

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



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:

Tuesday, 16 January 2007

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
Martin Royston-Wright
Ext 7217

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Awareness Times
 Tuesday, 16 January 2007

A call for Blood Diamond proceeds to benefit Salone ex-child soldiers

By Sahr Musa Yamba

A young Sierra Leonean, Alhassan Kargbo, has made a passionate plea to the Director and Casts of the recently filmed "Blood Diamonds" movie, to consider using some of the proceeds of the film in order to benefit the children of Sierra Leone whom, he said, had undergone gruesome experiences during the country's civil conflict. The film - Blood Diamonds - is plotted on the ended conflict in Sierra Leone, which was generally perceived as being 'a conflict over the control of diamond mining areas in the country'. In a mammoth gathering that included some of the finest world diplomats, Hollywood celebrities and high-ranking NGOs at the Dag Hammerstad Auditorium at the United Nations in New York last Friday, 12th January 2007, Alhassan Kargbo aka 'Comrade Alaska,' took the auditorium by surprise to make one of the most stunning appeals for ex-child soldiers and all children in Sierra Leone, during the screening of the movie.

The movie-screening and subsequent panel discussions, which were aimed at highlighting the roles of child-soldiers and conflict-diamond in the course of the conflict, and the Special Court as justice mechanism, attracted hundreds of stakeholders from all over the world. In an assemblage that brought together the Casts of Blood Diamond, world policy makers, Ambassadors, Special Representatives of the UN Secretary

General, international journalists, the World Diamond Council, Canadian experts on the Kimberly Process, Human Rights organizations, Warner Brothers Pictures Virtual Studios etc, Alaska, used a very rare opportunity to articulate the impact of the war on the children of Sierra Leone from his perspective as a direct victim. In a passionate plea to the gathering, and particularly one of the major casts, Djimon Hounsou, (alias Solomon Vandy), he asked that some of the proceeds from the movie be donated to the cause of children in Sierra Leone.

Hinging on the major storyline of the movie where Solomon Vandy perseveres at all odds to be reunited with his only son, "Dia", Alaska depicted Dia as representing all Sierra Leonean Children whose "traumatic experiences" need not be ignored in spite of the end of the Sierra Leone conflict four years ago.

Until Alaska's appeal, many in the audience (only seeing the movie for the first time), presumed it to be another Hollywood docudrama, with its over-exaggeration of real life experiences of native people in tropical Africa through graphic images, in order to ensure a dramatic effect in a bid to upsurge the box office.

Although there were no specific pledges, the plea ignited serious thoughts about how to move forward the issue of Sierra Leone's children beyond the discussion table.

Concord Times

Tuesday, 16 January 2007

The Unfinished Business of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Sierra Leone

By Pat Marckarone

It has been two years now since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission presented its final report to the Government. The handling over of the final report to the government left in its wake an uneasy relationship with the Government, civil society, media and the wider community, yet the work still had to go on.

Despite these uneasiness, the TRC report made great strides in coming to terms with this difficult relationship. The Lome Peace Agreement signed in Togo in July 7, 1999 stated that a TRC should be set up as one of the main "structures for national reconciliation and the consolidation of peace in Sierra Leone". In February 2000, the Parliament of Sierra Leone passed an Act establishing a body known as the "Truth and Reconciliation Commission". The TRC made recommendations with a vision of a new Sierra Leone, and the Government has an obligation to implement these recommendations in a "faithful and timely manner".

Barely few months after the launch of the TRC final report, the Sierra Leone Government issued a white paper on the report dated June, 2005. Many observers have viewed the White Paper with mixed feelings. According to the response of civil society to the Government "White Paper" on the TRC report, the TRC Act 2000 requires the government to apply itself faithfully and timorously to the TRC recommendations.

It is the view of the civil society that such an approach was not reflected in the current "White Paper" document. The government's "White Paper", as it is currently formulated falls short in almost all aspects. It does not constitute a serious and methodological consideration of the matters raised in the TRC recommendations. Simply stated, civil society believed that the people of Sierra Leone deserves better and the Government of Sierra Leone can do better. It was more or less a defense on the side of the Government on issues that

The unfinished business of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Sierra Leone

ciliation without re-establishment of the fundamental values that affirm the dignity of every human being and make life in society possible. If human beings are not "to return to their folly" and are to be reconciled with themselves, their neighbors and God, some very radical social changes will obviously have to take place". These range from the "conversion of minds and hearts", to the transformation of political, economic and social structures which distort human relations, to the "healing of memories".

A basic tenet of the TRC was that it is better to deal with the difficulties of the past than to keep them hidden. Yet, when it

comes to the issue of its recommendations after its hearings, it appears that the Government that is responsible for the implementation of the TRC recommendations has been less than responsive. In this sense, it is easy to see why many of those who testified before the TRC perceived that the perpetrators have received more from the process than they themselves have, as victims. Already, the treatment of the perpetrators had deepened the anger and pain of victims.

Reconciliation is not the responsibility of the TRC alone. It belongs to the public but is dependent on Government leadership, political will and vision.

The TRC needs to be evaluated alongside other initiatives such as the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and Decentralisation Process. It is worthwhile to see the TRC recommendation debates as another step towards transformation in the Sierras Leone society.

If we do not want the next generation to carry the guilt of the TRC, we need to consider carefully the recommendations of the TRC reports in respect of its formulation and implementation.

However, getting back to the unfinished business of the TRC, I am ashamed to say that the Government is dragging its feet

on the implementation of the recommendations in the Report.

In terms of closure, the TRC recommendations must be implemented by the Government, because Truth Commissions try to create conditions for forgiveness, through accountability, amnesty and reparation.

But, as Michael Ignatieff asks, "can a nation be reconciled to its past as individuals can, by replacing myth with fact, lies with truth?" We don't want to see a situation in which the state fails to implement the TRC recommendations.

Credit: Network on Collaborative Peacebuilding - Sierra Leone

Awoko

Tuesday, 16 January 2007

Illegal adjudication by Chiefs on Women's Human Rights

A report from Amnesty International, entitled "Rural women's Access to Justice" has exposed the illegal adjudication by chiefs on women's human rights.

The report holds that chiefs have a tremendous impact on women's access to justice in rural Sierra Leone. In some cases they can be a positive influence in a community, by assisting members of the community to resolve disputes without a formal legal hearing.

However in some cases, Amnesty International has found that they have exceeded their authority under the law by imposing punishments on women which violate their human rights - including the right to liberty.

Amnesty International has also discovered that in other cases, the chief's role and actions in dealing with cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse has resulted in the continued perpetuation of violence at the community level.

At times, the hearings themselves have become the mechanism for perpetrating further discrimination and violence. Amnesty International has also found that despite the fact that civil cases fall under the jurisdiction of the local courts, chiefs are also illegally judging cases related to civil status. These illegal practices carried out by chiefs both violate the national laws of Sierra Leone, and render justice for women inaccessible.

On a recent research mission to Sierra Leone, a woman in Kenema town told Amnesty International: "I am married and have five children with the same father who until recently was my husband. A few months ago my husband left me to marry another woman. He is now trying to evict me and our five children from the property where we have lived for so many years. The first thing that happened was that an order came from the paramount chief through the chieftom police that we should leave our family home. When the chieftom police arrived, I was terrified and told them that I couldn't move as my children and I have nowhere else to go. When the paramount chief found out that I refused to move he took the case to the local court. My husband then asked the local courts to grant us a divorce arguing that I would not perform my wifely duties because I wore trousers when in bed with him. This accusation was enough for the local court to present me with divorce papers. My husband had already signed them. The human rights people told me not to sign them and I did not. Therefore, the local court summoned me for failing to obey their orders. The local court officials put me in a box in public all day to humiliate me. Thankfully some human rights advocates came and had me freed the same day. The human rights people told me to refuse to sign the divorce papers because they had not included a clause which required my husband to pay care and maintenance for the children as part of the agreement for the divorce. The human rights people wrote a letter to the local court to this effect. How will my children—his children continue to go to school if these fees are not paid. I barely make enough to cover the food for all of us.

In the end it turned out that the customary law officer saw the ruling made by the Local Court and advised that they had no jurisdiction in this case. In the end the customary law officer wrote and said that my husband must pay the care and maintenance of the children. Basically they told him that in order for him to divorce me he needs to pay care and maintenance. My husband is still reluctant."

This case, according to the Amnesty report, is illustrative of the confusion which exists throughout rural Sierra Leone regarding where chiefs' powers end and local court's jurisdiction begins. While it is common for women to be forcibly evicted from their homes and land without consideration of their contribution to the assets from the marriage upon the death or divorce of their husband, it is only the local courts, accountable to the people through the Government of Sierra Leone can make this determination. Under Sierra Leonean law, under no circumstances can the chief take it upon himself to order the eviction of a woman from her family home.

Likewise it is unlawful for chiefs to utilize chieftom police to carry out forced evictions or other human rights abuses. Despite their name, chieftom police do not work for chiefs, they work on behalf of the local courts and enforce judgements in the customary legal system and serve as marshals of the local court. Their primary responsibilities are to keep order in the local courts, serve summons, and enforce punishments such as the collection of fines.

This separation of powers between the formal and customary law sectors is not new. As mentioned above, there is a provision within the Local Courts Act, 19631 which prohibits any person from adjudicating without due authority - rendering the Chief's actions in the above case illegal. Amnesty International's research revealed that this provision is rarely respected by the chiefs, or enforced by the Government of Sierra Leone. Additionally a right to bring cases before the Magistrates Courts on appeal exists, however such appeals rarely take place. In the Sierra Leonean justice system, Customary Law Officers and officers of the Ministry of Justice should oversee rulings and have the power to overturn unfair rulings imposed by Local Court officials. The above case illustrates how this is carried out in practice.

Amnesty International's research indicates that Chiefs have in some instances illegally carried out functions as both prosecutor and judge in cases brought before them by members of the community. In some cases brought against them by their husbands, the women did not have a fair hearing but encountered stigmatization and ostracism as well as other threats to their liberty and security. Examples which were brought to Amnesty International's attention included Chiefs who have levied arbitrary charges against women, such as "witchcraft". Amnesty International is also aware of cases where Chiefs have determined guilt without evidence, imposed arbitrary and exorbitant fines, imprisoned women unlawfully in their homes or in "tribal prisons", charged fees for services, and threatened to, or actually carried out, expulsions from the community as a form of punishment.

Awoko

Tuesday, 16 January 2007



Paramount Helicopters grounded

The Director of Civil Aviation George Gbongbor has confirmed that Paramount Helicopters have been grounded.

Speaking to Awoko over the telephone line yesterday, he explained that “their equipment has to operate for a certain number of hours and the limit was getting very close”

The Aviation Director insisted that this was a

“routine check” and that the temporary ban would stay in place “until they comply”.

He stated that this had nothing to do with the fire incident at Lungi or at the Aberdeen Paramount helipad.

The two incidences had raised eyebrows among passengers when at Lungi on attempting to take off the Helicopter had emitted fire from its exhaust.

Paramount officials on the

ground explained that a bird had entered the engine and while being flushed out the engine emitted flames which alarmed the passengers.

Sources say about the same scenario was again acted out at the helipad last Saturday.

The grounding of the flights will cause severe traveling constraints to holiday makers who are returning home.

It is not clear yet whether the ferry service has been adjusted to meet the new demands.

Associated Press

Monday, 15 January 2007

Liberia's president says no reason for her country to try Charles Taylor

The Associated Press

MONROVIA, Liberia

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said Monday that her country does not need to try former president Charles Taylor, who is already being tried by a U.N.-backed court for his role in atrocities committed in neighboring Sierra Leone.

"He doesn't need to be tried here," Sirleaf said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Let him go through the due process that has already charged him on so many counts."

Sirleaf had previously said that she was more focused on moving Liberia forward than on punishing the rebel leader who launched a bloody insurgency in 1989. She said Monday that the Sierra Leone charges could stand in for any that could be levied in Liberia.

Africa's first female president, Sirleaf has been seen as a reformer and peacemaker in Liberia since she took office one year ago. But some in the international community have criticized her for being slow to ask for Taylor to be extradited last year from Nigeria, where he was in exile, to Sierra Leone, where he was charged with backing rebels who burned villages, hacked off people's limbs and raped women systematically during that country's brutal decade-long war.

Taylor's trial by the Sierra Leone Special Court is scheduled for later this year in The Hague, Netherlands. He has pleaded not guilty.

Taylor's fighters have been accused of similar acts in his homeland but Liberia has made no move yet to try its former president. After taking control by force, Taylor won elections that handed him the presidency in 1997.

"Don't forget that our war was regional, you know, so if you get charged in Sierra Leone, chances are the war was part of the same Liberian war," Sirleaf said in an interview at her office in the capital, Monrovia. "If you get charged there, you get judged guilty or acquitted there. It has the same kind of implication and ramifications for the other countries that were involved in this cross-border war."

Liberia has set up a countrywide Truth and Reconciliation Commission to compile testimony by both victims and perpetrators in the West African country's 14-year civil war and that group may eventually make recommendations to the government to try certain serious offenders.

"If that process leads to those whose rights have been infringed upon insisting on judgment through due process, then the (commission) will insist on that and due process will take place," Sirleaf said.

Star Radio (Liberia)

Sunday, 14 January 2007

<http://www.starradio.org.lr/latest-news/main-opposition-party-distances-from-planned-demonstr.html>

Main opposition party distances from planned demonstration

Written by Matthias Daffah

Sunday, 14 January 2007

The opposition Congress for Democratic Change has dissociated itself from Monday's planned demonstration by a pro-war crimes advocacy group.

According to a release, the CDC said it is not interested in any planned demonstration to seek the impeachment of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

The CDC believes that as a credible political party, it should remain focused on engaging the government constructively.

The party's statement also called on its partisans and sympathizers not to be a part of Monday's planned demonstration.

The demonstration is being spearheaded by the Forum for the Establishment of War Crimes Court in collaboration with de-activated security personnel.

The forum said it would hold a non-violent demonstration Monday for the impeachment of President Sirleaf.

Star Radio (Liberia)

Monday, 15 January 2007

<http://www.starradio.org.lr/latest-news/leader-of-pro-war-crime-court-advocacy-group-arrested-2.html>

Leader of pro-war crime court advocacy group arrested

Written by Vivian Gartyn

Monday, 15 January 2007

Government security forces have arrested the head of the Forum for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia.

Mr. Mulbah Morlu was picked up Monday morning at the B.W Harris School on Broad Street where a planned demonstration was due to start.

Police spokesman Alvin Jask told Star Radio Morlu was picked up for questioning.

Government last evening announced the cancellation of the protest march based on what it called information that some persons were planning to infiltrate.

Mr. Morlu is the chief organizer of the demonstration, which was expected to draw the participation of some deactivated security personnel.

United Nations



Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 15 Jan. 2007

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

International Clips on Liberia

VOA 15 January 2007

Liberian President Wins Praise after First Year in Office

On the eve of her first anniversary in office Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has won praise for her efforts and prompted cautious optimism for the future of her country. Liberia was still ravaged by a 14-year civil war when Mrs. Sirleaf was sworn in on January 16, 2006 as Liberia's first female president. A year later the 68-year-old economist is being hailed for fighting corruption, restoring electricity to parts of the capital, Monrovia, and making steps towards revitalizing Liberia's shattered economy.

One year on, Sirleaf shines in bid to bring Liberia off its knees

By Zoom Dosso

MONROVIA, Jan 14, 2007 (AFP) - One year after taking the helm of a country torn by 14 years of war, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is winning praise for her efforts to restore the rule of law in Liberia, and for standing up to world steel giant Arcelor Mittal. There will be no fanfare to mark the swearing-in on January 16, 2006 of Africa's first female president in Liberia, a small west African country that was engulfed in successive wars from 1989 to 2003.

International Clips on West Africa

Ivorian police ditch uniforms to stem child traffic

By Peter Murphy

ABOISSO, Jan 14 (Reuters) - Staring bewildered at the floor and fiddling nervously with their hands, three shoeless girls mumble details of how they were smuggled to work in Ivory Coast as plain clothes police officers clatter away at typewriters. Four boys and six young men sit outside on a stone floor waiting to be interviewed along with Lambo Zougrou, 34, the farmer who took them from his native village about 600 km (375 miles) away in northern Togo to grow manioc or work as nannies.

BBC Last Updated: Friday, 12 January 2007, 16:44 GMT

Ivorian border shut after attack

Ivory Coast has closed its border with Ghana after an attack in which three members of the security forces were reportedly killed. A further 12 people who were injured in the raid on Noe checkpoint are being treated in a nearby hospital. The incident occurred when unidentified gunmen attacked the border post, making away with a number of weapons. The attack is believed to be criminal, rather than linked to Ivory Coast's deep political divisions. The Ivorian authorities are now conducting a security sweep in the area. The shooting began late on Thursday and carried on until Friday morning.

Four arrested after attacks at Ivory Coast border

ABIDJAN, Jan 13 (Reuters) - Ivory Coast's security forces have arrested four people after attacks on two checkpoints near the border with Ghana in which two military police and a customs officer were killed, the army said in a statement. Army spokesman Colonel Hilaire Babri Gohourou said two of the attackers had also been killed in Friday's violence, raising the death toll to five. One of the four arrested was an air force deserter and they were being detained at a police station on the border pending investigations, he said in the statement.

African countries to mull 'deadlocked' Ivory Coast peace process

ABIDJAN, Jan 13, 2007 (AFP) - African countries are to begin reviewing the situation in troubled Ivory Coast next week ahead of a February 1 deadline for a report to the United Nations, UN sources said Saturday. The regional Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) will meet on January 19 in Ouagadougou, and the African Union on January 29 and 30 in Addis Ababa, the office of the UN head of mission in Ivory Coast said.

Local Media – Newspapers

Lawmakers Resume Work amid Bribery Claims and Attempts to Remove Speaker Snowe

(The News, The Analyst, Heritage, Liberian Express, The Monitor, The Informer, The Independent, New Democrat, Daily Observer, Plain Truth)

- Members of the National Legislature [*Senators and Representatives*] are expected to resume legislative functions today following three months of "Agriculture Break."
- The House of Representatives is plagued with ongoing attempts by some lawmakers to remove Speaker Edwin Snowe while at the same time there are claims that some of them received bribe to sign a resolution to unseat Mr. Snowe. *The Informer* quoted Mr. Snowe as saying that he was prepared to step down if it is the will of his colleagues to do so.

Opposition Party Denounces Anti-Government Demonstration

(The News, The Informer, Daily Observer, The Monitor, The Inquirer and Heritage)

- In a release issued yesterday, the opposition Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) has rejected attempts by the pro-democracy group, Forum for the Establishment of War Crimes Court in Liberia, to have President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf impeached.
- Meanwhile, the government has cancelled any planned demonstration until further notice. The government's action comes in the wake of reports that the are people planning to infiltrate what would have been a peaceful demonstration.

Senator and Media Group Want LPRC Boss Resign or Suspended

(The News, Public Agenda, Liberian Express, Heritage and The Monitor)

- Participating on a radio talk show, Grand Kru County Senator Blamo Nelson called for the "immediate resignation" of Mr. Harry Greaves as Managing Director of the Liberia Petroleum Refining Company.
- The Executive Director of the Liberia Media Center, Mr. Lawrence Randall also called for the immediate suspension of Mr. Greaves pending a criminal investigation into the recent UN Panel of Experts report over the alleged disappearance of US\$7m at the Corporation.

Local Media – Radio Veritas *(News monitored yesterday at 18:45 pm)*

"Renegade" Lawmakers Boycott Opening Session of National Legislature

- River Gee County Representative Elijah Sieh reported that the “Bloc of Representatives” which is campaigning to unseat House Speaker Edwin Snowe would boycott today’s Opening Session of the House to be presided over by the Speaker.
- Representative Sieh told Radio Veritas over the weekend that the “Bloc” lost confidence in the Speaker’s leadership and sitting with him at Plenary would suggest that he was still their leader.
- The resumption of Session comes amidst roar amongst the Representatives that some of their colleagues received US\$5,000 each to remove the Speaker with Margibi County Representative Saah Gbollie and Bong County Representative Samuel Bondo admitting that they received US\$5,000 bribe to remove the Speaker.

Justice Ministry Cancels Civil Society Groups Demonstration

- The Special Assistant to Justice Minister Frances Johnson-Morris, Mr. Onesimous Barwon said that the Ministry of Justice thought the planned street demonstration was illegal and did not grant the Forum for the Establishment of a War Crime Court permission to go ahead with the demonstration.
- But, in a statement issued in Monrovia over the weekend, the Forum contended that the civil society groups got approval from the Ministry to stage the protest today to press for the impeachment of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf for allegedly violating the Constitution of Liberia and giving US\$500 to each of the media institutions as Christmas gift.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Foreign Minister Calls on UN to Remove Sanctions on Liberia

- Speaking at a reception for diplomats accredited to Liberia, Foreign Minister George Wallace called on Liberia’s partners to treat the post-war Country as a special case as it recovered from the trauma of war.
- Minister Wallace emphasized that it was unfortunate that some of Liberia’s partners were unsympathetic to the Country’s condition and called on the United Nations Security Council to remove the sanctions regime on Liberia in order to erase the stigma it places on the Country.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Civil Society Groups and Ex-Servicemen Hold Peaceful Demonstration

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Star Radio *(News culled from website today at 9:00 am)*

Health Ministry Orders Re-Run of Leadership Election of AIDS Carriers

- In an interview over the weekend, the Deputy Minister of Health for Administration, Dr. Mohammed Sheriff ordered a re-run of the leadership elections of an HIV/AIDS group called “Light Association.” Dr. Sheriff noted that the decision which followed a meeting with the National Aids Control Program would ensure transparency and accountability in electioneering process.

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.

Voice of America

Tuesday, 16 January 2007

Violence Mars On-Going Guinea Strike

By Naomi Schwarz

Dakar



Tear gas, thrown rocks, and a handful of arrests heated up the scene in Guinea's capital, Conakry, as a nationwide strike against the government entered a second week. Naomi Schwarz reports for VOA from our West Africa Bureau in Dakar.

Dozens of people were arrested after Guinean youths took to the streets in support of striking workers. Several others were wounded by rubber bullets and tear gas when the military intervened to disperse the demonstration.

Maseco Conde, a local journalist, reported on the scene.

There were some rocks thrown, some violence, some tear gas, he said. It is really what he called "a hot day of this general, unlimited strike."

The strike, which began last Wednesday, has until now, been largely peaceful. But the Guinean government had earlier banned all public demonstrations.

During a similar strike last year, a student protest turned bloody when government forces intervened. Shots were fired and more than 20 people died.

The streets are now calm.

There is almost no traffic in Conakry, says journalist Maseco Conde. There are only military vehicles on the roads, and the banks, markets, and gas stations are all closed, he says.

A collective prayer session in front of the National Assembly was called off. The organizers, from the National Council of Civil Society Organizations, cited safety concerns as their reason for canceling.

Meanwhile, the National Council of Guinean Workers, the organization behind the nationwide strike, says it continues to work towards its goals. Union general secretary Radiatou Serah Diallo says the organization is working to comply with a request from President Lansana Conte that it put its demands in writing.

We are working on the letter right now, says Diallo. During a meeting Saturday, union leaders had asked that the ailing Mr. Conte step down. They say he is out of touch with current hardships.

The strike was also prompted by Mr. Conte's unilateral decision to release, from jail, two of his allies who are being investigated for corruption.

The striking workers have also met with the head of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Sompore, to urge him to invoke a parliamentary law that allows him to temporarily replace the president if he is incapacitated.

Mr. Conte seized power in a 1984 coup. The president, now in his seventies, is seriously ill and can barely walk. He is rarely seen in public, and speculation about problems surrounding his succession has been rife.

The Reporter (Ethiopia)

Sunday, 14 January 2007

Why Mugabe Rejects an Appeal for Extradition of Mengistu

The Reporter (Addis Ababa)

ANALYSIS

By Fred Bridgland

Prominent Zimbabweans feel Mugabe was wrong to reject Ethiopia's request for its former leader to be sent home to face justice

Opposition representatives, top human rights lawyers and church leaders in Zimbabwe have called for the extradition of the former Ethiopian president Mengistu Haile Mariam who was sentenced to life in prison in absentia for crimes of genocide by a court in Addis Ababa.

A day after the conviction on December 12, Zimbabwe's president Robert Mugabe rejected an appeal by the government of Ethiopia to extradite Mengistu, found guilty of causing the deaths of between half a million and 1.5 million of his fellow countrymen, to face justice at home.

Mengistu, dubbed "The Butcher of Addis", fled ten days before rebel forces entered the city in May 1991 and was given asylum and permanent residence in Zimbabwe by Mugabe.

Justifying protecting a leader responsible for more deaths than any other African dictator, Mugabe said through his spokesman, "As a comrade of our struggle [against white rule in former Rhodesia], Comrade Mengistu and his government played a key and commendable role during our struggle for independence and no one can dispute that."

The Ethiopian court found Mengistu guilty of genocide for atrocities committed under his Marxist regime. "Members of the Dergue [government] who are present in court today and those who are being tried in absentia have conspired to destroy a political group and kill people with impunity," said the presiding judge, Medhen Kiros. The trial lasted twelve years and sentence, when passed at the end of December, seems certain to be death. The Soviet-backed revolution that brought Mengistu and a group of other young army officers to power in 1974 ended the feudal rule of Emperor Haile Selassie, treated as a deity by millions of dirt-poor people in Africa's second most-populous country. The court was told how the ageing emperor was suffocated to death with a pillow and his body buried under a lavatory in the royal palace, where he was under house arrest.

Mengistu provided arms to Mugabe's ZANU, Zimbabwe African National Union, and guerrilla movement and trained Zimbabwe's air force pilots after independence. But Mugabe has come under a barrage of criticism from human rights and opposition groups in Zimbabwe for protecting Mengistu. Various international organizations such as the London-based International Bar Association have called for the president himself to be tried by the new International Criminal Court in The Hague for crimes against humanity.

"Verdicts such as this [in Addis Ababa] build up pressure and send the message that leaders who are bloodstained must not be allowed to retire in comfort," said Peter Takirambudde, Africa head of Human Rights Watch. He said Mengistu would find it impossible to travel to neighboring

countries, even for medical treatment, without facing the danger of arrest. "This man and his followers committed monstrous crimes against humanity, and international justice demands he be brought to face justice. The cycle of impunity must and will be stopped."

Mugabe has appointed Mengistu as one of his own security advisers. In that role, said Nelson Chamisa, national spokesman of the Movement for Democratic Change, MDC, Zimbabwe's main opposition party, Mengistu helped plot last year's devastating Operation Murambatsvina (Operation Clean Out the Trash), in which police and Mugabe's personal militiamen bulldozed, sledge hammered and burned down the homes of some 700,000 to a million town dwellers, most of them MDC supporters.

Chamisa said most Zimbabweans regard Mengistu as an undesirable guest who has long overstayed his welcome. He added that Mugabe's refusal to hand over the former Ethiopian dictator to face justice betrayed his own inner fear of international law, saying, "The days in which dictators would consort in a boys' club and luxuriously look after themselves are over. Mr. Mengistu may be safe in Harare for now, but for how long?"

Leading Zimbabwean human rights lawyer Otto Saki, of Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights, said his organization demanded that Mengistu be conveyed to Ethiopia to accept responsibility for his crimes. "We expect the government to fulfill this commitment," he said. "We expect government to draw a precedent from the Taylor case."

Former Liberian president Charles Taylor was extradited this year from Nigeria, where he had been given political asylum, to face charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity at the United Nations-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, Liberia's neighbor where Taylor gave weapons to rebel forces. Taylor is presently imprisoned in The Hague awaiting trial.

For 17 years in Ethiopia, Mengistu ran The Dergue, perhaps the most terrifying regime modern Africa has known. Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch both estimate that at least half a million, and possibly as many as 1.5 million, people died in assassinations and executions, warfare and politically induced famine during Mengistu's "Red Terror" campaign against opponents.

It is difficult to exaggerate the scale of Mengistu's crimes. At the start of the darkest days of his rule in 1976, Mengistu stood before a huge crowd in the central plaza of Addis Ababa and smashed a series of bottles filled with pigs' blood. They represented, he said, the blood of the "counter-revolutionaries" that would flow as his regime set out to eliminate rivals of the ruling junta.

"The revolution needs to be fed by the blood of traitors," he said. Human rights groups reported that at the height of the terror campaign, organized by Soviet advisers and Mengistu's East German-controlled Department of State Security, government hit squads were summarily executing 100 to 150 "anarchists, feudalists, exploiters of the people and counter-revolutionaries" each day on the streets of Addis Ababa, other centers and in the notorious state prison on the edge of the capital.

It became commonplace to see students, suspected government critics and rebel sympathizers hanging from lampposts each morning. Families had to pay a tax known as "the wasted bullet" to obtain the bodies of their executed loved ones. At the height of his power, Mengistu himself frequently garroted or shot dead opponents, saying that he was leading by example, and may have personally killed Haile Selassie.

During his 1974-1991 rules, Mengistu's mass herding of Ethiopia's peasant farmers into giant collective farms spawned a famine that took hundreds of thousands of lives.

Mengistu, also known as the Black Lenin, was alleged to have fled Ethiopia with many millions of US dollars, including a chunk of the 300 million dollars that Israel paid for the right to evacuate 15,000 Falasha Jews from Ethiopia. In the months before he left, Mengistu nationalized Nestlé's Ethiopian Livestock Development Company without compensation. He sold the cattle stock for 10 million dollars and took the money with him to Zimbabwe. The Ethiopian people did not get a cent.

In Zimbabwe, Mugabe gave Mengistu a luxury villa in the up market Gun Hill suburb, where Zimbabwean reporters have observed up to six luxury cars, including a Mercedes and a BMW, parked in the drive. The house is heavily protected by soldiers from Mugabe's elite Presidential Guard battalion, and anyone who attempts to take photographs is arrested. On the rare occasions when Mengistu is spotted shopping, he wears military boots and carries a pistol.

Mengistu, 69, has also been given a large farm 45km outside Harare and a property in the far north on the shores of Lake Kariba, to which he is believed to have moved in July for security reasons.

Kenya's main daily newspaper, The Nation, commented: "Why does it not come as a surprise that President Mugabe is not willing to hand over Mengistu to the Ethiopian government? It is no wonder that he [Mengistu] long ago found a soul-mate in Mugabe and was given sanctuary; the two are birds of a feather when it comes to atrocities against their people."

Among the voices raised against Mengistu's presence in Zimbabwe is that of Pius Ncube, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bulawayo, Mugabe's most fearless and outspoken critic who repeatedly says the best service the Zimbabwean head of state can do for his countrymen is to die. "Mugabe is using the taxpayers' money to keep a dictator who killed a million people," said the archbishop. "You can see what kind of friends Mugabe keeps. You need one dictator to prop up another."

BBC Online

Tuesday, 16 January 2007

Court frees ex-Burundi president

Former Burundi leader Domitien Ndayizeye and four others have been acquitted on charges of plotting to assassinate the president.

Two others were convicted and sentenced to 15 and 20 years in prison.

Mr Ndayizeye was leader under a power-sharing agreement intended to end years of ethnic conflict, before stepping down in 2005 after elections.



President Domitien Ndayizeye (l) handed over power last August

Diplomats criticised Mr Ndayizeye's arrest. The man convicted of organising the plot had alleged he was tortured.

Ex-rebel leader Alain Mugabarabona was sentenced to serve 20 years in prison.

Last August, he told local radio stations by phone from his prison cell that he was threatened with death.

"This coup story has been invented by the Documentation Nationale," said Mr Mugabarabona, referring to Burundi's powerful presidential police and intelligence service.

"Everything I accused former President Domitien Ndayizeye, former Vice-President Alphonse-Marie Kadege and the others of was extorted by torture and threats," said the official of the rebel National Liberation Forces (FNL).

Mr Ndayizeye was succeeded by Pierre Nkurunziza, a former rebel leader who was elected by a landslide.