining. These could help the country escape its dependence on foreign aid, but may also entrench corruption and cause environmental damage.

"Both Sierra Leone and Liberia have taken steps to reform their natural resource sectors but serious threats persist," said Patrick Alley. "Illegal contracts, badly outdated laws and the persistent failure to prosecute corrupt officials must all be addressed if either country is to make a genuine break with Taylor's legacy of resource mismanagement."

The Special Court has now succeeded in delivering justice for many of Taylor's victims. However, its jurisdiction does not extend beyond Sierra Leone and Taylor has not yet been held to account for crimes he committed against the people of Liberia, whom he terrorized from 1989 to 2003.

"Unlike in Sierra Leone, no tribunal has been established in Liberia to hold accountable those who committed war crimes or crimes against humanity during the civil war," said Alley.

The Economist

Monday, 30 April 2012

What's fair for the war-criminal goose

LAST week Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, became the first escapee from an American maximum-security prison ever to be convicted of crimes against humanity by an international court. More significantly, he became the first former head of state convicted of crimes against humanity by an international court, at least since Karl Doneitz went down at Nuremberg. Mr Taylor is hardly an international heavyweight, having been pushed out of Liberia under international pressure back in 2003, but the example of his conviction does have some international resonance to other dictators thinking about their futures. Back in the beginning of the protests against Bashir al-Assad in February, 2011, demonstrators in Syria were chanting: "Assad, Assad, we'll see you in The Hague." (This is apparently a near-rhyme in Arabic, as it is in Dutch.) With Mr Taylor having been convicted by the Special Court on Sierra Leone, Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast in custody and facing trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC), and the record-fast ICC indictment secured last year against Muammar Qaddafi (who might have ended up in The Hague as well had a few bullets not interceded), international justice is starting to become a serious factor in the way end-of-regime dramas play out for dictators, as they contemplate whether or not to spray the crowds with bullets.

For anyone who has watched the development of structures of international criminal justice since their halting, often ineffectual first steps in the 1990s, this is very encouraging. But in the course of mounting the best possible defence of the indefensible last week, Mr Taylor's lawyer, the silver-tongued British barrister Courtenay Griffiths, made several trenchant arguments. The last was a new version of the argument he's been making for a couple of years, that Mr Taylor is being prosecuted for actions which, had they been committed by the head of a more powerful state, would never have come to trial. This version of the argument was a bit sharper than usual. Mr Taylor was convicted, ultimately, of "aiding and abetting" the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the rebel groups that carried them out in Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). If national leaders are going to be convicted of crimes against humanity for providing support, material and otherwise, to groups that commit war crimes in other countries, Mr Griffiths said, he can think of a few other examples: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Afghanistan. Shouldn't American and British leaders, say, be held to the same standard? And yet, "do you seriously think that could ever happen?"

This is a fair point. America has in fact given arms, strategic advice and training, and moral support to armed groups that have committed war crimes. But there are two points to be made in response. The first is that the war crimes committed by the groups Mr Taylor backed were of a spectacular gruesome nature; everyone knew they were committing these crimes; and the links that tied Mr Taylor to the RUF and the AFRC were very, very tight. The Contras did some pretty awful stuff, but their brutality didn't quite rise to the spectacular level achieved by the RUF—routinely lining up villagers and hacking off their forearms, kidnapping their nine-year-old kids and brainwashing them as child soldiers, enslaving their women for sex and their men to mine diamonds, carving their group initials into their foreheads, and so forth and so on. Ronald Reagan wasn't personally on the phone telling Contra leaders to launch offensives with names like "Operation No Living Thing" in which he knew perfectly well they would massacre whole villages, and he didn't personally take delivery in the White House of 40-karat diamonds from Contra officers. The CIA did in fact write a manual for the Contras that essentially advised them to terrorise civilian populations, but in terms of putting a national leader on trial, there's a significantly greater level of remove there.

The second response to Mr Griffiths's question "could that ever happen?" came to me from a lawyer for a major international human-rights organisation, who said, basically, yes. To be more precise, she said: if there is evidence that American officials have given substantial support to foreign armed groups they knew to be involved in war crimes, then "bring on the investigations". There is no hypocrisy here on the part of advocates of holding international actors to account. Obviously, it will always be harder to bring a case against the leader or ex-leader of a major international power than to bring one against dictators in smaller peripheral states. But the position of human-rights advocates is consistent. You have to start somewhere, and what we've seen over the past decade and more of international justice is that, contrary to the more sceptical expectations, a tentative sort of rule of law is gradually being extended over sovereigns who once treated international courts as laughingstocks.

Christian Science Monitor

Monday, 30 April 2012

Taylor guilty: Liberians have mixed emotions about verdict

By Clair MacDougall

Liberians in the capital of Monrovia expressed sorrow and anger over Thursday's war crimes conviction of their former president Charles Taylor, who is still considered by many Liberians to be a hero.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone in the Hague found Mr. Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting crimes including murder, terrorism, rape, sexual slavery, and mutilations committed by rebel forces during Sierra Leone's civil war. The 11-year conflict, which ended in 2002, killed more than 50,000, and left many traumatized and maimed.

While Sierra Leoneans are expressing relief, the verdict was not widely welcomed in next-door Liberia. Taylor was also a central figure in Liberia's own – even deadlier – civil war but the country has not pushed for war crimes prosecutions and remained defensive on the subject of Taylor. International human rights advocates say that the victory in the Hague needs to be followed up in places like Liberia where an atmosphere of impunity lingers.

“Taylor's conviction shows that even those at the highest levels of power can be held to account for the worst crimes,” says Elise Keppler, senior counsel for the International Justice Program of Human Rights Watch. “Liberia has yet to initiate prosecutions for heinous crimes committed there, including under Taylor's presidency. Liberia should follow Sierra Leone's example so that Liberian victims can also see justice done.”

In downtown Monrovia men gathered at atai shops – the everyman's political saloons where men meet to drink tea, eat cooked meat, and discuss politics – people sat, listening to their radios intently listening to the judgment.

Alfred Momo Kandakar Kromah, 40, a self-labeled political activist and ex-Taylor fighter stood outside a well-known atai shop: “The most God-fearing president is the Messiah Taylor. The Messiah Taylor will be in Liberia on the 30th of April,” he predicted, followed by the statement, “Ellen is Evil,” referring to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who had Taylor extradited from Nigeria to Liberia and then on to Sierra Leone where he had initially been held before he was transferred to the Hague.

In the Center for Excellence of Intellectual Ideas, an atai society, Secretary General Franklin Kasseh Wesseh, expressed his dismay when it started to become clear the verdict would be guilty.

“I fail to imagine why anyone would want to see their president found guilty – it saddens me to know that there are people out there who are taking pleasure in this,” Mr. Wesseh said. “[He] should be living here happily and freely with us just as others, who perpetrated mayhem and other serious crimes, are living with us today on the basis of reconciliation, people are taking pleasure in seeing one individual being nailed, that is my sadness.”

This is a common sentiment expressed in Liberia, a country in which many of those who were deeply involved in Liberia's own 14-year civil war now hold senior positions in government. Liberia's civil war killed an estimated 250,000 people and left the nation's infrastructure in tatters and Liberians with traumatic memories of rape, torture, and humiliation at the hands of armed factions.

Charles Wreh, a 24-year-old seller of mobile phone scratch cards outside ministry of education building in downtown Monrovia, does not accept the dark picture painted of Taylor in the verdict.

“I don’t agree with the verdict because Charles Taylor is our president,” says Mr. Wreh. “Charles Taylor said he didn’t carry war to Sierra Leone so he should have been free.”

“Charles Taylor is a good guy. He took good care of us in Liberia. He used to bring us food, drop money.... Things rare fine now, but you have to struggle more.”

In an early sign that Liberians were willing to overlook Taylor's human rights record, Taylor was voted president in 1997 in a campaign that included the slogan, "He killed my Ma, he killed my Pa, but I will vote for him." But some say Taylor's landslide victory may in part be attributed to war fatigue and the desire for some kind of stability.

But for some of those Liberians who did lose family or faced persecution, the decision in the Hague is welcome.

John Denker, a worker at the Ministry of Education whose father was killed by Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), sees it as a victory for human rights.

“Charles Taylor being guilty is not a surprise to the Liberians. He brought war and suffering to the country,” Mr. Denker says. “The NPFL killed my father and everything I worked for they destroyed.... He deserved it.”

Counselor Tiawan Gongloe, a human rights lawyer who was severely tortured under Taylor's orders when he criticized the government in 2002, said the judgment was a triumph for human rights in Liberia, the region, and the world as a whole. But most importantly, he said, it marks an end to Taylor’s political influence in Liberia.

“We could never have sustainable peace in this country without a closure to the Taylor era. Liberia will be a peaceful place from now on – a peaceful, progressive and prosperous nation.”

Daily Times (Pakistan)

Tuesday, 1 May 2012

Jury still out on international war crimes system

The failure to hold other heads of state accountable, experts say, reveals some more of the struggles international justice faces

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor's war crimes conviction may be seen in some quarters as a victory for global justice, but a backlash against costly, lengthy international tribunals is also underway.

Found guilty of aiding and abetting a host of crimes including murder, rape and torture as well as arming brutal Sierra Leonean rebels, Taylor became the first head of state to be convicted by an international tribunal since the Nuremberg Trials after World War Two. He will be sentenced on May 30.

While Adolf Hitler avoided justice at Nuremberg by committing suicide in his Berlin bunker, his successor Admiral Karl Doenitz was convicted of crimes against the laws of war and planning a war of aggression. Human rights groups and western governments in particular welcomed the Taylor verdict, saying it stood as a warning to others that while the wheels of justice might take a long time to turn, the age of impunity for national leaders was over. But with the United Nations-backed "hybrid" court trial - including both international and Sierra Leonean members - taking a decade and costing an estimated \$50 million, some see that as simplistic. Some put the cost of the entire Sierra Leone tribunal process at some \$200 million, while British newspapers complained that plans for Taylor to serve his sentence in a British prison could cost taxpayers up to 100,000 pounds a year.

At the very least, some wonder whether the money could have been better spent in impoverished West Africa. While Taylor's prosecution was handled by a tribunal only looking at one conflict - Sierra Leone, not the Liberian civil war in which he is also accused of mass atrocities - most more recent war crimes cases are in the hands of the International Criminal Court. That has now issued indictments for crimes committed in six countries - Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Sudan, Central African Republic, Libya and Kenya - and found itself coming under growing criticism itself. "No one's in favour of impunity," says Jennifer Cooke, head of the Africa programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies in Washington DC. "But there are growing questions about the way in which international justice is being carried out in cases like this. There's the cost, there is the time and with the ICC there are complaints that they are only targeting Africans."

Others say that while the system remains deeply imperfect, and does almost invariably find itself targeting less powerful countries and their leaders, it is improving. The fact that some of the first recent war crimes trials were for abuses in the former Yugoslavia, they say, suggest African complaints of victimisation may be wide of the mark. That prosecution remains a distant dream in many conflicts, they say, does not make the process a bad thing. "There is no doubt (the) verdict sends an important message to high-ranking state officials; no matter who you are or what position you hold, you will be brought to justice for crimes," said Brima Abdulai Sheriff, Director of Amnesty International Sierra Leone.

Other voices, however, worry that on occasion war crimes charges themselves may be making it harder, not easier to bring peace. Indicted war criminals such as Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony might become more reluctant to agree peace deals. Less punitive systems such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, where abusers were granted amnesty if they told the truth, are held up as alternative models. But other recent attempts, such as Sri Lanka's recent inquiry after its civil war, have been widely criticised as whitewashing government acts. "Prosecution is very important," says Colette Rausch, director of the rule of law program at the United States Institute for Peace. "(But) it's not the only thing when you look at it from a transitional justice perspective — looking at the transition from

conflict to peace. It doesn't necessarily heal all wounds and it doesn't necessarily help individual victims."

The failure to hold other heads of state accountable, experts say, reveals some more of the struggles international justice faces. The trial of Slobodan Milosevic, the Yugoslav leader accused of orchestrating multiple atrocities during the Bosnia and Kosovo wars, died in 2006 with his trial unconcluded. Critics said he had been simply allowed to prolong his trial too long, effectively denying justice to his victims.

Sudan's President Omar Al Bashir, indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity in 2009 and for genocide the following year, remains not just at large but still in power. The charges hanging over his head do not appear to have significantly weakened him domestically or perhaps even within Africa. The African Union and Arab League both condemned the indictment, and he has since visited several countries including Djibouti, Egypt and Kenya — a move some worry has essentially made a mockery of the court. When Muammar Gaddafi was killed by a mob last year in the dying days of Libya's civil war, some western states and local leaders, many sometime allies or co-conspirators, while condemning the act may have drawn a sigh of relief he would not appear in court. Gaddafi might have jumped at the chance to extend his time in court as long as possible and seek to compromise Western governments with accusations of co-operation. Certainly, Libya shows little sign of handing over Gaddafi's eldest son Saif, captured in November and in custody. After discussions between the ICC and Libyan authorities, he may now be tried in Libya but under ICC supervision. That, analysts suggest, would allow Libya's new rulers much tighter control over proceedings and to try him on counts other than war crimes — potentially including financial embezzlement. Some rights activists have long worried he might put up a relatively strong defence against the war crimes charge if he were able to claim he had no direct involvement or was trying to rein in his father's excesses.

The only head of state so far extradited to the International Criminal remains Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo, sent to the Hague in November. He was captured in his compound in Abidjan following an operation by French and Ivorian forces loyal to Alassane Ouattara, internationally recognised as the winner of a 2010 election. But there seems little sign that either Ivorian courts or the ICC itself have any particular appetite to charge those on the winning side with war crimes, despite reports from groups such as Human Rights Watch laying serious accusations on both. In the other countries so far handled by the ICC, some again see a reluctance to charge those still in authority. While Lord's Resistance Army leader Joseph Kony is widely regarded by rights groups as one of the world's worst war criminals, accused of killings, rapes, murders and child soldier recruitment, Uganda's President Yoweri Museveni is also seen far from clean.

Once lauded by the West, critics now view his rule as increasingly autocratic. In Democratic Republic of Congo, several militia leaders have been indicted of various crimes. But there have been a few suggestions of a move against President Joseph Kabila despite allegations of abuses by his forces. Syria's Bashar Al Assad, analysts suspect, will probably avoid his own ICC indictment as long as Russia and China protect him from a Security Council ruling referring him to the court. Reuters

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Opinion

A Sierra Leone on the rise must also confront its past

Aminatta Forna

There will be celebrations in Sierra Leone following the Charles Taylor verdict issued this week by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, not least because yesterday was independence day and a public holiday.

And there are other reasons to celebrate. Ten years after the end of a decade-long civil war, Sierra Leone is undergoing an economic boom. For years the bottom-ranking country on the UN human development index, Sierra Leone is predicted by the IMF to experience economic growth of a world-leading 34 per cent this year.

On my last visit there, the plane was full of oil workers from Aberdeen following the discovery of offshore oil reserves. In the capital, Freetown, Chinese investment was carving a traffic route through the city and new beachfront hotels were going up. The boom has been largely resource-driven - primarily by iron ore, but also gold, titanium and aluminium.

The Taylor verdict will bring the country full circle from a war that left thousands dead and maimed. People will certainly welcome the verdict of guilty on 11 counts of aiding and abetting war crimes in Sierra Leone, but for most the war was about much more than Charles Taylor.

I was in Freetown when Taylor was arrested in Nigeria in 2006, accused by the special court for Sierra Leone of backing Sierra Leone's RUF rebels in an attempt to gain control of the country's diamond and mineral wealth. I heard about his imminent arrival and drove to the court, but found no waiting crowds.

I wrote about the special court when it opened in 2004, with its brief to try those most responsible for the war in Sierra Leone. I canvassed opinion from everyone I met: working girls, unemployed young men, soldiers, a government minister. Feelings about the court were mixed; many believed those truly responsible were not and would never be held to account. The court prosecuted the leaders of the fighting groups. The people I spoke to were referring to the political leaders, whose corrupt and inept governance brought the country to its knees long before Taylor, going back as far as the 1970s and dictator Siaka Stevens.

I followed David Crane, the special court's chief prosecutor, on an outreach mission to take the court's message to the populace. In Makeni deaf school I watched a girl of 14 dare to ask Crane what everyone else was thinking. "Are you," she signed through an interpreter, "going to indict the president?" Crane ducked the question.

When it declared independence 51 years ago today, Sierra Leone was more fortunate than most African countries, as it possessed a middle class of administrators and professionals. But the middle class would choose apathy over action. Stevens had emasculated both the police and the army, from whom he feared rebellion. Hence by the time Foday Sankoh's embryonic Revolutionary United Front went to Liberia for training by Taylor (backed, lest we forget, by Muammar Gaddafi), they walked back into a country full of angry and disenfranchised young men without jobs or prospects, with nothing to lose.

The background to the civil war has been established by the special court, and the road map to how a country implodes may be the court's most important legacy. Democracy requires eternal vigilance. Sierra Leone learnt the lesson in the hardest possible way.

Elections are due to be held in November, but there is already sporadic violence. One of the main opposition candidates is a former coup leader, Maada Bio. Now a successful businessman, Bio has "grown up a lot" since then. A return to war is highly unlikely, but for the Taylor verdict to mean anything, the country has to grow up politically, too. It must learn to hold its leaders accountable, and say "never again".

Aminatta Forna is author of The Devil that Danced on the Water, a memoir of Sierra Leone and her dissident father.