

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



Since this sign first appeared in Monrovia last February (see the February 11 press clippings), it appears to have suffered badly from sun, rain and abuse.

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Press and Public Affairs Office
as at:

Thursday, 10 May 2007

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

Thursday, 10 May 2007

Special Court A Death Trap!

The Special Court in Sierra Leone is the independent war crimes court set up by the United Nations backed by the government of Sierra Leone and charged with the responsibilities of bringing those who violated Sierra Leonean and the International Laws to judgement and to pay the price for their actions. An act was passed in Parliament for the approval of the court. The act was approved and it was in February 2004 that the Special Court building was officially opened and it was also in June that the trials of those detained since March 2003 finally kicked off. Hinga Norman, the former Deputy Defence Minister and Civil Defence Force (CDF) Coordinator who was later appointed Internal Affairs Minister was one of the biggest fish in the Special Court's net. Chief Norman was arrested in 2003 in his office. The arrest was a big shock and surprise to many Sierra Leoneans who saw Norman as one of their liberators. Norman played a key role towards the restoration of the ousted and exiled government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah in May 1997. On that fateful day of the coup, President Kabbah and some Ministers fled to Guinea while Norman took refuge at the British High Commission. The RUF rebels and their allied rebel soldiers were looking for him to kill him. Norman was able to escape to Guinea via an American Marine boat that was evacuating Americans and other foreign nationals.

Norman returned to the shores of Sierra Leone and began coordinating the activities of the Civil Defence Forces with full support from the exile government, ECOMOG and some Sierra Leoneans.

The presence of the Civil Defence Force was felt right across the country as they put up heavy resistance against the AFRC regime and their rebel alliance. The regime was very adamant to hand over power to the democratically elected regime which is in exile in Guinea. The Civil Defence Force under the direct supervision of Norman continued to pile pressure as some people thought that they were extraordinary people. They frustrated and defeated and also regained many areas initially possessed by members of the

AFRC regime and their rebel allies. The idea to set up the Special Court to many Sierra Leoneans was a mere waste of resources whilst many see it as a good gesture that can serve as a deterrent to prevent future crimes and also to punish the agitators and their accomplices. Norman was indicted on the grounds that he was the head of the civil militias who were believed to have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity and he was responsible for all those crimes. This did not go down well with some people in and out side Sierra Leone. No one would deny the fact that during the struggle to restore order and the legitimate regime, they did not commit any crime but it can be commensurate with what the rebels committed according to statistics from the

defend democracy. After his arrest in March 2003 in his office by top ranking Special Court officials, there were speculations that Sierra Leoneans again would once again be plunged into another chaos and anarchy taking into consideration the command and respect Norman used to enjoy within the ranks of the Civil Defence Forces across the country. Norman's indictment and detention by the Special Court painted an ugly picture for the government, the SLPP and some members of the public who saw this as a betrayed member of the government, a staunch supporter and member of the SLPP. After his arrest, the government issued a communiqué via the Ministry of Information stating that the indictment and detention of Norman for war

in the country. Norman himself has refused on several occasion to cooperate with the Special Court on the grounds that he was not properly indicted and he also went on hunger strike on several occasions during the struggle to restore the legitimate regime. Norman received support and logistic from the exiled government in Guinea and from some other influential SLPP supporters in America and at home. Norman was given vital and sensitive information about the illegal regime which the Civil Defence Force used to counter their opponents. Norman was in detention for close to four years and during that period, his health deteriorated sharply and on the 17th of January, Norman was flown to a military hospital in Dakar for an operation on his hip. According to sources from the Special Court, the operation was successful and some few weeks later Norman succumbed to death on the 27th January 2007 in Dakar, Senegal.

The news about Norman's death was received with shock by many Sierra Leoneans and many people are blaming the government for Norman's demise. The death of Norman has brought controversies into the political scenario in the country. The country will have her presidential and parliamentary elec-



tions in few months time which will see the exit of President Kabbah and the entrance of a new president and a new government. The ruling SLPP are claiming that Norman died as an SLPP whilst the newly formed and break away group from the SLPP.

The PMDC are claiming that Norman resigned from SLPP and that he died as a PMDC member. Family members have warned both parties not to make a statement with Norman's death. Also, during a University Convocation in the southern city of Bo, President Kabbah spoke lengthily about Norman's death. He described him as his best Minister and close colleague whom he admired much. He also stated that as a government, they had no hands in the indictment and detention of Chief Norman and that they were observing the situation cautiously. He also made it clear that Norman was not a war criminal, in the sense that the Special Court did not find him guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He assured the family that his government would assist in whatever ways possible so that Norman is given a befitting funeral service.

Norman returned to the shores of Sierra Leone and began coordinating the activities of the Civil Defence Forces with full support from the exile government, ECOMOG and some Sierra Leoneans

TRC reports. The Civil Defence Force only committed six percent of the atrocities during the 11 years war. Norman was seen as a disciplined man as some of his militia took him as a demigod. He enjoyed great command within the rank and file of the Civil Defence Force who were always ready to obey Norman's instructions. Norman and his men softened the ground for the West African intervention force ECOMOG as both troops entered the City without much hindrances to the enchantment of many Sierra Leoneans who were subjected to fear and depression during the nine months of the AFRC regime.

The Civil Defence Force and Norman were complementing the efforts of ECOMOG in Freetown and the country at large. Norman was hailed by thousands of Sierra Leoneans for his bravery and loyalty to

crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court is their jurisdiction and that they are watching and observing the situation closely out side in the provinces especially in the South and East where many people are concerned and bitter about Norman's detention.

To many people in the south and east were Norman hails, is seen as a hero because he did everything humanly possible to bring back peace and to restore democracy to the country although at a very high cost. The desperation amongst the Civil Defence Force especially the Kamajors who have 90% of Norman's tribes men and some other loyal and admirers of Norman to attack the Special Court and free Norman from detention was very high and possible. Norman's message to them was to remain calm and not to disrupt the fragile peace

Standard Times

Thursday, 10 May 2007

The Hague Trial: Implications

Since the setting up of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the issue of security has always been a priority. The decision to transfer the Taylor trial to The Hague is hinged on the belief that his continued presence in West Africa will not augur well for the peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia and to international peace and security as a whole in the sub region. However, the Government of Sierra Leone stated unambiguously that it does not share such security fears as it had adequate security to have held the trial in the country.

That notwithstanding, many important governmental institutions, most remarkably the Legislature, as well as the civil society groups and the Amputees and War Wounded Association, in whose name the court is said to be dispensing justice, have echoed that the trial of Mr. Taylor should be held in the country.

When the late Chief Sam Hinga Norman, former head of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) - national hero for many - was arrested, many people feared that his cohorts would cause an uprising. After the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and Yugoslavia repudiated the request of the Special Court to provide temporary detention for him and to host his preliminary appearance, he was subsequently tried in Sierra Leone with no reported security disturbances up to his death in February this year. Similarly, when Charles Taylor left office, he resided in Nigeria as a 'free man' with no public evidence to date extenuating his threat to security in the sub region. Both cases definitely make the much trumpeted security concern obsolete. The contentious issue is the actual arrest and trial of Taylor, and not whether he is tried in Freetown or The Hague.

The decision by the President of the Trial Chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone to move the seat of the Court in the Charles Taylor trial from Freetown to The Hague has had serious implications for the Court. Given the political and legal significance of the Taylor trial in the continent at large, his trial in The Hague may possibly, like the Dujail Tribunal which tried former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, discredit the Court as nothing more than the

The Hague Trial: Implications

new imperialism disguised as international rule of law to tame the "beast of impunity".

The transfer of the trial has undermined the entire rationale for having the Court located where the crimes were perpetrated, thus making it difficult for people, in whose name and on whose behalf the Court is said to be rendering justice, to access the process of justice in the trial. Indeed for many victims, the most significant succor they can get for their afflictions during the decade long conflict is for them to see those that they consider responsible, tried in their pres-

to the whole country every trial proceedings in The Hague will be travesty of accountability. Hence, the people would have been denied the right to see, first hand justice being administered.

The change in the trial venue also makes room for serious financial, logistical and administrative burden on the Court. The cost of hosting Charles Taylor's trial in The Netherlands has been projected at \$20 Million. The establishment of a second Special Court Office in The Hague, the relocation of Trial Chamber II, the re-deployment of staff, the transfer

sufficient funds to continue operations until the middle of the year. This will be halfway through the opening statement of the trial scheduled for 4th June. Thus, if the Court fails to solicit more funds from donor countries, there is the possibility that the trial, once started, will not be finished. Hence continuing to stage the trial in The Hague will impose undue difficulty for a Court that is already bleeding white.

Ever since Charles Taylor's arraignment before the Court, he had relayed two concerns. First, fear for his life and second, that he is completely op-

with other SCSL detainees contrary to Article 17(1) of the Statute of the SCSL which states that "All accused shall be equal before the Special Court". The Defence alleged that the accused's lawyer-client privilege consultations have been subjected to video surveillance, and the Detention Centre at the ICC where Mr. Taylor is held in custody has imposed an excess of unnecessary, unreasonable, and discriminatory restrictions that are not applicable to other detainees in Freetown. The Defence has incriminated the Special Court for abdicating its jurisdiction in a flawed Memorandum of Understanding between the Court and the ICC over decisions relating to Mr. Taylor's detention conditions. Consequently, the defence has even threatened to boycott the trial if these "unnecessary, unreasonable, and discriminatory restrictions" are not removed immediately.

The underlying principle for the establishment of the Special Court, hailed as a new model because it is located where the atrocities were committed, is arguably to provide the victims of the war with some sense of justice and restitution and to allow for a mix of international legal principles with local participation from those affected by the conflict. With the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, sitting in Arusha, Tanzania already criticized for denying the people of Rwanda the opportunity to closely follow the trial, thus having very little impact on Rwandans, the same could be said of the Special Court if the Taylor trial is not made accessible to those most affected.

Be that as it may, the Court must take into account the rights and wishes of the accused, who, incidentally, is the only non-Sierra Leonean and with the highest profile before the Court, lest there be a claim, again as in the internationally discredited the Dujail Tribunal, for falling short of fairness standards.

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ence. However, with the trial being conducted in The Hague, Sierra Leoneans and Liberians, particularly war victims, would not be getting first hand information of the proceedings. The transmission of the trial through video link will not be enough as many people, particularly in Sierra Leone do not have access to television sets, and, for those who do, electric power supply remains a crisis. Equally so, for two monitors/observers (from civil society groups) to report

of and accommodation arrangements for witnesses, and the establishment of an enhanced Outreach presence in Liberia are very challenging. The President of the Court, in the Order Changing Venue, stated that "while it is true that certain witnesses may have to travel to The Hague, this should not present an undue financial or administrative burden". It is worth noting that as of 30th January 2007, it has been reported that the Court only had

posed to his transfer to The Hague. Pursuant to Article 17(3) of the Statute of the SCSL which provides for "The accused to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to the provisions of the present Statute," Mr. Taylor's trial should be transparent, fair, just and equitable. On the contrary, the Taylor Defence have filed a number of Motions alleging that the change of venue has resulted in violations of their client's rights to equal treatment

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New Vision
Thursday, 10 May 2007

9,541 Weapons Collected In 46 Chiefdoms

By Amara A. Samura

Forty six chiefdoms out of the ninety one where the Arms for Development Project is operating in the country have been verified and certified arms free by the Sierra Leone Police.

The Officer Commanding Fire Arms at Police

Headquarter, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Andrew Gbanie told New Vision yesterday that eight chiefdoms in Bombali District, Seven in Kambia, eight in Tonkolili, four in Koinadugu, nine in Kono, four in Kenema, five in Kailahun and one in Moyamba have been

declared arms free.

Mr. Gbanie said some nine thousand five hundred and forty one (9,541) ammunition were collected from the people in ninety one chiefdoms where they have been operating.

He said each of the certified chiefdoms have been awarded

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9,541 Weapons Collected In 46 Chiefdoms

forty million or above (Le 40m) by the United Nations Development Project to undertake any development project for the chiefdom.

The AFD, he said, has moved from the initial phase of a pilot project in 2003 targeting four chiefdoms to an Outward Expansion Phase presently intervening in eighty seven chiefdoms.

“These chiefdoms have been awarded Le 40m or above as

a form of compensation for voluntarily surrendering arms in exchange for community development,” Mr. Gbanie said.

He noted that his department is facing mobility problems and that no new legislation has been enacted by Parliament on the control of arms.

He said the installation of a computerized data processing system by UNDP cannot be done until a new legislation has

been enacted by Parliament.

He appealed to UNDP to assist his department in the areas of vehicle and other logistics, noting that funding is crucial towards the implementation of the AFD programme. Meanwhile moves are underway to relocate arms stored in sea containers under the custody of the police for a better storage facility in the provinces.

Awareness Times (Online Edition)

Thursday, 9 March 2007

Theological college students tour special court in Sierra Leone

By John Mansaray

Staff and Students the Sierra Leone Theological College Church Training Centre on Monday 7th May, took an official tour of the United Nation backed Special Court for Sierra Leone at New England, in Freetown.

The Principal together with her staff and Students was received by team of outreach officers of the Special Court. In her welcome address, Mrs. M'bawa thanked the Principal, staff and students for visiting the court. Mrs. M'bawa gave a brief background to the establishment of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. She informed the visiting team that the establishment of the court came as an agreement between the United Nation and the government of Sierra Leone, upon the request of the Head of State.

Mrs. M'bawa also said that since the establishment of the court in 2004, 8 persons have so far been detained and there is one fugitive, John Paw Koroma. The students and staff were divided groups and each group was led by an outreach officer. The four groups took a tour and examined facilities on Trail Court Room Number Two.

They were received by personnel of the sections; they included personnel of the Public Affairs, Library Unit, the Special Court Deputy Head of the Press and the Public Affairs Section. Mr. M'bawa welcomed the students and staff into his office, which he said is the mouthpiece of the court. He informed them that his section is well-grounded with the activities of the court and can therefore respond to queries and enquires and interact with both the local and international media.

Mrs. Claire Fatmata Carlton Hanciles of the Trail Court Room Two responded to questions posed by the visiting team. She informed them about the procedures of the court, its mandate and moral obligation, which is to dispense justice in the country after the brutal war in Sierra Leone. Mrs. Claire Fatmata Carlton Hanciles, who is a lawyer, is attached to the defense section. She encouraged all Sierra Leoneans to go and listen to the court's proceedings.

Reverend Olivia Wesley, in her closing remarks, thanked the management of the Court. She said that the purpose of the visit was to enable her staff and students to have the opportunity to be familiar with the activities of the Special Court and to have a close look at the facilities. She thanked Lawyer Carlton Hanciles for taking her time to explicitly explain issues that pertain to the court.

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 09 May 2007

[The media summaries and press clips do not necessarily represent the views of UNMIL.]

International Clips on Liberia

VOA 09 May 2007

Liberia's TB Victims, Doctors Cry Out For Help, Funds

By Nico Colombant, Dakar

Victims of tuberculosis in Liberia, as well as their doctors, are crying out for more help from their government and the international community. Funds Liberia was receiving from the Geneva-based Global Fund to fight tuberculosis and malaria have not been renewed. Dozens of patients mill about inside Monrovia's National tuberculosis annex building, fighting off the curable but deadly and contagious respiratory illness, awaiting food and medicine.

International Clips on West Africa

Ivory Coast pro-government militias to disarm next week

ABIDJAN, May 8, 2007 (AFP) - A pro-government militia based in Ivory Coast's lawless western region will disband next week in line with a recently secured peace deal to end four years of civil conflict, its commander said Tuesday.

"We will turn in on May 19 the last weapons which we are holding, to President (Laurent) Gbagbo and his Prime Minister Guillaume Soro," Denis Maho Goflehi told AFP.

Sierra Leone opposition slam poll planned for monsoon season

FREETOWN, May 8, 2007 (AFP) - Opposition and civil society groups in Sierra Leone on Tuesday launched a stinging attack on a decision to delay presidential and legislative elections as the new date is in the peak of the rain season. Voting initially set for July 28 will now be held on August 11 to give lawmakers more time for the electoral campaign, the national electoral commission (NEC) said at the weekend.

Banned Liberian paper denies seeking state pardon

afrol News, 9 May - Liberia's banned radical newspaper, 'The Independent' again has a beef with the government over allegations that its management was frustrated that it has sought for state pardon instead of allowing the legal process to exhaust at the Supreme Court. A one-year ban was slapped on the paper for publishing pictures of Liberia's most senior Presidential Minister, Willis Knuckles, having sex with two women. Mr Knuckles, a well-respected executive until the expose, was left with no option than tendering his resignation in a country that does not accept sex scandal involving political leaders.

Local Media – Newspaper

Liberia's Commander-in-Chief Commissions Army Officers

(The Informer, Public Agenda, New Democrat, The Monitor, The Parrot, Daily Observer, The News, New Vision, The Inquirer and Heritage)

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on Tuesday commissioned nine of the restructured 105 officers of the new Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) to the rank of 2nd Lieutenant during a programme held at the refurbished Edward B. Kesselly Barracks outside Monrovia.
- Those commissioned were Theophilus Dana, Jr., Davidson Forleh, Oyango Cole, Dynicious Kwia, Geraldine George (*the only female officer*), Benefit Mason, Guiney Tenny, Joel Toe and Daniel Zia Kahn.
- Initially, 11 officers were due to have been commissioned but Defense Minister Brownie Samukai said two of the officers were still undergoing some disciplinary measures and were therefore barred from the process.
- Even though Minister Samukai did not name the two officers, the *Daily Observer* identified the two affected officers as Prince C. Johnson, Jr. [*son of the late Lt. /Gen. Prince C. Johnson, Sr., former Chief of Staff of the AFL under Mr. Taylor who died in a car crash in 2000*] and Eric Dennis [*former Lecturer and Chairman of the Department of Reserved Officers Training Corps of the University of Liberia*].

WAEC to Re-examine Liberian Students in June

(The Informer, New Democrat, Daily Observer, The Inquirer and Heritage)

- Stakeholders of the Liberian educational system on Tuesday agreed to re-administer this year's West African Examination Council's (WAEC) exams to 12th graders across the country. The decision resulted from a meeting held at the Ministry of Education yesterday.
- The decision was in response to last week's cancellation of WAEC's Senior High School Certificate Examinations on account of suspected leakages, especially in Montserrado and Margibi Counties by the Ministry of Education.
- New exams would be developed and administered to 6th, 9th and 12th graders from 18th to 27th June 2007.
- During the meeting, an 11-man committee headed by Sister Mary Lauren Browne [*President of the Catholic-run Stella Maris Polytechnic*] was set up to investigate circumstances leading to the suspected leakage of the examinations.

Senate Suspends Executive Committee Chair

(The News, Heritage, Daily Observer and Public Agenda)

- The Liberian Senate on Tuesday suspended its Committee Chairman on Executive, Maryland County Senator Gloria Scott for supposedly failing to submit the controversial Financial Autonomy Act to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for her to sign it into law. Senator Scott was suspended for three months.
- However, Senator Scott argued that the House of Representatives Speaker Alex Tyler asked her to delay the submission of the Act to the President to enable him read it through. At the same time, River Gee County Senator Frederick Cherue has filed a motion for reconsideration of the suspension of Senator Scott.
- The contentious Financial Autonomy Act seeks to grant the National Legislature the right to control its own budgetary allocation on a quarterly basis, but President Johnson Sirleaf reportedly told a news conference Monday that she was not in the position to sign the Act.

Local Media – Radio Veritas *(News monitored today at 9:45 am)*

President Commissioned Officers of Armed Forces of Liberia

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Senate Committee Suspends its Chairman

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

President Spent over US\$1 Million on International Travels

- According to an official document released to the press Monday, the Government allegedly spent more than US\$1 million on President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's foreign trips in 2006 and nearly US\$650,000 in the first four months of 2007.

- Entitled: Costs vs. Benefits, the document was supposedly released amidst concerns that the President makes too many foreign trips which cost the Government huge amount of money.
- According to the document, in 2006, President Sirleaf's foreign trips netted nearly US\$143 million from the Countries she visited while in the first four months, the trips accrued nearly US\$116 million.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

British Broadcasting House to Train Liberian Journalists

- Sources hinted that Madam Julia Crawford, representative of the BBC World Service Trust, arrived in the Country to encourage Liberian journalists to take advantage of a training programme designed to raise public understanding and debate about the activities of international criminal tribunals and their relationship with transitional justice. Other countries to benefit from the training include Sierra Leone, Uganda, Burundi and Democratic Republic of the Congo.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

National Civil Service Strike Likely to Get Underway Today

- Correspondents said that the called industrial strike of the Civil Service Association was likely to get underway today even though reporters visiting the Finance, Commerce and Transport Ministries found employees of the entities actively at work.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Complete versions of the UNMIL International Press Clips, UNMIL Daily Liberian Radio Summary and UNMIL Liberian Newspapers Summary are posted each day on the UNMIL Bulletin Board. If you are unable to access the UNMIL Bulletin Board or would like further information on the content of the summaries, please contact Mr. Weah Karpeh at karpeh@un.org.

United Nations News Centre

Wednesday, 9 May 2007

UN tribunal reverses Bosnian Serb's genocide conviction for Srebrenica massacre

9 May 2007 – The United Nations war crimes tribunal for the former Yugoslavia today overturned a former Bosnian Serb army commander's conviction for complicity to commit genocide against Muslims at Srebrenica in July 1995, but upheld other convictions for his role in the mass killings there.

The appeals chamber of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), sitting in The Hague, reduced the sentence of Vidoje Blagojević from 18 years' jail to 15 years after reversing the complicity in genocide conviction.

But the judges confirmed his convictions – and that of Dragan Jokić, another Bosnian Serb army officer – for crimes against humanity and violations of the laws and customs of war over their actions at Srebrenica, and upheld Mr. Jokić's sentence of nine years in prison.

More than 7,000 Muslim men and boys were murdered in Srebrenica in July 1995 after Bosnian Serb forces overran what was supposed to be a UN-protected enclave, or safe haven, and the ICTY has found that the events there constituted genocide.

Mr. Blagojević, 56, served as commander of the Bosnian Serb army's Bratunac Brigade while Mr. Jokić, 49, was the chief of engineering in the same army's Zvornik Brigade, and both participated in the persecution and killings around Srebrenica.

Troops commanded by Mr. Blagojević fired on the Srebrenica enclave, attacked a group of men and boys attempting to flee and blocked humanitarian convoys bound for the safe haven. Mr. Jokić organized machinery and troops to dig mass graves for the people killed.

Announcing its judgment today, the ICTY appeals chamber said the trial chamber had erred in convicting Mr. Blagojević of complicity in genocide in 2005 because it was not clear beyond a reasonable doubt that he knew of the main perpetrators' genocidal intent.

The ICTY has now rendered final judgments against six persons in connection with the crimes committed at Srebrenica, one of the most notorious events of the Balkan wars of the 1990s. A trial against seven accused continues, while three other accused persons are in a pre-trial phase and one case has been referred to the courts of Bosnia and Herzegovina for trial.

Six men remain as fugitives, including the former Bosnian Serb president Radovan Karadžić, Bosnian Serb army leader Ratko Mladić and the senior army officer Zdravko Tolimir.

BBC

Wednesday, 9 May 2007

Chad demobilises child soldiers

By Stephanie Hancock
BBC News, N'Djamena

Chad's government has signed a deal with the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) to begin demobilising child soldiers from its national army.

The agreement is a U-turn for the government, which has always denied that it has had under-age fighters.

In a recent Unicef investigation more than 300 child soldiers were discovered in one town alone.

Chad's minister for external relations, Djidda Moussa Outman, says the army has never purposely recruited children.



The authorities say children forge birth certificates

Widespread

"A few days ago, in the town of Mongo, we began to demobilise 200 to 300 children from the Chadian army," Mr Outman said.

A good proportion of the children were reportedly between eight and 11 years old.

"This is already a strong sign of our goodwill. The government has never knowingly signed up children into the Chadian army. It's young people who forge their birth certificates," the minister said.



Unicef's Steve Adkisson

"If they come to sign up we cannot know they are lying. What happens in Europe is not the same in Africa. But we are now taking concrete actions to remove them quickly from the national army."

He gave an assurance that the government is trying to educate people that youths should not be recruited.

Unicef's Steve Adkisson says the recruitment of child fighters is widespread in Chad - the true number is not known.

"The effort today is to conduct a census across the Chadian territory, with the co-operation of the government - looking at rebel forces, children recruited by Sudanese rebels and other groups," he said.

Convincing the children to disarm is a complicated process too.

"To draw these children out of their current lives requires their own engagement, requires the engagement of NGOs who have the capacity and experience to work with these children," Mr Adkisson said.

Areas were also needed where the children could go before returning to their communities,

some of which are still in conflict zones, he says.

Clearly, the issue of Chad's child soldiers is not something that will be solved overnight.

But now the government's admitted that it does have a problem, there is hope that many hundreds of children can finally return home to safety.

Voice of America

Thursday, 9 May 2007

Chad Signs Agreement to End Child Soldier Recruitment

By Phuong Tran
N'Djamena, Chad

Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs has signed an agreement with the United Nations to end child soldier recruitment. Phuong Tran attended the signing in Chad's capital, N'Djamena, and has this report for VOA.



Before signing the accord, Chad Minister of Foreign Affairs Djida Moussa said any child who only knows war as a way of life is a loss to society.

Families and schools in Chad have long reported their children fighting in the ongoing conflict that involves the governments of Chad and Sudan, and rebel groups in both countries looking for more power.

UNICEF's representative Stephen Adkisson and Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Djida Moussa, sign an agreement to end child soldier recruitment

U.N. Children's Fund representative in Chad, Stephen Adkisson, says working with the Chadian government is the first step to find out just how bad the problem is.

"There are clearly a considerable number of children, but the actual number is part of the effort today to conduct a census across the Chadian territory with cooperation of [the] government in looking at rebel forces, children recruited by Sudanese rebel groups and other groups," he said.

In a recent survey, UNICEF discovered more than 300 child soldiers in a camp of displaced Chadians in Mongo in eastern Chad.

Chad's government denies recruiting children to fight, and has said the children lie about their ages in order to join the army.

But Chad rebel leader Amine Ben Barka, of the Concord of Progress and Recourse based in eastern Chad, says Chad army soldiers continue to freely give weapons to civilians, including many children, along the Chad-Sudanese border.



Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Djida Moussa

Chad's Minister of Foreign Affairs says untrained army officers are to blame for involving children.

Moussa says his government has tried and will continue to train their officers to not recruit children when trying to find soldiers.

The Chadian government agreed to work with UNICEF to create a commission of government ministers to prevent continued recruitment, to release children currently fighting, and to help them adjust to life back in their communities.

It also gives the U.N. agency permission to work with Chad's rebel groups, which the Chadian government has accused Sudan of supporting, a claim Sudan has denied.

Despite repeated peace agreements between Chad and Sudan, the most recent being a week ago, violence continues to rock the lawless border region with thousands of Chadians living out of tents and straw huts, alongside hundreds of thousands of Sudanese refugees.