

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



Flashback to October 2003: The Chairlady of the Sierra Leone Market Women's Association pours a libation to the ancestors of pink champagne at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Special Court's new courthouse.

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:

Monday, 14 May 2007

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

Monday, 14 May 2007

Taylor Judge sworn in

By Betty Milton

At a simple ceremony at the Trial Chamber of the Special Court, the first alternate judge to preside over the trial of Charles Taylor was Friday sworn in.

Senegalese-born El Hadji Malick Sow will join his colleagues to try the former Liberian president. The trial begins on 4 June.

In accordance with the court's statute, Judge Sow will be present at every trial and will replace judges Julia Sebatinde, Richard Lussick

and Teresa Doherty if they are unable to attend a trial session.

The Senegalese has an extensive experience in his country's Judiciary and at the international level. He has served as judge at various tribunals.

In 1984 to 1990, Justice Sow served as judge of the Regional Tribunals of Ziguinchor and Diourbel, as well as the Labor Tribunal of Dakar.

In November 2006 he was named President of the Criminal Chamber of the Appeals Court in Dakar.

During the ceremony Justice El Hadji Malick Sow made his solemn declaration before the Acting Registrar Herman Von Hebel.

The swearing in ceremony was presided over by the President of the Special Court, George Gelaga-King and witnessed by the Attorney General and Minister of Justice Fred Carew and Kedar Poudal, the Human Rights Co-ordinator at the UN support unit in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) on behalf of the Secretary General of the United Nations.

Concord Times
Monday, 14 May 2007

Special Court appoints alternate Judge

A press release from the Special Court issued Friday has disclosed that Justice El Haji Malick Sow of Senegal was sworn in as an alternate Judge of the Special Court's Trial Chamber II. "Justice Sow made his solemn declaration before Acting Registrar Herman von Hebel at a special ceremony held in the Court's landmark courthouse in Freetown," the release stated adding that the solemn declaration was witnessed by the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Frederick Carew on behalf of the government of Sierra Leone. Kedar Poudal, the Human Rights Coordinator at UNIOSIL's Rule of Law Unit attended on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The statements stated that Justice Sow is the first alternate Judge of the Special Court and he is expected to join Justice Julia Sebutinde of Uganda, Justice Richard Lassick of Samoa, and Justice Teresa Doherty of Northern Ireland to hear evidence in the Special Court's trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor at The Hague.

In accordance with Article 12 (4) of the Statute of the Special Court, Justice Sow will be present at each stage of the trial, and will replace a Judge if that

Judge is unable to continue sitting.

"Justice Sow has extensive experience in Senegal's judiciary, both at the regional and national level. From 1984 to 1990 he served in various capacities as Judge of the Regional Tribunals of Ziguinchor and Diourbel the Labor Tribunal of Dakar," the release stated adding that since 1994, Justice Sow has served as Judge in a number of Senegalese courts, including the Premiere Chambre Sociale, the Premiere Chambre Civile et Commerciale, the

Troisieme Chambre Correctionnelle, the Chambre of Accusation and the Premiere Chambre Correctionnelle of the Court of Appeals of Dakar. In November 2006 he was named President of the Criminal Chamber of the Appeals Court in Dakar. Justice Sow received his Masters (L.L.M) in International and Comparative Law from the Southern Methodist University, in Texas in 2004, and his L.L.M in Private and Business Law from the University of Dakar in 1982.

Independent Observer
Monday, 14 May 2007

New Judge named in trial of Charles Taylor

Justice El Hadji Malick Sow of Senegal was sworn last Friday as an alternate Judge of the Special Court's Trial Chamber II.

Justice Sow made his solemn declaration before Acting Registrar Herman von Hebel at a special ceremony held

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New Special Court Judge

from front page

in the Court's landmark courthouse in Freetown. Court President Justice George Gelaga-King then gave the closing address. The solemn declaration was witnessed by the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Mr. Frederick Carew on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone. Mr. Kedar Poudal, the Human Rights Co-ordinator at UNIOSIL's Rule of Law Unit attended on behalf of the Secretary-

General of the United Nations.

Justice Sow was joined by his fellow Judges from the Trial and Appeals Chambers, led by Justice King. Members of the diplomatic corps, Special Court staff, and journalists were also in attendance.

Justice Sow is the first alternate Judge at the Special Court. He will join Justice Julia Sebutinde of Uganda, Justice Richard Lussick of Samoa, and

Justice Teresa Doherty of Northern Ireland to hear evidence in the Special Court's trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor at The Hague.

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In November 2006 he was named President of the Criminal Chamber of the Appeals Court in Dakar.

Justice Sow also worked as a Technical Advisor to the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Justice, respectively.

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Independent Observer
Monday, 14 May 2007

...& Charles Taylor's Opening Trial Starts June 4

Following last Friday's Pre-Trial conference in The Hague, opening arguments in the highly anticipated trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor are set to take place on June 4.

Great efforts have been made to bring this case to trial since Mr Taylor was indicted in March 2003, said Stephen Rapp, Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

His arrest and transfer last year were the result of three years of intense diplomacy by many in the sub-region and abroad. Up to now, attention has been on the process. On June 4, all eyes can focus on the trial itself.

The very fact that this man is going on trial is a victory



over impunity. Taylor's indictment, apprehension and arrest are a credit to the persistence of the world community, the governments of the region, and above all the courageous people of Sierra Leone.

That Charles Taylor will now face justice is the very embodiment of the maxim that no one is above the law.

Taylor is charged with 11 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, including mass murder, mutilations, rape, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers.

The Prosecution has indicated its intention to present up to 139 core witnesses. Of these, 62 will be predominantly linkage witnesses. Proving the connections between Taylor and the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone is a necessary part of the Prosecution's case. Witnesses to these connections will include persons with inside knowledge of Taylor's alleged activities.

Standard Times

Monday, 14 May 2007

The Need To Implement TRC Recommendations

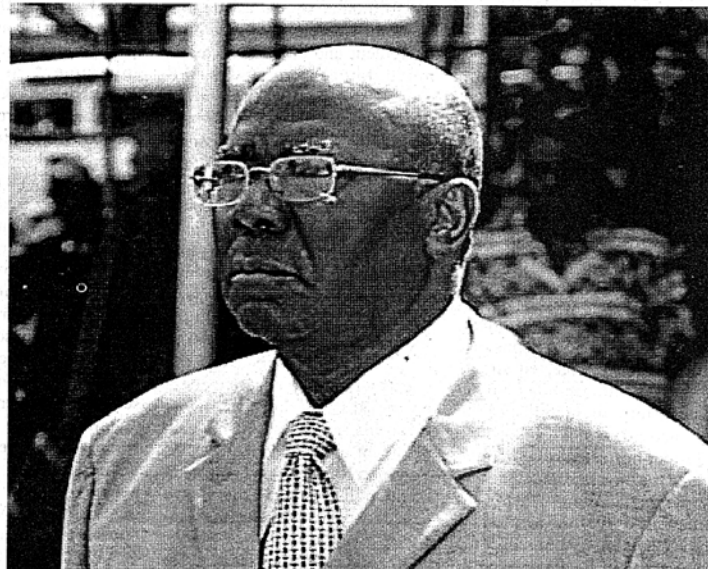
On March 23rd 1991, a serious armed conflict broke out in Sierra Leone when rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) crossed over the border from Liberia to the town of Bomaru in the Kailahun district, east of Sierra Leone. The incursion by then was viewed by many people in Freetown and beyond as something of less importance until when the conflict reduced the country to shocking brutality against innocent lives and property that were destroyed. Apparently, the world became horrified as a result of the atrocities caused by the rebels, elements of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council of the Sierra Leone Army and the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) known as the "Kamajors".

Indeed, there were reports of abductions of women and children, rape, sexual slavery, cannibalism, indiscriminate killings and massive destruction of villages and towns with impunity. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) claimed responsibility for the incursion and even declared that their objective was to overthrow the corrupt and tyrannical government of Major General Joseph Saidu Momoh, the country's head of state at the period under the All Peoples Congress (APC) administration.

According to the TRC report, "The war finally reached a negotiated conclusion at Lome, the capital of Togo, in July 1999". The report further indicates that "Although the Lome peace agreement did not end the fighting entirely, it began a process that brought a delicate peace to the country. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established after years of brutal conflict in the country as Sierra Leoneans wanted to know what actually caused the wave of vengeance and mayhem that swept across the country.

The Lome Peace Agreement indicates that "Sierra Leoneans had to express and acknowledge suffering, a need to explain decisions, actions and behaviours, a need to reconcile with former enemies, a need to begin personal and national healing and a need to build accountability in order to address impunity". The TRC was established under Article XXVI of the Lome Peace Agreement. And in 2000 section 6 (1) of the TRC Act clearly states that "The objective for which the commission is established is to create an impartial historical record of violations and abuse of human rights and International Humanitarian Law related to

The need to implement the TRC Recommendations



President Kabbah

the armed conflict in Sierra Leone, from the beginning of the conflict in 1991 to the signing of the Lome Peace Agreement; to address impunity, to respond to the needs of the victims, to promote healing and reconciliation and to prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered".

To fulfill this agreement, the government of Sierra Leone established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in July 2002. The TRC was given the legal responsibility to make findings about the causes, nature and extent of violations and abuses in the civil conflict in Sierra Leone. The causes of the civil conflict were highlighted and recommendations came into effect. However, since the TRC folded up its operations, there are no foreseeable circumstances on the side of the government to implement some of its recommendations.

RESPONDING TO THE NEEDS OF THE VICTIMS

Amputees who suffered most during the civil conflicts are now left on their

public sector to usher in a new culture of ethics and service to fight the problem of corruption which weakens the soul of Sierra Leone". Certainly, this is contrary to what is obtaining in the country as at present corruption is

many parts of the country have been widespread. Even in Freetown, police officers are sexually harassing petty traders and some female suspects in police cells. What mechanism has the government put in place to protect the rights of women in Sierra Leone? How many women are actively engaged in the politics of the country? The Child Rights Bill is yet to be tabled and passed into law in the House of Parliament. How many children can access free education in the country? What would one say about the menace of child trafficking and child labour? Don't these children have rights to human dignity like their colleagues? Therefore, protecting the right of human dignity is one of the TRC recommendations which this government should prioritize or else the TRC recommendations will only appear like a sheet of toilet roll paper.

The abolition of the death penalty is another aspect of the TRC recommendation which the government has failed to uphold. Reports indicate that from the 1st of January 2007 on to this day, eighty-eight (88) countries and territories have abolished the death penalty for all crimes and eleven (11) countries have abolished the death penalty for all but exceptional crimes such as war crimes and twenty-nine (29) countries can be considered abolitionist in practice. Sierra Leone falls within this category even though the TRC report strongly recommends that it should be totally abolish.

The government should not allow this report to be left lying on the shelves without implementing it. All what the people of this country need now is peace.

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own with out any form of support from the government. Most of them are now visibly seen on the streets of Freetown begging. In fact, their only source of survival at this particular point in time is begging. They cannot have their basic necessities of life such as food, shelter, Medicare etc compared to the perpetrators who killed, maimed, raped and even carried out heinous and diabolic crimes against humanity. Today, most of these ex-combatants are far off better than the amputees. It is ridiculous to see a combatant living a luxurious life while victims on the other hand are suffering. Even though the TRC recommendations made provision for the victims, most of them have taken up begging as their career. How long will they continue to live in absolute misery, asked many human rights activists? Therefore, the government needs to consider the plight of these victims as it did for the perpetrators. The commission also notes in its recommendations that "all those in the

deep rooted in the fabric of the society. The SALWACO boss, Justin Musa for example, converted public funds into his own personal use and went scot free. Again the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Mr. Prince Sylvanus Parker Huggins to name but a few, is currently in the net of the Anti-corruption under investigations for alleged misappropriation of funds.

Protecting the right of human dignity and the abolition of the death penalty. This other recommendation of the TRC report has been neglected by government.

Protecting the right to human dignity is among the articles enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights. In Sierra Leone today, the protection of human dignity is nothing good to write home about as the Sierra Leone Police Force (SLP) which is mandated by the laws of the land to protect the lives and property of the citizens is against most of the norms of the society as reports of police brutality in

New Vision
Monday, 14 May 2007

LAWCLA Protects Juvenile Justice

By Mohamed Melron
The Director of Lawyers Center for Legal Assistance (LAWCLA), Melron Nicol-Wilson has been advocating for the right of juvenile offenders since inception of its Juvenile Justice unit in July 2001. Making a statement, at the launching ceremony held at the Miatta Conference Center recently, the LAWCLA boss noted that the inherent special needs and vulnerability of children need to be taken in to account, adding that the implementation and development of laws, in relation to young persons who commit offences should be investigated.

In his statement, he said that the report examines the administration of juvenile Justice in practice, revealing that many provisions

enshrined in Sierra Leone's legislation are not enforced in practice. He observed that such obligations require for Juveniles to be detained separately from adults.

Melron maintained that the main objective of his report is to engender the necessary Law Reform to bring Sierra Leone's legislation in to conformity with its international obligations in relation to the treatment of Juvenile offenders. He said, they seek to inform those involved in the administration of juvenile justice such as judges, lawyers, the police, prison officers and social workers.

Speaking about specialized training for Law Enforcement officials, the Director said enforcing the law, requires the

official (i.e the Police) to receive special training to deal with children, adding that the police are often the first point of contact with the Juvenile Justice system and so it is important that they act in an appropriate and informed manner. Nicol-Wilson stated further that the Beijing Rules state, that Law enforcement agencies should be trained to 'respect' the legal status of the juvenile, promote the well-being of the juvenile and avoid harm to them, with due regard to the circumstances of the cases.

The Director concluded that detention and institutionalization of children, both pending trial and following trial (in the form of a custodial sentence, should be avoided wherever possible

under international law standards. Melron said the CRC states that arrest, detention or imprisonment of a child shall be used only as a measure of last resort and for the shortest

appropriate period of time. The Director concluded that if there is any alternative course of action that is appropriate, a state should not incarcerate juveniles in conflict with the

The Analyst (Liberia)
Saturday, 12 May 2007

The Irony Of Mr. Taylor's Hague Trial:

WHO ARE THE WITNESSES?

📄 As Trial Draws Near, Cllr. Supuwood Says No Shortages



The capture, turnover, and transfer of former President Mr. Charles Taylor to face charges for war crimes and crimes against humanity may be dramatic alright.

But one seemingly difficult things that many, mainly prosecution, defense, and interest groups, don't seem to take seriously or acknowledge as a hurdle is who will testify against or in behalf of the accused.

In a suspicious alignment of vocal former aides, millions of former victims, and an overbearing international stakeholder community, analysts cannot help but to wonder about the prospects of Taylor's June 4th trial.

Patriotic Vanguard website

Saturday, 12 May 2007

http://www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/article.php3?id_article=1229

Justice El Hadji Malick Sow of Senegal Sworn in as Alternate Judge

- Saturday 12 May 2007.

Justice El Hadji Malick Sow of Senegal (right, photo) was sworn in Friday as an alternate Judge of the Special Court's Trial Chamber II.



Justice Sow made his solemn declaration before Acting Registrar Herman von Hebel at a special ceremony held in the Court's landmark courthouse in Freetown. Court President Justice George Gelaga-King then gave the closing address.

The solemn declaration was witnessed by the Attorney-General and Minister of Justice Mr Frederick Carew on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone. Mr Kedar Poudal, the Human Rights Co-ordinator at UNIOSIL's Rule of Law Unit attended on behalf of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

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UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 11 May 2007

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

International Clips on Liberia

VOA 10 May 2007

Liberia's Education System Faces Obstacles

By Naomi Schwarz, Dakar

One of Africa's oldest universities has been shut down for more than a month. Administrators of Liberia's Cuttington University closed the school after students held protests saying the school was taking their money, but failing to provide promised services. Naomi Schwarz has more on the story from Dakar, with additional reporting from Prince Collins in Monrovia.

International Clips on West Africa

AP May 11, 2007

United Methodist high court says Ivory Coast church not yet a full member

MANILA, Philippines_The United Methodist high court has ruled that the Methodist Church of the Ivory Coast hasn't yet been fully admitted to the denomination. The Judicial Council concluded that the 2004 General Conference, the top legislative body of the church, did not complete all the required steps for full admission. That work is expected to be finished by the next General Conference, scheduled for next year in Texas.

Local Media – Newspaper

Government Rebuffs Newspaper Report of Insincerity

(The Analyst, The Inquirer, The News, The Informer, Heritage, Public Agenda)

- Addressing a news conference in Monrovia, Information Minister Laurence Bropleh said that the Government discounted a report in the *Public Agenda* newspaper this week that it floated its own policy of "fiscal probity" by opening a "secret account" without the knowledge of the Governance Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) and Cash Management Committee (CMC) signaling a corrupt practice in government.
- Minister Bropleh noted that there was no secret surrounding the account in that it is intended to help government settle its financial arrears of more than US\$12 million with the Economic Community of West African States.
- He added that the account was created in furtherance of a Legislation of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly to create such an account for the sole purpose of paying ECOWAS.
- But the *Public Agenda* debunked Minister Bropleh's explanation in that some former members of the Assembly confided that they lacked memory of ever passing legislation to that effect.

Government Announces Increases in Fiscal Budget

(The Analyst, The Informer and Heritage)

- The Bureau of the Budget Director-General Augustine Ngafuan said that the Government would soon submit to the National Legislature, the fiscal budget of more than US\$180 million for 2007/2008 for approval.
- Mr. Ngafuan emphasized that proposal contains increases in civil servants salary from US\$30 to US\$40 while the County Development Fund climbed to US\$3 million from US\$1million and asked the civil servants not to agitate over any delinquencies on the part of the Government to pay salary arrears.

Political Parties Call for State-Burial for Female Presidential Candidate

(The Analyst, The Informer and National Chronicle)

- Expressing his condolence to the family of Presidential Candidate Rev. Dr. Margret Torh Thompson, the Chairman of the Forum of Political Party Leaders Siafa Gbollie pleaded with the Government to ensure that the falling Presidential Candidate is given a State-burial.
- Mr. Gbollie recounted that he saw Margret developing into another "Iron Lady" likening her to the current President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.
- In its editorial, *The Analyst* paid tribute to Dr. Thompson asserting that her death was mere "psychological" giving that the qualitative endeavors and other milestones of her life will continue to animate our political and religious practices.

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

Government Dismisses Report of Secret Account

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Budget Bureau Announces Increase in National Budget

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Justice Minister Lashes out at Human Rights Group

- Reacting to claims of police brutality, Justice Minister, Francis Johnson Morris criticized reports by human rights groups as often one sided and exaggerated and urged them to become more objective. Minister Morris said the work of rights groups is to be accurate but observed that some of them were doing business at the expense of the government.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

EPA Releases Environmental Impact Assessment Guidelines

- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has released its first set of regulations on the conduct of environmental impact assessment in Liberia.
- Making the disclosure, the Executive Director of EPA, Ben Donnie said the regulations were put together after many meetings with the rubber and mining sector as well as general developers.

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.

BBC

Saturday, 12 May 2007

Guinea soldiers riot over talks

Discontented soldiers have again rioted in the Guinean capital, Conakry.

They are angry that President Lansana Conte failed to turn up to a meeting to hear grievances over pay and housing.

A brief calm had returned to the capital, Conakry, after President Lansana Conte sacked the defence minister and army chief of staff.

The sackings followed days of rioting by soldiers seeking improved working conditions and the re-instatement of military leaders sacked after a coup.

Six people have been killed in two days of protests in Conakry and other towns.

Gunshots heard

Soldiers flooded the streets around Conakry's main army base and broke out in cheers when it was announced that Mr Conte had sacked Defence Minister Arafan Camara and army chief Gen Kerfalla Camara.

But the celebrations turned to anger when the president failed to turn up to a promised meeting to discuss the soldiers' other demands, which include better pay and housing.

Gunfire was heard throughout the capital, as soldiers shot into the air, says the BBC's Catherine Utley in Conakry.

It seems the soldiers are not yet in a mood to be pacified, our correspondent says.

Army mutiny

General Bailo Diallo, a retired former head of Guinea's ground forces, has been named as the new defence minister.

A total of five top army commanders have been replaced.

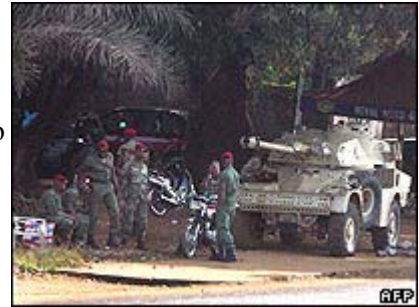
"Conte has responded to an important demand of the Guinean army," said Lt Ibrahima Bah, one of the soldiers involved in the mutiny, said as the sackings were announced.

"General Bailo is a high-ranking officer who is worthy of our respect. He has integrity and is responsible."

Rioting began 10 days ago when the soldiers alleged Mr Conte had gone back on his pledge to increase their wages after an army mutiny in 1996.

The army has supported Mr Conte's rule since he seized power in a bloodless coup in 1984 and keeping the military content is seen as key to his bid to stay in power.

Guinea was the scene of violent protests earlier this year as people called for the ailing president to step down.



Soldiers say they were promised a pay rise after a 1996 army mutiny

New York Times
 Sunday, 13 May 2007

Taking the War Out of a Child Soldier

By NINA BERNSTEIN

The teenager stepped off an airplane at Kennedy International Airport on Nov. 8 and asked for asylum. Days before, he had been wielding an automatic weapon as a child soldier in Ivory Coast. Now he had only his name, Salifou Yankene, and a phrase in halting English: "I want to make refugee."

Eventually Salifou's story would emerge, and in granting him asylum, one of the system's toughest judges would find it credible: the assassination of his father and older sister when he was 12; the family's flight to a makeshift camp for the displaced; his conscription at 15 by rebel troops who chopped off his younger brother's hand; and an extraordinary escape two years later, when his mother risked her life to try to save him.

But when a lawyer took the case without fee in January, Salifou, then 17, was almost ready to give up. Detained in a New Jersey jail, overtaken by guilt, anger and despair, he resisted painful questions, sometimes crying, "Send me back!" And the lawyer soon realized that saving Salifou would require much more than winning him asylum.

There are 300,000 child soldiers worldwide, human rights groups say. Only a few have ever made it to the United States, but campaigns to halt recruitment and rehabilitate survivors are resonating here — not least because a best-selling memoir by one former child soldier, Ishmael Beah, has put a compelling human face on the potential for redemption.

Yet no one has really grappled with how to handle those who make it to this country seeking refuge.

Their violent pasts pose hard questions: Should they be legally barred from asylum as persecutors or protected as victims? How can they be healed, and who will help them?

Both Salifou and Mr. Beah, who testified on Salifou's behalf, show that on the ground, the answers are haphazard, and the results may turn on the kindness of strangers.

Mr. Beah, now a 26-year-old who exudes a gentle radiance, surged to celebrity with "Long Way Gone," showcased at Starbucks and acclaimed on "The Daily Show." The book tells how he was orphaned, drugged up, indoctrinated and made to kill indiscriminately by government forces in Sierra Leone's civil war — and then reclaimed by counselors at a Unicef rehabilitation center. But unlike Mr. Beah, who became a permanent resident without applying for asylum, Salifou has faced legal opposition from the government. And while Mr. Beah has had a decade to adjust to America, go to college and come to terms with his past, Salifou's story is still raw, and changing. Less than three weeks ago, days after his 18th birthday, immigration authorities abruptly released Salifou alone, at 10 p.m., on a street corner in Lower Manhattan.

"They say, 'You free to go,' " he recalled, eyes wide. "I say, 'Go where?'"

That night, the former child soldier — now over six feet tall, with toned muscles and a diagnosis of severe post-traumatic stress disorder — slept on a couch in the Brooklyn apartment of his lawyer, Elliot F. Kaye, near the toy trains of Mr. Kaye’s 2-year-old son.

Salifou could still be deported. At his asylum hearing in April, the government argued that based solely on his own account, he was a persecutor, and thus legally barred from refuge.

When the judge disagreed, citing Salifou’s youth and coercion by his rebel captors, a government lawyer invoked a right to appeal that will not expire until May 23.

Ernestine Fobbs, a spokeswoman for Immigration and Customs Enforcement, said on Friday that the agency did not comment on active cases.

Salifou testified that to satisfy leaders who punished disobedience with death, he had looted during raids, grabbed new child conscripts and hit and kicked civilians without pity if they resisted. He maintained, though, that while he had shot at people, he had never knowingly killed anyone.

Many mysteries remain in the story of the escape of this adolescent, whose sheltered, upper-middle-class childhood and French schooling in West Africa ended abruptly with his father’s murder.

One is the real identity of the foreigner his mother called Father William, who smuggled him onto a plane to Geneva, he said, outfitted him in jeans and Timberland boots, and sent him on to New York with a false Swiss passport.

Were Salifou deported now, concluded the judge in the case, Alan L. Page — who has denied 83 percent of asylum cases brought before him — he could face jail, torture or death from both sides in the conflict dividing Ivory Coast.

Instead, on Salifou’s first day of freedom, he awoke in the Kayes’ small Cobble Hill apartment, with the French books he had collected in jail: math and physics texts, Harry Potter paperbacks and a short story by Balzac that had made him cry, he said, because, like Mr. Beah’s testimony, “it is my own history.”

When the lawyer took Salifou’s case last winter, Mr. Beah’s memoir had not yet been published, but an adaptation in *The New York Times Magazine* led Mr. Kaye to contact Laura Simms, the woman Mr. Beah calls his second mother.

“How did you do that?” Mr. Kaye said he asked her, when he learned that she had taken Mr. Beah into her home as soon as he arrived on a hard-won temporary visa in 1998. “I remember saying: ‘I have a wife and a young son. He may not even know how dangerous he still is.’ ”

Ms. Simms became his mentor, the guide to an expanding circle of strangers determined to rescue Salifou — even, if necessary, from himself.

“At first I distrusted everyone,” Salifou said in French. “Elliot said, ‘Life is giving you a second chance.’ All I wanted was death.”

“Little by little, Elliot changed that.”

Unlike Mr. Beah, who had major trauma therapy in his country in a residential center staffed by trained counselors, Salifou was facing his demons in an adult jail, and the lawyers probing for details of his life, against asylum deadlines, were in effect his only therapists.

Sometimes, the lawyers said, they found a petulant teenager, or an angry soldier; sometimes he was a child closing his eyes, longing to be magically transported back to a time when his family was intact and pillow fights were his only combat.

“We realized we had to make him remember things that he wanted desperately to forget,” said Bryan Lonagan, the Legal Aid lawyer who screened Salifou’s case at the Sussex County, N. J., jail and enlisted the help of Mr. Kaye and his colleagues at the Cooley Godward Kronish law firm in Manhattan.

By then, Salifou had good reason to be confused and distrustful of the system he had entered when he sought asylum. Like many of the 5,000 unaccompanied minors apprehended each year, he had no valid identity documents. But based on the birth date he gave, he had been placed in a juvenile shelter in Queens.

Within days, after confiding to a counselor that he sometimes heard voices and had once attempted suicide, he was transferred to a mental hospital’s pediatric ward, where he was so medicated, he said, that he could barely move.

Discharged in time for Thanksgiving dinner at the children’s residence, he was suddenly declared to be over 18, not 17 years and 7 months as he maintained, based on an immigration service dentist’s interpretation of his X-rays — a practice that many doctors contest as unreliable. An adult immigration detention center refused to take him, so he was locked up in a county jail in western New Jersey.

His experience evokes the larger international confusion over how to draw the line between juveniles and adults, and what treatment is best for former child soldiers.

In one sense, Salifou’s childhood ended on Aug. 6, 2001, according to the 25-page affidavit he signed. That was the day his father and older sister were shot to death within earshot of the family home in Man, a market town in northwestern Ivory Coast. He remains tormented that as a 12-year-old he was powerless to protect his family when armed men ransacked the house and assaulted his mother.

His father, a civil servant in the defense ministry, had been politically active with an opposition party, but may also have dealt in arms and diamonds. He had been able to afford to send Salifou to a French school, where he excelled.

But after the murders of his father and sister, he fled with his mother, brother and two younger sisters. For three years, they lived in a roving camp for the displaced, and it was all they could do to stay alive.

Late in 2004, troops of the Mouvement Patriotique, the rebel faction that controlled the north, raided the camp for new recruits. As rebels grabbed Salifou and his younger brother, Abdul Razack, then about 13, their mother held on to Abdul’s arm, yelling that he was too young to take. To punish her, Salifou testified, one rebel chopped off Abdul’s hand with a machete.

Abdul was left behind, but Salifou was thrown in the back of a truck with other boys and began two years as an unwilling child soldier among thousands — trained, armed, drugged and growing numb to violence.

“There are some who can’t be healed anymore,” he said two days after his release, confessing that firing a machine gun had seemed “cool,” the power, heady. “There are some who can’t stop killing and giving orders. There are people who hate people. If you had a terrible childhood, if you hated your parents ...” He added, “I loved my parents.”

In the end, he said, his mother helped him persuade his chief to let him visit her briefly after one of his raids stumbled on her village camp again. Later, with a well-timed gift of a yam for his leader, she had Salifou return and meet Father William, a friend of his father’s who would take him to safety.

“I told her that I wasn’t going to leave,” he said, mindful that the rebels often hurt or killed the families of those who escaped. “But she forced me.”

He has had no contact with his family since. The lawyers, despite tantalizing near-misses, failed to locate Father William, who drove Salifou to the capital, Abidjan, dressed him as a luggage handler to get him past airport security, then guided him onto an airplane to Geneva. There, Salifou said, he gave him a passport and instructions for a flight to the United States.

Salifou arrived in November knowing no one. Now his circle of supporters includes the lawyers who took him on a giddy shopping spree for sneakers, T-shirts and a Yankees cap the day after his release on April 23. It includes Ms. Simms, who saw his descent into deep sorrow the next day, twisting his fingers and saying he just wanted to sit in the dark.

A few days later, Salifou seemed resilient, even joyful, after a session with a therapist at Bellevue Hospital, prayer at the 96th Street mosque and a dinner cooked by Mr. Beah in Ms. Simms’s homey kitchen.

“A family was born,” said Salifou, who is now staying in Harlem with an interpreter who is himself an African refugee. “It’s true what I was taught, what the philosopher said: Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed. I thought I lost a family, but it was transformed.”

It was a lesson from physics, applied to humankind, and Mr. Beah, the writer, echoed the sentiment.

“I realized what an intelligent, calm and sweet person he is,” he said. “He just happened to have the misfortune of having his childhood taken from him. But you can see him coming back.”

“I consider him like a brother to me,” he added, “because we’re both coming from a place where we have learned to deeply understand the true nature of violence, what war really is and what it does to the human spirit.”

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Spotlight turns on Africa's lost boys

By Jason Cowley

A militia member in Sierra Leone heads into the fighting zone. Photo / Reuters

SIERRA LEONE - Brutalised, war-ravaged and drugged-up, the child soldiers of Sierra Leone and Sudan have become objects of fascination in the West.

They feature in films like *Blood Diamond* and a new novel by Dave Eggers, while Brad Pitt has produced a documentary on their plight. And now they're in Starbucks, as it launches its new book club with a harrowing first-person account by an ex-boy killer.

Are Africans telling their own stories, or are these merely signs of our appetite for tales of savagery?



On one level *Blood Diamond* indulges many of the stereotypes of the traditional Hollywood adventure movie set in or about Africa. The hero, a Rhodesian mercenary, (Leonardo DiCaprio), is white.

The chaos of the war-stricken African state of Sierra Leone provides the setting for his quest to live authentically and free.

He is an all-action hero, seemingly indestructible until his heart is softened by a woman - an American journalist, also white.

Yet on another level, *Blood Diamond* is a political text which, like *The Constant Gardener*, attempts to expose the complicity of western corporations in the ruin of a resources-rich but vulnerable and disturbed African countries; the ultimate villains, for all their cruelty and violence, are not the rebel soldiers but their western sponsors.

The film investigates the phenomenon of the child soldier in Africa, of those orphaned in conflict or stolen from their families and then brutalised and humiliated until, finding a new kind of family among rebel soldiers, they become drug-addicted killers, without pity or fear.

We know something of these children from innumerable journalistic dispatches from northern Uganda, from Sierra Leone, from Liberia - one of the most ravaged of all African states - and, most recently, from Sudan.

We know something of these children, too, from recent novels, such as Uzodinma Iweala's acclaimed *Beasts of No Nation*, which was set in an unnamed west African state and narrated in a swirling, fractured demotic by a boy soldier named Agu, and Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated*, which takes as its setting the civil war in Liberia.

We know something of these children but, at the same time, can we ever say that we know them - know what they feel, think, need or want?

The honest answer is that we do not, although that may be about to change with the publication next month of two remarkable first-person documentary accounts.

These are Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, an astonishingly self-revealing memoir of his time as a boy soldier in Sierra Leone in the mid-1990s, and Dave Eggers' *What Is the What*, a long, experimental non-fiction novel written in collaboration with Valentino Achak Deng, one of the so-called Lost Boys of Sudan who are now living in the United States, having been displaced in the civil war.

There is, too, the forthcoming documentary film *God Grew Tired of Us*, directed by Christopher Quinn, with Brad Pitt as an executive producer and Nicole Kidman as narrator.

Like the Eggers novel, this is a story of American immigration framed by the trauma of war in Sudan and the suffering of tens of thousands of children separated from their families, some of whom became boy soldiers.

Clearly, as the *New York Times* recently put it, the African boy-killer "is becoming a pop-cultural trope". Even Starbucks has sensed a commercial opportunity. The coffee chain has chosen Beah's memoir as the inaugural title of its new book club. *A Long Way Gone* is already a number one bestseller in the US because of the support of Starbucks, which sponsored Beah's countrywide reading tour.

As harrowing as it is violent, *A Long Way Gone* is an odd choice for a sanitised coffee chain. It begins relatively serenely, with a gentle portrayal of communal life in Beah's home village. One day the village is attacked by the Revolutionary United Front, the rebel army that controls Sierra Leone's diamond mines.

Beah, then 12, is separated from his family in the ensuing chaos. Once safe, he first allows himself to believe that a reunion with his family is possible, supported and protected as he is by other displaced boys - in a kind of union of strangers.

Later, however, he discovers that his parents and two brothers are dead; soon, he is separated from the boys as well, left to wander alone and bereft in the hostile bush, scavenging for food.

He is eventually picked up by government troops in the south-east. They teach him how to handle an AK-47, in preparation for his becoming part of a child unit fighting rebels.

Beah writes without self-pity of how he became addicted to drugs, "smoking marijuana and sniffing brown brown, cocaine mixed with gunpowder"; of how he ransacked villages, murdering innocents as and when he had to; and of how he learned never to wonder about the old life he left behind.

The first death is the most difficult for him, after which he kills and tortures without remorse.

Beah has no idea how many people he killed. "I never thought to keep count," he told *Time* magazine.

"We attacked civilians, villagers, anyone the commander deemed was an enemy; we killed them. If you thought they maybe aided the rebels, you shot them. If they withheld food, you shot them."

In 1998, he moved to New York to live with a woman called Laura Simms, who worked at the United Nations and had been paying his school fees in Freetown as part of his rehabilitation. He was 17.

He attended Oberlin College in Ohio and decided to write a memoir because he knows he has been given a second chance in life and he wants to bear witness.

The publisher is selling *A Long Way Gone* hard, perhaps overselling it: "This account is utterly unique - until now there has not been a first-person account of this kind."

In fact, I read something similar only a couple of years ago, China Keitetsi's *Child Soldier*, published by the independent Souvenir Press.

She fought as a young girl in Yoweri Museveni's National Resistance Army, which came to power in Uganda in 1985. Keitetsi, who lives in Denmark, was repeatedly raped as a soldier and had her first child at the age of 14. "For us female soldiers, we had to offer sex to more than five officers in one unit," she wrote.

Uzodinma Iweala, who has just been selected as one of *Granta* magazine's Best of Young American Writers says, "It's important and wonderful that issues such as that of the plight of the child soldiers are being written about and discussed.

"If people are encouraged as a result to think more deeply about the historical context for conflict, about the situation about which they are reading as well as the historical context of African writing itself, then that's all the better."

There is, however, a problem, what he calls a "sinister side" to our fascination with Africa.

"Is this resurgence of interest in Africa and its issues indicative of a genuine desire to see change?" he asks. "Or does it merely reflect that Africa has been centre stage for the past two or three years, even if it is now being edged out by the new celebrity cause of global warming?"

Iweala is a Nigerian, an Igbo, born and educated in America. His mother, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, was until recently the finance and then foreign minister of Nigeria. Before that, she was vice-president of the World Bank.

Her son is a child of privilege. So why for his first novel did he choose to speak in such a disturbed voice, as a child of suffering? Is he, in one sense writing for a Western audience, conforming to what is expected of a novel set in Africa?

He is silent for a while and then says: "As African writers we have a compulsion to tell our own stories. I agree that there can be an expectation for stories about Africa to be about suffering, death and destruction ... but for too long we had to listen to other people, non-Africans, as they attempted to tell our stories."

The day after we had spoken, I received an email from Iweala. He had been thinking.

"If you read articles and watch the BBC you constantly and consistently hear words like 'bloodthirsty', 'tribal'. And the wars we fight are always 'senseless' as compared to Western wars which I suppose are full of meaning.

"Personally I believe all war is senseless.

"What I'm saying is that I wonder if sometimes the fascination with the child soldier or Africa's wars is one of genuine 'how can we stop this' or whether it's that same attitude that people have when they pass a gruesome road accident.

"Why I and others like me who have written and will write about such a subject is to humanise rather than dehumanise as the press and common stereotypes often do."

The most celebrated of the current batch of boy soldier narratives is, perhaps inevitably, *What Is the What* by the bestselling author Dave Eggers.

Iweala is one of several of the new generation of African novelists to have endorsed the Eggers book with a cover quote.

What Is the What is a curious hybrid. It is at once a gripping, fast-paced adventure story - there are gun battles, people are eaten by crocodiles, and so on - and a more ruminative, coming-of-age narrative.

Eggers has spoken of how he wanted to write a conventional biography, to tell Achak Deng's story straight. "I didn't want my voice in there."

"In many cases, the Lost Boys of Sudan have no one else," the fictional Achak tells us, beginning another of his long internal monologues.

"The Lost Boys is not a nickname appreciated by many among our ranks, but it is apt enough. We fled or were sent from our homes, many of us orphaned, and thousands of us wandered through deserts and forests for what seemed like years.

"In many ways we are alone and in most cases we are unsure of where exactly we're going."

As a boy - aged no more than about 6 - Valentino Achak Deng was separated from his family when his village of Marial Bai in southern Sudan came under attack from Islamist Arab militia.

That was during what is now known as the second Sudanese civil war, from 1983 to 2005. (It is happening again in Darfur, western Sudan.)

Once adrift from his family, Achak, an ethnic Dinka, begins to wander lost and hungry with other similarly bereaved boys.

Together in ever-increasing numbers they begin the monumental trek north to Ethiopia, where they have been told they will find safety and comfort, "in the place that is", as well as one day having the possibility of being reunited with their families - if their families are not dead already.

Deng, who is now 25 and a student at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania, eventually arrived in America in 2001, having spent a decade at the Kukuma camp in Kenya, which he describes as "one of the largest and most remote refugee camps in the world".

He was brought to America by a charity called the Lost Boys Foundation and once there he was introduced to Eggers, to whom he told his story orally over the course of many years.

Deng has granted Eggers an unusual freedom, the freedom to recast his life in fiction. The result is a deeply affecting, if problematic work.

Its chief selling point and the source of much of its considerable pathos is the claim it makes to truth - to be telling the truth, in broad outline, of the terrors of the civil war in Sudan as well as the truth, in detailed particularity, of one man's suffering and quest for redemption in America.

There is a moment, early in *A Long Way Gone*, when Ishmael Beah, in flight from rebel attack, describes arriving in a village in the company of a group of boys. This is before he has become a soldier.

Beah loves American rap music and carries cassettes of his favourite artists. But on arriving in the village he is searched and his rap cassettes are confiscated.

The village chief demands to know what kind of music is rap. "It is similar to telling parables," Beah replies, "but in the white man's language."

In their own different ways, Eggers and Deng, Beah and Iweala, and even China Keitetsi (whose book was published first in Danish before being translated into many languages), are all telling parables; parables of loss, flight and renewal, not in the white man's language, but in a style and idiom that is entirely their own.

Absent from their books are the grand, melodramatic generalisations about Africa that are such a feature of so much work by western writers about the continent.

The stories of Ishmael Beah, Achak Deng and the Lost Boys featured in *God Grew Tired of Us* are each related in long retrospective, from positions of relative safety.

They are stories of departure and of arrival in a new land, with new aspirations. They are also about the process of memory.

When Beah describes his most brutal experiences as a soldier in the bush his language contracts. It is as if such moments of horror can only be described in the sketchiest of details; to recall them otherwise would be beyond perhaps what is possible. It would be, as it were, to relive them all over again.

"Forgiveness is actually an important part of healing from the war for me," Beah says.

"To forgive is not to forget but to transform all that happened into something positive because the other route can only bring more suffering to me and those around me."

You hope that writing his book has brought him a release from suffering.

As for the other countless lost boys and kids-at-arms who have survived wars but have never made it out of Africa, you would like to believe that one day they, too, will be able to find a kind of peace.

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