

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Monday, 2 February 2009

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Special Court for Sierra Leone
Outreach and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 30 January 2009

Prosecution Witness Testimony Ends in the Trial of Charles Taylor

The Prosecution today concluded witness testimony in the trial for former Liberian President Charles Taylor, on trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague. Taylor, the first African head of state to be tried by an international tribunal, faces an 11-count indictment for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Since the trial began in January 2008, Prosecutors have called 91 witnesses, including 52 crime base (victim) witnesses, 31 insider (linkage) witnesses, four expert witnesses and 4 witnesses of fact. Sixty-four of the witnesses testified in open session, and 23 testified in open session with protective measures. Four of the witnesses testified in closed session.

The Prosecution is now waiting for the Trial Chamber to take a number of important decisions on outstanding motions before it will be able to conclude its case. It is expected that will happen in the coming month.

Charles Taylor was indicted by the Special Court Prosecutor in March 2003. The indictment remained under seal until June 2003. Two months later, Taylor stepped down as President of Liberia and went into exile in Nigeria. On 29 March 2006 he was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Special Court.

Two of the four trials conducted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone are complete, including appeals. A judgment in the trial of three former leaders of the Revolutionary United Front is due shortly.

#END

The Special Court is an independent tribunal established jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone. It is mandated to bring to justice those who bear the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone after 30 November 1996.

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Produced by the
Outreach and Public Affairs Office
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SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTOR

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, 2 February 2009

Testimony for the Prosecution Concluded in Taylor Trial

The Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Stephen Rapp, said Monday that his team had “achieved what we set out to do” with the presentation of testimony in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor in The Hague.

On Friday afternoon, the final witness for the prosecution, a double amputee from Sierra Leone, concluded testimony at the trial in The Hague, Netherlands. He was the 91st in a procession of prosecution witnesses whose testimony began in January 2008, and had filled 205 days, or 41 full weeks, of court sessions.

Prosecutor Rapp praised his trial team, led by Principal Trial Attorney Brenda Hollis, the Special Court Judges, and all court personnel for “the great professionalism shown in bringing the trial forward to this milestone.”

“It has been demonstrated that it is possible to prosecute a former chief of state in a trial that is fair and efficient, even where the indictment covers wide-ranging crimes. We have seen international justice conducted in accordance with the highest standards,” said Mr. Rapp.

Charles Taylor is charged with 11 counts of War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity and other violations of International Humanitarian Law committed during the civil war in Sierra Leone from 1996 to 2002. The Prosecution built its case on the strength of the 91 witnesses, including 31 “insider” witnesses who testified to the links between Taylor and the crimes committed in Sierra Leone, and 52 “crime base” witnesses who themselves had seen or suffered these atrocities.

The Prosecutor praised the contribution to justice made by the victim witnesses. “Brave men, women and children have taken the stand against Charles Taylor and recounted their suffering. They have included amputees, rape victims, former child soldiers, and persons enslaved, robbed, and terrorized. We are awed by their courage and grateful for their willingness to travel thousands of miles to bear witness.”

“The contrast between these victims and the accused could not be more stark,” said Rapp. “This was brought home in particular by the last witness, a man whose left hand was amputated by rebels alleged to have been controlled or aided by Taylor. When his 4-year old son protested the injury to his “papa” and the rebels then threatened the boy with amputation, the witness offered his own right hand to save his son.”

“Here we saw a man who sacrificed his hands for the future of his son bearing witness against a man charged with sacrificing the lives, the hands, and the futures of thousands of human beings in pursuit of his own wealth and power,” said Rapp.

Of the 91 witnesses, only four testified entirely in closed session. All the rest were heard in open court, with some protected by partial security measures, such as voice or facial distortion. All open session testimony has been streamed worldwide over the internet. There has been daily radio and newspaper coverage in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The Prosecution’s case will not officially close until certain pending motions before the judges are decided and there remains the possibility that further evidence may be presented by the Prosecution depending on these decisions.

#END

Produced by the
Office of the Prosecutor
Special Court for Sierra Leone

Visit the Special Court’s website at www.sc-sl.org

The Spectator
Monday, 2 February 2009

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Awoko

Monday, 2 February 2009

Amputee is last witness against Charles Taylor

A man who had both hands hacked off during Sierra Leone's civil war testified Friday as the last prosecution witness in the war crimes case against Charles Taylor.

The former Liberian president's defense lawyer said he now plans to call for Taylor's acquittal. If judges refuse, Courtenay Griffiths told The Associated Press he will likely call Taylor as his first defense witness, but only after a delay to allow him to prepare his case.

"He can't wait (to testify)," Griffiths said.

Taylor has pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity including murder, torture and using child soldiers.

Prosecutors accuse him of masterminding crimes in Sierra Leone from his power base in neighboring Liberia, where he was a warlord who rose to become president from 1997-2003.

Alusine Conteh, the stumps of both arms wrapped in white bandages, told judges that rebels hacked off his hands in January 1999 as rival armed factions battled for control of the Sierra Leone capital of Freetown.

Such amputations were the calling card of rebels during Sierra Leone's 11-year conflict.

Conteh, 59, said rebels hacked off his left hand with an ax in front of his wife and 4-year-old son. When the child screamed at them, the rebels got ready to amputate one of his hands, Conteh told judges.

"I said I would rather you cut off my second hand," he said. "I placed my hand (on a slab) and they hacked it twice."

Conteh was the last of 91 witnesses called by prosecutors. Many were victims of atrocities by rebels allegedly supported by Taylor during a conflict fueled by so-called "blood diamonds."

Others were from Taylor's inner circle who testified about his links to Sierra Leone's rebels, particularly the notorious Revolutionary United Front.

The trial started in June 2007 but was halted for six months after Taylor boycotted the opening, saying he could not get a fair trial, and then fired his lawyer. It resumed in January 2008. Earlier this month, Taylor's son, Charles McArthur Emmanuel, was sentenced to 97 years imprisonment by a court in Miami for torturing people when he led his father's Anti-Terrorist Unit in Liberia.

Taylor is being tried by the U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in a courtroom rented from the International Criminal Court because of fears that holding the case in Sierra Leone could spark fresh unrest in the West African nation. Griffiths said that as well as seeking an immediate acquittal he will ask judges for a six-month adjournment to allow him time to travel to Africa to prepare his defense

Awoko

Monday, 2 February 2009

Sierra Leone War Victims finally gets redress from NaCSA

By Saidu Bah

The National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) over the weekend officially launched the Sierra Reparations Programme at the British Council Auditorium in Freetown to address the needs of victims of human right abuses during the war.

The Sierra Leone Reparations Programme originated from the Lome Peace Agreement of 1999 between the Government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Recommendations.

The Reparations Programme of NaCSA will largely focus on the rehabilitation of victims through the delivery of social service packages and symbolic measures which acknowledge the past harm done to victims, and empower them to rebuild their lives. Categories of victims who stand to benefit include amputees, other war wounded, victims of sexual violence and children. Registered War victims stand to benefit from NaCSA compensation, restitution, rehabilitation and restoration of dignity. The reparations programme will also promote healing and reconciliation to restore the dignity of victims and civic trust by improving the lives of those who

have suffered harm during the past brutal war in the country. The eligible criteria for a person to qualify for the reparations package is that the person must have sustained injuries during the specified time and that registration is presently ongoing in the country.

Chairing the official launching programme Bishop Joseph Humper former Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission called on war victims to come forward and register as it was one of the many recommendations of the TRC report because the reparations has been long awaited for the realization of this programme. Bishop Humper called on the Government to support the programme and also appealed to the International Community to provide the necessary funding and technical expertise to make the entire programme a success so that the war victims will benefit by providing them their needs to restore their dignity and foster reconciliation.

Amadu Bangura NaCSA Programme Manager for

Reparations encouraged war victims to come forward and register with the programme as they will benefit from physical, health, skills training, free education and micro credit loans. He added that they will also support memorials and reburials of the dead.

NaCSA Commissioner Conton Sesay promised to work with line ministries to ensure that the programme realize its objectives and victims benefit from the package without favor to parties, tribe and regions. He noted that the success of the programme depends on the respect of beneficiaries.

Benedict Sannoh of the United Nations Human Right Section in Sierra Leone spoke about the need for a political will to address the various violations of Human Rights through adequate budgetary allocation. He strictly warned NaCSA staff handling the programme to consult stakeholders particularly the civil society to ensure there is transparency and accountability in the implementation of the programme.

Representatives of the Human Right Commission and Valnora Edwin of Campaign for Good Governance all spoke about the need to consult civil society for their active participation. They also called on the Government to offer a public apology to all victims of the war.

Alhaji Ahmed Jusu Jaka Chairman of the Victims Association, who had his two limbs chopped off by the RUF during the war, took to the podium to deliver his statement. He struggled with his script and emotionally said "this day is a significant day in the history of Sierra Leone particularly for those affected by the war. I only hope that the programme will be implemented judiciously with honesty and sincerity."

Vice President of the Republic of Sierra Leone Alhaji Sam Sumana delivered the key note address by warning the NaCSA staff that Government will not hesitate to sack any official found in dubious dealings with the programme.

Charlestaylortrial.org

Friday, 30 January 2009

Court Adjourned To February 9, 2009, As Prosecution Ends Evidence with Testimony of The Last Witness Against Charles Taylor

On Friday January 30, 2009, the prosecution concluded its evidence against Charles Taylor. 91 witness in total testified against Mr. Taylor. The court is adjourned and will resume with a Status Conference on February 9, 2009.

10:00am: The prosecution evidence against Charles Taylor was brought to a close today Friday January 30, 2009. The last/final prosecution witness TF1-278, who commenced his testimony yesterday, concluded his evidence against Charles Taylor. Mr. Taylor was absent in court but he consented to the continuation of proceedings in his absence.

Examination of Witness TF1-278

Prosecution counsel Mr. Nicholas Koumjian continued the cross-examination of the witness. Counsel continued asking questions about the witness's experience during the January 1999 rebel invasion of Freetown. Counsel asked the witness about an individual he mentioned as having seen at Shell Gas Station when rebels entered Freetown in January 1999. The man's name according to the witness was High Way. He explained that the man had been imprisoned at pademba Road Prison for murder and he was released by rebels when they released all the prisoners upon entering the capital. Asked how he knew that the man's name was High Way, the witness said that everybody in Freetown knew about High Way as he had murdered a former Bank Governor as well as a medical doctor. He said that High Way was very notorious. He also informed the court that High Way was armed when he saw him.

Further explaining his experiences, the witness said that at Falcon Street, the rebels asked all residents to move outside and dance for peace with white cloth. He said that the rebels started harrassing civilians after some time. Some of the rebels were armed, while some were not, the witness explained. He further said that at some point, the rebels asked the civilians to move to the center of town at PZ and dance for peace. He said he refused to go but based on what he heard, the ECOMOG Alpha Jet dropped a bomb thus killing 17 civilians who went to PZ. He said that at some point, a group of rebels went and stayed at Falcon Street, where he resided.

At some point, the witness said a group of rebels, led by one Tommy went to his house, entered his room where he had kept a suitcase. Among the rebels, he said were adults and children, both males and females. While some of them wore military fatigue, he said some had civilian clothes on. He said some of the rebels called themselves the Junta and some spoke with Liberian accent.

The witness also said that he interacted with a small boy in the group called Kelleh. When he realised that the boy was his Limba tribesman, he asked the boy why he had joined the group and the boy, he said, told him that he was captured eight years ago.

When ECOMOG Jets started dropping bombs, the witness said the gang left his house but another group went there and searched the entire house. He said when they went upstairs, they found a police uniform wrapped in a bag. He said the rebels thought he was a police officer but he explained to them and showed them his work ID that he was not a police officer. He said the rebels searched him and took away the Le. 50,000 he had with him. Two days later, the witness said he saw the Kissy Mental Home on fire. He said some other rebels entered his house, took the rice his wife had cooked, took some alcohol that he had and

set the house on fire. According to the witness, he was hiding in the bath room outside the house. When the rebels left, he said he came and put out the fire but the rebels came back and set fire to the house again. He said that other house and structures close to his house were set on fire and so together with his family and other neighbours, they hid themselves in a banana plantation.

Court went into brief private session to allow the witness to mention the name of a person who was sexually assaulted. While hiding in the banana plantation, the witness said two girls between the ages of 16-18 were taken away by the rebels and they were only seen after the disarmament in Sierra Leone. He also said that while in hiding, a young baby cried and that brought the rebels' attention to where they were hiding. Because of this, he said they all escaped and moved into different directions. On their way, he said he saw a man who was shot and killed by the rebels. He said when the rebels halted them, some people escaped but he stayed to protect his family. One Mr. Barry, he said confronted the rebels and his hands were chopped off by the rebels using an axe. Mr. Barrie, he said left his children and went away. The rebels told him to go to Tejan Kabbah.

The witness said he was the next person to be called by the rebels. He said they chopped off his left hand and when his son cried about it, they threatened to cut off the son's hand as well but the witness said he told the rebels that they had rather chop off his other hand than do same to his son. As a result, he said the rebels chopped off his right hand as well. Both hands, he said were now hanging off when he told his family to move along with the civilians while he went to look for a clinic. When he got to the clinic, he said it was closed and so he decided to move ahead. While moving, he said he fell into a gutter and started screaming. ECOMOG soldiers later took him to the Cannnaught Hospital where his chopped hands were amputated. He said he spent six months in the hospital, after which he was moved to the Amputee Camp at Aberdeen, in the western part of Freetown.

Counsel had the court view a short video of the witness and his son explaining their plight at the amputee camp at Aberdeen. The witness said he spent over five years at the camp and that there were over 280,000 of them there.

When asked whether this experience has had any impact on him, the witness explained that because of his amputation, he can no longer work and now lives as a begger. He said it is now even difficult to control his family.

Thus ended the examination of the witness.

Cross-Examination

Defence counsel Courtenay Griffiths QC cross-examined the witness. Counsel's cross-examination was very short as he just asked the witness about the various stages of the conflict. Counsel asked the witness where he was when the war started in Sierra Leone. The witness responded that he was based in Freetown at that time. He said he heard peopel say that the war had started around Kailahun and Pujehun. He said he was not following the trend of the war so much on radio at this time.

When asked about the NPRC coup that toppled Joseph Momoh in 1992, the witness said he was in Freetown at that time. He said he was also in Freetown when the AFRC overthrew Tejan Kabbah in 1997. According to the witness, he knew that the RUF joined the AFRC in 1997. He said he was in Freetown when ECOMOG drove the AFRC out of power in 1998. He further reiterated his experiences during the January 1999 invasion of Freetown.

Thus ended the cross-examination of the witness.

This brought to an end the prosecution's evidence against Charles Taylor. Presiding judge Richard Lissick thanked all parties for their cooperation during this phase of the trial. Court was adjourned to February 9, 2009 when the Chamber will hold a Status Conference and determine how to proceed with the defence case.

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Afternoon Session: Witness TF1-303 Concludes Her Testimony; Final Prosecution Witness TF1-278 Commences His Testimony

3:00pm: Court resumed and witness TF1-303 concluded her testimony. The prosecution also commenced the examination of its last witness in the Charles Taylor trial, TF1-278.

Cross-Examination of Witness TF1-303

Defence counsel Morris Anyah continued the cross-examination of the witness. Counsel continued soliciting information from the witness's testimony that contradicted her written statements to prosecution investigators.

Counsel referenced the witness's statement that Sgt. Foday's wife met her at Superman Ground. The witness agreed that the account is correct. She said that she went to Superman Ground with Mammie but did not count how many months she spent there. Counsel referenced the witness's statement to prosecution investigators that she spent three months at Superman Ground but the witness insisted that she did not count the months. Counsel also asked her whether she told investigators that Mammie used to beat her and that Sgt. Foday used to rape her while she was with Mammie. The witness said she did say so. In response to questions about Superman's location at this time, the witness said that he was based at Mayor (Superman Ground). She said that prior to moving to Mayor, Superman was based at Hill Station. Counsel asked the witness whether Superman lived at Dabundeh Road prior to his relocation to Superman Ground and the witness said she did not know whether that was the case. She said that she knew of Superman living at Hill Station.

Counsel asked the witness whether she ever knew the name Short Bai Bureh. The witness said while she never met him personally, she heard about him. She also said she knew Co. Banya and that he lived at Banya Ground. She also said that she knew Rambo and that he used to live at Jalloh Town. She said she has not heard about Savage and cannot recall hearing the name Co. Rocky. Counsel told the witness that a previous witness had said that Superman lived at Dabundeh Ground and then moved to PC. Ground in March 1998. The witness said she did not know about that. She said she met Superman at Superman Ground.

According to the witness, when ECOMOG troops attacked Koidu in 1998, rebels ran to different places in Kono District such as Gandohun, Tombodu, etc. She said she cannot say who the commander was in Tombodu. At Superground, she said that commanders based there included Co. Kailahun, Co. Karmoh, etc. She said that she saw Peleto there but he was only visiting. In relation to those who spoke Liberian English, the witness mentioned that Major Borkito did as well as Sgt. Foday. Counsel told the witness that she never told investigators that Sgt. Foday spoke Liberian English but the witness insisted that she did. Counsel also told the witness that she only mentioned for the first time that there was a Liberian English speaker at Superman Ground in October 2008. She said that she also heard other people speak Liberian English at Superman Ground. She reiterated that Rambo and Peleto were not based at Superman Ground.

Counsel also referenced the witness's statement that when she was in Kailahun, together with other people, she used to go to Dawa in Liberia. The witness responded while she mentioned that she used to go to Dawa, she never added that Dawa was in Liberia.

On the issue of Bockarie giving orders that rebels should amputate the arms and limbs of civilians, the witness said that while Sgt. Foday told her about this order, she never accompanied rebels on such a mission and cannot say where this order was carried out.

The witness said that from Superman Ground, she was sent to Giema to stay with Sgt. Foday's mother. Counsel referenced the witness's statement that there was an order for civilians to be taken to Kailahun for military training but that Sgt. Foday did not allow the witness to go. She agreed that this was the correct account. She also said that on occasions, she worked on Sankoh's farm in Kailahun. Counsel sought to establish that Sankoh was in custody at this time and so how possible was it for him to have a farm. The witness said she heard of Sankoh's custody but she still had orders to work on his farm. She also explained that her mother's friend had to take her to Kailahun from Giema. G4 Commander, Moigbeh was the husband of the woman who rescued her.

The witness agreed with counsel that she had knowledge of the RUF and AFRC trials going on at the Special Court in Freetown but she did not testify in any of them.

Counsel asked the witness about monies she received from the court while preparing for her testimony. The witness agreed that she did receive money from the court but cannot say what the amount was. Counsel went through a list of expenditures on the witness's behalf and pointed that among other things that the witness received Le. 576,000 for witness attendance, Le. 235,000 for transportation, Le. 226,000 for medical expenses, 225,000 for miscellaneous expenses, etc. Counsel pointed out that in total, the witness received Le. 2,439,500, which converts into \$813.16. She agreed with counsel that the money helped her when she gave birth to her baby.

Thus ended the cross-examination of the witness.

Re-Examination

Prosecution counsel Ms. Hollis sought to clarify a few things that had come up in cross-examination. The witness stated that Sgt. Foday's wife's name was Fattie and that she met her (witness) at Superman Ground. She also said she told counsel she was not captured in Koidu but Baima. She said that they spent sometime in the bush but went back with her family to Baima town where they occupied a house. While in the house, one night, Pepeh came with his boys and kicked the door open. Pepeh ordered her entire family to move outside and said he was going to take the witness away as his wife.

Thus ended the re-examination of the witness.

Judges's Questions

Justice Sebutinde asked the witness whether the first person who interviewed her in Koidu had introduced herself as a staff of the Special Court. The witness responded that she cannot say whether the person was an employee of the court but she had told her she was from Freetown.

The witness ended her testimony

Examination of Witness TF1-278

The prosecution called its final witness in the Charles Taylor trial and was led in evidence by Mr. Nicholas Koumjian. The witness, named Mr. Conteh is 59 years old and speaks Limba, Temne and Krio. He said he has lived in Freetown for very many years. Counsel asked the witness about the January 1999 invasion of Freetown.

January 1999 Invasion of Freetown

The witness said he was at Falkon Street in Freetown when the January 1999 invasion of Freetown took place. He said he was running a business close to his house at Falkon Street. According to the witness, he lived in the same house with other family members including his wife, son and other relatives. His son, Karim was 4 years old and his wife's younger sister Marie was 16 years old. There was also Tenneh and Naniyor at the same house. He said that on January 6 1999, he was with a friend inside his house when at about 2am, they heard gun shots and people singing in Temne, saying "we have come." The following day, he said he heard that the rebels had opened Pademba Road Prisons. He said that he had given money to somebody to buy him alcohol for his business but since he had not heard back from the person, he went out to go look for him. When he got to Shell Gas Station, he took some locally brewed palm wine which he took home. On his way home, he said he saw a man who was released from prison, called High Way. Asked how he knew High Way, the witness explained that High Way was a renowned murderer and everybody in Freetown knew about him. He said he saw several other gun men roaming about.

Court adjourned and the witness is set to continue his testimony tomorrow.

BBC World Service Trust

Saturday, 31 January 2009

Round-up of prosecution case

Before resting evidence against Charles Taylor, the prosecution at the Special Court for Sierra Leone produced 91 witnesses in total. Most of the witnesses alleged that Mr. Taylor indeed supported the rebels in Sierra Leone. The prosecution indicted Mr. Taylor for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Liberian Journalist, Joseph Cheeseman working for the BBC World Service Trust watched the prosecution case from the beginning to the end. In this round-up of the prosecution case, he starts with the Court Manager reading out count five of the charges against Mr. Taylor.

Ugandan Lady Justice, Julia Sebutinde Presided over the trial of Charles Taylor when it started in 2007.

She asked Mr. Taylor about his reaction to the allegation of sexual slavery.

Mr. Taylor is still presumed innocent until the World hears his side of the case.

Ninety-one witnesses including experts, victims of sexual slavery, amputees and insiders painted a graphic picture the horrific atrocities in Sierra Leone.

But the prosecution major task is to convince the Judges that Mr. Taylor bears the greatest responsibilities for those atrocities.

The Former Liberian Leader has a robust Defense Team made of three internationally reputed Lawyers, including a Queen's Counsel, QC.

But can they free their client from this international criminal hook? The World is anxiously awaiting the outcome.

The prosecution took a little over one year to produce evidence of Mr. Taylor's alleged support to the Sierra Leone rebel group, the RUF.

Now that the prosecution has rested evidence, how much time does the Defense need to plan its case? Courtenay Griffiths is Taylor's Lead Defense Lawyer.

There are no indications that Mr. Taylor would leave his Netherlands jail during the break of the Defense.

But the Prosecutor, Stephen Rapp said whatever time period Mr. Taylor spends in jail before the conclusion of the case is in favour of the Former Liberian Leader.

Mr. Rapp also indicated that Mr. Taylor would not face death penalty or life sentence if he were convicted.

The prosecution has rested evidence.

But it is now waiting for the trial chamber to take a number of important decisions on outstanding motions.

After the Judges decisions on those motions the prosecution would conclude its case.

Those decisions are likely to be taken by the Judges in the coming month.

A status conference is scheduled to take place in The Hague on next Monday, February 9.

Charles Taylor was indicted by the Special Court Prosecutor in March 2003.

The indictment did not take effect until June 2003.

Two months later Mr. Taylor stepped down as President of Liberia.

He went into exile in Nigeria. On March 29, 2006, he was arrested and transferred to the jurisdiction of the Special Court.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone is an independent tribunal established by the Government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations.

It is mandated to bring to justice those who bear the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed in Sierra Leone after November 30, 1996.

Agence France Presses
Saturday, 31 January 2009

Amputee testimony ends prosecution of Liberia's Taylor

THE HAGUE (AFP) — The final prosecution witness in the trial of ex-Liberian president Charles Taylor told judges Friday how he pleaded with rebels to cut off his last remaining hand so they would spare his toddler son.

Alusine Conteh told the Special Tribunal for Sierra Leone that he, his wife and four-year-old son had encountered a group of soldiers on the road in January 1999 while fleeing attacks in the capital Freetown on foot.

After being made to watch as a man in civilian clothes chopped off a family friend's hands on the soldiers' instructions, Conteh was himself ordered to step forward.

"The only thing I asked of them, was 'What have I done?'. I put my left hand on the slab. He raised the axe and hacked once.

"My child screamed out: 'Don't cut off my father's hand'. The soldiers said he was making a noise and they said we should untie him from his mother's back.

"I said: 'Instead of you chopping off his hand, chop off both of mine'. They said I should place my right hand, and they hacked it twice."

Conteh, his stumps wrapped in bandages, was the 91st and final witness to testify in Taylor's trial on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity stemming from the brutal 1991-2001 civil war in Sierra Leone.

About 120,000 people were killed in the conflict, with rebels mutilating thousands more -- cutting off arms, legs, ears or noses.

Taylor is accused of arming, training and controlling Sierra Leone's notorious Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, blamed for many of the mutilations, in exchange for diamonds used to fund warfare.

Conteh told the court that men in RUF uniforms had burnt down homes, including his own, in Freetown's Kissy area.

He and his family hid with dozens of others in a banana plantation for two days.

"On the morning of the third day, a child screamed. She said she was hungry."

This alerted men Conteh described as "combatants", who fired into the plantation shouting: "If you don't come out we will kill you". People fled in different directions.

It was then that Conteh encountered the men, four in uniform and one in civilian clothes, who attacked him and his friend, Boi Barrie.

Barrie, carrying his daughters aged five and six, was their first victim, the witness recalled.

"He pleaded with them in the name of God. They asked him: 'Do you see God?'. They ordered him to put down the children.

"One took out an axe. They first hit his left hand. One of the children went to him, but they kicked her and she fell. Then they hit the other hand. He left his children there and left, his hands hanging. There was no bone, just flesh.

"Then they called me."

Formerly a small businessman, Conteh said he has been reduced to begging. His son is his hands.

"Even if I want to eat, he is the one who helps me."

The trial before the UN-backed court started in The Hague in June 2007, and the prosecution expects it to be concluded before the end of this year.

It had been moved from Freetown for fears that Taylor's presence in the African country could destabilise the region.

The hearing will adjourn before the start of the defence case, which may involve Taylor taking the stand.

The Patriotic Vanguard

Saturday, 31 January 2009

Taylor family in trouble

The family of former Liberian President Charles Taylor is facing two distressful situations. Early this month an American criminal court sentenced Chuckie Taylor, the heir apparent of the indicted former Liberian leader, to a 97 year prison term. Charles Taylor, the father of Chuckie Taylor, is facing trial on an eleven count charges for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Netherlands. So, how is the former Liberian president reacting to the 97 year sentence of his son? This was the question Joseph Cheeseman asked Charles Taylor's Lead Defense Lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths(photo).



GRIFFITHS: Well of course as a father it's a matter of great concern to him, and a matter of great distress. And one has to wonder what the sense is in giving a young man a sentence of that nature, almost a century behind bars. Any objective individual looking at that sentence must ask themselves about the sanity of the United States justice system.

CHEESEMAN: So what has he said to you regarding this?

GRIFFITHS: Well as I say, he's concerned about the sentence, but beyond that I'm not really prepared to divulge what has passed between me and my lay client.

CHEESEMAN: Now the Prosecutor told me that some unidentified persons threatened some of the discouraged some of their witnesses and discouraged them from testifying against Mr. Taylor. You wouldn't be surprised if you should face similar threats.

GRIFFITHS: Well it wouldn't surprise me at all, because that part of the world is still riven by a degree of factionalism which one hopes would have diminished by now, but sadly hasn't. And it may well be that people still feel strongly about that episode in their history and might feel moved to intervene and interview with witnesses in this way. One thing I can say to you hand on heart is that Mr. Taylor is not behind any orchestration of interference with witnesses. He's certainly not behind that. Everybody knows his telephone calls from the prison are monitored. If he was giving out orders to that effect, the authorities would have known and would have refused him access to the telephone. That has not happened, precisely because he is not doing that.

CHEESEMAN: I spoke with the Prosecutor in December, and he told me that at the end of the trial, if Mr. Taylor is found guilty, the Prosecution will be applying for what he called a "supplementary hearing" for Mr. Taylor to account for Sierra Leone's diamonds. Would this be tantamount to double jeopardy?

GRIFFITHS: Well it's not a question of double jeopardy. I must say the Prosecution and indeed the Western media are being fairly consistent in this regard. They've constantly claimed that Mr. Taylor benefited enormously from the diamond wealth of Sierra Leone. They've had many years in which to investigate this, and they still haven't come up with a single stone. So one wonders whether or not there is any truth in their claim which they've pursued vigorously all these years, that he's sitting on diamond wealth somewhere.

CHEESEMAN: Some of the witnesses who allegedly worked with Mr. Taylor in Monrovia testified here that indeed they transported diamonds from Sierra Leone to Monrovia to Mr. Taylor.

GRIFFITHS: Nobody's denying that diamonds may well have been transported to Monrovia, but what is quite clear is the RUF had their own contacts within the worldwide market for diamonds, whereby they themselves were capable of selling those diamonds for their own benefit. And one wonders why, giving that they had such contacts with Lebanese merchants and others, why they would need to pay some sort of a commission to Mr. Taylor to enable those transactions to go ahead. Why do you need a middleman when historically you always have those links? So I have real doubts about this Prosecution claim that Mr. Taylor is sitting on all these resources which he illegally obtained from Sierra Leone. I just don't believe it's true.

News Story

Lead Defense Lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths says the 97 year prison sentence of Liberia Former Anti-terrorist Unit Commander Chuckie Taylor is a matter of great distress to the father, Charles Taylor.

Mr. Griffiths said he was not prepared to disclose what Mr. Taylor told him about the nearly 100-year prison term of his son, Chuckie Taylor.

Mr. Griffiths, the head of Mr. Taylor's legal team, wondered what the sense was in giving a young man a sentence of that nature.

He told the BBC World Service Trust that any objective individual looking at that sentence would ask himself about what he called the sanity of the American justice system.

Mr. Griffiths also denied that Mr. Taylor or his associates in Monrovia were behind an alleged threat issued out to Prosecution witnesses.

The Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Stephen Rapp, told the BBC Trust last month that some unidentified persons in Liberia threatened some of his witnesses from testifying against Mr. Taylor.

Mr. Griffiths also denied that his client, Mr. Taylor, was restoring diamonds looted from Sierra Leone by the rebels.

He said the RUF rebels had their own business contacts so they did not have to use the then Liberian President, Charles Taylor, as a middle man.

The Defense lawyer declared that the Prosecution case against the former Liberian leader was what he referred to as riddled with holes and inconsistencies.

Meanwhile the court continues in closed session.

Source: Courtesy of BBC World Service Trust.

United Nations  **Nations Unies**

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries
30 January 2009

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

Newspaper Summary

TRC Commissioner faces constant accusations over alleged support to a Disbanded Rebel Faction

(The Analyst, New Democrat)

- Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner, Sheikh Kafumba Konneh has for the fourth time been accused of supporting the defunct rebel faction United Liberation Movement for Democracy (ULIMO).
- Testifying at the ongoing thematic and institutional hearings Thursday, a former ULIMO General, Mohammed Sherriff alleged that Commissioner Konneh was a member of the former warring faction political wing.
- In recent months, there had been incessant accusations against Commissioner Sheikh Kafumba Konneh of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) about roles he had allegedly played during the Liberian civil war as a backer of the disbanded rebel faction, United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO).
- A former General of LURD, Ofori Diah and a Liberian in the diaspora, Tarty Teh last year made similar claims but Commissioner Konneh has persistently denied the allegations dismissing, saying it's a smear campaign against him.

Lawmakers Cite Ambiguity in President's comments regarding County Development Fund - Seek Clarification

(Public Agenda, Heritage, National Chronicle, New Democrat, The News, Daily Observer)

- The House of Representatives is requesting clarification from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf over her recent statement for members of the National Legislature to withdraw from the implementation of the County Development Funds.
- The lawmakers are calling for more information on the intent of the statement citing ambiguity in the pronouncement.
- In her State of the Nation address, the President said the withdrawal will enable the Executive to fully manage the implementation of the resources allotted to the counties.
- There have been numerous reports of fraud in the use of the county development fund with County Superintendents and lawmakers being accused.

Youth and Sports Ministry Deploys 135 Youths for Volunteer Service

(Daily Observer)

- The Ministry of Youth and Sports (MYS) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), on Thursday began the deployment of 135 young men and women under phase two of the National Youth Volunteer Service (NYVS).

- The volunteers completed a three-week induction course in education, health, agriculture and other subjects prior to their deployment. They are being deployed in six counties namely - Bong, Lofa, Grand Gedeh, Grand Bassa, Maryland and Sinoe Counties.

US Firm Faces Exploitation Charge in Liberia

(Daily Observer)

- [sic] Citizens of Kokoyah Statutory District in Bong County have threatened to stop the American-Liberia Mineral Company (AMLIB) from operating in their district over assumptions that the company, which has been prospecting for gold over the last nine years, has been exploiting the area instead.

Business Organization Backs President Sirleaf's Plan to Cut Taxes

(Daily Observer)

- A local business organization says it strongly backs President Sirleaf's tax cut policy for businesses and individuals. The Concerned Liberian International Business Organization (COLINBO) said recent tax cut policy proposals made to the Legislature by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the reduction in the price of rice from US\$35 to US\$30 were in the best interest of the business community and the people of Liberia.

Radio Summary

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

Commissioner Konneh Accused Again of Support to Rebel Group

(Also reported on Sky F.M., Truth F.M. and ELBC)

Legislature Seeks Clarification Over President Sirleaf's Pronouncement

(Also reported on Sky F.M., Truth F.M. and ELBC)

Truth F.M. *(News monitored today at 10:00 am)*

Commerce Ministry Announces Price Reduction on Basic Commodities

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry has announced a reduction in the prices of basic commodities on the Liberian market.
- At a news conference yesterday, Commerce Minister, Miatta Beyslow named rice, cement and petroleum products as the commodities affected by the price reduction.

Female Lawmakers Claim Marginalization

- Female lawmakers from the lower House have expressed dissatisfaction over the leadership reshuffle saying it was targeted at female lawmakers.
- At a joint news conference yesterday, the female lawmakers said they were singled out of the dominant male House of Representatives and replaced as heads of the committees they were serving.
- Since the reshuffle of the House leadership, there have been claims that the changes were not done in good faith but were targeted at certain individuals.

Cocorioko

Sunday, 1 February 2009

Witness: Moses Blah Participated In Sam Bockarie's Killing

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

Continental Realty Building,
9th Street, Sinkor
P.O. BOX 717 Telephone: 231 6 543829

Monrovia, Liberia

Press Release

Monrovia, February 1, 2009: Former Vice President Moses Blah took part in the murder of RUF commander Sam Bockarie, a witness told commissioners of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).

Mohammed Sheriff, a senior commander of the defunct Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) of exiled President Charles Taylor said Blah conspired and participated in the killing of Bockarie in the town of Tiaplay in Nimba County. Sheriff said the late Sierra Leonean rebel commander was murdered upon the orders of then President Taylor who was informed that Bockarie was conspiring against him.

He said an order was passed to General Benjamin Yeaten to recall Bockarie who was fighting alongside dissident forces fighting the Government of La Cote D' Ivoire. "Bockarie and his men came across the border into Liberia based on the order and when he reached the Town of Tiaplay, Yeaten invited him to have meal with him and Moses Blah, the former vice president," he explained.

Mr. Sheriff was testifying recently at the ongoing public hearings of the TRC at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in Monrovia. "After an order came to Ivory Coast by the President Charles Taylor through General Yeaten, everybody was surprised at the order to retreat. We all were taken to Tiaplay in a town called Bloh together with Sam Bockarie and his families.

An order was given for us to be tied and Sam Bockarie was called upon to go and eat together with the Vice President Moses Blah, Gen. Yeaten and Joe Tuah." After eating, Sheriff explained, Yeaten told Bockarie to escort them to an unknown destination somewhere in the forest, where he was swept down by group of Yeaten and Blah bodyguards and beaten to death. He said the Sierra Leonean rebel commander was later shot to prove that he was killed in an exchange of gunfire.

He said following the death of Bockarie, Yeaten ordered his (Bockarie's) senior bodyguard, Gen. Salami "to sex his wife" to death. He said Yeaten's bodyguards then killed the RUF commander's mother and children. "He was beaten to death and fired; Gen. Salami sexed his wife (Mama Hawa) to death; killed his mother (Mama Fatu) and his son, Corporal." Sheriff said they were then released and Bockarie's body was transported to Monrovia "in order to create a camouflage that he was ambushed." "They then left men down to Tiaplay to execute men loyal to the late Gen. Sam Bockarie. They were even over 700 men that were killed on that day," he said.

He explained also that in Monrovia, wounded fighters loyal to Bockarie who were hospitalized were loaded into three trucks and executed somewhere along the Bomi Highway to conceal evidence after the

agitated for remuneration to return to Sierra Leone. Sheriff said the government also hunted and eliminated other Sierra Leonean fighters that were residing in other parts of Monrovia as part of its campaign to “destroy evidence.”

During his appearance before the TRC last year, Mr. Blah said that he only knew about Bockarie’s death when Gen. Yeaten stopped over in his town while enroute to Monrovia and showed him his corpse.

Blah: “Yeaten was passing through the town one day when he came and told me they had just come from an operation. Yeaten told me chief we just came from an operation so come and see. When I looked in the pickup I saw the body of Bockarie lying down in a pool of blood.”

Liberia is recovering from years of conflict that was characterized by horrific human rights violations, including arbitrary killings, use of child combatants, rape and sexual violence, separation of families, and looting and destruction of properties. Out of a population of 3 million, an estimated 300,000 Liberians were killed, with as many as 1.5 million displaced.

Under the theme: “Understanding the Conflict Through its Principal Events and Actors,” the ongoing hearings are addressing the root causes of the conflict, including its military and political dimensions. The hearings are focused on events between 1979 and 2003 and the national and external actors that helped to shape those events. The TRC was agreed upon in the August 2003 peace agreement and created by the TRC Act of 2005.

The TRC was established to “promote national peace, security, unity and reconciliation,” and at the same time make it possible to hold perpetrators accountable for gross human rights violations and violations of international humanitarian law that occurred in Liberia between January 1979 and October 2003. -30

-Signed: _____

Mambu James Kpargoi

Media & Information Officer

BBC Online

Friday, 30 January 2009

Witness 'trained child soldiers'

The International Criminal Court in The Hague has heard from a man who says he trained children to use Kalashnikovs for DR Congo warlord Thomas Lubanga.

The unnamed former militia fighter was giving evidence at Mr Lubanga's trial for war crimes allegedly committed during the five-year civil conflict.

He said Mr Lubanga had told child recruits in his camp: "Do not be afraid. The war will not be difficult."

Mr Lubanga denies using hundreds of child soldiers during the war.

His trial opened on Monday after a seven-month delay, as judges and prosecutors disputed confidential evidence.

He is the first person to be tried at the ICC.

'Fighting and dying'

Taking the stand on Friday, the unnamed former fighter said he had joined Mr Lubanga's militia, the Union of Congolese Patriots, in 2002 after militia commanders threatened to burn his village if the young people did not join its ranks.



Mr Lubanga denies the charges



THOMAS LUBANGA

Leader of the Union of Congolese Patriots, an ethnic Hema militia
 Accused of recruiting children under 15 as soldiers
 Arrested in Kinshasa in March 2005
 Held by the ICC at The Hague since 2006

He said that children had been among the group that went with them to a training camp.

Born in 1960, has a degree in psychology

The militia made him an instructor since he had already served in the DR Congolese army, in which he had served seven months as a child soldier in 1997, at the age of 13.

[Trial starts road to justice](#)
[Profile: Thomas Lubanga](#)

He taught children to shoot and the basics of combat, he said.

Underage children were often assigned to officers as armed "bodyguards or escorts", he said.

"Children were deployed in companies, battalions, brigades and platoons. They were like soldiers."

Eventually, the witness added, he saw children fighting and dying in several battles.

"If the commander gave the order, everyone had to fire, even the children," he testified.

The first witness at the trial retracted his testimony after first saying he had been recruited by Mr Lubanga's fighters on his way home from school.

The prosecutor, Fatou Bensouda, asked for an investigation into whether the witness, who was also unidentified, feared for his personal safety after the trial.

TheStar.com

Sunday, 1 February 2009

<http://www.thestar.com/comment/article/580097>

Bringing justice to the warlords

EDITORIAL

Why put an obscure African warlord on trial at The Hague for crimes committed in a backwater region of Congo during a civil war years ago? Does this make sense? Can justice be done? And should the world care at this late date?

Yes, on all counts. The trial of Thomas Lubanga, which began last week at the International Criminal Court, matters a great deal. And not just because it is the first trial at the court.

During some of the Democratic Republic of Congo's darkest days in 2002 and 2003, Lubanga allegedly forced children who were not yet 15 to be soldiers, sending them to their deaths to keep his grip on the remote Ituri region and its gold deposits. If true, that is a war crime. But it is far from a rare event even today in Congo, and other places.

Some 250,000 "child soldiers" under age 18 have been pressed into service by warlords and others as fighters, spies, sex slaves or in related support roles, reports Amnesty International. "Significant recruitment starts at the age of 10 and the use of even younger children has been recorded," Amnesty says, despite efforts to end the vile practice.

Using youths under 15 as fighters is a war crime under the Rome Statute that set up the court. It also violates a United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child protocol that outlaws youth fighters under 18. Canada and a majority of countries endorse all this.

Yet youths continue to be recruited as warriors not only in Congo but also in Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Myanmar, the Mideast, Sri Lanka, Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, Sierra Leone and other places.

And the practice will persist until warlords and others understand they can no longer send children to their deaths with impunity. However the Lubanga case plays out, the ICC is using this first prosecution to warn child abusers that they risk being called to account.

This message carries weight. Unlike special UN tribunals and courts for the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Cambodia and Lebanon, with their limited shelf lives, the ICC is a permanent court with broad jurisdiction. If it can try a Congolese warlord, it can try others.

Indeed the court is considering indicting Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, a sitting head of state, for alleged genocide in Darfur.

By prosecuting those who employ child soldiers or who commit genocide and other crimes against humanity, the ICC will set a powerful international judicial example and establish universal precedents.

Under international law, alleged war criminals should be tried in the countries where they commit their crimes. That is the best deterrent. But it is not always practical. Some national governments are too weak or are unwilling to prosecute. The ICC was created to deal with such cases, as a court of last resort.

In Congo's darkest, most chaotic days, ruthless men considered children expendable. Some still do, in Congo and elsewhere. But the world does not. That is why Thomas Lubanga's trial matters.

BBC Online

Wednesday, 29 January 2009

'I forgive friend who killed my family'

John Paul Samputu's family was murdered during Rwanda's genocide of 1994 by a friend and a neighbour. He still calls him a friend because he has forgiven him.

John Paul is now an ambassador of peace and next month he will take part in an international forgiveness conference in his homeland. The BBC World Service's Mark Whitaker spoke to him:

JP: "In Rwanda we need to heal the wounds of the past. It's now 15 years but when you look at what happened in the genocide people are still affected."

MW: "Do you think 15 years is long enough?"

JP: "It's like one year. People still have bitterness, anger and the spirit of revenge."

MW: "You talk about reconciliation and your own reconciliation is perhaps one of the most remarkable that I have heard. Your entire family was killed by your neighbour, someone who was a friend, and you have now forgiven him?"

JP: "Yes I have forgiven him because I didn't have any choice. By forgiving him, I was healed. And me and him together, we are now dedicated to promoting peace and reconciliation."

MW: "Why do you say you didn't have a choice?"

JP: "After the genocide, when I went to my village and I learnt that my best friend was the one who killed my parents, it destroyed me. I couldn't understand why a very good friend would do that. I lost my mind.

"It took nine years dealing with anger and bitterness. I lost my career. I was addicted... drugs. At the end, I realised I was destroying myself."

MW: "You must have wanted to kill him?"

JP: "Yeah - the first time. I didn't see him but I was going to kill him. I have never killed in my life. I decided to forgive him because I wanted to get healing."



Jean Paul Samputu wanted revenge but decided that would not "heal him"
He (my friend) said: 'We had the laws of the genocide. And I had to kill your father' ”

Jean Paul Samputu

MW: "Your friend is a killer. What did he say to you when you said: 'I want to forgive you'?"

JP: "The first time he thought it was a political game. He was thinking: 'How can he forgive me when I can not forgive myself?' It was hard to understand."

MW: "Has he ever explained to you why he did it?"

JP: "Of course. Because now we are together we talk about everything."

"He said: 'You know Samputu, your father was a very good friend. More than you."

"And I asked him: 'If he was your friend, why did you kill him?'"

"He said: 'You don't understand. We had the laws of the genocide. In the genocide, the law was that your best friend, your close neighbour, was the one who must be killed by you, because you were close. And I had to kill your father because I was the closest'."

MW: "And that was repeated across Rwanda? Those sort of interpersonal relationships were distorted?"

JP: "Even the husband killed his wife. It was not killing for them, it was working. If you kill many people then you are rewarded."

MW: "Do you think your father will be proud of you?"

JP: "If I revenge or I kill because he was killed, I think he (my father) would not accept that..."

"I can't do what they did... If I don't forgive, what do we do to the other children?"

"It's a cycle of violence. A cycle of hatred. It's generations. The world, where we live, carries the wounds of not forgiving and future peace depends on what we do with that."

1994: RWANDA'S GENOCIDE



6 April: President Habyarimana killed in plane explosion
 April - July: Some 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus killed
 July: Tutsi-led rebel movement
 RPF captures the capital Kigali
 July: Two million Hutus flee to Zaire, now DR Congo

[Q&A: Search for justice](#)

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