

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



Siaka Stevens Street, Freetown

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Friday, 11 February 2011

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Concord Times
Friday, 11 February 2011

As Charles Taylor boycotts trial, Sierra Leone's war-battered residents hope for justice

By Paige McClanahan (Credit: The Christian Science Monitor)

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor boycotted his war crimes trial in The Hague for a second day on Wednesday, further delaying the court's ruling on whether he bears responsibility for the civil war that ravaged the West African country of Sierra Leone for more than a decade. It is the latest bizarre twist in the drawn-out trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, established in 2003 "to try those who bear the greatest responsibility" for the war that brutalized the country in the 1990s. Proceedings have included Shakespearean monologues from Mr. Taylor along with testimonies from British supermodel Naomi Campbell and American actor-activist Mia Farrow. But here in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, the public remains confident that the law will eventually catch up with Taylor, who faces indictments on 11 counts, including murder, rape, sexual slavery, and the use of child soldiers.

"Charles Taylor is pretending to the world that he's innocent," says Theresa Turay, a Sierra Leonean who lived through the country's gruesome 11-year civil war. "But he has to face the trial. He has to face the penalty." "If you play evil," she adds, "it will come back for you."

The trial, which heard its first witness in January 2008, was set to come to an end Friday. Prosecutors presented their closing arguments Tuesday, and the defense was meant

to do the same today. If closing arguments had wrapped up as planned this week, a ruling in the case could have been expected sometime later this year.

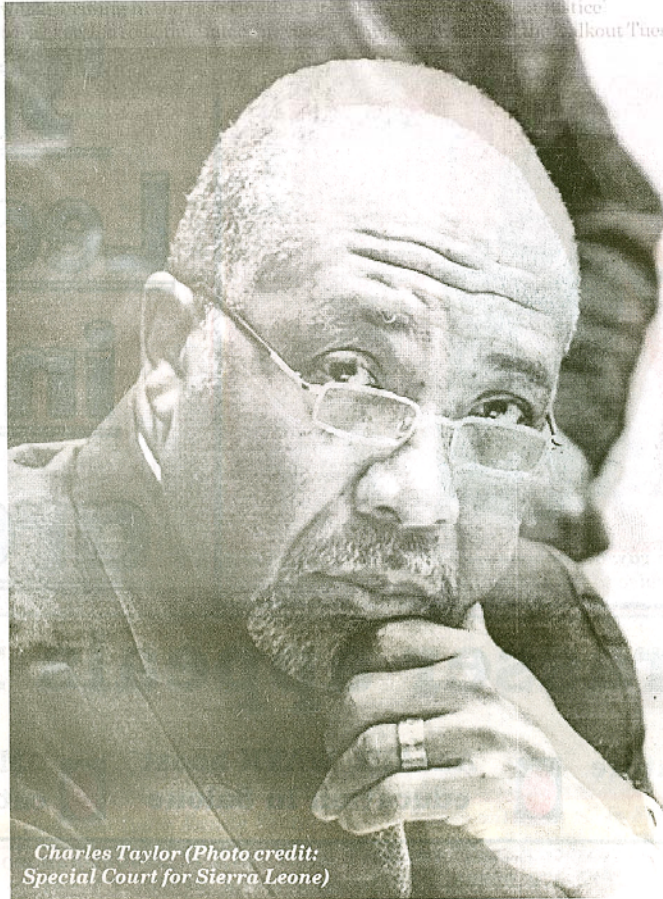
Taylor's boycott has thrown that schedule into disarray.

"This is about ego, not justice," Taylor's lawyers led the walkout Tues-

day, claiming the court wrongly rejected their 517-page trial summary, which was filed three weeks late despite multiple warnings from the court.

Speaking outside the courtroom Wednesday morning, Taylor's lead lawyer Courtenay Griffiths insisted that the court's refusal to accept the trial summary was evidence of its bias against the defense team. The British lawyer said he plans to appeal, a process that could delay a ruling in the case indefinitely. "It's about simply this: You're not running this court, Mr. Taylor, and we're going to show you who's in charge by rejecting your final brief," Mr. Griffiths said outside the court, reports the Associated Press. "So this is about ego, not justice, and I really don't see that this kind of personalized politics has any part to play in a court of law." Chief prosecutor Brenda Hollis shot back, claiming that Taylor's team was just trying to buy time. "The accused is not attending a social event. He may not R.S.V.P. at the last minute. He is the accused at a criminal proceeding," Ms. Hollis said. Prosecutors claim that while Liberia's president from 1997 to 2003, Taylor effectively served as the commander of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) — the rebel group that instigated Sierra Leone's civil war — from his base in Liberia, issuing orders and supplying the rebels with black market weapons. In exchange, the prosecution maintains, RUF

black market weapons. *Contd page 11*



Charles Taylor (Photo credit: Special Court for Sierra Leone)

Premier News
Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor Trial.. TAYLOR AND LAWYER BOYCOTT CLOSING ARGUMENTS

Charles Taylor and his defense lawyer have boycotted the closing arguments which were scheduled to take place in the former Liberian president's trial this week in The Hague.

On Tuesday February 8 2011, Taylor's defense lawyer Courtenay Griffiths stormed out of court after telling the Special Court for Sierra Leone judges that the defense was not prepared to take part in the closing arguments of the trial scheduled to commence on same day.

The Court had been scheduled to hear closing arguments this week from both the prosecution and the defense. However, when the court began proceedings this Tuesday, Mr. Griffiths informed the judges that because they had refused to accept the defense final trial brief, it was not in the best interest of his client for him to continue to take part in the proceedings.

“We do not think it will be appropriate to take part in the oral submissions...and we have Mr. Taylor's instructions in that regard,” Mr. Griffiths told the judges.

He added that based on the present circumstances, the defense team cannot in “[their] professional view...adequately represent the accused's rights.”

Prior on Monday February 7, the judges issued a ruling that the defense final trial brief would not be accepted because it had been filed after the required deadline of January 14, 2011. Based on a previous scheduling order, both the prosecution and defense were required to file their final trial briefs by January 14, which was to be followed by the closing arguments this week. However, while prosecutors filed their final trial brief by the required deadline, defense lawyers refused to do so. In their view, there were certain important outstanding motions and appeals before the Trial and Appeals Chambers of the Court that needed to be decided. Any decisions on these motions and appeals would have an impact on the content of the defense final trial brief, defense lawyers had argued.

On Tuesday, February 1, the judges delivered their decision in the last of the outstanding motions and immediately after that, defense lawyers filed their final trial brief. As all parties were preparing to commence closing arguments on Tuesday, the judges by a majority ruling (Justice Julia Sebutinde dissenting) issued a decision on Monday evening in which they rejected the defense final trial brief because their original orders requiring parties to file final briefs by January 14 had been flouted.

In her dissenting judgment, Justice Sebutinde opined that exceptional circumstances in this case required that the defense be made to delay their final trial brief and to reject this brief would have an impact on the fair trial rights of the accused. Justice Sebutinde also stated that while the judges had stated January 14 as the required date on which to file final trial briefs, the defense filing on February 1 was still within the stipulated time since the Rules of Procedure and Evidence of the Court provide that a party shall file a final trial brief at least five days before closing arguments. She therefore expressed the view that the majority of judges should have used their discretion to allow the defense to file their final brief.

With this decision by the majority, the defense went into closing arguments on Tuesday without having filed a final trial brief. For this reason, Mr. Griffiths stated that he would not take part in the proceedings.

“Our very presence in court is incompatible with representing Mr. Taylor's interest...and it is our intention at this point, both Mr. Taylor and I, to withdraw from the court at this point,” Mr. Griffiths said.

Chief Prosecutor Brenda Hollis in her submission to the court told the judges that it was not for defense counsel and the accused to determine whether they want to be in court or not. They are required to be in court, she told the judges.

“There is no right of any accused to determine if and when they will abide by orders of the court,” Ms. Hollis said.

“The accused is not attending a social event. He may not RSVP at the last minute. He is the accused at a criminal proceeding,” she added.

Despite being cautioned by the judges, Mr. Griffiths decided to walk out of the proceedings, saying, “I have made a decision, so is my client that we intend to leave.”

Prosecutors went ahead with their closing argument without the presence or participation of the defense.

On Wednesday February 9, the day on which the defense were supposed to present their own closing argument, both Mr. Taylor and his lawyer were absent in court.

Late Wednesday evening, the Judges issued an order for Mr. Griffiths to appear before them on Friday February 11 and apologize for his actions, failing which a sanction will be imposed on him. When court resumes on Friday, all will be waiting to see if Mr. Griffiths will be present before the judges.

Associated Press

Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor war crimes trial adjourned as judges allow him to appeal final brief rejection

By The Associated Press (CP)

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

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

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

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

United Press International

Friday, 11 February 2011

Judges await apology from Taylor's lawyer

THE HAGUE, Netherlands, Feb. 11 (UPI) -- Judges at the war crimes trial of ex-Liberian President Charles Taylor waited to see if Taylor's lawyer would apologize Friday for walking out, officials said.

The defense team said attorney Courtenay Griffiths will return to court, but Taylor would boycott his trial at The Hague, Netherlands, on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, the BBC reported.

Griffiths walked out of court earlier this week to protest the judges' decision not accepting his closing briefs filed about 20 days past deadline. Court sources told the BBC the judges were considering sanctioning Griffiths if he didn't return to court and apologize.

Taylor is accused of arming and overseeing Revolutionary United Front rebels in Sierra Leone during a 10-year campaign of terror conducted against civilians. Prosecutors allege Taylor supplied the rebels through the sale of conflict, or "blood," diamonds.

The defense argued Taylor was trying to mediate peace in Sierra Leone.

Taylor also boycotted the opening of the trial in June 2007, saying he would not get a fair hearing.

Friday was supposed to be the last day of the trial, but the defense has not made its closing arguments.

The judges are expected to announce their ruling later this year.

Read more: http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2011/02/11/Judges-await-apology-from-Taylors-lawyer/UPI-60881297426367/#ixzz1DeYFY4ZS

Africasia.com

Friday, 11 February 2011

http://www.africasia.com/services/news_africa/article.php?ID=CNG.ac77f4a664827a6ef5fdb5eabc9af2b.611

Judges delay end of Charles Taylor trial

Charles Taylor stepped down as Liberia's president in 2003

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

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

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

"This hearing is adjourned sine die."

Taylor, 62, has pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He sent a notice to the court on Friday waiving his right to be present.

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

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

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

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

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

This is the decision he has now been granted leave to appeal.

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

BBC World Service Trust

Friday, 11 February 2011

The former Prosecutor for the Special Court for Sierra Leone says Charles Taylor's trial is one of the most important trials in the world.

Though he is no longer working as prosecutor for the SCSL, he still manifests interest in the ongoing trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor in The Hague.

Stephen Rapp is now working at the U S State department as War crime ambassador at large.

Mr Rapp was in The Hague to witness the February 8th Final Trial Brief. Back in the U S, the BBC World Service Trust Mariama Khai Fornah in a telephone interview asked Mr Rapp why he was in The Hague

RAPP: Well, I'm very interested in this case. Being the prosecutor that opened my government – now I'm the Ambassador for War Crimes Issues – is one of many supporters of this court working very hard to make sure it has the kind of resources for both the prosecution and the defence to ensure Charles Taylor a fair trial, and the victims of the crimes in Sierra Leone, those victims receive justice.

How can you relate your job as a War Crimes Ambassador to the present ongoing trial in The Hague?

RAPP: Well, I'm interested in all these processes. I was recently in Cambodia for the conclusion of the first trial of the Extraordinary Chambers in Cambodia for the atrocities there in the 70s. I'm involved as well in working with the Rwanda and Yugoslavia tribunals, helping them arrest fugitives, and obtain the resources that they need to now close their cases, complete their cases and have a Residual Mechanism. I'm dealing in a dozen different countries from Burma to Kyrgyzstan in trying to ensure that there are trials in situations where persons have committed the kind of crimes that were experienced in Sierra Leone. And obviously the trial of Charles Taylor is a very important precedent for all of that. As I've said, it's the most important trial in the world in terms of ensuring that justice is done and that the resources are there to do it.

You are in The Hague, and in The Hague Taylor's defence lawyer walked out from the courtroom as a result of the court refusing to accept their final trial brief, saying that the defence [indistinct] late. As somebody who has [once served] in the capacity of prosecutor for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, what's your take on this?

RAPP: Well, the role that I now play is ensuring the court has the resources to do justice. The Judges had set deadlines three months ago on dates suggested by Defence for having briefs filed and set limits, rules, and they weren't obeyed. The Judges pointed out the brief is over-long, it's 20 days late, you know, it's defiance of their rules and they were within their rights to say they're not going to accept it. It was also, because Mr. Griffiths is an officer of the court, he's Assigned Counsel, [indistinct] court he doesn't have the right to withdraw or leave the courtroom without the court's permission and they didn't grant that, so I thought that was very unfortunate. On the other hand, argument is not evidence. All the witnesses that the prosecution wanted to call have been called, all of the ones the Defence has wanted to call have been called, all the evidence has been brought in, and the Judges are now can [indistinct] with regard to the party to say in arguments, and so I think Mr. Taylor defence counsel [indistinct] arguments, but all the evidence is in front of the Judges, and I'm confident that they can do justice in this case. But I destroy myself, it's defiance of the law, it's like people who lose elections and say they won. You don't do that. This is about the rule of law. It's not about the rule someone that thinks they can get away with anything if they want to. I told the Judges the day they began the trial, I said I want you to be tough on the Prosecution and Defence. If we do something wrong, I want you to hammer us down; If the Defence does something wrong, hammer them down [conflicting voices] and that's what they were doing.

Mr. Rapp, people have told me that it's always the Defence that is [indistinct] of the law, and if you are [indistinct] you are speaking on behalf of the Prosecution.

RAPP: Well understand, the Judges provided – first of all, the court provided, as I said, millions of dollars in Mr. Taylor's defence on the basis that he was a poor man, and the Defence [indistinct] one of the finest lawyers in the world to represent him, and very, very able team, had all the opportunity to cross-examine the witnesses when I was there, and opportunity to present their case, and opportunity to write a brief, for three months they could write a brief, and then they didn't meet the deadline. If the Prosecution had done the same, I'd say the same. I'd say the Prosecution brief should be thrown out. I expect the Prosecutor to obey the rules, I expect the Defence to obey the rules. In fact if I were a Judge that is the position I would take, and that's of course the position the Judges took here.

Now that the court is saying the defence should pay for disobeying the rules, what if the judges stick to their guns, that they will not grant the Defence their wish? Would people see [indistinct] here?

RAPP: Well, I mean, this has been a 44-month trial, and many people have been frustrated that it's taken as long as it has, and that's because the judges have allowed every extension, every deference, to the defence that they had asked for, and then the defence, having been given as much time as they wanted, couldn't obey the rule that they had asked for. So it's just a matter of rule, and rule of law. And, you know, I've been very, very [indistinct], you know, this is a case about knowing and wilful conduct on people's part. In the case of Taylor, and the other Accused, it was serious conduct in the case of the crimes, but the same thing applies: you don't wilfully, you knowingly defy court orders or there will be consequences. I've known that since the day I became a lawyer.

BBC World Service Trust

Friday, 11 February 2011

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

GRIFFITHS: No, no, no, no, there can be no suggestion that I'm in the habit of disobeying the Court. I have always cooperated with this tribunal from word go. That has always been the case. And when one compares the Taylor trial with other trials which have taken place, such as the trial of Mr. Milosevic, this trial has run extremely smoothly, and I think it's largely due to the very responsible way in which the Defence have behaved.

Mr. Griffiths, now, from the latest developments from the court in The Hague, you have been ordered that you be in court Friday by 11:30 Dutch time. What are you going to do there?

GRIFFITHS: Well I will attend because the court has ordered me to attend, and I'm not in the habit of disobeying court orders. I will be in attendance.

So what difference would this make, after you have walked out from the court on the 8th and now you are gong back to the court? What then are you going to do?

GRIFFITHS: Well, my position remains as it was on Tuesday when I walked out, that I am not going to, by my presence in court, add any credibility to proceedings which I consider are totally unjust. That remains my position.

Is there anything you may like our audience in Sierra Leone and Liberia to know with regards to the trial that I didn't ask you?

GRIFFITHS: Yes, I would like your audience to know that as far as I'm concerned, I think the two Judges that decided not to accept our closing brief have behaved totally unreasonably. I think the interests of justice demanded that they look at all sides of the story. That's a basic principle of natural justice, and one which these judges have totally disregarded.

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

CharlesTaylorTrial.org

Thursday, 10 February 2011

Judges Order Taylor's Defense Lawyer to Appear in Court On Friday

Alpha Sesay

The Special Court for Sierra Leone judges in The Hague yesterday issued an order for Charles Taylor's defense lawyer to appear before them on Friday, February 11, 2011.

Mr. Taylor's trial in The Hague has been a center of drama this week as the former Liberian president's defense lawyer, Courtnay Griffiths, walked out of the courtroom on Tuesday, telling judges that it was not in his client's best interest for him to take part in the closing arguments. On Monday, the judges had rejected the defense final trial brief because it had been filed 20 days late. The defense said they were waiting for the judges to deliver decisions on outstanding motions before they would conclude and file their final brief.

On Wednesday, defense lawyers failed to appear in court, with Mr. Griffiths telling the media outside the courtroom that his team will not take part in the proceedings as long as their final brief was not accepted by the judges.

The court had scheduled Friday, February 11, as the day for both prosecution and defense lawyers to make rebuttals to each other's closing arguments. Mr. Griffiths has insisted that he will not be present in court on Friday.

On Wednesday evening, after Mr. Griffiths failed to appear in court in the morning, the judges by majority (Justice Julia Sebutinde dissenting) issued an order directing that Mr. Griffiths to appear in court on Friday and that unless he apologizes for his action of walking out of the courtroom on Tuesday, a sanction will be imposed on him.

The order, which was issued by a majority of the judges, "Directs Lead Counsel for the Accused, Courtenay Griffiths to attend court on Friday 11 February 2011 at 11:30 and warns Lead Counsel that unless he apologises for his behaviour on 8 February 2011 the Trial Chamber may impose sanctions pursuant to Rule 46 of the Rules and Procedure and Evidence."

It is yet unclear whether Mr. Griffiths will yield to this order from the judges.

Court resumes on Friday, February 11, 2011 at 11:30a.m.

Associated Press

Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor's boycotts end of war crimes trial

MIKE CORDER, Associated Press

LEIDSCHENDAM, Netherlands (AP) — Charles Taylor's war crimes trial is ending the way it began — with the former Liberian president boycotting proceedings and claiming they are politically motivated and unfair.

Taylor's British attorney Courtenay Griffiths stormed out of the courtroom Tuesday after judges at the Special Tribunal for Sierra Leone refused to accept his 600-page summary of the case — a key document that distills three years of testimony from the defense's perspective.

Taylor briefly stayed in his seat but later refused to return to the courtroom after a break. Griffiths said it would have been "unseemly" if Taylor had tried to walk out with his lawyer and had struggled with his U.N. guards.

The boycott was unlikely to have an impact on the outcome of the case. The three international judges ordered the proceedings to continue, and one judge appeared visibly angry at what he called Taylor's attempt to dictate to the court.

"If Mr. Taylor thinks he can make orders or disobey orders of this court at will, simply because he thinks it is in his best interest to do so, then he is running this court, not us," said Judge Richard Lussick, of Samoa.

Taylor is accused of arming and supporting murderous rebels in neighboring Sierra Leone in exchange for illegally mined diamonds. He has pleaded innocent to 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, torture and using child soldiers.

His trial marks the first time a former African head of state has appeared before an international war crimes tribunal.

"Look at it from the point of view of the legacy of the tribunal," Griffith said after defying judges by walking out of the courtroom. "The most important defendant (could be) convicted without the judges hearing his lawyer's closing arguments."

The tribunal, in a majority decision, refused Monday to accept Griffiths' final brief because it was filed after the Jan. 14 deadline.

Ugandan Judge Julia Sebutinde dissented, warning that refusing to accept Taylor's summation "is to deny him his fundamental right to defend himself."

Griffiths conceded the late filing, but said rejecting it for being 20 days late, "within the context of a trial lasting three years is, in my submission, totally unreasonable."

He said he would appeal the decision.

Prosecutor Brenda Hollis accused Taylor of deliberately defying the court, just as he did when he boycotted its opening in June 2007, leading to a six-month delay.

"The accused is not attending a social event. He may not R.S.V.P. at the last minute," Hollis said. "He is the accused at a criminal proceeding."

Prosecutors allege Taylor armed and supported rebels responsible for many of the worst atrocities of Sierra Leone's civil war, which left tens of thousands of people dead and many more mutilated after enemy fighters hacked off their limbs, noses or lips.

In her summation, Hollis laid the blame for the atrocities firmly at Taylor's feet, saying he used the rebels to pillage Sierra Leone's mineral wealth and in particular its diamonds.

"Charles Taylor, this intelligent, charismatic manipulator, had his proxy forces ... carry out these crimes against helpless victims in Sierra Leone," she said. "All this suffering, all these atrocities, to feed the greed and lust for power of Charles Taylor."

Griffiths has argued that the U.N.-backed tribunal is a tool of major world powers and particularly the United States to keep Taylor out of Liberia, the West African country he ruled as an elected president from 1997-2003 after seizing power in a bloody civil war.

Griffiths said leaks from the court to U.S. embassy officials in The Hague and a diplomatic cable from the American embassy in Liberia's capital, Monrovia, expose U.S. designs regarding Taylor.

"The best we can do for Liberia is to see to it that Taylor is put away for a long time" said the cable, dated March 10, 2009, and released by WikiLeaks. Griffiths said the cable showed the tribunal is not independent "because the Americans are already putting in place contingency plans so if Mr. Taylor is acquitted they will put him on trial again in the United States."

David Crane, the former prosecutor who indicted Taylor, dismissed claims of U.S. intervention.

"Most of his claims, and what appears to be his defense, is that he is a victim of 'white man's justice' and that my motives in indicting him in 2003 were purely racial," Crane told The Associated Press in an e-mail.

"The truth is that I signed his indictment as the facts and law showed that he allegedly murdered, raped, maimed, and mutilated 1.2 million West Africans, destroying 3 countries, and forcibly displacing over 5 million people. That is why he sits in the dock."

Hollis rejected Taylor's claims that he was a victim of an international conspiracy and said the people of Sierra Leone were the real victims of "a new breed of killer" that Mr. Taylor and his proxy forces had created — "killers who knew no restraint and were on the brink of denying themselves and others the very notion of humanity," he added.

Hollis wrapped up her presentation by telling judges that the evidence "proves beyond a reasonable doubt that Mr. Taylor is guilty" and asking them to convict him of all charges.

BBC

Friday, 11 February 2011

Charles Taylor trial judges await lawyer apology



Charles Taylor is accused of selling "blood diamonds" from Sierra Leone

Judges at the war crimes trial of Liberia's former President Charles Taylor are waiting to see if his lawyer will apologise as ordered for walking out earlier this week.

Defence sources say Mr Taylor will continue his boycott but his lawyer will appear.

The judges have said they could impose sanctions if lawyer Courtenay Griffiths does not apologise for walking out.

Mr Taylor denies 11 counts - including murder, rape, and using child soldiers.

Mr Taylor is accused of arming and controlling the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone during a 10-year campaign of terror conducted largely against civilians.

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

The trial started in June 2007. Mr Taylor also boycotted the opening, arguing he would not get a fair trial.

Friday was due to be the last day of the trial but the defence did not make its closing arguments as expected on Wednesday, so it is not clear what will happen.

Taylor Timeline

- **1989:** Launches rebellion in Liberia
- **1991:** RUF rebellion starts in Sierra Leone
- **1995:** Peace deal signed
- **1997:** Elected president
- **1999:** Liberia's Lurd rebels start insurrection to oust Mr Taylor
- **June 2003:** Arrest warrant issued
- **August 2003:** Steps down, flees to Nigeria
- **March 2006:** Arrested, sent to Sierra Leone
- **June 2007:** Trial opens in The Hague

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

New York Times

Wednesday, 9 February 2011

Former Liberian President Boycotts War Crimes Trial for Second Day

By MARLISE SIMONS

PARIS — Expectations that an important war crimes trial would conclude this week were dampened further on Wednesday when Charles G. Taylor, the former president of Liberia, and his defense lawyers boycotted the final stage of the proceedings for the second day in a row, contending that the court was unfair and driven by politics.

The presiding judge immediately adjourned the proceedings until Friday.

The reason for the boycott was the rejection by the judges of a 600-page trial summary by Mr. Taylor's team that, despite frequent warnings, had missed a deadline.

The walkout on Tuesday came at a point of high media attention, as the trial drew to a close and prosecutors were about to present their closing arguments. Mr. Taylor and his team had used the same strategy, staging a boycott, when prosecutors opened the trial, now more than three and a half years ago.

Since then, international judges of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, seated in The Hague, have heard testimony from 115 witnesses about the civil war in Sierra Leone in the 1990s. Many testified about horrifying crimes committed by rebels whom Mr. Taylor is accused of commanding. They spoke, too, about slave labor in captured diamond mines, episodes of cannibalism, of rape, of severed heads displayed on stakes and of captured villagers lining up, waiting to have their hands hacked off.

Mr. Taylor, who took the stand in his own defense for seven months, presented himself as a man striving for peace and his accusers as liars.

Over the course of the trial, which has now lasted more than twice as long as planned, Mr. Taylor's lawyers have frequently insisted on getting more time and have missed deadlines set by the judges, who have tried hard to appear fair to the defense.

But in recent weeks a confrontation began to develop, as defense lawyers said they wanted extra time to prepare their closing arguments and the judges insisted that they abide by the deadline, Jan. 14. On Monday, with no sign of the summary, the judges ruled that Mr. Taylor had defied court orders and that his written summary was no longer admissible.

Tempers rose Tuesday morning as Courtenay Griffiths, Mr. Taylor's lead defense lawyer, said he was no longer participating in the trial. The judges ordered him to sit down. Visibly angry, Judge Richard Lussick said Mr. Taylor could not make or disobey orders at will. "You are not running the court, you know," he said.

Prosecutors, who have often accused Mr. Taylor of trying to manipulate the court, weighed in. "The accused is not attending a social event," said Brenda Hollis, the lead prosecutor. "He may not R.S.V.P. at the last minute. He is the accused at a criminal proceeding."

After leaving the courtroom, Mr. Griffiths told reporters that the trial was "a complete farce" and said that he was refusing to "lend legitimacy to the proceedings."

Lawyers at the court expect that the trial, scheduled to end on Friday, is now likely to go on for an unforeseeable time.

The prosecution summarized its case, arguing that the court should hold Mr. Taylor criminally responsible for the deaths and mutilation of thousands of people, because, as Nicholas Koumjian, a prosecutor, put it, he had financed, armed, supplied and controlled rebels in Sierra Leone for “power and profit.”

Mr. Taylor’s defense was scheduled to present closing arguments on Wednesday, even without filing a written document, and both sides were scheduled to wrap up on Friday. But Mr. Griffiths has said he will stay away and file an appeal to have his documents accepted and his closing arguments rescheduled.

Mr. Griffiths said he wanted more time because he had only recently discovered two secret diplomatic cables from 2009, part of the cache revealed by WikiLeaks, in which American diplomats wrote about Mr. Taylor. He has presented them as evidence, including one cable, dated March 2009, in which the United States ambassador to Liberia is quoted as saying that “the best we can do for Liberia is to see that Charles Taylor is put away for a long time.”

The ambassador, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, wrote that “should Taylor be acquitted in The Hague or given a light sentence,” other options should be considered, like building a case against Mr. Taylor in the United States on charges that might include financial crimes, using child soldiers or even terrorism, to ensure “that Taylor cannot return to destabilize Liberia.”

Mr. Griffiths argued that the cable and a second cable discussing what he called “sensitive details” about the trial, raised doubts about the impartiality and independence of the court.

While the judges admitted the two cables into evidence, they have asserted that their impartiality was in no way compromised. They have thrown out a request by the defense to investigate the relations between the court and the United States government and to investigate which officers of the court have leaked to American diplomats information about the Taylor trial, its timing and the financing it required.

Because of the long delays, the special court, which is financed by donor countries including the United States, has faced regular budget shortages, requiring diplomats to request additional contributions to finance the court, as well as Mr. Taylor’s defense.

Prosecutors have said Mr. Taylor amassed a fortune during the war, but he has said that he cannot afford an adequate defense. The court pays more than \$100,000 per month for his team of lawyers and researchers.

Mr. Griffiths has said that the defense team he leads is “one of the best resourced teams there’s ever been in an international tribunal.”

Diamonds.net

Thursday, 10 February 2011

Editorial

The Charles Taylor Trial

By Avi Krawitz

RAPAPORT... The war crimes trial of Charles Taylor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague was set to close this week. However, the final proceedings may now be delayed in much the same manner that the opening was postponed just over three years ago: amidst a boycott by the former Liberian President.

Testimony was supposed to close the trial this week, with the defense scheduled to present its closing arguments on Wednesday and rebuttals taking place on Friday. However, true to the drama that has beset the trial from the start, Taylor's lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, stormed out on Tuesday to protest the court's refusal to accept the defense's final written case summary.

The court reasoned that the document was filed some 20 days late, while Griffiths argued that he had requested an extension on the January deadline. He explained that the submission of his defense summation was contingent on rulings on eight legal matters that were rendered after the filing deadline.

The British lawyer said he would boycott the hearing until the document was accepted.

Following his lawyer's example, Taylor "waived his right" to attend Wednesday's hearing. As the defense appeals the court's rejection of its summation document, the closing could be delayed indefinitely.

It is not the first time Taylor has halted the trial. Back in June 2007, Taylor boycotted the opening sessions and dismissed his initial legal team, causing a delay of six months until new counsel was assigned.

The trial has been a long, drawn-out process. Since January 2008, the court has heard evidence from 94 prosecution witnesses and 21 for the defense and has admitted 1,093 exhibits. Its very nature has also been a sensitive one, with the location moved from Freetown to The Hague so as not to evoke too much emotion amongst the local Sierra Leone population.

The issue of whether the boycotts are defense tactics or legitimate legal protests will hopefully be ironed out by the procedural decisions of the presiding judges sooner rather than later. The population of Sierra Leoneans would surely like to put this final chapter of its ugly civil war to bed – with justice served.

Rather than divert attention to the procedural issues facing the court, it is worth stressing what is at stake for the people of Sierra Leone, as well as for the diamond industry in these penultimate moments of the trial.

It may be easy to forget that the tragic civil war in Sierra Leone, the backdrop to the trial, still burns in the memories of the people of that country, with hundreds of thousands dead and countless limbs dismembered, as many of the prosecutor witnesses testified. It was also this conflict that ultimately led to the establishment of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) in 2000, to stem the flow of conflict diamonds used by rebel movements to finance wars against legitimate governments.

Prosecutors allege that during Taylor's term as Liberia's president between 1997 and 2003, he "created, armed, supported, and controlled the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in a ten-year campaign of terror against the civilian population of Sierra Leone," from his neighboring Liberia. In addition, prosecutors

assert in their written summation that Taylor directed and facilitated RUF's control of the diamond mining areas so that "many millions of dollars worth of RUF diamonds – mostly mined by civilians under conditions amounting to slavery – were delivered to Taylor."

As a result of these allegations, Taylor faces an 11-count indictment for crimes against humanity, war crimes and violations of international humanitarian law. These are listed by the court as follows:

Acts of terrorism; Murder; Violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular murder; Rape; Sexual slavery and any other form of sexual violence; Outrages upon personal dignity; Violence to life, health and physical or mental well-being of persons, in particular cruel treatment; Other inhumane acts; Conscripting or enlisting children under the age of 15 years into armed forces or groups or using them to participate actively in hostilities; Enslavement; and Pillage.

Taylor is the first African leader to face an international tribunal and has pleaded innocent to all charges. Rather, he claims to have been at the forefront of brokering peace between the Sierra Leone government and the rebels.

Griffiths, whose written summation was not accepted by the court for the aforementioned reasons and therefore had not been published at press time, has argued bias by the court. He has further claimed a U.S.-led conspiracy against Taylor, citing cables written by U.S. diplomats stationed in the West African country and leaked by WikiLeaks to major media outlets, which then published them. It appears to be the case that Griffiths is clutching at straws, both in his government conspiracy claim and regarding what are perceived as delay tactics.

Either way, the diamond industry should be following these events closely, particularly as it continues to face conflict-diamond-related reputational challenges, vis-a-vie a weakened KP and a manipulative member in Zimbabwe. The conclusion of the Taylor trial will hopefully not only bring some closure to the people of Sierra Leone, but also strengthen the diamond industry's resolve to react to human rights violations with a sense of urgency. After all, the industry's vulnerability to the ethical challenges posed by manipulative dictators remains as relevant today as during the presidency of Charles Taylor.

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CharlesTaylorTrial.org

Thursday, 10 February 2011

Prosecutors Ask for Investigation; Say Defense Investigator Attempted to Bribe Prosecution Witnesses to Change Their Evidence

Alpha Sesay

Prosecutors in the trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor have asked judges in The Hague to institute an "investigation into contempt" based on allegations that a defense investigator and other persons have attempted to bribe prosecution witnesses in order to have them recant their evidence before the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

In a motion filed on February 3, 2011, prosecutors allege that one Eric Koi Senessie, a former member of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) - the rebel group in Sierra Leone that Mr. Taylor is on trial for allegedly supporting, and Prince Taylor, an investigator for the Taylor defense team, made contacts with three prosecution witnesses.

The three witnesses, Mohamed B. Kabbah (TFI-568), Aruna Gbonda (TFI-330), and a protected witness TFI-585), who testified against Mr. Taylor in The Hague, have made statements to the prosecution about the contacts made with them by Messers Senessie and Taylor. A fourth protected witness was also contact by the these two individuals, prosecutors say.

According to prosecutors, Mr. Senessie told each of the witnesses that he had been sent by Mr. Taylor's defense team to persuade them to recant their previous testimonies against Mr. Taylor and testify before the judges again that their testimonies were false and were only given because of promises of money and relocation by the prosecution.

"In exchange for recantation and/or further testimony, Senessie told Kabba and TFI-585 that the Defense would give a 'good cash reward' or 'huge financial benefit' to cooperating witnesses...Senessie explained to Kabbah that these efforts were aimed at securing Taylor's acquittal or a minimal sentence," prosecutors stated in their motion.