

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



Photos from Saturday's match between Detention and the Rest of the Court in today's *'Special Court Supplement'*.

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Tuesday, 20 February 2007

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Special Court gets •600,000 boost

The European Commission has made a donation of •600,000 (\$787,000) to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to continue the Court's Victims Justice and Legacy Project. The EC grant is part of the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights. Since the Project was started in January 2004, the EC has

given more than •1.9 million to the project. The Victims Justice and Legacy Project aims to provide a broader understanding of justice to the

victims of Sierra Leone's decade-long civil conflict. Through various sub projects, the Special Court seeks to leave a legacy to Sierra Leone and to international criminal justice. The main activities of the Project are con-

ducted through the Witness and Victim Support Programme, the Grass Roots Awareness Campaign (Outreach), the Audio Visual Programme, the Intern and Pro-bono Support Programme, the Court Interpreters Professionalizing and Training Programme, and the Library and Archives Development

Programme.

The Project targets all areas of the Sierra Leone public and civil society, in particular victims and witnesses, ex-combatants, national grassroots organizations and community leaders. In the coming months it will begin programmes to inform the people of Sierra Leone and Liberia about

the upcoming Special Court trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor in The Hague. The Victims Justice and Legacy Project is part of the Court's overall legacy programme, which seeks to promote the rule of law, human rights, and international humanitarian law.

Concord Times

Tuesday, 20 February 2007

Will Street Children Benefit From Child Rights Bill?

Perhaps the hottest topic of discussion regarding children in Sierra Leone today is the Child Right Bill that is before Parliament. This Bill has to go through several stages before it becomes law.

How will this bill benefit street children in the country? Have they been given the opportunity to make their own input in the preparation of the said Child Right Bill. I would ask such a question because I think it is their right. Children too should be consulted with on issues that have to do with their welfare.

The bill has been with the authorities that are supposed to expedite its process through Parliament for quite some time now. But because little is being done, organizations and individuals concerned with and about the welfare of the Sierra Leonean children have been mounting serious pressure for results. The idea to lobby Parliament came following a temporary suspension of deliberations on the bill in adherence to what legislators would describe as, laid-down procedures in Parliament.

Why the hiccup at every stage of the bill? The answer is simple. The authorities did not do their homework properly. They were supposed to have put all modalities in place before the bill could be piloted in Parliament.

I do not know whether these children, whose

rights are being fought for, have had the privilege to talk to those people who are in charge of piloting the said bill. Like I said, these children were supposed to have made their input into the bill, no matter how small. They should not be kept out because they will make the next generation of players.

The Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs should be in the position to consult with non-governmental organizations. The ministry could even ask of their assistance where they seem not get the resources to undertake certain children-based activities.

Sometimes I don't seem to understand the predominant activities of some of these child rights protection agencies. Don't they think that some of these children, if given the opportunity, will be willing to go to school? Have they, or the Social Welfare ministry, for once attempted to conduct a national survey to establish what are really their plights of street children for instance?

If they had not done that then I wonder what kind of right would they be protecting or guaranteeing after the bill would have been passed into an Act? Frankly speaking I cannot foresee children enjoying those rights, the bill to which they never made any input.

The children are the next generation

and if they are left to waste like that posterity will hold us responsible, at least for not doing our own bit. They are a generation in crisis because they do not have the opportunity to meet with those in authority. If we ignored their welfare now they will not be able to make a responsible government or people tomorrow.

Much attention should be given to those unfortunate children; the street children. They've always been put aside when it comes to matters affecting them in the country. We have NGO's that are responsible for children but they are mostly into it for money making. They do so under the guise of helping children, especially those in need.

What I noticed was that the Child Right Bill only concerns children going to school. This is because only school children attempted to attend the session on the Child Right Bill in Parliament. But the bill, they say, is a Child Right Bill. These street children too have their own rights that must not be denied them. Who pioneers their case? Nobody?

A senior government official once told me, after the war, that no matter what one gives to some of these children, they will hardly come out of the streets. Yes I agree to some extent. But

it depends on what kind of encouragement that is being given to a child that one wants to take away from the street.

I spoke with a girl, age 14 and she said if she had the opportunity to attend school she will be ready for that. I further asked her what her grandmother, with whom she stays, does for a living. She said after school, "I do petty trading for our survival."

Some of these children are susceptible to sexual harassment. Walking around Garrison Street, (Commonly known to our teenage

prostitutes as 'good evening street'), you will nearly shed tears. Children as young as thirteen, either because of circumstances following the war or maltreatment from parents or guidance at home, have often taken to the streets.

Also some of these children are good at telling lies. Go to some of these video centers and you will find out that there are those who do odd jobs. They even take to stealing or they are being forced into things like child labour. One thing that baffles me, however, is the answer a street child will give for

being to the streets. "I was driven away from home," or "my parents are dead." However, not that children enjoy being in the streets, but because they do not have the required counseling centres, they just can't help. What would be the fate of some of these children if proper attention is not given to them? Who will forward their case to the authorities concerned? Let those that claim to be championing the course of children rally authorities for the necessary support for children. Children must be made them productive.

Standard Times

Tuesday, 20 February 2007

Anomalies in National Legislation Affecting Children in Sierra Leone

ISSUES

BY MILLICENT MANNAH

INTRODUCTION

Sierra Leone, one of the smallest countries on the African Continent was, prior to the conflict in 1991, quite literally a 'nation of children'. Statistics from the Central statistics Office showed that in 1991, approximately half of the estimated 4.5 million populations were children. In other words, half of the population was made up of persons below the age of 18 years.

However, the conflict in Sierra Leone impacted heavily on children, as they became prime target for abuse by the fighting factions. Hundreds of children were abducted; forcefully recruited to fight (according to CARITAS more than 5000 combatants were children below the age of 18 years); raped and forced to serve as sexual slaves. Some of them were mutilated; and had their limbs cut off. Most of them were subjected to torture and forced labour.

On the eve of the war, children were marginalized and deprived of their basic human rights. The break down of democratic institutions; the collapse of the rule of law and the mismanagement of the country's resources further exacerbated the continued violation of the rights of children in Sierra Leone.

Laws in Sierra Leone relating to children were and are still outdated, uninformed and grossly inadequate to guarantee the protection and promotion of their rights. Crimes against children including rape, sexual violence, child labour, child trafficking etc. have most times gone unpunished, aided further by the culture of silence and impunity that prevails.

This article will look at the anomalies in national legislations in Sierra Leone and how they adversely affect the interests of children. It is important to note children in Sierra Leone are governed under the general law and customary law which are mostly unwritten. The article will examine the anomalies in this context as opposed to other international instruments such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It will also examine specific issues where the rights and status of children come into focus.

DEFINITION OF A CHILD AND JUVENILE

In Sierra Leone, laws relating to children are often in conflict with those at the international level. That is to say, they are inconsistent with customs and practices in the global realm. In Sierra Leone, according to The Children and Young Persons Act (Cap 44), Laws of Sierra Leone 1960, a child is defined as a person under the age of 14; s.2 of Cap 31 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act defines a child as a person under the age

of 16, whilst under customary law, the age of a child is not fixed and varies depending on the purpose for which it is considered and from one ethnic group to another. A juvenile according to Cap 44 of the Laws of Sierra Leone 1960 includes 'children' and 'young persons'. The Act further defines a young person as a person who is fourteen years of age or upwards and under the age of seventeen years. The age of maturity under the common law is 21 years. Under 31 of the 1991 Constitution of Sierra Leone, a citizen who is 18 years old and above has voting rights; meaning such persons can reason well in terms of decision-making. Criminal responsibility, however, starts at the age of 10.

The above state of affairs cre-

ates a crime under the general law and applies to all persons, irrespective of age. There are specific laws prohibiting cruel treatment and violence against children. Under the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act (Cap 31 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, 1960), it is a crime for someone to commit acts of cruelty including sexual and other related offences against a child and such crime is punishable either by imprisonment or by paying a fine. It also includes people that are in custody of a child and "willfully assaults, ill-treats, neglects, abandons or exposes such a child or causes or procures such a child to be assaulted, ill-treated, neglected, abandoned or exposed, in a manner likely to cause such a child unnecessary suffering or in-

Adoption takes place under both general law and customary law. However, the Adoption Act 1989 does not recognize adoptions being carried out under customary law which governs the majority of the people in Sierra Leone. Customary law is equally vague and unclear with regard to the fostering and guardianship of children. In other words, there are no defined guidelines regulating the relationship between the adopted child and the foster parents. The problem here is that when neither rights are allocated to the adopted child or responsibilities to the foster parents, there is the propensity for the rights of the adopted child to be grossly abused since there are no binding rules regulating the conduct of both the

ity then they can be employed by a family member in the areas of horticulture, agriculture and domestic work. Even when they are permitted, their hours of work are strictly laid down. Also, the Act prohibits the employment of street traders under the age of 18 at night. These laws, however, are hardly enforced given the commonness of children engaged in street trading and mining. In Freetown and other big towns in the provinces, a good number of children below the age of 12 are usually seen roaming the streets and hawking commodities in the name of petty trading whilst others are employed as shop attendants. In Kono and other diamond mining areas, some are employed in gangs to mine diamonds. This practice is a clear breach of the Employees and Employers Act of Sierra Leone. Most times it is the parents who send their children to hawk commodities in order for them to survive but this at the detriment of the child as more often than not we see children below the ages of 13 and 14 hawking in the streets.

INHERITANCE LAW

Under customary law children are entitled to one third of their father's estate when he dies intestate. On the contrary, however, they are not entitled to their mother's property upon her death since everything goes to the husband. If a child is born illegitimate, such a child is not entitled to any property of the father. That is to say, such a child is not recognized according to law to be the child of the deceased. This greatly affects the child's psychological and physical well-being; on the one hand, the child is estranged from other members of the father's family and on the other, if the mother is not financially strong enough to take care, such child may drop out of school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Laws and customs in Sierra Leone are in urgent need of reform as in many instances; they are archaic, inconsistent and fall short of international standards. As I write, Parliament is still debating the child welfare Bill. SLCMP is urging Parliament to speedily enact into law the proposed Bill. Since children are the most vulnerable group in every society, all possible measures must be taken to protect and promote their rights, as they are the leaders of tomorrow. To this end therefore, it is important to approve these laws in order to drastically reduce child rights violations.

Finally, the Government must see the protection of children's rights as a moral as well as a contractual obligation. It should therefore ensure that it is committed to whatever international treaty it signs and not just paying lip service to it.

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ates a high degree of confusion and uncertainty, as there are multiple definitions in various pieces of legislation as to the age below which one is legally considered a child. It has been noted that this state of affairs affects children at both civil and criminal levels due to the lack of clarity as to whether they are entitled to protection as children or to be treated as adults. Under the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Administration of Juvenile Justice, a juvenile is defined as a young person under the age of 18 whose treatment for an offence is different from adults. This definition, which is consistent with the definition of a child under Art. 1 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), clearly contradicts various definitions of a child under Sierra Leonean law. For example, a case in point involves a boy who is alleged to have raped a girl aged 5. It is alleged that he is 17 but close scrutiny revealed that he was not above 14 years. The matter is still before Magistrate Court No.3 and it is still unclear whether the case should be tried as juvenile case or simply as child cases.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND CRUELTY

Violence against children consti-

jury to health (including injury to or loss of sight, hearing, limb or organ of body and any mental derangement)...". There is no provision for the protection of children under customary law, and in practice the rights of children are being violated on a regular basis.

UNLAWFUL CARNAL KNOWLEDGE

Unlawful carnal knowledge is a criminal offence punishable under sec. 6 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Act, for a period not exceeding two years if committed against any girl below 13 years of age. Also sec. 9 of the said Act includes indecent assault and attempted carnal knowledge against children less than 14 years having the same punishment. On the other hand, rape of a person over the age of 16 is considered a felony and carries a maximum sentence of fifteen years. The deficiency here is that perpetrators who rape children under the age of 14 are only liable to two years of imprisonment whilst those who rape children over 16 are jailed for fifteen years. This certainly trivializes the prosecution of sexual crimes thus leaving children unprotected from sexual offences.

ADOPTION LAW

adopted child and those of the foster parents.

EARLY MARRIAGES

There are 4 types of marriages in Sierra Leone, namely; Islamic, Christian, Civil and customary law marriages. Under customary law, there is no minimum age of marriage applicable throughout Sierra Leone. Under Islamic and customary law, a girl below the age of 10 can be given for marriage depending on their level of maturity. It is confirmed from studies that because of this early marriages, negative impacts are cited in their full developments as regards their education, economic autonomy, physical and physiological health. Most adolescents who marry young begin childbirth at a very early age. This normally leads to high maternal and infant mortality. Thus early marriage is an abuse of the right of the girl child which practice is detrimental to the development of the young girl.

CHILD LABOUR

According to Caps.212 of the Employees and Employers Act of the Laws of Sierra Leone 1960, the minimum age of employment of children is 12 years and above, except in the case where they are approved by a competent author-

Standard Times

Tuesday, 20 February 2007

The Judiciary at A Glance

Many people all over the world have come to accept the judiciary of their country as the only constitutional body charged with the responsibility of interpreting the laws of the land in an impartial manner, the last resort for redress. The judiciary in Sierra Leone is no different from other countries as it was created to fulfill the same role the judiciaries in other countries perform.

The difference between the Sierra Leone judiciary and other countries is perhaps the only judiciary in the world that fails to comply with the laws of the land, and where decisions are taken without proper consultation and with due established procedures.

A lot of readers will share the view that the judiciary has been a vital source of the problems we have encountered in this country. Indeed the TRC report confirms that view. The question one would ask is what has the Chief Justice and his team done to reverse the findings about the image of the judiciary? If ever any research has been done. Although, a code of conduct for judicial officers has been put in place to ensure that "transparency and accountability" are visibly in operation in the judiciary, how effective the implementation of the code is is the million questions the public is demanding an answer. No one should be hoodwinked by such sound bites. A code of conduct is not what the populace in this country need at this time. Quite frankly the code of conduct is ineffective and has clearly not done anything to salvage the reputation of the judiciary as being corrupt. No one to date has been disciplined pursuant to its provision and contrary to the code of conduct, we see judicial Officers openly flouting the code to the extent that the position is no different than it was prior to the code of conduct. What people need is justice when cases are brought to court and decided within the shortest possible time. Cases are still subject to excessive delays with long periods of remand for those in custody, accused persons who have been granted bail frequently jump bail, witnesses do not come to court and exhibits do not come to court when required are among a plethora of problems including low salaries for judicial officers as well as non payment of salaries for considerable periods of time. During the usual rounds of the courts by journalists of this press, a number of courts including the High Courts were unable to commence the day's sittings as court clerks (who have not been paid for up to six

The Judiciary at a glance

months) and has to go to Youyi Building to collect their salaries in the middle of the court sittings. The Judiciary cannot conjure up an arrangement that would ensure that court clerks receive their salaries without disruption to the court sittings. The Judiciary has agreed with the Sierra Leone Commercial Bank who has set up mobile banking units at Youyi Building to cash these cheques at Youyi Building, which then requires the clerks to abandon court sittings in order to collect their salaries. It is of some concern that two highly paid DFID sponsored consultants currently employed as Masters and Registrars may be handicapped of proposing a proper arrangement as opposed to touting this colonial arrangement as a new and novel idea. In the midst of all these the competence of some of the Magistrates and Judges on the bench are a cause for concern. Young graduates from the Law School are recruited to serve as Magistrates and Masters and Regis-

ages of Magistrates and Judges we have in the judiciary." The Bench is not a place to do pupilage however. One wonders how the Chief Justice will feel if he has to appear before a law graduate and risked being sent to Jail by someone who is not competent to serve in that capacity? This was a move he opposed whilst in practice as a Lawyer which was in the interest of the country and the progress and effective implementation of the law. No fanciful code of conduct will rectify these problems and to date appears to be the only significant issue in the judiciary.

These issues highlighted above are of considerable concerns in this country. However there is an even more alarming issue. That is the Justices of the Peace, frequently referred to as JPs. WHO ARE THEY? These are people who sit as Magistrates and make life changing decisions concerning member of the public and whom have "NO LEGAL KNOWLEDGE OR TRAIN-

officers with no legal knowledge either. What type of justice are these people meting out to the public? However this position has caused too many problems in the Judiciary as previous Chief Justices have only allocated minor matters to them to preside over, not complex or those matters with legal implications. For example abusive language and insulting conduct are cases within their competence.

However, it would appear that the Chief Justice has recently reversed centuries of practice by now allocating very complex and technical offences to JPs, by doing so may have removed these cases from the Professionally and legally trained Magistrates. Many litigants would now find their private criminal prosecutions presided over by JPs, as the Chief Justice has given a directive that all private prosecutions should be allocated to JPs regardless of their complexities. Such decision has not only provoked debates from some appellate and supreme

he subjecting innocent member of the public to such injustice? What the Chief Justice has done is not a matter of merry making as it deals with one of the fundamental right of every individual, which is the freedom of an individual. The Chief Justice has issued this directive without having the power to do so. He has no powers to issue practice directions and this directive is indeed a practice direction but without approval from parliament. Besides, the Courts Act 1965 regulates the position of Magistrates in this country, two of the Act defines a Magistrate as "A person appointed as such by the Judicial Services Commission and includes any person performing the functions of a Magistrate in accordance with subsection (2) of section 5." 5(2) provides: "Where in any place in the Provinces or in the Sherbro Judicial District, the number of pending cases in any judicial district cannot in the opinion of the Magistrate having jurisdiction in such district, be disposed of within a reasonable time, such Magistrate may summon two or more Justices of the Peace to perform the functions of a Magistrate in such District."

Freetown does not clearly form part of the Provinces neither does the Sherbro Island extend to Freetown, Consequently JPs have no lawful authority to sit in Freetown, except from the Chief Justice. JPs MUST CEASE SITTING ON ALL MATTERS IN FREETOWN WITH IMMEDIATE EFFECT.

The implications of this arbitrary action by the Chief Justice are many and varied. All those who have been sentenced to terms of imprisonment in Freetown by JPs have been convicted unlawfully and ought to be set free. These trials are a nullity and those currently on remand at the Pademba Road Prisons are currently being held unlawfully if they were remanded by JPs. To be imprisoned by an unlawful court is a fundamental breach on one's human rights and ought not to happen in a democratic state. The Chief Justice should understand the implications of his decision and reverse it for the good of society. Organizations like LAWCLA must take up this issue to avoid further injustice to the people of this country.

The Chief Justice should understand the implications of his decision and reverse it for the good of society. Organizations like LAWCLA must take up this issue to avoid further injustice to the people of this country

trars, a decision which has been a calamity in terms of the quality of justice meted out by these recruits. They are qualified legally, but require time and experience to determine the fate of people brought before them. Even in past years with all the shortages in recruitment in the judiciary no Chief Justice has ever recruited law school graduates to serve on the bench immediately after graduation since it is a position that requires experience, knowledge, patience and tact. Young graduates who have never mentioned a case in court are presiding over multi million Leones cases as well as determining the liberties of individuals. The defence of Chief Justice may sound good and effective depending on the presentation. "To address the short-

ING". It is scary to think that a man who knows nothing about the law can tell you in a court of law that you have broken the law, incredible these JPs continue doing so on a daily basis. The JP in the early days is a man who was a local school teacher or civil servant who, having retired is recruited to serve as a Magistrate and expected to apply his common sense to situations they encounter in their cases. Well there is nothing wrong with that. Even in the UK, an established democracy, JPs do usually sit as Magistrates. However there is always a clerk whose duty is to advise them on the law. The clerks are always Barristers and Solicitors and they sit with the Lay Magistrates to assist them. In this country, the clerks are merely administrative

court Judges who have argued that the Chief Justice since he failed to acquire the rights of practice directives from Parliament should not in any way put the JPs in a situation that would be at the detriment of litigants. Above all they are not legally minded. Some are retired bankers, police officers with crooked background, retired principals and pastors. This is a disaster and the question is how can the Chief Justice issue this kind of directive is beyond imagination especially those who knew him as somebody who stand for principles. It makes little sense whatsoever to remove an airline pilot (who is trained to fly) from flying a plane and hand it over to a "Poda Poda driver." The Chief Justice would surely not fly in such a plane. So why is

Standard Times
Tuesday, 20 February 2007

Diplomats pull-out... British, French nationals flee Guinea

... Religious groups mediate

BY SAIDU KAMARA

Reports monitored by this press from Guinea intimated that most diplomats based in the capital, Conakry have fled the city as there is no end in sight for the crisis, which has claimed the lives of over hundred

and fifty people including an eight-year old boy who was shot at point blank range.

According to sources close to the diplomatic and consular corp in Conakry, most of the French, British and other envoys have left the country temporary, leaving be-



President Lansana Conte hind low level staff to monitor the situation.

The strike action has degenerated and there are speculations that the

situation may get worst in the future if urgent steps are not put in place to prevent spill over into neighbouring countries.

The international community has condemned the recent action by the ailing President Lansana Conte in declaring martial law and imposing 18-hour curfew as a way to keep the demonstrators at bay.

However, in a bid to resolve the crisis, religious leaders mainly Muslims and Christians in Guinea have held talks with the union leaders and the government, and reportedly the government prevailed on the union leaders to re-

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British, French nationals flee Guinea

FROM PAGE 1

alize that Guinea is bigger than President Conte and therefore they should not fast track the death of innocent people. They said a lot of people are suffering more than ever before, and

called on them to forget about the strike action and end the political crisis.

Meanwhile, the African Union (AU) has called for an end to the "ominous situation involving the killing of citizens".

Independent Observer
Tuesday, 20 February 2007

Sa. Leone wary of Guinea conflict...

but no cause for alarm

Sierra Leone has taken precautions to avoid a spillover of the violent political unrest in neighbouring Guinea where dozens have died in recent weeks, its police chief said.

"There is no cause for alarm concerning the security of nation because ... all modalities have been put in place for any spillover of civilians or armed men into the country," police assistant inspector-general Morrie Lengor told reporters.

Guinea's President Lansana Conte put his country under a "state of siege" on Monday allowing the military to do all it sees necessary to avoid the country descending into a "civil war" following weeks of political upheaval that has claimed 112 lives.

"Mechanisms are in place to stop a recurrence of what caused the spillover of armed men into Sierra Leone in the early 1990s that later turned out to be catastrophic leading to 10 years of war with devastating effect," the police chief said.

A civil war - widely believed to have been driven by former warlord and president of Liberia, Charles Taylor - broke out in Sierra Leone in 1991. Lasting 10 years, the conflict, one of the most brutal in modern history, claimed some 200,000 lives and left thousands maimed.

Sapa-AFP

Cocorioko website

Tuesday, 20 February 2007

<http://www.cocorioko.net/charlesmargairubbinghishandswithglee.html>

With Hinga Norman now a confirmed PMDC member ...Charles Margai Rubbing His Hands With Glee

By Wilfred Kabs-Kanu

Charles Margai , the political upstart in Sierra Leone aspiring to send the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) packing , come the July 28 elections, is rubbing his hands with glee , like Houdini the magician, after completing the immaculate feat of prising the politically-valuable former Chief of the Civil Defence Force (CDF), Sam Hinga Norman, from the hands of his bitter rivals.

It would not be surprising if Charles Margai is screaming "Yahooooooo !!!" in the shower or the privacy of his bedroom , because even ardent SLPP supporters in the diaspora, though still in denial and disbelief, conceded that if it is really true that Chief Norman has crossed carpet from their party to the PMDC, he has dealt "Some kind of " blow to their chances of winning the July 28 elections.

It is just as well that SLPP fanatics , who admittedly are always confident, have decided to gobble a generous piece of the humble pie and give Charles Margai his just desserts, even if for a short moment. If it is indeed true that Norman had joined the PMDC, it is a monumental victory. The PMDC must be given credit for what they have accomplished.

The truth that no SLPP supporter can deny is that Chief Hinga Norman, though in captivity at the UN-supported Special Court for alleged War Crimes and crimes against humanity, , still commands awe, respect and hero-status among a good number of Sierra Leoneans, especially in the South/East .Even those who think he deserves his present fate because of alleged atrocities committed by the CDF militia under his control during the war, still admit, if grudgingly, that Norman at least also deserves some praise for helping immensely to stop the wicked and devilish Revolutionary United Front (RUF) from taking over Sierra Leone.

And for the South/Easterner who still looks at the war as a well-orchestrated plan to destroy Mendeland and eternally subjugate its people, (Though events later proved them wrong , because other parts of the country later suffered equally, if not worse), Chief Norman is the folk hero and savior responsible for whatever political clout they still possess in Sierra Leone, even as many of them are displeased with the SLPP for straying from their desire of total dominance . President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, whatever his mistakes, has ensured that he runs a government of inclusion that cuts across tribal and regional lines, to the bitter end. Kabbah has remained a centrist ,with many key posts in government in the hands of Westerners and Northerners.

The South/Easterner, always casting a wary look back at the APC rule when he believes that his people were subjected to almost complete control by Northerners, thinks it could have been worse , had Hinga Norman not withstood AFRC Military junta strongman Johnny Paul Koroma , and helped to reverse the May 27, 1997 disastrous coup. . A man credited with the survival of Mendeland and some parts of Sierra Leone where the CDF also thwarted the RUF , should therefore be expected to command tremendous influence to be able to tip the scales in Sierra Leone's power struggle, especially if he helps to deprive the SLPP from sweeping the South/East as it had always done during elections.

To win any election in Sierra Leone, the SLPP needs to make a clean sweep of the South/East. The party's support in the West and North, has always been suspect and only a landslide victory in the South/East, spiced with modest gains in the North and capture of a large chunk of the votes in the West , has always helped the SLPP to prevail. With the APC on the ascendant once more in its traditional Northern strongholds and the West a likely dogfight between them and the PMDC, it is easier to see why the worry lines have started developing on the faces of SLPP supporters.

However, political experts who talked to COCORIOKO last weekend, urged caution in making elections projections based on the switch-over to the PMDC by Chief Hinga Norman and Special Court indictees. The SLPP, they warned, is not just a political party in the South/East. It is a bastion that has solid bearing on the very cultural, philosophical, psychological and political essence of the people. Unlike the North, where the APC is not considered as a vehicle for national hegemony, the mende man in the South/East looks at the SLPP as the be-all and end-all of his very existence and essence. His loyalty, it could be said, is not built on personalities but on the party itself. Some people have said that even if a dog is given the SLPP symbol, the South/Easterner would rather have that dog win his votes than waste it on his rivals. As Patrick Lavalie of Parsippany, NJ told this newspaper: "Without the SLPP, I am nothing in Sierra Leone. Therefore I will always vote SLPP".

Some Sierra Leoneans told COCORIOKO last weekend that given a choice between the heroism of Chief Norman and victory for the SLPP, the typical South/Easterner will choose the latter, even while manifesting all imaginable respects for the Chief.

Another school of thought over the weekend, however, was that those who are predicting that events do not affect South/Easterners are underestimating two things. Firstly, they are underrating the political change that has swept Sierra Leone. These Sierra Leoneans said that they have been shuttling between the Diaspora and Sierra Leone and fully understand what is going on presently in Sierra Leone more than those political experts making their projections from the comfort of their armchairs in their living rooms in America or England. They applied the fact that things have changed in Sierra Leone and people now look after their own interests than traditional loyalties to political parties. People, they say have changed so much that they will vote only for the party or person they believe will bring changes to their lives.

The second factor that people are said to be underestimating is the extent to which Sierra Leoneans, even in the South/East, are frustrated with the SLPP government. Some angry Sierra Leoneans told COCORIOKO that the SLPP did nothing for the South/East. They said that in fact, the SLPP was inimical to the socio-political and economic welfare of the South/Eastern people. And they do not see Vice-President Solomon Berewa as somebody that would reverse Kabbah's unhelpful attitude to the South/East. The SLPP today, they claimed, is not the SLPP of the Sir Milton and Sir Albert Margai days. This present SLPP, they went on, is just a shell of the original SLPP "The present SLPP is packed full of greedy, corrupt, unpatriotic, self-seeking and anti-people swehgbehs who have hijacked and destroyed the dreams of the founding fathers of the party", one man stated sardonically on the phone. These bitter Sierra Leoneans would not mind turning their backs on an SLPP they once loved and voting for the PMDC.

From all indications, it looks like both the SLPP and PMDC have a lot of work to do to win the elections. If they cancel each other out in the South/East and key constituencies, the APC will capitalize and snatch victory from right under their noses.


United Nations Nations Unies
 United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 19 February 2007

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

International Clips on Liberia

There were no relevant stories on Liberia in the international media today.

International Clips on West Africa

VOA 17 February 2007

Guinea Unions Cancel Planned Talks with Government

By Gilbert da Costa, Abuja

Union leaders in Guinea say they have cancelled talks with the government until martial law is lifted. Meanwhile, the West-African regional grouping, ECOWAS, has sent a high-level delegation to Guinea, to help resolve the crisis there. Gilbert da Costa reports for VOA from Abuja, the ECOWAS team is led by a former Nigerian military ruler. The three-man team is led by Nigeria's former military ruler, Ibrahim Babangida, and includes Mohammed Ibn Chambas, president of ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States.

GUINEA: Life means terror in army-run Conakry

CONAKRY, 16 February 2007 (IRIN) - "The boss made reference to President Lansana Conte and gave us the order to shoot anyone provocative, so whoever provokes me, I will shoot him without any hesitation," said a Kalashnikov-toting soldier in the main street outside the Donka hospital in central Conakry on Thursday, who refused to give his name.

Local Media – Newspaper

President Johnson-Sirleaf Returns Home to a Jubilant Welcome

(The Analyst, The News, National Chronicle, New Democrat, Heritage, Public Agenda and The Informer)

- President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and entourage returned home on Sunday to a jubilant welcome following fruitful discussions with international partners and world-class business conglomerates on Liberia's debt problems, development agenda and challenges confronting the Government.
- Speaking to well wishers on her return from the Partnership Forum in Washington D.C., President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf stated that progress from the Forum was a first step to consolidating the peace and that much still needed to be done to accelerate the Country's development efforts.

Newspapers in Possession of "Damaging" Pornographic Photo of Presidential Affairs Minister

(Public Agenda and Liberian Express)

- The *Public Agenda* and the *Liberian Express* have claimed to be in possession of a pornographic photo supposedly showing Mr. Willis Knuckles, Minister of State for Presidential Affairs and Chief of Staff in the Office of the President in the frenzy of sexual intercourse and/or orgy with two ladies.

- It is not known whether the photo was deliberately taken by Mr. Knuckles himself or a sinister plan carried out by any of the ladies involved or by an unknown person for the purpose of destroying him.

UN Envoy Hails Debt Relief Deals

(National Chronicle and Liberian Express)

- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Alan Doss, said “real progress” has been made in dealing with Liberia’s almost US\$4 billion debt, but acknowledged that major challenges remain in rebuilding, particularly the security and creating jobs. Mr. Doss made the assertions at the just ended Partners’ Forum on Liberia held in Washington D.C., the United States of America.

Key Faction Leader Confirms Recruitment of Mercenaries

(The Informer)

- Madam Aisha Conneh, former executive of the disbanded Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, confirmed over the weekend that some Liberian ex-fighters were being recruited to participate in the Guinean conflict. Madam Conneh described as “common criminals” those engaged in such recruitment as it would undermine the existing cordial relationship between Presidents Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and Lansana Conteh.

Local Media – Star Radio *(News culled from website at 11:00 am)*

President Says Partnership Forum Consolidates the Peace

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Ex-Warring Faction Leader Confirms Recruitment of Mercenaries

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Candidates in Nimba District By-Election Laud President

- In their debate as candidates in the Nimba County by-election slated for Tuesday, February 20, Liberia Action Party candidate Paul Tuazamah and Unity Party candidate Evans Koah said that they supported President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s move to takeover the Cocopa Rubber Plantation Company with Mr. Koah adding that the step was necessary in the wake of violence at the Plantation while Mr. Tuazamah thought the President should use the Courts if it became necessary for the Government to possess the farm.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Conservation Group to Empower Communities to Protect Sarpo Park

- Addressing a news conference over the weekend, Conservation International/Liberia Country Director Alex Pearl said that the institution would launch a US\$1.4 million project to involve communities in the conservation and protection of the Sarpo National Park in Sinoe County.
- He stated that the USAID-funded Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) pilot project would mobilize 6 communities around the Park to help stop illegal activities and support its conservation.
- Mr. Pearl added that the communities will receive assistance projects, skills training and service provision in exchange for their participation in protecting the Park.

- The project is being implemented by Conservation International/Liberia in partnership with the National Adult Education Association of Liberia and the Forestry Development Authority, among others.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

County Attorney to Orders Arrest of "Sassywood" Administrators

- In an interview, Grand Cape Mount County Attorney Richard Davis said that he would order the arrest of anyone caught administrating "Sassywood" in the County in compliance with a directive by the Ministry of Justice to all County Attorneys to stop "trial by ordeal" widely known as "Sassywood".
- Attorney Davis' order followed the conduct of "Sassywood" in Garwula District, Grand Cape Mount County to find the alleged thief of a cassava processing machine in the area. Attorney Davis added that the practice violated human rights and undermined the judicial system of the Country.
- Attorney Davis recalled that the Supreme Court prohibited the administration of "Sassywood" in Liberia 1916.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Complete versions of the UNMIL International Press Clips, UNMIL Daily Liberian Radio Summary and UNMIL Liberian Newspapers Summary are posted each day on the UNMIL Bulletin Board. If you are unable to access the UNMIL Bulletin Board or would like further information on the content of the summaries, please contact Mr. Weah Karpeh at karpeh@un.org.

Voice of America

Monday, 19 February 2007

Guinea's Union Leaders Welcome Lighter Curfew, Pursue Strike Action

Union leaders in Guinea are welcoming a more relaxed curfew, but are pursuing a crippling strike action. They say they want President Lansana Conte to respect agreements signed in January that have been ignored. VOA's Nico Colombant reports from Dakar.

One of the main union leaders, who initiated the strike, Radiatou Serah Diallo, tells VOA she is open to dialogue with Mr. Conte, but that negotiations are no longer needed.

She says he already signed agreements that led to the strike's brief suspension last month,

but then ignored them.

Following the deal, Mr. Conte unilaterally named officials to key national and foreign posts, and then appointed a close ally as new prime minister, Eugene Camara. This angered union leaders, opposition politicians and many young people who took to the streets again, and went on looting rampages. They had demanded an independent prime minister.



Guinean soldiers patrol a street in Conakry, Guinea, 19 Feb 2007

The renewed violence led to the establishment of a curfew, which was relaxed Monday, allowing people to move about from six in the morning, rather than starting at noon.

But the strike continues, with banks, government offices and major shops shut down, as has been the case for many weeks since the strike action first started in January.

A West African human-rights activist, Ibrahima Kane, is not surprised by the strike's lasting power. He says Guineans are fed up with Mr. Conte's autocratic rule since a coup in 1984.

"The society in Guinea has changed. People in Guinea are also looking at the life of people in the sub-region. It was the same situation in Mali. People managed to get rid of [former military ruler] Moussa Traore," said Kane. "Now, they have a very democratic country, a very democratic society. It was recently the same situation in Mauritania [where] people tried, even [if it was] with the help of the army, but they are now trying to organize a better society. It was even [the same] in the neighboring country, Guinea-Bissau, two years ago, the same situation and it has changed. The only country that is not changing in 30 years in the subregion is Guinea-Conakry."

In Guinea, the few times there have been attempts at mass demonstrations during the strike action, there has been fierce military repression, leaving more than 100 people dead.

A West Africa analyst with the Brussels-based International Crisis Group, Gilles Yabi, says the presidential guard, in particular played a key role in stopping demonstrations around the center of Conakry.

"The presidential guard is mainly composed of people from the same ethnic area, and even from the same family as President Conte, so these people are enjoying important economic privileges.

So, we can expect them to be more loyal to President Conte, and again even follow him, even during bad situations for [Mr.] Conte himself," said Yabi.

Yabi says divisions could be possible within the army, but that this has yet to happen.

"There are a lot of high ranking officials who came to power at the same time as [Mr.] Conte, and who are completely associated to the regime. I think, they are also in a difficult situation now, and they are certainly trying to evaluate what will be best for them to follow [Mr.] Conte again for a few weeks, or now to try to change the tide, and then to have a future in a new Guinea," added Yabi.

The latest strike action started after Mr. Conte unilaterally freed two allies, who had been jailed as part of a corruption probe, amid grinding poverty, rising prices and crumbling government services.

BBC Online

Monday, 19 February 2007

Rwanda frees genocide prisoners

Rwanda is releasing more than 9,000 prisoners, most of whom are in jail over the 1994 genocide which left about 800,000 people - mostly Tutsis - dead.

This is the latest wave of releases under a 2003 presidential decree. About 60,000 inmates have been freed since.

The government has said the releases are to ease overcrowding and foster reconciliation, Reuters reports.

The latest group to be freed does not include any major figures involved in the genocide, an official said.

About 800,000 Tutsis and Hutu moderates were slaughtered during the country's 100-day genocide of 1994.

Since 1997 a UN tribunal sitting in Tanzania has convicted 26 ringleaders of the genocide and acquitted four people, according to its website.

Rwanda has also been trying people accused over the genocide in local institutions known as gacaca courts.

Rehabilitation

The Rwandan government says that most of the thousands released since President Paul Kagame's 2003 decree are the sick, elderly and children.

"The group that has been released excludes key masterminds of the genocide," Rwanda's chief prosecutor told the Reuters news agency.

Genocide survivors, however, are outraged and accuse the released inmates of planning more ethnic crimes.

"They should ensure that they keep an eye on these people because some of them continue to harbour a genocide ideology", said Theodore Simburdali, president of a local genocide survivors group told Reuters.

Inmates at the central prison were crowding round the windows of their cells waiting to hear if their names were called out, a BBC correspondent in Kigali says.

He adds that women prisoners, waiting in the sun with their belongings packed, were seen shouting with joy if their names were on the list. The prisoners will go to rehabilitation camps for two months before being allowed home.

Many thousands more people remain in Rwanda's overcrowded jails.



Some prisoners have been held for 10 years without trial

Special Court Supplement
Intramural Football Match, Saturday 17 February 2007
Game 2: Rest of the Court 5, Detention 4 (Penalties)







