SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OUTREACH AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

Outreach Officer Mohamed Kargbo addressing an audience at Mathirie, Koya Chiefdom on the day of the Taylor judgment

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:
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

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

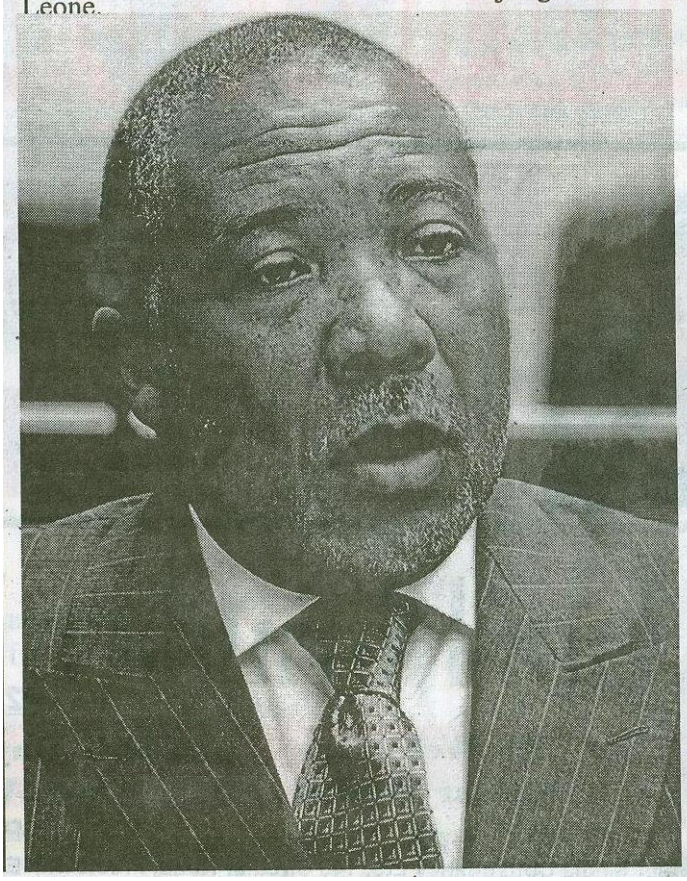
International News

Premier News
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

US Welcomes Taylor Verdict

The United States welcomes the issuance of the judgment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, convicting Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The judgment was an important step toward delivering justice and accountability for victims, restoring peace and stability in the country and the region, and completing the Special Court for Sierra Leone's mandate to prosecute those persons who bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities committed in Sierra Leone.



The Taylor prosecution at the Special Court delivers a strong message to all perpetrators of atrocities, including those in the highest positions of power, that they will be held accountable.

The trial of Charles Taylor is of enormous historical and legal significance as it is the first of a powerful head of state to be brought to judgment before an international tribunal on charges of mass atrocities and serious violations of international humanitarian law.

Over 90 witnesses testified during the trial, bringing to light the range of crimes committed during the war in Sierra Leone, and affirming the importance of justice for the victims.

The United States has been a strong supporter and the leading donor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone since its inception.

The successful completion of the Special Court's work remains a top U.S. Government priority.

Premier News
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

CARL Urges Government To Improve Social And Economic Services Delivery

The Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL) on Monday welcomed, in a press release, the conviction of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, for aiding and abetting rebels who committed egregious crimes against the people of Sierra Leone.

It notes in the release that it believes the verdict is a victory for justice and the people of Sierra Leone, and urged the government to learn from the trial, and to make genuine efforts at combating impunity and promoting the rule of law in Sierra Leone.

The center also observes that after five-years and at least 120 witness testimonies, the Special Court's Trial Chamber II on April 26 issued a verdict which confirmed the long-held suspicion that Charles Taylor supported rebels who killed, maimed, raped women and children, recruited child soldiers, and committed other serious crimes against the people of Sierra Leone during the country's civil conflict.

"It must have been a relief for Sierra Leoneans, particularly those most affected by the war, to learn that Charles Taylor, a key supporter of the rebels who wreaked cruelty on them, has been convicted. This verdict would help smooth out the bumps in the path to healing the wounds of the war," Ibrahim Tommy, Executive Director of the Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law, said.

It commended the international community's commitment to delivering justice to the victims of the Sierra Leone conflict, but lamented that more than a decade after the war, there are still serious gaps in meeting the social and economic needs of the victims.

It however recognized the strong efforts of the Reparations Programmes, through the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA), in providing some amount of reparations for the victims, though it notes, the support has been largely insufficient and falls far below the expectations and basic needs of the victims.

"The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report of Sierra Leone placed the obligation of providing social and economic services for victims on the government, but the government has largely failed to fulfill this obligation.

"In spite of several promises to integrate the basic social services needs of victims into regular government programmes, the government has continued to disappoint the victims of the war.

"The government's failure to provide a sustainable and meaningful reparations package for the victims of the conflict has only made it difficult for the victims to overcome the challenges brought upon them by the war. This is a government of all Sierra Leoneans, and must care for all Sierra Leoneans, especially those who cannot now fend for themselves as a result of the war," CARL's Ibrahim Tommy said.

It concluded by calling on the government to take proper ownership of the scheme, and to collaborate with its international partners to provide the resources required for the Commission to do its work.

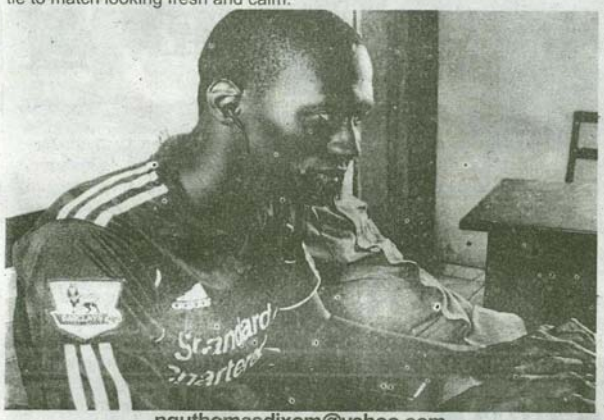
Salone Times
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

Lessons for African Leaders

By Thomas Dixon

The warlord and former President of Liberia Charles Gangay Taylor has been found guilty of all eleven count charge of aiding and abetting war crime against humanity in Sierra Leone.

The warlord started the war in Liberia in 1989 after his controversial escape from a sophisticated US prison. While listening to the BBC on Thursday people enjoyed the court proceeding at the Hague and the public opinion from both Liberia and Sierra Leone. There is a whole gamut of issues to pitch out in the verdict of the Former President of Liberia. Charles Taylor appeared before the court in a suit and red neck tie to match looking fresh and calm.



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While fighting the war in Liberia Taylor promised Sierra Leone a taste of war because Sierra Leone had participated in an intervention force of the Economic Community of West African States military wing called ECOMOG. This infuriated Charles Taylor and that was the reason he made that unfortunate and poisonous statement against Sierra Leone..

WAS TAYLOR BETRAYED BY AFRICAN LEADERS?

Many Pan Africanists believed that Charles Taylor was betrayed by African Leaders who canvassed and persuaded him to relinquish power in Liberia in the interest of peace to. Little did he know that he will be handed over to the Western Imperialist Strategists who themselves see Taylor as a betrayer. Taylor was convinced by the former Nigerian President and by then Chair of the ECOWAS Olusegun Obasanjo and the South African President and the then leader of the African Union Thabo Mbeki. One can't imagine how the two leaders will feel today after they have betrayed their comrade for few Western Goodies. Charles Taylor was captured at the Nigerian-Cameroon border after intense pressure on the Nigerian Government and a long meeting between President Bush who has his hands full of blood and President Obansanjo. This, many African who believed in the ideology of the Pan Africanism considered a Judas attitude by African Leaders against their colleague for few dollars. This is what one of the founders of the Organization of African Unity now the Africa Union Kwame Nkurama saw when he said that the last stage of neocolonialism is economic imperialism. Also from a liberalist point of view many African Leaders believed that Justice should be done to whoever is found wanting in order to put an end to impunity in Africa.

LEGAL, MORAL AND POLITICAL JUSTICE

The judgment of the special court for Sierra Leone in the Charles Taylor trial was faced with mixed reaction from both Sierra Leone and Liberia. While the Judge in the special court was criminalizing Charles Taylor by finding him guilty of all the eleven count charges of aiding and abating war crimes in Sierra Leone, Taylor was vindicated in the court of public opinion in Africa especially in his home country Liberia. One thought that while the guilty verdict was read in the Hague it would have been accepted by Sierra Leoneans in jubilant mood but it was taken by the people in a somber mood. That was because they were not just interested in the whole process or they were concentrating on finding their daily bread. On the other side of the border in neighboring Liberia, the verdict was received with disappointment which palpitated the imagination of many Liberians against. Sierra Leoneans who were victims of the war at the special court here said that they have been psychologically satisfied but raised concerns about their reparation which was recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). This is in fact the moral justice because millions if not billions of dollars were pumped into the special court while the victims are suffering. It was as a result of this that the Government of Sierra Leone set up the National Commission of Social Action (NaCSA) to help rehabilitate both the infrastructure of this country and the life of the victims of the war. The reparation program of NaCSA started in 2008 but did not continue. Now that the people of Sierra Leone have been given legal justice, it is high time they are given the moral justice by providing them with the reparation package. The West which was also buying the blood diamonds that were criminally mined from Sierra Leone should take the responsibility to help the government in the reparation programs of the victims of the war. The People of Liberia did look at the Justice at The Hague as a political judgment that was a ploy by the west to get rid of Charles Taylor. The people of Liberia still consider Charles Taylor a hero.

MANO RIVER UNION

Where did the guilty verdicts leave the diplomatic relationship between Sierra Leone and Liberia consequently the manor river union? It seems as if this judgment will stifle the good relationship between the people of Liberia and Sierra Leone. Obviously there will be a window dressing good relationship between the governments of both states. Liberia and Sierra Leone have similar culture and the two countries share about four ethnic groups between them but from the reactions of people in Sierra Leone and Liberia you will notice that there is already a rift especially on the Liberia side. The people hope this will not turn into chaos.

The Governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia must do something to tamper down their citizens. This must not also affect the proper functionality of the Manor River Union as Sierra Leone and Liberia are the main pillars of the existence of the Mano River Unions.

THE MYSTERIOUS RAINBOW ON THE SUNNY SKY

While listening to the verdict on the BBC, the Sierra Leonean born journalist Hassan Arouni screamed that something strange has happened in the Liberian capital. One thought that it was another breakdown in Monrovia, but according to Hassan, it was a rainbow that appeared mysteriously in the hot burning, sunny sky in Monrovia. For Africans, rainbow on the sky is symbol of many things, in Sierra Leone its depict the beginning and the end of the raining seasons. Surprisingly for the Liberians the rainbow on the sky in Liberia in the hot burning sun always marks a serious political issue in their country. This mysterious rainbow during the reading of the guilty verdict of Charles Taylor showed how important this Man was to the people of Liberia.

HOW THE INTERNATIONL MEDIA REPORTED THE TRIAL

The agenda for the Taylor's trial was not set by the media in Africa or the ones in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Even before the guilty verdict was read, the western media has already framed and primed the story. They mentioned the heinous crimes committed in Sierra Leone with the help of Charles Taylor. None of them was taking about the chances of Charles Taylor being exonerated. Also after the reading of the guilty verdict the western media were talking about the lesson learnt and what the verdict meant for other African Leaders. On second thoughts one may want to ask why it was not asked what the guilty verdict meant for leaders in the world. No one in the western media talked about the reparation of the war victim in the country. It was only the Pan Arabic News Network Aljazera which talked about the reparation program when interviewing the Minister of Information and Communication. The BBC and the CNN did not even interview any government official to get their opinion. Despite the BBC and the CNN reported the news from the Western Perspective. Thus journalists in Sierra Leone and Liberia must know that they should get serious and start reporting the news from the African Perspective.

Finally although many Pan Africanist may see the Taylor's trial as ploy by the west to get rid of another African leader, majority think that justice must be done and given to all and sundry in society. They just hope that Bush and Blair will be tried for similar atrocities in Iraq and Afghanistan because if African leaders are not above the law then Western Leaders should also not be above the law.

One thought that it was another breakdown in Monrovia, but according to Hassan, it was a rainbow that appeared mysteriously in the hot burning, sunny sky in Monrovia

The Exclusive
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

Justice Minister Lauds Special Court

By Ayodele Deen Cole

Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Frank Kargbo has congratulated the Special Court for Sierra Leone on their accomplishment of the marathon trial of the former Liberian President, Charles G. Taylor.

Minster Frank Kargbo made this remarks in front of the Registrar for the Special Court of Sierra Leone, Binta Mansaray while delivering the keynote address to launch the National Committee on the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law in Sierra Leone.

According to the Justice Minister, the accomplishment of the Charles Taylor trial comes as a clear demonstration of Sierra Leone's desire to uphold the tenets of peace and justice not only locally but also internationally. The Minister who is also a legal luminary further called for the Sierra Leone Parliament to sign and ratify all conventions and international documents relating to IHL

Continued page 2

Justice Minister Lauds Special Court

From front page

and also to review the 1962 Sierra Leone Red Cross Acts to include more contemporary approach to contemporary issues.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Joseph B. Dauda, noted that the setting up of the national committee is to implement the International Humanitarian Laws as well as ECOWAS mandate presently operating in 5 countries that emanates from the substantial increases in crimes in International Humanitarian Laws across the sub-region.

He said that Sierra Leone now joins other nations to show great respect for IHL. "This turning point in the rule of law, justice and human rights will serve as revolving tools that would put an end to impunity and checkmate perpetrators for becoming fully responsible for their deeds", the Minister maintained.

The National Committee in Sierra Leone to implement IHL was inaugurated on 12 January 2012.

It consists of representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sierra Leone Red Cross and ICRC, ECOWAS, Institute of IHL- Sierra Leone and other stakeholders. Since its establishment, the committee has held five extra-ordinary meetings and one general meeting.

Currently, the institute seeks assistance from SLRC.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hon J.B Dauda promised to incorporate the committee into the WOFAIC budget-2013.

The Exclusive
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

Taylor's Lawyer Blasts

*"Judgement is Dictatorial & Bias"

By Musa Seay

Lawyer representing the former President of Liberia, Courtney Griffiths has taken a sweep on the Special Court for Sierra Leone over its judgement against his client, Charles Taylor. According to Griffiths, the entire process was dictatorial and that the fundamental principles were flawed from the onset of the trial.

He said the convictions were obtained by untainted and uncorrupted evidence effectively bought by the prosecution. The concept of the Joint Criminal Enterprise (JCE) which he said involves also Bokinafaso and Libya was rejected by the judges and according to him that should be the case as it is the central foundation of the trial. The judges, he said did not find anything that implicated Charles Taylor on the supply arms and ammunition into Sierra Leone and the sale of diamond. Even the Special Court's prime witness, Naomi Campbell never implicated Charles Taylor in any way even though the Court wasted huge sums to transport her and other witnesses.

Lawyer Griffiths buttressed his point while reading the view of one of the judges Malik Sall whom he said disagreed with the finding and the conclusion of the other judges.

He said, and according to the judge the standard of proof for the guilt of the accused from the evidence provided in the trial was not proven beyond reasonable doubt by the prosecution. The whole system, he said is inconsistence with the values of the international criminal justice stressing that it is heading for a failure.

However, the prosecutor of the Court, Benda Hills said the conviction is one more victory in the important fight against impunity. This was supported by another human right group which said it is a victory for women who were raped during the war.

Over Special Court Judgement...

Taylor's Lawyer Blasts

By Musa Sesay

Legal luminary representing Charles Taylor in the just concluded trial has said that African leaders continue to face humiliation from the western powers in the name of selective justice.

Lawyer Courtney Griffith said at a press briefing in The Hague, that he could not imagine why in this 21st Century African leaders are still transported on handcuffs for trials away from Africa.

He said the Special Court and The Hague are not established to try American Presidents or British Prime Ministers but purposely for African Leaders and it is now time for Africa to stop that trend.

He therefore suggested the setting up a court in African that will try Africa leaders in their own continent. The International Criminal Court (ICC) as it stands; he said is above any court in Africa, although it lacks credibility and common sense. He said Britain has requested for Charles Taylor to be jailed in Britain while other Special Court indictees are presently serving jail terms in Rwanda.

"Why the selective justice?" lawyer Griffith queried. According to him, Charles Taylor's family and his close relatives would have the opportunity to talk with Charles Taylor if he serves his jail term in any African Countries.

"Former Ivorian President, Lawrent Gbagbo, is in The Hague awaiting trial while Sudan's President is also on the wish list," he said. The west, he added, has developed a special perspective about Africa and its leaders.

Awareness Times
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

Charles Taylor: Sierra Leone's Scapegoat

By Dr. Sylvia Olayinka Blyden

Many readers contacted me to enquire as to why I made little, if any, mention of the Charles Taylor trial at The Hague. My response has been simple. I will not join to twist History to suit those who would want History to be twisted. Charles Taylor is just a bogeyman; an excuse created by Sierra Leoneans' inability to take responsibility for our mad actions against each other. He is the scapegoat who has been given omnipotent powers which deep in our hearts, we know is untrue. First of all, Charles Taylor would not have had impact here if some Sierra Leoneans (mostly from the South-East), had not used the aggrieved Taylor as a tool to help them destroy our country simply because they (Sierra Leoneans) were bitter with Momoh & Stevens APC regime. Secondly, there is an untold story which our Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) failed to elicit. Charles Taylor, like his willing allies from South-Eastern Sierra Leone and Corporal Foday Sankoh, shared angry resentment of APC. The story commences with an arrangement in late eighties for Liberian dissidents in America to use Sierra Leone soil to launch a rebellion against Samuel Doe, the then Liberian President. It received the tacit endorsement of then APC Government of President Momoh in Sierra Leone. Taylor entered Sierra Leone with a huge cache of money in earlier part of 1989 but Charles Taylor was double-crossed by APC elements and locked up at the CID. It took intervention of prominent Liberians in exile in America to have him 'released'. Some say he 'escaped' from police cells at CID. Taylor left Sierra Leone in 1989 with bitter experience - penniless. With the assistance of his Liberian backers in America, he now launched their rebellion into Liberia, not from Sierra Leone as originally planned, but from Ivory Coast to unseat the brutal Samuel Doe regime. In the process of carrying out his actions, the same APC Government which had double-crossed Charles Taylor, now allowed Sierra Leone to be used as a launching pad for ECOMOG to stop Taylor's advance on Monrovia. APC also armed, sponsored, aided and abetted two groups of Liberians to assist ECOMOG to stop Taylor. They included ULIMO. As a result, what should have been an easy unseatment of Samuel Doe became much more prolonged than initially planned and the suffering of Liberians took to unprecedented levels.

Taylor, in understandable reaction, then threatens Sierra Leone that they will also taste the bitterness of war. The rest is History. However, in the midst of all of this, the fact remains that no matter how bitter Charles Taylor might have been, he would never have been able to help RUF destroy Sierra Leone had it not been for our own kith and kin; mostly South-Easterners who bore grievances against the former APC regime. These people opened their doors to Taylor backed RUF. They are Sierra Leoneans. So, whenever I hear people shouting and raging against Charles Taylor's destruction of Sierra Leone, I simply shake my head at it all because the truth is that Taylor is just the Bogeyman taking the fall for something much deeper. When Historians really do in-depth studies into the origins and processes of the Sierra Leone war, they will find out that unlike the superficial nonsense of Lans Gberie and his Blood Diamonds Theory, the war in Sierra Leone goes much deeper than just diamond sales to a despot.

With respect to his despicable actions in Liberia, Charles Taylor is clearly a War Criminal but when it comes to Sierra Leone, I will not join those who naively proclaim that Taylor was the sole source and sole offender in our Sierra Leone madness. No, I will not.

Standard Times
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

The Charles Taylor War shattered the lives of my generation

BY MESSEH KAMARA

A United Nations backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague has found former Liberian leader Charles Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes during the Sierra Leone civil war. He was accused of backing rebels who killed tens of thousands including children during 10 years civil war.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone has again taken a major step which will help restore justice for children affected by the war in Sierra Leone. Another page has been turned in the history of justice for children. It is a historic moment for the children of Sierra Leone and across the world.

Children will live with the long-lasting impact of the war for the rest of their lives. The recruitment and use of children to fight wars is criminal. It is a war crime and a crime against humanity. In Sierra Leone, the war shattered the lives of my generation. It is not possible to replace ten years of a lost childhood but what children lost in the war - education, health, protection - must be restored to the extent possible.

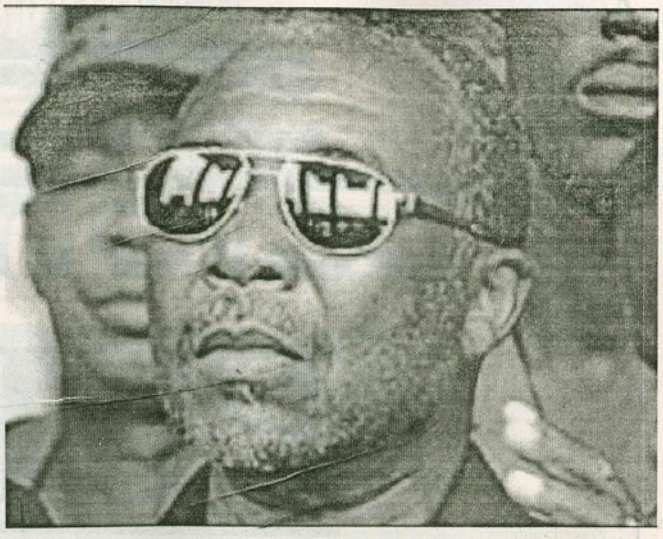
When I was 11 years old, I was separated from my parents. I spent months hiding in the bush and moving from village to village to escape the rebels. I lost everything in a war I did not cause to happened, but I suffered the most. During the 10-year conflict, children had no rights. Children could not go to school, children had no access to doctors, children were victims of abuses and violations, and children had no access to justice. Children were used and abused by those who should have been protecting them.

There is no justice without children. When children are abused, justice brings hope and security for the present and future generations. In a conflict where children had no rights, justice is sometimes a child's last hope.

The physical, social and economic costs of conflicts have impacted negatively on the lives of children and their communities limiting their access to services and their ability to realise their full potential. Many children in Sierra Leone are orphaned and left with deep emotional scars and trauma from direct exposure to violence, rape, displacement, poverty and the loss of loved ones. These coupled with the difficulty in accessing health and education services and a weak social structure to protect children have had a terrible impact on the lives of children.

So after the war, long-term rehabilitation must be given priority in all programmes, from psychosocial and trauma services to the provision of health, education and skills training. A child-sensitive approach to peace-building and reconciliation, and to transitional justice, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone, has helped uphold the rights of children. But it's also necessary to implement programmes that address children needs and protect their rights.

There is an urgent need to design and implement reparations programmes that effectively target all children who have been affected by the war. International justice mechanisms must not only seek to hold perpetrators accountable, but must also seek to provide long-term support to victims who will otherwise continued to suffer if support is not provided. In order to ensure that children benefit from reparations programmes, the Court should also consider reparations awards for children that fit into existing programmes currently being implemented by NGO's and child-led organizations like the Children's Forum Network in Sierra Leone.



The Court must therefore work closely with the Government of Sierra Leone to ensure that they continue to support and facilitate the work of such organizations to help and support children affected by the war with an emphasis on girls and women, so that the Government will faithfully execute the awards made by the Court.

There is a great responsibility now to make sure that Sierra Leone's future is not defined by the negative impact of the war and that the questions of child rights, democracy, justice and ending impunity are addressed fairly and fully. That rule of law is a significant contributor to that agenda. If perpetrators are not prosecuted it is harder to rebuild our country and restore respect for the rule of law.

The war is not over - there is still a war against girls and women who are suffering from sexual violence. Justice can provide a window of opportunity to address atrocities against girls and women. Ending impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence would do a great deal to rebuild women's sense of community and belonging and to encourage their public engagement.

Yet this is still work in progress, we need more action to end impunity and prevent wars. We want a society without war, a society based on justice --- justice that is fairly and fully implemented for children.

Sierra Leone Policy Watch

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Reaction of Sierra Leone Policy Watch Inc. to the conviction of Charles Taylor in The Hague for war crimes against the People of Sierra Leone.

Sierra Leone Policy Watch Inc. welcomes the conviction of Charles Taylor today in The Hague for aiding and abetting atrocities in our beloved country Sierra Leone. We consider this as the first chapter in delivering a measure of justice for the many victims of Charles Taylor's war crimes against our people. We thank the international community for all their efforts in making this happen. We implore the international community to please remember that the scars of his horrendous acts are still visible in every village and on every street in Sierra Leone, we must not forget the victims.

Therefore the second phase should be reasonable reparation for the victims, taken from the assets left behind by Charles Taylor and those who financed his atrocities to provide support for the Government and people of Sierra Leone to help provide basic public services in our effort to rebuild the country.

Jesmed F Suma
Executive Director
Sierra Leone Policy Watch Inc.

Aljazeera
Friday, 27 April 2012
Opinion

Charles Taylor trial highlights ICC concerns

A milestone in international justice also highlights the Court's need to maintain its legitimacy.

Oxford, United Kingdom - After a long and expensive trial, the Special Court for Sierra Leone finally pronounced that former Liberian president Charles Taylor is guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes.

While there has been little doubt that Taylor commanded militia that were responsible for some horrific acts of violence in Liberia, his home country, this judgment considered the extent to which he should be held responsible for ordering and condoning various war crimes (including murder, sexual violence, and enslavement) which were committed in neighbouring Sierra Leone. He has been acquitted of ordering these crimes and atrocities with the court finding that he did not hold direct command and control responsibility, but he has been found guilty of aiding and abetting these crimes.

Among Western governments and their publics, there is widespread agreement that prosecuting Taylor has been the right and proper thing to do. The West considers the Special Court for Sierra Leone as upholding human rights and bringing justice to bear on a brutal dictator. Yet even though these claims undoubtedly have merit, it would be naïve to think that international justice is being pursued purely for its own sake.

It seems particularly important to acknowledge that justice, especially international justice in the context of war crimes, can never be completely isolated from its broader social and political context - no matter how hard we try to separate the two. The prosecution of Charles Taylor is no exception.

Those who are cynical about prosecuting war crimes at the international level will first point out that the Special Court for Sierra Leone has been backed and financed by the West (primarily the US, UK, Netherlands, and Canada). For Westerners who are accustomed to impartial judicial systems, this is an irrelevant fact: Justice is justice no matter who is paying for it.

To the rest of the world, however, there is much greater variation in judicial norms, and the fact that the trial has been funded by Western powers is significant. It will also not escape unnoticed that this trial conveniently helped the US and UK achieve an important geopolitical goal: the removal of Charles Taylor from West African soil at a fragile moment in Liberia's post-conflict recovery in 2006.

Destabilising force

In 2003, when the indictment was first announced, Charles Taylor was a major destabilising force in West Africa. Aside from instigating civil war in Liberia and financing the war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, Taylor had also managed to draw Guinea and Ivory Coast into border wars. Removing him from Liberia was the first of many steps towards restoring peace in the country and establishing peaceful relations with neighbouring countries. For the West, it was clear that Taylor had to go and he should not be allowed to return.

Indeed, Taylor's lawyers have pointed to a 2009 US diplomatic cable from former US Ambassador to Liberia Linda Thomas-Greenfield which stated that if the Special Court were to acquit Charles Taylor, or even to hand him a light sentence, he would be in a position to jeopardise Liberia's stability.

Thomas-Greenfield states: "The best we can do for Liberia is to see to it that Taylor is put away for a long time." She goes on to argue that the US should not wait for the Special Court's verdict and that "all legal options should be studied to ensure that Taylor cannot return to destabilise Liberia". In all likelihood then, even if Taylor were acquitted, it seems likely that the US would have been be set to charge him with financial crimes.

Clearly, the US wants to see Taylor locked up for as long as possible. But the wording of the cable is equally clear that the Special Court's verdict remained uncertain at that time. While the outcome was far from pre-ordained, it does lead one to worry about how this strength of sentiment from the court's most important financial backer might indirectly affect the case.

Fundamentally though, the core concern is not with judges' independence. The intensity of public scrutiny and the reputational risks to those who compromise their integrity provide strong incentives for judges to guard their independence. No, the greater worry concerns the choice of cases that international prosecutors decide to pursue in the first place.

The role of the ICC

Turning to the International Criminal Court, a brief look at those who have been indicted reveals that to date, the vast majority have been from sub-Saharan Africa, and the remaining few are from Libya, also on the African continent. While armed conflict has been more prevalent in Africa than in other parts of the world over the past decade, African leaders certainly do not hold a monopoly on the commission of war crimes.

Courts build their legitimacy partly based on the cases that they choose to hear. By focusing predominantly on Africans, there is a real worry that the ICC will be perceived by non-Western countries as providing a cloak of legitimacy for the US and other Western nations to achieve their political aims - despite the fact that the ICC's chief prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo has explicitly stated that the ICC is not a court "just for the Third World".

What the international community needs to guard against is allowing the ICC to become a tool that Western liberal democracies can impose on developing country leaders who have fallen out of political favour. For the ICC to remain viable, it also cannot be perceived as the backdoor by which Western powers target their political enemies.

All of this takes us back to Charles Taylor. Make no mistake: few will be sorry to see him locked up. But Taylor's case does highlight concerns about the political expediency factor and the degree to which it can be exploited. For countries such as the US, China, and India who worry about the politicisation of the Office of the Prosecutor, and, by extension, the politicisation of the ICC, this case will only confirm that their misgivings were justified.

For the rest of us though, the conclusion of the Taylor's trial represents a major milestone in the pursuit of international justice.

Dr Christine Cheng is the Boskey Fellow in Politics at Exeter College, University of Oxford. She co-edited Corruption and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding (Routledge) and is currently writing a book about Liberia's post-conflict transition. She blogs at www.christinescottcheng.wordpress.com.

This article has been updated since the verdict against Charles Taylor was announced.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial policy.

The Atlantic
Monday, 30 April 2012

Victor's Justice: What's Wrong With Warlord Charles Taylor's Conviction

By Chris Mahony

Critics of the International Criminal Court often complain that it only targets abusive African leaders. But the truth is that the international justice system is inconsistent and arbitrary inside of Africa as well as outside.

Journalists watch a closed-circuit broadcast of former Liberian leader Charles Taylor's trial as he hears the court's verdict. Reuters

The war crimes conviction of former Liberian President Charles Taylor last week, by the UN-backed Special Court For Sierra Leone, sends an important message to high-ranking state officials everywhere; no matter who you are or what position you hold, you will be brought to justice for crimes. Right?

Wrong.

The truth is that Taylor is an aberration, the exception that proves the rule of a nascent international justice system that is developing in such a way as to reflect global power, not the ideals of global justice. International courts are unable to exercise jurisdiction over many of the most powerful criminals. Some domestic court systems, on the other hand, are empowered to exercise universal jurisdiction over such crimes as torture, for example in Germany, where the country's top prosecutor indicted former U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, or in Switzerland, where two torture victims initiated proceedings against George W. Bush. This action has at least restricted them from travelling to these and other countries.

Taylor was convicted for "aiding and abetting" in war crimes and crimes against humanity, but this threshold is not a high one. This same standard could potentially be applied to other heads of state that might be culpable for aiding and abetting crimes within their territories or elsewhere.

That might include, for example, Ugandan President, Yoweri Museveni, who is alleged to support the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), which committed crimes in eastern Congo's Ituri province, or Rwandan President Paul Kagame for his support of the National Congress for the Defence of the People and its crimes in Congo's Kivu region.

These two central African rulers supported crimes that fall within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. In fact, the court secured its first-ever conviction just in March; against UPC founder Thomas Lubanga for use of child soldiers. Museveni and Kagame both heavily supported the UPC.

Yet the ICC (which is separate from the Special Court for Sierra Leone) has not indicted Museveni or Kagame. There are a few reasons, which reveal how the ICC functions and how it doesn't.

To investigate crimes within any country, the ICC needs one of three things: (1) to be invited in by a state that has signed up to it, (2) to assert jurisdiction of its own volition in a country that has signed up to it, (3) or to have its jurisdiction imposed on a state by the United Nations Security Council. Savvy leaders such as Museveni have been able to play to the ICC's dependence on state cooperation -- any exhaustive investigation would require the cooperation of the host government. So, after negotiating referral from Museveni to investigate abuses in Uganda, the ICC investigated Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army, a stated U.S. target. But it has not pursued war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Ugandan Army, a U.S. ally. In 2002, a U.S. official threatened the court with obstruction if it pursued cases such as that against Museveni.

Thorough investigations require access to witnesses, documentation, crime scenes, and of course the physical apprehension of the accused. An unfriendly host government can deny all of these things.

According to Sierra Leone's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the Revolutionary United Front (a Taylor-sponsored rebel group) committed 57 percent of the crimes in Sierra Leone's war, the Sierra Leonean army (whose allegiance has changed between the RUF and the government) committed 30 percent, and government-aligned Civil Defence forces 12 percent. Only 1 per cent of crimes were committed by West African peacekeepers, although they were only present in Sierra Leone for small parts of the conflict.

The UN-backed Special Court was empowered to prosecute "those bearing the greatest responsibility" for the war's crimes. But the Special Court was barred from prosecuting British personnel that supported crimes by the Civil Defence Forces. The prosecution did not seriously investigate Sierra Leone's President, probably for fear that it would lead him to stop cooperating with other parts of their investigation. The Sierra Leonean president also seconded Sierra Leonean police officers to undertake the Special Court's investigations into crimes by the Civil Defence Forces.

The UN-backed prosecutor, according to my interviews with him and other prosecution and U.S. officials, did consider pursuing two other heads-of-state who, like Taylor, supported the RUF: Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi and Burkina Faso President Blaise Compaore.

Unlike the tribunals for Rwanda or the former Yugoslavia, the Special Court depended on voluntary financial contributions, of which the U.S. government was the primary funder. Unsurprisingly, the U.S. government has helped lead the court's design and proposed its original prosecutor that selected cases for prosecution: former U.S. Defense Department lawyer David Crane.

At one point, when Crane came back to the U.S. government requesting funding for the court, he later told me that he was informed that, were he to indict Qaddafi or Compaore, the court would be shut down.

So why go after Charles Taylor? Taylor, after all, had established close ties with the Clinton Administration. But by 2000, opinion globally and within the U.S. had turned against Taylor, who also fought a brutal civil war within his own country. The Clinton White House financed a rebel insurgency (that also committed war crimes) against Taylor, imposed sanctions to weaken Taylor's capacity to fight back, financed internal political opposition, and helped create a war crimes court to indict him.

In other words, international justice was just one of the tools that the U.S. used to force Taylor out of office. That might have been a good thing in ousting Taylor, but it's not exactly justice or rule of law at its purest.

Nonetheless Taylor's verdict advances, incrementally, international criminal justice. If you are going to support crimes, even if you're a head of state, you had best hold on to power. If you can't, then make sure the world's great powers are supporting you, because they decide who is prosecuted, and who is not.

Los Angeles Times
Thursday, 26 April 2012

Former prosecutor hails Charles Taylor guilty verdict

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa -- David M. Crane, founding prosecutor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, said Thursday's conviction of former Liberian President Charles Taylor for war crimes and crimes against humanity was "hugely significant."

Taylor is the first former head of state to be convicted of war crimes in an international court or hybrid international-national court since the Nuremburg trials that followed World War II.

"A very clear bell has rung across the world saying that dictators and thugs who kill their own people will be held responsible for that atrocity," Crane said in a phone interview from The Hague.

Crane, a law professor at Syracuse University who drafted the 2003 indictment of Taylor, flew to The Hague for the verdict.

Taylor, 64, was found guilty aiding and abetting Sierra Leone rebels in 11 crimes, including murder, terrorizing civilians, rape, sexual slavery, and recruiting and using child soldiers during Sierra Leone's bloody 1991-2002 civil war.

Crane said it sent a strong message that leaders who committed atrocities would face justice.

He predicted that Taylor would remain behind bars for the rest of his life. He said the fact that Taylor was found guilty of "aiding and abetting" the war crimes did not imply a lesser conviction than being found guilty of being in the chain of command.

"He's been found guilty, as charged, of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He's going to get a very stiff sentence, which will amount to life imprisonment," said Crane.

Taylor's lawyers, who tried to have the case thrown out during the trial, argue that the case is political, designed to keep Taylor out of power in Liberia.

The former Liberian president played a role in conflict and instability across several West African countries, arming and supporting militias across the region, but Thursday's verdict at the U.N.-backed special court relates to his role in Sierra Leone's war, where around 50,000 people died.

Critics have questioned the Liberian government's failure to ensure prosecution of Taylor and others for alleged war crimes in the 1989-1995 Liberian civil war which killed some 200,000. But Crane said while the international justice system was new, and wasn't perfect, justice had been done.

Taylor became president in 1997. He stepped down in 2003, several months after being indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, taking advantage of an offer of safe haven by Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo.

Obansanjo made the deal to protect Taylor from prosecution on condition he stay out of Liberian politics. But the deal was ditched after Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf came to power in 2005 elections and requested that Nigeria hand over Taylor to stand trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in 2006.

Critics in Africa have argued that repudiating Taylor's amnesty deal has made it more difficult to remove tyrants, making them more likely to cling to power, often violently.

"It's an important point," said Crane. "It's peace versus justice. Sometimes justice has to wait until there is peace. But certainly justice has to be done. At the end of the day you have to have justice because the people who suffered and saw members of their families suffer, demand it."

The verdict was hailed by human rights organizations.

"Powerful leaders like Charles Taylor have for too long lived comfortably above the law," said Elise Keppler of Human Rights Watch's international justice program. "Taylor's conviction sends a powerful message that even those in the highest-level positions can be held to account for grave crimes."

Amnesty International deputy director for Sierra Leone, Brima Abdulai Sheriff, welcomed Taylor's conviction but said thousands of others who were criminally responsible for abuses had never been investigated or prosecuted. He said a limited number of victims had received reparations.

"This verdict can also be seen as a reminder for Taylor's home country Liberia that those responsible for the crimes committed during Liberia's conflict must be brought to justice," Sheriff said in an emailed statement.

Photo: People in Freetown, Sierra Leone, watch a live broadcast Thursday of the verdict in the Netherlands-based trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Credit: Felicity Thompson / Associated Press

Heritage (Liberia)
Wednesday, 02 May 2012

Liberia: Moses Blah Cries Over Taylor's Guilty Verdict

Moses Z. Blah, former President Charles Taylor's Vice President has said he "feels hurt" over the verdict handed down by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, Netherlands. He said: "I feel a little bit hurt and I am not happy about the whole situation. Taylor is my friend and Brother, I still respect him."

Mr. Blah, who served as a prosecution witness in the trial of his former Boss, said he did not expect that Mr. Taylor would be found guilty. Mr. Blah, also former president of Liberia, told the BBC Network Africa Program Tuesday morning (May 1, 2012) that his testimony in the Taylor's trial was not against his former boss (Mr. Taylor).

However, he said he testified to what he knew based on a subpoena of the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Speaking further, Mr. Blah described Mr. Taylor as his revolutionary brother who he still respects.

He said, if Taylor is set free by Appeal chamber of Special Court, he would organize a party for his former boss.

He said he would intercede for Mr. Taylor through prayers to ensure that he is set free.

On Thursday, April 26, 2012, international judges found Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes during the Sierra Leone civil war.

Taylor, 64, has been on trial for almost five years. He was accused of backing rebels who killed tens of thousands during Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war. Taylor was convicted of 11 counts including terror, murder and rape - but cleared of ordering the crimes.

He is the first former head of state convicted by an international court since the Nuremburg military tribunal of Nazis after World War II.

The presiding judge of the Special Court Richard Lussick said the prosecution proved beyond reasonable doubt that Mr. Taylor aided and abetted rebel activities in Sierra Leone.

But defense lawyer Courtenay Griffiths told the BBC shortly after the verdict that the trial was unfair.

He maintained that the verdict of the trial judges was expected.

However in reaction, the Prosecution led by Breda Hollis said the arguments that the trial of Mr. Taylor was "politically motivated" were made several times by the defense.

Madam Hollis added that the verdict eloquently rejects these claims and assertions by the Taylor defense team and supporters.

The New Dawn (Liberia)
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

Blah Bites Tongue: "I Was Forced to Testify"

Former President Moses Z. Blah has said that he's feeling the blame for his predecessor Charles Taylor's guilty verdict handed down last Thursday, 26 April after his five-year trial at The Hague.

Many Liberians, mainly supporters of the former President, blamed Blah for his testimonies before chamber II of the UN- backed Special Court of Sierra Leone sitting in The Hague.

But Blah, in a furious reaction, told the BBC on Monday that he should not be held responsible.

"Though I am feeling guilty of the verdict, but what can I do? My testimony was not to prosecute Taylor."

"Therefore, I should not be blamed," Blah clarified, claiming to have been threatened with indictment by the court if he refused at the time to honor the invitation.

"Being that I was threatened with an arrest warrant, I was forced to go and testified, but not at my own freed mind. Because Taylor was my boss and a revolutionary brother," the former president noted.

However, Blah said in spite of the verdict he can never divorce Taylor. "I cannot forsake Taylor as a human being and brother." On 2 August, 2003 Taylor handed over authority of the country to Blah before going into exiled in Nigeria.

Blah was President of Liberia for 3 months (August, September & October) before handing over power to the transitional Head of State Charles Gyude Bryant. Before coming to prominent, Blah was an auto mechanic, working with LAMCO in his home county, Nimba in the north of the country.

He went into exile as a result of the 1983 'Nimba Raid' under the military regime of the late Master sergeant Samuel Doe, and was later recruited in the Ivory Coast and onto Libya for training from where he became one of the Special Forces with the defunct National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the military wing of the US-based Association for Constitutional Democracy in Liberia.

The ACDL was a political organization established by exiled Liberian politician in the United States to battle the regime of M/S Doe, who they perceived as an obstacle to democracy in Liberia. Moses Blah was trained alongside other exiled Liberians at Tarjura military training camp in Libya in the 80s.

He and others, including current senator Prince Y. Johnson, alias Prince Tonic Water, led by Mr. Taylor launched the ACDL/NPFL rebellion on 24 December, 1989 against the late Samuel Doe's regime which occasioned untold destruction and a loss of about three hundred thousand lives in Liberia, including children.

Angola Press
Wednesday, 2 May 2012

Taylor trial a threat to Africa: family spokesman

MONROVIA - Former Liberian president Charles Taylor's conviction for aiding war crimes in Sierra Leone is a trap for all African leaders, a spokesman for the Taylor family said Tuesday.

"We believe that the trial and subsequent conviction of Mr. Taylor is a trap that has been set up for African leaders by Western leaders," Sando Johnson, a Liberian senator, told AFP in Monrovia.

Taylor, 64, was found guilty by a special court in the Netherlands on April 26 of war crimes and crimes against humanity for supporting Sierra Leonean rebels in exchange for diamonds during their 10-year war.

A sentence is expected on May 30.

The Liberian politician, regarded as the Taylor family's spokesman, argued that African leaders needed to close ranks and warned that those of them tempted to reach out to Western powers would be made to regret it.

Johnson then recounted a rambling parable told by Taylor when he agreed to resign as president in August 2003 before going into exile.

The parable centred on three cows a black, a red and a white cow who befriend a lion. Having eaten up all the antelopes around, the hungry lion tells the white and red cows that they will be spared if they let him eat the black one. He repeats his trick until the white cow is left alone and gets eaten up too.

"You must be careful. Today is Charles Taylor. The black cow is going. The red cow is waiting out there," Taylor said in 2003.

Johnson argued that history had vindicated Taylor's prediction, citing the demise of Libya's Moamer Kadhafi and the downfall of former Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo, who is awaiting trial in The Hague.

Angola Press
Tuesday, 1 May 2012

Jury still out on international war crimes system

Washington - Former Liberian President Charles Taylor's war crimes conviction may be seen in some quarters as a victory for global justice, but a backlash against costly, lengthy international tribunals is also underway.

Found guilty of aiding and abetting a host of crimes including murder, rape and torture as well as arming brutal Sierra Leonean rebels, Taylor became the first head of state to be convicted by an international tribunal since the Nuremberg Trials after World War Two. He will be sentenced on May 30.

While Adolf Hitler avoided justice at Nuremberg by committing suicide in his Berlin bunker, his successor Admiral Karl Doenitz was convicted of crimes against the laws of war and planning a war of aggression.

Human rights groups and western governments in particular welcomed the Taylor verdict, saying it stood as a warning to others that while the wheels of justice might take a long time to turn, the age of impunity for national leaders was over.

But with the United Nations-backed "hybrid" court trial - including both international and Sierra Leonean members - taking a decade and costing an estimated $50 million, some see that as simplistic. Some put the cost of the entire Sierra Leone tribunal process at some $200 million, while British newspapers complained that plans for Taylor to serve his sentence in a British prison could cost taxpayers up to 100,000 pounds a year.

At the very least, some wonder whether the money could have been better spent in impoverished West Africa.

While Taylor's prosecution was handled by a tribunal only looking at one conflict - Sierra Leone, not the Liberian civil war in which he is also accused of mass atrocities - most more recent war crimes cases are in the hands of the International Criminal Court.

That has now issued indictments for crimes committed in six countries - Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Sudan, Central African Republic, Libya and Kenya - and found itself coming under growing criticism itself.

The Seattle Times
Tuesday, 1 May 2012
Opinion

The tenacious pursuit of war crimes and a war criminal

The long journey that brought a patron of murder and mayhem to justice is a victory for human rights, human dignity and legal authority.

By Mason C. MORE

FORMER Liberian President Charles Taylor is scheduled to be sentenced next month. His conviction on 11 counts of aiding and abetting a bloody civil war in Sierra Leone offers a grim punishment option: short sleeves or long sleeves?

Such was the cruel, maniacal choice given by rebels to men, women and children on where their limbs would be hacked off: at the elbow or the wrist.

Raw vengeance would never be as satisfying as the pursuit, capture and international legal proceedings against a tyrant once so supremely confident of his own invulnerability.

The message from the International Criminal Court is that those despots and oppressors engaging in war crimes will be held accountable. The demonstrated tenacity that followed Taylor after he went into exile in 2003, continued through his arrest in 2006 and ended with last week's verdict is extraordinary.

Taylor swapped weapons for diamonds with rebels in Sierra Leone, and helped sustain a malicious upheaval for 11 years that claimed 50,000 lives. Taylor came to power in Liberia in 1989 via another bloody civil war that killed 200,000 over more than a decade.

The ruling, issued by the Special Court for Sierra Leone from the trial's secure venue in the Netherlands, has been cheered around the world, including in the African media. Broad hints are dropped about who might be next.

CNN reported William Hague, Britain's foreign minister, suggested Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, who has brutally suppressed dissent, might pay attention to what transpired with Taylor.

The central message is that the world paid attention. Africa was not too remote to register on the international conscience. Dedicated, purposeful people acted to enforce the law.

AllAfrica.Com
Tuesday, 1 May 2012

Africa: On the Charles Taylor Verdict - Is There Justice in Africa?

By Michael Keating

The conviction of Charles Taylor is certainly some kind of justice. Many in Sierra Leone will feel that their suffering has been acknowledged by the international community. In Liberia many others will rejoice while some will grumble that Taylor, the Liberian "patriot", is just a victim of white man's justice.

Given the tsunami of suffering that Taylor unleashed upon West Africa, the overly constrained proceedings in the Hague are really more like a show trial, a demonstration of Western judicial power rather than a real exploration of the facts and figures surrounding the series of events that destroyed hundreds of thousands of lives across the region.

For most of the world the narrative is simple: Charles Taylor = blood diamonds + child soldiers + limb chopping = war criminal. Fair enough. That case was made.

What was missing from the dock in the Hague, as opposed to say the Nuremberg Trials, are the countless other personalities and political entrepreneurs that animated many of the events that to the West seemed more like antics in a Hobbesian charnel house than acts of sovereign states.

Whether or not one believes that it was the CIA that engineered Taylor's escape from prison in Massachusetts (which many in Monrovia firmly swear to) it is certainly the case that the Reagan-era State Department was displeased with Samuel Doe. After showering Doe with money in the first years of his reign, American diplomats looked on aghast as Doe turned into an embarrassing kleptocrat. It was also after Doe's rigged elections in 1985 that Liberians in exile, many in the United States, began plotting to get rid of Doe by any means necessary.

Those means were provided by U.S. educated Taylor who had one time worked in the Doe regime but who had to flee Liberia after being accused of embezzlement. It was on those charges that Taylor was imprisoned in the U.S. while awaiting an extradition hearing.

At that point the young idealist Taylor no doubt viewed himself as a liberator. He would launch a counter-revolution against Doe. In order to do so he would first have to get arms, money and rear echelon support. Taylor and his partner Prince Johnson -- who sits in the Liberian Senate to this day -- travelled to Burkina Faso and assisted the coup that assassinated the popular Burkinabe President Thomas Sankara- the so-called Che Guevara of Africa- in exchange for support of their own coup plans against Doe. Taylor was also invited to Libya to meet with Gaddafi and was given financial and tactical support in the context of Gaddafi's own pan-African hallucinations.

When Taylor finally launched his incursion from friendly Cote d'Ivoire in 1989 all the stars were aligned in his favour, including the support of current Liberian President Sirleaf. Unfortunately, he had the resources to launch his campaign but neither a disciplined revolutionary party nor a competent officer corps to carry it forward. Instead he had an undisciplined armed mob and a group of associates who quickly turned on each other when it was clear that the liberation of Liberia would be a winner-take-all affair.

By the time he became the elected President of an exhausted and terrorized Liberia in 1997, Taylor had succumbed to all the ills that befall a dictator. He had ruled his personal catchments called "Greater Liberia" with a toxic combination of terror and patronage.

His frustration in not being able to capture Monrovia -- due to blocking manoeuvres from other West African nations -- only fuelled his megalomania and greed. This led him to start selling off large swatches of precious hardwood forests to greedy European buyers. He also began supporting monsters like Foday Sankoh in next door Sierra Leone whose access to diamonds provided Taylor with a virtual bloody ATM machine. There is no doubt that the insanity he unleashed had begun to affect him. However, he always put on a good face for foreign visitors.

One was the Rev. Jesse Jackson who came as Clinton's special envoy and supposedly tried to make the dubious case that both Taylor and the madman Sankoh were worthy of American support. Another was the Rev. Pat Robertson of 700 Club fame who allegedly came to Taylor's Liberia looking for diamonds in exchange for lobbying President Bush on Taylor's behalf. In the end, Taylor became increasingly erratic with rumors of secret rituals and even cannibalism swirling around his inner circle.

It was at this point that Islam also emerged in the conflict. One of Taylor's most serious miscalculations was his oppression of the Mandingos, an Islamic ethnic group spread out across several West African countries including neighboring Guinea. It was Guinea, with help from Nigeria, that supplied Liberian-Mandingo leaders like Alhaji Kromah - now a professor of mass communications at the University of Liberia - with money, weapons and logistical support in his quest to topple Taylor from his presidential perch. It was a mirror scenario to the one which aided Taylor a decade before.

Ironically, it has been suggested that Taylor's conflict diamonds helped finance several Al Queda operations, one of which may have been 9/11. Taylor should be happy he's imprisoned in the Netherlands. The U.S. would probably like to see him in Guantanamo.

So what are we left with in the Taylor judgment? Robin White, the former BBC journalist who covered the events in question, told the BBC that he felt the money that went to the prosecution - reportedly $50 Million -- should have been given to amputees in Sierra Leone instead, many of whom are living in abject poverty.

What about Taylor's victims in Liberia, what satisfaction do they get? Taylor's millions are still rolling around the international banking system with no serious efforts afoot to capture them for the benefit of the Liberian people.

Unlike the Nazis who obsessively and absurdly documented all of their crimes and thus handed their prosecutors an airtight case, the trial of Charles Taylor has left out of the record much more than it revealed. To say that western understanding of Africa is based on cliché and disinformation is an understatement. That same might be said of prosecutions of Africans in Western courts, both present and future.

Taylor will likely die in prison. His son, the infamous "Chuckie" Taylor will do so as well. Many of his family and former cronies are now wealthy businessmen and influential politicians in Liberia, even though several of them remain under a U.N. travel ban. Neither of the reverends Jackson nor Robertson will likely see the inside of a jail cell for having consorted with a convicted war criminal.

Like all would-be revolutionaries, Taylor unleashed the forces of unintended consequences. One of the most remarkable was that it was his doings in Sierra Leone that brought him down, not his destruction of Liberia. The other was that with his incarceration, most of the other unquestionably guilty will rest more comfortably in their freedom.

Until Africans take control of their own justice, it will be an expensive dog's breakfast indeed.

Michael Keating is a Lecturer in International Relations at the University of Massachusetts Boston with a special interest in the Mano River countries of West Africa.

BBC Focus on Africa
Tuesday, 1 May 2012

Moses Blah on the Judgement of Charles Taylor

LEAD-IN: …Taylor is still the subject of plenty of debate around the world. Closer to home, in Liberia, Moses Blah, Taylor's former vice president, has been expressing regrets about the trial. Mr. Blah gave testimony in 2008 which pointed to some evidence of the recruitment of child soldiers. So how does he feel, now that Charles Taylor has been found guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes in Sierra Leone? Our reporter Jonathan Paye-Layleh put this question to Mr. Blah.

BLAH: As a human being, I felt somehow bad because this is a fellow who has been my chief, my boss, even though he has not been sentenced he has been jailed for a very long time. I feel a little bit hurt. I am not happy about the whole situation.

When you were leaving Liberia for The Hague to testify in the Taylor trial, you referred to him as a revolutionary brother that you would not betray, but what was said didn't look like something that was sad towards a revolutionary brother.

BLAH: He is still my revolutionary brother. Taylor is my friend and brother. We fought the revolution together and I still respect him as a chief. I did not go to The Hague by my own power. I did not go willingly to say let me go and prosecute my brother. It was subpoena power that ordered me to go to The Hague.

You were subpoenaed by the court.

BLAH: Yes, subpoenaed by the court to go to The Hague. I must go to this court to testify. If I don't, then I will go to where he is – that is what the letter said. I can show you the paper now that was written to me.

So the Special Court said in a subpoena that if you didn't go you would find yourself in trouble.

BLAH: Yeah. They said if I don't, that if I refuse to go, they will make me to go to testify and I would find myself in bigger trouble. What I said was not against him, and still I'm not against him.

But your testimony pointed to some involvement by him in the Sierra Leonean crisis.

BLAH: No, I never had it go against. And I went to The Hague and prepared to say exactly what I know when I was vice president in his government.

When you were walking out of the premises of the court after your testimony, did you ever expect that Taylor was going to be found guilty?

BLAH: No, I did not, because I didn't go to prosecute him. I went to say exactly what I knew. It's left to the court to decide. That's what I said in court.

If Taylor and his lawyers take the matter to the Appeals Chamber of the Special Court, two things are possible. Either he's found guilty to be sitting in a British jail, or he returns back to Liberia. If he comes back, will you be scared?

BLAH: Not at all. I will be happy to see him. I will really rejoice, I may have a party for him if he comes back. I will receive him as a boss to me.

If he's found guilty and he's put in jail, what reflection will you have for him?

BLAH: That would not make me happy. I pray to the Lord that he's set free to go to his family to be a happy man once again.

Liberia's former Deputy President Moses Blah, speaking with Jonathan Paye-Layleh.