

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

Tuesday, 21 March 2006

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
If you are aware of omissions or have any comments or suggestions please contact
Ibrahim Tommy
Ext 7248

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Awoko

21 March 2006

“Two men were given long and short sleeves”

As the trial of the three Revolutionary United Front (RUF) Special Court indictees continues, a prosecution witness TF1-028 yesterday disclosed that as they approached Kortu village, two men were amputated.

The witness, who was led in evidence by Mohammed Bangura, said when they went to the village, a man in a white “wronko” went in a house and came out with two men; he then asked the men: “long sleeve or short

sleeve which one do you want?”

The right hand of one of the men was amputated at the elbow which was long sleeve and the other’s hand was cut at the wrist which was called a short sleeve.”

The witness disclosed that after their hands were amputated, one of them was given a letter to take to Tejan Kabbah for him to replace their hands.

Narrating further, the witness said the group which she was part of was headed by 55, Gullit and others went to Rosus but there were frequent bombings there so

they left that area and went to Tufayia. At Tufayia, she said, the Red Lion of RUF went there so also were “Saj’s group”.

TF1-028 went on to state that she was informed by a man that they would be going to Freetown. Later they were called to a meeting where 55 and Saj addressed them. At the meeting, they were told that women should take one dress together with the ones they were putting on, as they would be coming to Freetown. The reason for them taking few clothes was because there would be fighting on the way.

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Two men were given long and short sleeves

From Front Page

Saj on the other hand, the witness maintained, informed them that the only reason they were coming to Freetown was not to fight or loot, but because Tejan Kabbah had said he had disbanded the Army.

On 6th January 1999 the

group entered Freetown.

The witness stated that two of her brothers were hacked to death by men in combat fatigues and she narrowly escaped but was later caught by some men, and one of them asked her about her tribe. “I told them that I was a Madingo-Limba, he said I should not

be killed, but one of them declined saying we were relatives of Tejan Kabbah but at the end I was spared.”

She went on that they were in the group of combatant who wore civilian clothes toting loads and they went to Manyae where she saw four boys between the ages of 12 and 13 years burning houses.

Exclusive
21 March 2006

OPINION

By Foday Fofana

We Sierra Leoneans are very unique on earth. We are the only people in this world who pray to God for one thing today and when God delivers the good tomorrow, we say we didn't mean that; we meant this.

We have long been praying for the former Liberian warlord to get out of our way because of the carnage he brought upon us through the RUF. We prayed that God Almighty takes Taylor's life so that we can have peace.

God being the most merciful, he did not get Taylor killed but put on a silver platter and bundled away to a cosy retreat (exile) in Calabar State, Nigeria so as to give the West African sub-region a new lease of life.

BRING TAYLOR HERE

And no sooner Charles Gangay Taylor landed in Nigeria, we all started crying foul and joined the first Chief Prosecutor of the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone Mr. David Crane; an aggressive war crimes suspects hunter in the campaign to get Charles Taylor extradited to Freetown to answer to charges of crime against humanity in their various forms and his particular role in the bloody civil war which cost over thirty thousand souls.

TAYLOR ON THE ROAD

But now Charlie Boy is on the road to Freetown to be put behind bars and the comfort of the Special Court as president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia had officially requested that president Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria hands over Taylor to the war crimes tribunal.

Nigeria has since 2003 stated their commitment to hand over Mr. Taylor to a democratically elected government in Liberia after consultations with his peers including President Kabbah; who struck the Taylor asylum deal.

TAYLOR A HOT POTATO

But Mr. Charles Taylor is a hot potato back home

The Extradition of Charles Taylor

in Liberia where he has a registered political party, a performing Radio Station, a couple of newspapers, various big business interests and the man is still extremely wealthy.

Even in exile, Taylor tried to influence the elections in Liberia until the International Crisis Group blew the whistle on him and UN Special Court, the United States and Britain among others piled pressure on Nigeria before president Obasanjo tightened the asylum conditions on Taylor; with all his communications facility intercepted.

WHAT TAYLOR CAN DO

Now that he is on his way to this country, there are very mixed feeling about whether to welcome or not to welcome our killer-Charles Gangay Taylor. There are two major schools of thought. Those who say bringing Taylor here is bringing a new war and those of the view that his coming to face justice in Sierra Leone would serve as a deterrent to potential political adversaries.

That said, those nationals who are apprehensive

Now that he is on his way to this country, there are very mixed feeling about whether to welcome or not to welcome our killer-Charles Gangay Taylor. There are two major schools of thought.

about Taylor's coming do have a fine point of concern. If Taylor was able to bribe his way in Nigeria to get money from his overseas accounts and transfer to Calabar, Monrovia, Conakry and even Freetown; what guarantee do we have that once here in greedy Sierra Leone (call it poor), Mr. Taylor may not even buy up his escape from prison!

Therefore, while we are all crying for justice and justice is about to be dispensed; let's ensure that when Taylor eventually gets here, security around him should be watertight for very many reasons.

TAYLOR SHOULDN'T DIE LIKE SANKOH

Firstly, Taylor should not be allowed to die in detention like his late brother Foday Saybana Sankoh of the former RUF or Slobodan Milosovitch of Serbia who died in an International War Crimes' Tribunal cell in the Hague, Netherlands where some said, he was poisoned.

We say this because Foday Sankoh died without saying a word and so did Sam Bockarie (Maskita) while Johnny Paul Koroma has disappeared into thin air like salt in soup.

No; Taylor must not die in prison; Taylor should be given time and life to talk and call names – the big names overseas; foreign powers who helped him; those he sold timber to in France and our diamonds; where they ended up.

We would want to know who in the first place let Taylor out of a maximum security prison in the United States of America and funded him to wreck havoc on Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea and as that which goes around turns around; on Ivory Coast from where he launched his assault on Liberia.

So we believe Mr. Taylor should come here to dance to the tune he played for over two decades. Two decades of devastation, retrogression and hopelessness should not go scot free. Taylor and his backers must face justice! Lonta!

Standard Times
21 March 2006

SPECIAL COMMENTARY

Extraditing Charles Taylor

THE NEWLY elected President of the Republic of Liberia, Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has reportedly made a formal request to the Nigeria government to hand over Charles Taylor to Liberia. Understandably this request is said to have been made by the Liberian President during a recent visit to the Republic of Nigeria.

THE NIGERIAN government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo cautiously responded to the request by promising to consult with ECOWAS and other African Union leaders. It was however not revealed as to how long this consultation will last and when a final statement will be made regarding the extradition of Mr. Charles Taylor to Liberia.

IF PRESIDENT Olusegun Obasanjo is at all to yield to the request of handing over Charles Taylor to the Liberian government that would certainly mean the beginning of his extradition to face the United Nations backed Special Court in Sierra Leone. Charles Taylor is at the moment an indictee of the Special Court of Sierra Leone, being charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity.

WHILE THIS news of the renewed request for handing over Charles Taylor is received with mixed feelings many are still wondering whether after all the effort of David Crane and the very United Nations, the Liberian President would now be able to overcome the government of Nigeria. THE NEWS is received with mixed feelings not because people do not want Charles Taylor to be tried for his alleged support of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels. What however remains the primordial concern is the security threat such an activity might pose to us as a nation.

WE DO recall that Charles Taylor was in power for a considerable period and had a large following from his then rebel faction. We continue to be concerned that his former NPFL fighters are still roaming within this sub-region as hired mercenaries.

OUR APPREHENSION is that those mercenaries are capable of wrecking havoc on this nation if proper security measures are not put in place to mark the coming of Mr. Taylor to the Special Court.

AS A nation, we ought to entertain such fears because we can also recall the use of this country by ECOMOG as a launching pad to strike Liberia that was the cause for which Charles Taylor promised the people of this country a "taste of the bitterness of war."

WE ARE also concerned with the fact that promises of providing adequate security are always made by the international community, and we are also equally aware of the fact that whenever push comes to the shove, they pack up their bags and are hurriedly flown out of the country.

IT IS against this background that most of us would hardly be impressed with promises by the authorities of the provision of adequate security to try Charles Taylor here in Sierra Leone. This is because when there is serious tension those so-called security persons will be airlifted to safe heavens, leaving the poor and helpless at the mercy of the invaders.

THERE ARE of course many in certain quarters that believe in the recent moves by the President of Liberia could not be unconnected with external pressure exerted by the United States on her government to drag Charles Taylor to the Special Court for some amount of money to run her government.

MOST OF us are keenly following the interest and support the American government is giving to the

newly elected government of Liberia and we are very certain that the issue of Charles Taylor's trial is a precondition for the United States Government to continue its support to the Liberia government.

AFTER THE frantic efforts by David Crane that went in vain, the America government now wants to use the cash-strapped Liberian government to achieve its objectives.

WE HOPE the Liberian government is putting in place stringent security measures, as their government's request for Charles Taylor to face the Special Court in Sierra Leone might stir renewed upheavals in that country.

THE CONCERN we are having regarding this matter is that an upheaval from Liberia will have the tendency of undermining the fragile peace we are now enjoying. Additionally most of the problems that has plagued us as a nation emanated from Liberia. We have always bear the brunt of problem that emanated from Liberia. THUS AFTER a period of almost eleven years of turmoil, we really do not want a situation that will give cause to our people to start running helter-skelter from their villages.

IT IS therefore our hope that the Liberian government has taken all these variables into consideration before making that appeal for the handling over of Charles Taylor.

WE ARE pretty sure that President Obasanjo himself would not be against the trial of Charles Taylor considering how much Nigeria lost in terms of human and other resources. His misgivings are that if the situation is not properly handled, it might spark another fire that might be difficult to extinguish.

WHILE THE people of this nation may not be against the trial of Charles Taylor, it ought nevertheless to be emphatically stated here that our security and the liberty to go about our daily chores freely is most paramount.

Awoko
21 March 2006

FOC welcomes Taylor's Extradition

The Forum of Conscience (FOC) has welcomed the "request by the Liberian President, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the General Assembly for the immediate commencement and consultation among the African Heads of State on the extradition of former President Charles Taylor.

The ex-President is to answer to war crimes

charges at the Special for Sierra Leone.

A Press Release issued by FOC yesterday stated that, "it is important to note that the arrival of Mr. Charles Taylor was long overdue though it was better late than never."

The Executive Director of FOC, Mr. John Caulker, said that, "the timing of the request and that of the remaining span of the Special Court

justifies that talks between the administration of the Special Court and the International Criminal Court (ICC) in the Hague should commence immediately to ensure that indictees and would-be indictees, who might escape justice in Sierra Leone are brought before the ICC."

The FOC release further urged the African Heads of State to "realize that the

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Not continued

Mail & Guardian Online

20 March 2006

Getting its own back

Abdul Lamin: ANALYSIS

20 March 2006 03:40

Between a rock and a hard place: Charles Taylor. (Photograph: AP)

Charles Taylor, the fugitive former leader of Liberia who gained notoriety for masterminding brutal armed conflicts in West Africa, is back in the news. Speculation is rife that Nigeria may extradite the former warlord to his homeland.

In 2003, Taylor was forced into exile in a peace deal that had the broad support of African Union leaders, the United States and the United Nations. Prior to his hurried exit, Taylor had been indicted on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity by an international war crimes tribunal, which was set up in 2002 to “prosecute individuals who bear the greatest responsibility” for atrocities committed during Sierra Leone’s decade-long war. Despite the Special Court’s blatant disregard for the complex political dynamics of West Africa, its bold action accelerated Taylor’s flight from the Liberian political stage.

With Taylor getting tongues wagging, it is timely to raise key questions about the latest developments.

Assuming that the country has actually requested Taylor’s extradition, contrary to the denials from Monrovia, one can reasonably infer that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf -- Africa’s first elected female leader -- is yielding to mounting international pressure. Upon taking office in January, Johnson-Sirleaf listed among her main priorities the reconstruction of state institutions, job creation, poverty alleviation, curbing corruption and so forth.

Taylor did not rank among her priorities, because the former leader had not been charged with any crimes in Liberia. Given that his forced return may spark unrest in the country, the Johnson-Sirleaf government reasoned at the time that it made no sense to press for extradition.

Why, then, the sudden shift? As long as Taylor remains a point of reference for those seeking justice for victims of West Africa’s brutal wars, Johnson-Sirleaf will not have breathing space. Related to this, the purported extradition request was made ahead of Johnson-Sirleaf’s first official visit to the US, where there is considerable support among human rights groups and lawmakers for Taylor to be transferred to Sierra Leone, to face the Special Court. While there is enough goodwill in the US at the moment to support her government, sooner or later she will have to address the Taylor issue decisively, lest it become an obstacle to her desire to deliver the dividends of peace.

Furthermore, if Liberia has indeed requested extradition, this can be interpreted as consistent with the Nigerian government’s own pronouncements of 2004: that it would consider sending Taylor back to Liberia if an elected government made the proper request. It was designed to leave the door open for Nigeria to save face. Politically, it would be better for Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo if Taylor eventually landed before the Special Court in Freetown, Sierra Leone, by way of Monrovia.

To the extent that Obasanjo is believed to have recently briefed President Thabo Mbeki on the Taylor issue, as reported in the press, indicates that a consultative process is already underway within the AU. Any decision would thus be interpreted as having the blessing of continental peers, and politically insulate Obasanjo from criticism of capitulation to external pressure.

Finally, what role, if any, does the sudden death of Slobodan Milosevic, who was being tried in The Hague by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, have on the politics and diplomacy surrounding the Taylor matter? It is indeed a timely coincidence that his death occurred about the same time as the debate around Taylor and accountability in West Africa was rekindled. While his death had no direct bearing on the Taylor debate, it is not lost on many that this is yet one more reminder to those who commit crimes against their own people that the world is becoming much smaller. Put differently, the era of impunity may be fast giving way to accountability.

To be sure, Milosevic is the second high-profile war crimes indictee in recent times to have died in custody while on trial or awaiting one. Charles Taylor's former ally, Foday Sankoh, the notorious rebel leader from Sierra Leone, died in 2003 while awaiting trial before the Special Court in Freetown. The charges against Sankoh were subsequently dropped, as eventually will those against Milosevic, leading some to argue that the victims have been robbed of justice.

Nonetheless, the lesson for Taylor and other would-be fugitives is clear: they can run for some time, but, ultimately, they have nowhere to hide.

Dr Abdul Lamin teaches international relations at the University of the Witwatersrand

New York Times

21 March 2006

Editorial: Extraditing Charles Taylor

Last week, Liberia's new president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, called for Nigeria to extradite the former president and warlord Charles Taylor to face war crimes charges. Mr. Taylor, who has been living in a Nigerian government guesthouse since 2003, is wanted on a range of charges relating to his decade-long West African rampage, which unleashed campaigns of torture, rape and dismemberment in Ivory Coast and Sierra Leone and on his home turf, Liberia.

In a just world, Mr. Taylor would have already been tried, condemned and sent up the river.

But the world has never been just, and this case is complicated. When Mr. Taylor was under siege by rebel forces in 2003, the United States, Britain and Nigeria arranged for him to get asylum in Nigeria, under the correct assumption that his quick exile would reduce the bloodshed. Nigeria gave Mr. Taylor a safe harbor on the condition that he stop sending his minions out to rape, pillage and plunder.

A report last year gave some weight to the argument that Mr. Taylor hadn't stopped his bad ways. The Coalition for International Justice charges that Mr. Taylor tried to destabilize Liberia, influence last year's elections and build a regional army. Specifics are vague, but it is true that Mr. Taylor's ex-wife, Jewel, was elected to the Liberian legislature in the same elections that swept Ms. Johnson Sirleaf to power.

There's no law against Jewel Taylor's running for office. And it's tempting to think that it may be better just to let this sleeping dog lie. After all, Mr. Taylor still has many loyalists in Liberia with no qualms about taking to the streets again.

But Ms. Johnson Sirleaf is taking a courageous, very risky step. It is incumbent upon America and Europe, which say they support justice in West Africa, to make sure that she and the new Liberian government get the necessary security aid, including United Nations troops if necessary, to handle any pro-Taylor backlash.

For West Africans, who have endured more than a decade of war, there's no justice without peace.

Irish Independent

20 March 2006

Irish troops braced to arrest former leader

Don Lavery

IRISH troops have been put on high alert to arrest Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia who is wanted for war crimes, and bring him to face justice in a special court in Sierra Leone.

Heavily-armed soldiers backed up by armoured vehicles are on stand-by in the capital Monrovia to bring Taylor to face trial in Sierra Leone after the Cabinet approved of the plan.

In December, the Cabinet approved UN Resolution 1638 extending the Irish troops' role in Liberia to include the apprehension, detention and transfer of Charles Taylor.

The role also involves protecting the court - which tries war crimes and includes one Irish judge - and to evacuate officials and judges in a security crisis. Taylor, who is living in Nigeria, has been accused of committing crimes against humanity by aiding and directing a Sierra Leone rebel movement and trading gems and guns with insurgents infamous for chopping off lips, ears and limbs of victims.

Now the new democratically-elected Liberian president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman president in Africa, has asked Nigeria to hand over Taylor.

Nigeria is consulting with other African leaders on how to respond to the request and a collective decision is expected to hand Taylor over to the special court in Sierra Leone set up by the UN. A Defence Forces spokesman said the 430-strong Irish battalion, who form the UN's quick reaction force in Liberia along with a Swedish company, had been on stand-by since last weekend.

He said as the 'quick reaction unit' in the 15,000 strong UN force, they were expected to play a leading role when Taylor is handed over in Liberia.

A spokeswoman for the Special Court's prosecutor Desmond de Silva welcomed the news: "His cell is empty and awaiting his arrival," she said.

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 20 March 2006

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

International Clips on Liberia

UN to withdraw 10 percent troops from Liberia

MONROVIA, Mar 18, 2006 (Xinhua via COMTEX) -- The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) announced at the weekend that it would withdraw 10percent of its peacekeeping troops from the West African country over a one-year period as part of its draw-down plan beginning this year.

Obasanjo Begins Talks with AU Leaders On Charles Taylor

By Kenneth Ehigiator

Abuja, Mar 18, 2006 (Vanguard/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) --President Olusegun Obasanjo weekend began consultations with African leaders on how to handle the case of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor.

A statement from the office of the Senior Special Assistant to President Obasanjo, Remi Oyo, stated that President Obasanjo is consulting with Chairmen of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The consultation, the statement continued "was in keeping with his commitment to give due consideration to any formal request from a democratically-elected government of Liberia

Irish troops braced to arrest former leader

Source: IRISH INDEPENDENT Date: March 20, 2006

Don Lavery

IRISH troops have been put on high alert to arrest Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia who is wanted for war crimes, and bring him to justice in a special court in Sierra Leone. Heavily-armed soldiers backed up by armoured vehicles are on stand-by in the capital Monrovia to bring Taylor to face trial in Sierra Leone after the Cabinet approved of the plan.

Local Media – Newspapers

President Criticizes Nigeria and International Community on Taylor Issue

(The News)

- Addressing the UN Security Council in New York over the weekend, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf criticized Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and the international community for not acting much earlier to bring former leader Charles Taylor to justice. She said that Liberia was taking a rather courageous but risky stand on the Taylor issue as the country's peace is fragile, adding that Mr. Taylor has many business interests and loyalists in Liberia.

Political Party Officials Deny Holding Secret Meeting on Taylor

(Heritage and The Informer)

- At a news conference in Monrovia over the weekend, former ruling National Patriotic Party (NPP) official Sando Johnson denied allegations that he and several other NPP members had held a secret meeting of a subversive nature at the home of former First Lady Jewel Taylor. He accused state security of harassing him and others because of their strong ties with former President Taylor, whose extradition request has generated tension in Monrovia, with his close associates expressing dissatisfaction.

UNMIL Reduces Troops Level Soon

(Liberian Express)

- UNMIL announced this week in Monrovia that it would withdraw 10 percent of its peacekeeping troops from Liberia over a one-year period as part of its draw down plan, which begins this year.

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

U.S. Pledges to Support Liberia on Taylor’s Trial

- In his speech to the Security Council which was released by the United States Embassy in Monrovia Saturday, United States Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton said that the government of President George Bush would support President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf’s efforts to bring former President Charles Taylor to justice.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Former Lawmaker Wants Labour Ministry to Suspend Issuing Work Permits to Aliens

- Speaking to journalists over the weekend, former Bong County Representative Joseph Cornomia called on the Ministry of Labour to suspend the issuance of work permits to aliens and foreigners, adding that such action would help to create jobs for Liberians.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Child Protection Group Calls for Awareness on Rape Bill

- In a press interview Saturday, Children Smile Humanitarian Network Executive Director Othello James stressed the need for awareness activities on the Rape Bill and Inheritance Laws among rural Liberians.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

STAR RADIO *(News culled from website today at 09:00 am)*

Development Group Reconditions Central Prison in Margibi County

- In a press interview during the weekend, the Project Manager of a development-support group, Aquarian Development International, Peter Charles said that his organization had completed renovation work on the Central Prison in Kakata, Margibi County.

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. Jeddi Armah at armahj@un.org.

BBC

17 March 2006

Liberia seeks end to Taylor exile

Liberia has formally asked Nigeria to extradite former Liberian President Charles Taylor. A spokeswoman for Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said he would put the request to other African leaders.

A UN-backed war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone wants to put Mr Taylor on trial for backing Sierra Leone rebels.

He stood down as Liberian leader and went into exile in Nigeria in 2003 under an international deal to end Liberia's 14-year civil war.

Liberian Information Minister Johnny McClain told the BBC that if the request was granted, Mr Taylor would be sent straight to Sierra Leone.

The 15,000 United Nations peacekeepers in Liberia are under instructions to arrest Mr Taylor and transfer him to the Special Court for Sierra Leone if he sets foot on Liberian soil.

'Empty cell'

A spokeswoman for the court's chief prosecutor Desmond de Silva told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme that he welcomed the news that Mr Taylor may soon end his exile in Nigeria.

"His cell is empty and awaiting his arrival," the spokeswoman said.

TAYLOR TIMELINE

1989: Launches rebellion
 1991: RUF rebellion starts in Sierra Leone
 1995: Peace deal signed
 1997: Elected president
 1999: Lurd starts rebellion to oust Taylor
 June 2003: Arrest warrant issued
 August 2003: Steps down, goes into exile in Nigeria

An official from Mr Taylor's National Patriotic Party said the news was "shocking". Mr Obasanjo has always refused to send Mr Taylor to Sierra Leone, saying he would only extradite him following a request from an elected Liberian leader.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took power in Liberia in January after winning last year's elections and visited Nigeria earlier this month.

Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf has previously said her priority is rebuilding Liberia, rather than putting Mr Taylor on trial.

But before she briefed the UN Security Council in New York on the situation in Liberia, she confirmed the request, reports the AFP news agency.

"I asked the African (Union) leadership to bring the Taylor issue to closure," she said.

Immunity

Mr Taylor is accused of selling diamonds and buying weapons for Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front rebels, who were notorious for hacking off the hands and legs of civilians during a 10-year war.

He also started the Liberian civil war in 1989, before being elected president in 1997. Mr Taylor's supporters have said that he enjoys immunity from prosecution under the peace deal which saw him step down.

But human rights activists have accused him of breaking the terms of that deal by trying to influence Liberian politics.

Just before Mr Taylor stepped on a plane to take him to the south-eastern Nigerian city of Calabar in August 2003, he told Liberians: "God willing, I will be back."

BBC

20 March 2006

DR Congo rebel in landmark trial

The leader of a Democratic Republic of Congo militia has become the first war crimes suspect to face charges at the International Criminal Court.

Thomas Lubanga was transferred to ICC custody on Friday from DR Congo.

He appeared before the court, based in the Dutch city of The Hague, to face three charges relating to the use of children in armed groups.

The ICC was set up in 2002 as a permanent court to deal with war crimes and genocide around the world.

"For 100 years an international court was a dream, now it's becoming a reality," said chief prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo.

Mr Lubanga appeared on Monday before judges who were expected to deal with administrative issues before formally charging him at a separate hearing.

Court Registrar Bruno Cathala told journalists Mr Lubanga had been examined twice by doctors - before leaving DR Congo, and on arrival at the Haaglanden Prison, in The Hague.

'Victims mutilated'

Mr Lubanga was arrested a year ago after nine Bangladeshi UN peacekeepers were killed in the volatile Ituri area.

His ethnic Hema Union of Congolese Patriots has been battling rivals from the Lendu ethnic group, partly for control of Ituri's large deposits of gold.

CHARGES FACED BY LUBANGA

Enlisting children under the age of 15 into armed groups

Conscripting children under the age of 15 into armed groups

Using children under the age of 15 to participate actively in hostilities

Several teams of ICC investigators have been sent in recent months to Ituri, where more than 50,000 people have died since the inter-ethnic war began in 1999.

The BBC's Robert Walker, who has travelled widely in eastern DR Congo, says Mr Lubanga emerged as one of the most notorious warlords in the civil war of the late 1990s.

Soldiers under his command are accused not just of murder, torture and rape, but also of mutilating their victims, our correspondent says.

In one massacre, human rights groups say, Mr Lubanga's militiamen killed civilians using a sledgehammer.

At different times, the UPC was backed by both Uganda and Rwanda - DR Congo's neighbours, which were closely involved in its conflict.

Some 17,000 UN peacekeepers are in DR Congo, tasked with ensuring that elections scheduled for June go smoothly.

They have been backing up the Congolese army as it conducts raids against the numerous rebel groups based in the east.

'Exception to the rule'

Our correspondent says the challenge for DR Congo and the ICC is to bring to justice the many other warlords who committed crimes during the civil war.

Rape and killings still continue in the east and for now the charges against Mr Lubanga are an exception, and impunity still the norm, he says.

The ICC has also issued its first arrest warrants for the leaders of Uganda's rebel Lord's Resistance Army but they remain at large.

It is also investigating alleged war crimes in Sudan's Darfur region.

The existence of the court is strongly opposed by the United States, which fears its troops could face political prosecutions.

Story from BBC NEWS:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4824772.stm>