

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:

Wednesday, 22 March 2006

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
If you are aware of omissions or have any comments or suggestions please contact
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Concord Times

22 March 2006

Local News**"SAJ Musa never wanted power"***Story: Tanu Jalloh*

Led in evidence by Prosecuting Counsel, Mohamed Bangura, TF1-028 in the ongoing RUF trial at Special Court, Monday disclosed SAJ Musa of the renegade Sierra Leone Armed Forces never wanted power when he

... Witness testifies

attempted to attack Freetown in January 1999. Musa reportedly died at Benguema near Waterloo some 20 miles from the capital Freetown.

"At a village called Tufayim SAJ Musa together with CO 55 and

the Red Lions battalion had converged and immediately summoned a meeting in the nearby bushes. Soon boys were jubilating saying we are going to Freetown and this was to be confirmed later by 55 when he addressed the crowd and

combatants. SAJ Musa told the fighters that he was coming to Freetown not because he wanted to overthrow the government and take power but that he was concerned when he heard that the army was going to be disbanded," she narrated.

The witness said they went through Port Loko and eventually entered

Waterloo where houses were set ablaze and later to Benguema.

At Benguema, the witness recalled, they were gathered by SAJ Musa, then the overall commander, and demanded that the youngest of women be brought forward. "We were there when a bomb

exploded and some of us escaped to nearby bushes only to learn later from 55 that SAJ Musa was dead."

It was 55, according to the witness, who took after Musa and led attackers through Tombo Hills, Grafton, Calaba Town Hills and subsequently to Freetown on January 6th of 1999.

Peep!

22 March 2006

Bring Charles Taylor To Justice: Here Or At The ICC

Press Release

FOC today welcomes the request by her Excellency the president of Liberia Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the General Assembly for the immediate commencement of consultations among African Heads of State on the extradition of Mr. Charles Taylor former President of Liberia to answer to war crime charges in Sierra Leone.

It is important to note however, that the arrival of Mr. Charles Taylor to Sierra Leone is long overdue though it is better late than never.

The Executive Director Mr. John Caulker FOC today said, *“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”.

FOC therefore urges African Heads of State to realize that the people of Sierra Leone deserve the right to

know the level of the alleged involvement of Mr. Charles Taylor in committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone. **(Forum of Conscience)**

Independent Observer

Opinion

22 March 2006

We Await Charles Taylor's Extradition

It is welcome news that Nigeria President Olusegun Obasando has stated that he will comply with the surrender request for former Liberian President Charles Taylor to be handed over to the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the capital Freetown after consulting with the African Union and ECOWAS.

After the deaths of the defunct Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader Foday Sankoh and RUF Battlefield Commander Sam "Maskita" Bockarie, the Court is currently starving of high profiled indicitees such as Charles Taylor and Johnny Paul Koroma.

It is no secret that Charles Taylor's complicity in our eleven years war helped prolonged the sufferings of Sierra Leoneans and the devastation of the provinces. So for his impunity to be now numbered is not only a welcome news to the people of Sierra Leone but it would be a situation of putting justice on its right course. In as much as there is the cliché that a man is presumed innocent until proven guilty, we strongly believe that Mr. Taylor's fingerprints could be seen in the modus operandi of the defunct RUF.

Or if Mr. Taylor believes that his hands are clean, why is he afraid of facing the Court which has shown the highest degree of impartiality and fair play since its inception in 2002? If Mr. Taylor is finally handed over to the Special Court, it will send a strong signal to other leaders in Africa that crimes committed would be accounted for someday.

Mr. Taylor's exile in Nigeria could be compared to what Abu Bakr Talib Jallon, now working with the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), once described as "hiding in a fog". Now the fog has cleared and he has nowhere to hide as the International Community is closing in on him.

We wholeheartedly support Mr. Taylor's extradition because crimes committed should be accounted for. Though we are not convicting him for crimes which he is yet to be tried for, we believe his extradition will help shed light on issues which both Foday Sankoh and Sam "Maskita" Bockarie would have shed light on.

Reuters

22 March 2006

Liberian president wants decision on ex-leader Taylor

By Lesley Wroughton

WASHINGTON, March 21 (Reuters) - Liberia's new president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf on Tuesday called for a decision on the fate of exiled former leader Charles Taylor whose forced departure in 2003 helped end the country's 14-year civil war.

Johnson-Sirleaf said the decision on whether to hand Taylor over to a special U.N. court to face war crimes charges was in the hands of African leaders like Nigerian President Olugesun Obasanjo.

Taylor, considered Liberia's worst human rights offender, has been living in exile in southeastern Nigeria after Obasanjo helped broker a peace deal in 2003 that later led to elections won by Johnson-Sirleaf in November.

Johnson-Sirleaf said many Liberians were tired of war but Taylor still wielded influence in the West African country.

"Liberia believes this matter ought to be brought to a closure, that we want to get on with the business of pursuing our development agenda and responding to the needs of our people," Johnson-Sirleaf told the Council on Foreign Relations.

"The African leadership, in conjunction with the U.S. and the U.N., had the arrangements that took Mr. Taylor into exile. We think they now must -- since we've given the word that we want it brought to closure -- take the decision on the next step to take it to the court," she added.

WAR CRIMES

Johnson-Sirleaf has denied that she requested Taylor's extradition, but said he should face war crimes charges in the special U.N.-backed court probing the civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Earlier Johnson-Sirleaf met U.S. President George W. Bush at the White House to discuss ways his administration could help Liberia.

Bush told her he would consult with other African leaders so a "fair decision is taken that would ensure not only the stability of Liberia is secured, but that the Liberian people can move ahead and have a new life, and also that the conditions upon which the African leaders have agreed for Mr. Taylor will be respected," she said.

She acknowledged that her government needs to act swiftly to meet the growing expectations of a country where the entire army has been dismantled under the 2003 peace agreement and security is in the hands of U.N. peacekeepers.

"Liberia's fragile peace is tied to the dynamics of the region," Johnson-Sirleaf said. "Our peace will never be secure until there is peace in the sub-region," she said, citing problems in the Ivory Coast and Guinea.

"Once peace is secured then the options for making sure we have sustained peace is then development and that means economic cooperation and economic integration."

She set out her main priorities as reconstructing Liberia's shattered infrastructure, particularly restoring electricity which has been cut off for 15 years, rebuilding schools and hospitals, and recruiting and training a new Liberian security force. (Additional reporting by Tabassum Zakaria)

AFP

22 March 2006

Taylor extradition must be speedy - president

Washington - Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, on a red-carpet visit to the United States, called on Tuesday for exiled former Liberian strongman Charles Taylor to be extradited home swiftly.

"I wish we had the luxury of time on this issue. But it has become an impediment to our being able to move forward to be able to pursue our development agenda," she said after talks with US President George Bush.

Johnson-Sirleaf, the first woman to be elected head of state in Africa, received a hero's welcome from the US president, who praised her as a "pioneer" after talks in the Oval Office.

Johnson-Sirleaf told reporters that Bush had pledged to consult with African leaders "so that a fair decision is taken" on Taylor's fate that would ensure "the stability of Liberia", which Taylor fled in 2003 for Nigeria.

Johnson-Sirleaf said that her government had held talks on the matter with Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who has come under increasing international pressure to allow Taylor to be tried for alleged crimes against humanity.

Obasanjo invited Taylor to Nigeria in order to bring an end to a 14-year-civil war which pitched the guerrilla-turned-ruler against two powerful rebel groups.

The United Nations-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone has indicted Taylor on charges of sponsoring rebels who waged a gruesome war in that country's 1990s civil conflict.

"We hope action will be taken not only to ensure Mr Taylor the day in court which he has asked for or to ensure that he does so in an environment that is free and fair to him and that enables him the full right of self-defence," said Johnson-Sirleaf.

"The longer we wait to bring this matter to closure, the more difficult it will be for us to move forward as a nation and as a people," she said after meeting with Bush.

The US president hailed Johnson-Sirleaf as a political "pioneer" and said her groundbreaking role "requires courage, and vision, and the desire to improve the lives of your people".

Johnson-Sirleaf thanked the United States "for all the support that our country has received in making this important transition from war to peace", and said she hoped Liberia would become "the US success story in Africa".

"We have taken the necessary first steps to restoring dignity to our people, starting to fix our economy, to get our international credibility and reputation back," she said.

She also said she believed she had Washington's support for lifting UN sanctions on Liberia.

Elected in November 2005 in a country devastated by 14 years of civil war, Johnson-Sirleaf, 67, is a Harvard University-educated former World Bank economist, Liberian cabinet member and senior UN administrator.

Her election was strongly supported by the United States, which last month renewed Liberia's preferential trade status. - Sapa-AFP

Associated Press

21 March 2006

Bush hosts new Liberian president at the White House

By Deb Riechmann

WASHINGTON – President Bush welcomed Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the White House on Tuesday, calling Africa's first democratically elected female head of state “a pioneer.”

“You're the first woman elected president to any country on the continent of Africa, and that requires courage and vision and the desire to improve the lives of your people,” Bush told her in the Oval Office.

Sirleaf thanked the United States for its financial aid and interest in Liberia's future. Earlier this month, the House Appropriations Committee approved \$50 million in new economic aid to the government.

“Liberia, we think, has the potential to become the U.S. success story in Africa,” she said.

In January, first lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice attended the inauguration of the 67-year-old Harvard-educated former finance minister. She inherits a war-ruined nation of 3 million with an 80 percent unemployment rate, no running water and no electricity. Despite its diamond and timber wealth, Liberia is among the world's poorest; ranked 206th in per capita income out of 208 countries on a 2004 World Bank list.

“We're confident that the Liberian people are ready to do what it takes,” Sirleaf said. “They're back at work. Our country is open for business.”

Neither leader publicly commented on U.S. aid to Liberia or Sirleaf's request for Nigeria to hand over exiled former President Charles Taylor, who is wanted on war crimes charges. Taylor has been indicted by a U.N. tribunal on charges of committing crimes against humanity by aiding and directing a Sierra Leone rebel movement and trading guns and gems with insurgents infamous for chopping off the lips, ears and limbs of civilian victims.

Taylor has lived in exile in southern Nigeria since being forced from power under a peace deal brokered in 2003 that ended the rebel assault on the Liberian capital, Monrovia.

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, who was credited with helping end Liberia's civil war when he helped arrange Taylor's asylum, is consulting with other African leaders on how to respond to Sirleaf's request.

Reuters

21 March 2006

Sierra Leoneans fear Taylor trial may stir unrest

By Victoria Averill

FREETOWN, March 21 (Reuters) - Sierra Leoneans fear moves to bring former Liberian leader Charles Taylor to trial for war crimes in their country will reopen old wounds and risk undermining a fragile peace in the ex-British colony.

The former warlord is seen as the mastermind behind once intertwined civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, two of modern Africa's most brutal conflicts that cost tens of thousands of lives and spawned a generation of young gunmen.

Newly-elected Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has asked Nigeria, where Taylor lives in exile, to consider handing him over so he can stand trial at a U.N.-backed court in Sierra Leone, where he has been indicted for war crimes.

But many people on the streets of Freetown fear Taylor's presence on Sierra Leonean soil, where the rebels he supported were notorious for hacking the limbs off civilians during the 1991-2002 civil war, would stir fresh instability.

"We really don't want Charles Taylor to come here. We have been through this war and just now we are having peace," said John Kamara, a computer technician.

"We know he has a lot of money, a lot on influence and a lot of supporters in Liberia. If he is here, they may try something. Let them try him somewhere else, out of Sierra Leone," he said.

Taylor is charged with supporting Sierra Leone's rebels in return for diamonds in a war that cost 50,000 lives. The charges do not include his role in starting Liberia's civil war, which killed 250,000 people and spread violence to nearby states.

A United Nations peacekeeping force in Liberia is under instructions to arrest Taylor and transfer him to Sierra Leone if he sets foot on Liberian territory. Sierra Leone itself no longer has the protection of U.N. troops.

The last of a once 17,500-strong U.N. force left Freetown in December, leaving many Sierra Leoneans wondering whether their own army would be able to deal with any trouble.

"If the U.N. sends Charles Taylor over here, he will send his supporters over after him," said Marie Turay, a 35-year old food stall owner in Freetown.

"Why must he come back here? We as a country are already suffering because of this war, because of him," she said.

PAINFUL MEMORIES

Sierra Leone's Special Court is supposed to try those bearing the greatest responsibility for atrocities committed during the country's conflict. Critics have said its failure to snare Taylor up to now has undermined its credibility.

The court's chief prosecutor, Desmond de Silva, told Reuters at the weekend he was confident Taylor would stand trial in Freetown and said the trial could take around 12 months.

The court is trying nine defendants for war crimes: three from a government militia, three from a former military junta and three from the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

The trials have proved politically sensitive and revived painful memories of a war in which RUF rebels raped, killed and maimed civilians. The court has not enjoyed nationwide support.

"They spend millions and millions of dollars building the Special Court ... That money could have been used for these amputees who are roaming the streets of our country, who are destitute," said Ishmael, 25, who lost parents in both Sierra Leone's and Liberia's wars.

"People have to think very carefully about sending Charles Taylor to the Special Court. There is too much history between these two countries. Bringing him here could be a mistake," he added. (Additional reporting by Christo Johnson in Freetown)

Reuters

21 March 2006

Liberia risks unrest if Taylor returned - adviser

By Tom Ashby

CALABAR, Nigeria (Reuters) - Former Liberian President Charles Taylor thinks a request for him to face war crimes charges is politically motivated and may spark renewed unrest, his spiritual adviser said on Tuesday.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, sworn in as Liberia's first postwar president in January, asked Nigeria last week to consider returning Taylor from exile in Nigeria, where he has lived since 2003, to face a special U.N.-backed court in Sierra Leone.

Indian-American evangelical preacher Kilari Anand Paul, who helped persuade Taylor to step down in 2003, held crisis talks with the former warlord at his residence in a hilltop villa in Calabar, southeast Nigeria on Monday and Tuesday.

"He (Taylor) said there will be chaos. Tens of thousands of people fighting. And there will be bloodshed," Paul told Reuters.

Some former Taylor fighters in Liberia have said they will fight any extradition.

"After 14 years of war, schools are reopening. We must save the people of Liberia," said Paul, who counts "six or seven dictators" among his followers.

Journalists accompanied Paul to Taylor's riverside residence, decorated with ornate French-style furniture, oil paintings and Persian carpets, but were barred from interviewing Taylor by restrictions imposed as a condition of his asylum.

PRESSURE

Johnson-Sirleaf has faced growing international pressure to bring to justice the man many Liberians blame for fuelling a civil war that cost a quarter of a million lives and spilled over into neighbouring states, threatening regional stability.

But the case poses a problem for her because the former warlord still has thousands of supporters at home and his ex-wife Jewel is a senator in Liberia's Congress.

Houston-based Paul said U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was pushing for Taylor's extradition because of what he described as her desperation to find a foreign policy success amid setbacks in Iraq.

"He (Taylor) said Johnson is a puppet of the State Department and that they want to see his head," said Paul.

He said Taylor questioned the legitimacy of the election which made Harvard-trained economist Johnson-Sirleaf Africa's first female head of state.

U.N. peacekeeping forces in Liberia are already under orders to detain Taylor and send him for trial by the special court in Sierra Leone if he returns to the country.

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo has said he intends to consult African leaders on the request and that his decision will depend on what they say. Paul said Obasanjo's desire to ingratiate himself with Washington amid political uncertainty in Nigeria could also persuade him to hand Taylor over.

"Taylor is in prison, he can't do anything. By giving victory to Condi Rice and Obasanjo, we are risking failure in Liberia," Paul said.

Daily Sun (Nigeria)

Editorial

21 March 2006

Taylor: Need for caution

The Federal Government recently confirmed that it has begun bilateral talks with the Liberian Government on the extradition of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, to his home country for the purpose of facing war crime charges.

The new government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is said to have made a formal request to the Nigerian Government to this effect. In fact, latest reports have it that President Olusegun Obasanjo has begun consultations with the chairmen of the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) on the issue.

Taylor was granted asylum in Nigeria in 2003 when invading rebel forces threatened to oust him. To save the situation, African leaders and the United Nations brokered a deal that saw him coming to Nigeria to seek refuge.

Part of the agreement reached at the time was that Nigeria would surrender Taylor to his home government once normalcy returns under a democratic environment if such a government makes such a request. The peace process that was initiated in 2003 following Taylor's exit culminated in the democratic elections that brought Johnson-Sirleaf to office in November, last year. However, during the intervening period, the International War Crimes Tribunal in Sierra Leone issued a warrant of arrest on Taylor, asking that he be brought to the country to answer charges of crime against humanity preferred against him.

The Nigerian government was put under pressure to relinquish Taylor to the tribunal, but Nigeria preferred to respect the original agreement that African leaders reached on the issue at the time of Taylor's exit in 2003.

About three months into the tenure of the new government in Monrovia, the issue of Taylor's extradition has re-echoed and government is getting set to respond, one way or another, to the request.

So far, we commend the steadfastness of the federal government in this matter, especially its refusal to cave in under the pressure from the United States for Taylor's extradition. Obviously, the Nigerian government, in line with agreements earlier reached on the issue, would be disposed to release Taylor to his home government.

However, in doing this, we urge government to exercise utmost caution. We do not know how ready the new government in Liberia is to receive Taylor and deal appropriately with matters that would arise therefrom.

But we believe that the government is too new to worry about such extraneous issues. The war in Liberia which lasted for about 14 years had Taylor as the principal combatant. That was why the peace process also took his status into consideration.

Even while in exile in Nigeria, Taylor was still being seen as a formidable force to the extent that he was at a point, believed to be influencing issues in Monrovia from his hideout in Calabar. Such

insinuations, more than anything else, suggested that Taylor was still relevant in the scheme of things in Liberia.

Notwithstanding the installation of a new government, we believe that Taylor is still a force to reckon with. The new government in Liberia and the government of Nigeria should therefore consult properly before handing Taylor over. If the matter is not properly handled, it could re-open old wounds. President Obasanjo and the leaders of AU and ECOWAS should take this into consideration.

For us, what should be uppermost in the agenda of the Johnson-Sirleaf government is national reconciliation. Liberians should be made to put their dark past behind them. To achieve this objective, the government should build bridges of understanding and tolerance. When lasting peace is achieved, the government can then externalise the peace machinery.

At the appropriate time, Taylor can be made to face the charges preferred against him. But neither the Nigerian government nor that of Liberia should allow itself to be stampeded into taking a precipitate action on this matter.

Concord Times

21 March 2006

Note: The Concord Times street edition "drowned", or failed to come out, yesterday due to the arrest of their editor. The first two articles below were republished locally on Wednesday.

Vox Pop: What Do People Make of Charles Taylor Coming to the Special Court?

By Mariama Kandeh

Lack of security Gibo Conteh Trader Siaka Stevens Street Since the country lacks the security to protect us from any threat, I don't think it will be wise for Taylor to come and appear at the Special Court. Our security is at stake if he comes to the court. Just imagine the NPFL rebels who are directly under his control are still in existence, and there is the possibility that they may want to revenge for him.

This will be at the detriment of the ordinary Sierra Leonean.

It is not necessary Abibakarr Barrie Banker Siaka Stevens Street Well, as the saying goes charity begins at home. They should have in the first place indicted President Kabbah, before thinking of Taylor. He should set the precedent at home. Taylor was a sitting President, and was even attending a peace talk when the indictment was served, so why should Pa Kabbah be an exception?

Let Taylor be left for his people to deal with him after them we can then come in but for now Pa Kabbah must be indicted first.

He must answer for his crime Alfred Turay Business Man Lightfoot Boston Street As far as I am concern, Taylor must come to answer for the atrocities he committed in the sub region. He really thinks he is supreme that no one will conquer him but if Saddam can be conquered I don't see any reason why Taylor will not be. He has enough to answer but if he continues to dwell in liberty he will consider himself the victor against the layman. I have strong belief that he will answer for his crimes.

He is the 'Hitler' of West Africa Marion Komeh Sales Woman Krootown Road Taylor has taken himself as the Hitler of West Africa.

I really doubt his appearance at that court. My reason is that from what I am hearing in the news it seems as if he has some international backing that is influencing him to think tough. But whatever the case, he must come and appear for backing the RUF.

Let him die or be imprisoned for life Gibrilla Turay Trader Siaka Stevens Street Let them come with him and when he comes let the government provide us with heavy security. I am greatly embittered with this man's attitude. He destabilized my whole family. There must not be any delay on his coming. This man has caused people of this country great harm, he must either be executed or imprisoned for life.

I'm in support of his coming Aminata Turay Sales Woman Congo Town I am in support of his coming as long as our security situation will be under control. I'm not even sure whether he will be brought before the Special Court. I see no reason for his coming since that will just deepen the

hate for the government amongst Sierra Leoneans as most see his indictment a security threat to the nation. But since he has been indicted let him come and answer for his deeds.

He claims to be responsible for the war Emmanuel Blackie Student Congo Cross Taylor said he is responsible for the war in Sierra Leone, so let him come and answer at the Special Court for all the atrocities committed during the war. From the court, let him be sentenced to life imprisonment.

So many people suffered during the war why must Taylor go free. If a man like Norman could answer, what is wrong with Taylor answering for his crime?

Let him be executed Yeabu Dumbuya Shop owner Tengbeh Town If this man is found guilty, he should be executed for the sub region to get total peace. Let him face the law at the special court by saying bye bye to earth.

This man is not fit to live on planet earth. All I know is that he must be given the treatment like an un-convicted man, but when found guilty let him bear the brunt of his wicked act.

Let us wait Abdul Aziz Koroma aka 'Biscuit' Trader Siaka Stevens Street I think the issue of Charles Taylor should be kept in the corner for now until we finish with those in our country. After we have dealt with the likes of Hinga Norman, then we will consider Taylor but for now let's deal with those in the court now. Taylor is indeed a threat to Sierra Leone's security. I am not in favor of a wicked man like Taylor and I am in full support of his coming to answer for crimes he committed but my point is that we must first finish with those at the court now.

I don't trust the court Ibrahim Koroma aka Pipi Trader Siaka Stevens Street I really want this Taylor guy to come and answer at the Special Court but my worry now is whether this court will give us the security that we need as our lives are at stake. I don't trust the judgment of the court. Just imagine Hinga Norman and others are still struggling in the court waiting for judgment. Right now we are suffering and we don't want any more pain to be added to the existing one.

Taylor deserves judgment Aminata Mansaray I think Taylor really deserves judgment. If he is not tried he may think that he was doing the right thing and that others may want to take after him. But if an example is set on him others who are wishing to do the same may get some fear and would not do the same. But whatever the case might be he must answer for what he did during the course of the war.

I don't see any need Fanta Sillah Trader Krootown Road I don't see any need why Taylor should be brought to the Special Court. First and foremost it poses a threat to our own security. In fact the most wicked and corrupt people are living big in town and all they care about is suppressing Taylor. There are senior government officials that should appear in that court who have not done so. Taylor is just one as there are many other Taylor's in this country.

What about Johnny Paul Marie Sesay Trader Kingtom Guys like Johnny Paul Koroma leader of the People's Liberation Party (PLP) and former head of the AFRC are still on the run. He was among the first indictees but he is still enjoying life while Taylor is being suppressed. Let them leave him, he is not the only bad person that was involved in the war. The issue of the Amputees and other war victims has still not been laid to rest. These are issues the international committee should look up to and not Taylor.

Concord Times

21 March 2006

RUFPP Say Trying Charles Taylor is Dangerous

By Mohamed Massaquoi
Freetown

Secretary General of the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFPP), Jonathan Kposowa has opposed plans to try erstwhile Liberian President Charles Taylor for war crimes. Kposowa described the move as "dangerous." He says the coming of Charles Taylor to the Special Court is visibly dangerous as the former warlord still has massive support in Liberia.

"The security situation in the country should be seriously take into consideration before ever taking such a venture," he said and added that Sierra Leone is not the only country trying people indicted for war crimes.

"We want to see a peaceful outcome of the 2007 elections and we don't need anything that will create instability resulting to the loss of life and property .If you talk to any mindful Sierra Leonean in and out of the country he/she will say the coming of Charles Taylor is not timely," the RUFPP scribe said.

Concord Times

21 March 2006

Bishop Humper Says "Charles Taylor's Trial Not Important for Sierra Leone"

By Abdul Karim Koroma
Freetown

Erstwhile Chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Bishop Joseph Christian Humper Monday said the trial of deposed president of Liberia, Charles Taylor at the Special Court is not the most important thing Sierra Leone needs now.

Bishop Humper's statement came few days after the President of Liberia, Eleen Johnson Sirleaf requested the extradition of Taylor from Nigeria.

"The pressing thing Sierra Leone needs now is the construction of roads, developed middle level man power base and how the country can attract investors," Humper said and continued, "Charles Taylor's detention and imprisonment will not in any way bring bread and butter to the table of the ordinary man." Bishop Humper said, "as for me whether Taylor comes or not is not material to me." He maintained that the country should be more concerned about how our resources are taken care of, restore peace and contractors stop constructing buildings that would collapse in the next two years while siphoning government funds.

"Whether Taylor comes or not is immaterial," the TRC Chairman said.

"Increased wages and stabilizing the economy is what the government and international community should focus on," he said and added, "Taylor's coming is another justice mechanism, but Sierra Leone can do better with the TRC."

The News (Monrovia)

20 March 2006

America Supports Taylor's Extradition U.S. Ambassador Tells UN

By Bobby Tapson
Monrovia

Report reaching this paper indicates that the United States Government stands ready to support the turnover of exiled former President, Charles Taylor to the War Crimes Court in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Taylor now in exile in Nigeria, under a special arrangement, is indicted by the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone on 17-counts war crime charges for allegedly committing atrocities in that country.

United States Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton says his government is in full support of President Ellen Johnson- Sirleaf's efforts to bring former President Taylor to Justice.

The US Envoy told the UN Security Council that his government was encouraged to see reports that President Sirleaf and African Leaders were discussing the issue of the former president.

In a speech to the UN Security Council, Ambassador Bolton said after many years of civil conflict, Liberia's problem remains enormous.

"But the international community was encouraged with signs that Liberia is on the path to recovery and reform," he stated.

He told the world body that the international community would be there to help if Liberians maintain their commitment to reform the country.

Ambassador Bolton indicated that he is convinced that President Sirleaf would lead the nation with sound financial management and full transparency that are crucial to moving Liberia forward.

The US Envoy among other things pledged America's support to Liberia's reconstruction.

Since the confirmation of President Sirleaf that she has indeed issued a note to President Obasanjo requesting the extradition of Mr. Taylor to the War Crimes Court, there has been mixed reaction on the issue in Monrovia and other parts of the country.

There are many that harbor the view that the former president should be left alone to live in exile in Calabar, Nigeria for the sake of peace.

On the other hand, others are insisting that based on the words of Mr.

Taylor that "Liberia is a country of laws and not men, he should be man enough to appear before the court to exonerate himself from criminal charges.

The Analyst (Monrovia)

21 March 2006

Analyst Forum: The Taylor Itinerary

By Tarty Teh

Getting from Nigeria to Sierra Leone seemed like a simple matter of determining the most direct air, road, or sea route between the two. But thanks to a combination of regional influence peddlers, legal scholars, strategic schemers, and some undue influence from unidentified sources, going to Sierra Leone may prove more difficult, theoretically, than building a hydrogen bomb: if you have Charles Taylor on the manifest of your chosen means of transport.

However, the apparent difficulty in making the transfer seems more contrived than inherent in the maneuver. To be sure, a good amount of Liberians wanted badly enough to remove Charles Taylor from office as to mount a military campaign to achieve that end. But, understandably, some regional interests and the United Nations could not agree on the shape of what would replace the Taylor government and therefore insisted on a negotiated settlement by which Liberia would be rid of Taylor.

The world community in the form of the United Nations made a proposition that was not exactly countered to the Economic Community of West African States' (ECOWAS') desire to contain Taylor long enough for Liberia to have a good chance at building some capacity for peace and security. But the United Nations cast its net too narrowly and only over the part of Taylor's activity that spilled over into neighboring Sierra Leone.

However, there is little doubt that Taylor did most of his damage in Liberia. This is why it appears that the United Nations only focused on Taylor's alleged crimes in Sierra Leone for the convenience of being able to trim the number of potential culprits in any legal action to one at most. The logic (if we can call it that) was strained, but it had the immediate merit of making Taylor a non-factor in Liberia at least initially. Having taken this earlier and torturous route to avoid Liberia, the current itinerary that makes Liberia a must is suspect in terms of motives.

Well, time flew when we had hope for peace and until ECOWAS, the United Nations, and the United States decided that they could not get Taylor to the site of the World Court session in Sierra Leone without a) the approval of "an elected government of Liberia," and b) a travel plan for Taylor which features Liberia as a necessary stop. Here disappointment lurks when you lean hard on logic. Why should Taylor go to Liberia when Liberia already has a plan in its war-ending peace pact through ECOWAS which calls for reconciliation in place of litigious free-for-all?

Logic would compel the conclusion that if Taylor made it to Liberia, he would immediately and unconditionally qualify (as would all of those who recruited him to start the war) for consideration for clemency through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which is a feature of the ECOWAS-sponsored Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that was signed in Ghana in 2003.

It would be one thing (although by no means an attractive choice) if Charles Taylor was coming to Liberia to stay and therefore benefit from the mood of reconciliation that we are trying to foster. Denying Taylor that right will be bad enough; having him in chain as he transits through Liberia for a World Court assembly in Sierra Leone would underscore our own inattention to

judicial principles. And, ominously, it would give a ring of truth to any claim by Taylor that he was being unfairly singled out just to give an appearance of having remedied the loss of over 220,000 lives through the Liberian civil war. That claim can be made easily and powerfully even without a lawyer.

However, and regardless of the number of stops along Taylor's route to Sierra Leone, there will be a great deal to worry about after Taylor gets to Sierra Leone, and especially if he is given any semblance of due process during the trial. For one thing, the artificially trimmed list of possible suspects may expand once again. All this might be good and entertaining political theater, but the timing is wrong for Liberia. We have real tragedy; we don't need to stage one.

I am not so stressed out about whether Taylor will fail to get a fair measure of justice, because if he didn't, it would fit nicely within the scheme of the region's comedy of errors dating from the time Liberia became ECOWAS' first test subject for military intervention. And because ECOWAS does not take note of its failures, much less own up to them, the Ivory Coast, which was next to collapse after Liberia (mostly as a consequence of its active role in destroying Liberia), decided to take its chances with the rebels in the north rather than risk multiplying its misery index by inviting the ECOWAS intervention force.

So, if ECOWAS and the world community are taking a step sideway on Liberia to simulate progress, that will be cynical enough. If that fake movement causes further instability in Liberia, that will be unforgivable. Copyrighted © Tarty Teh 2006 Monrovia, Liberia, March 20, 2006

UPI

20 March 2006

Liberia at the U.N.

By William M. Reilly

UNITED NATIONS, United States (UPI) -- The first woman to be democratically elected president in Africa told the U.N. Security Council that West Africa's leaders are considering whether to end former Liberian President Charles Taylor's exile in Nigeria and turn him over to a special court in Sierra Leone.

Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf reported Friday to the panel of 15 -- on how her West African nation, born in the mid-19th century of liberated U.S. slaves, was faring since she was inaugurated in January, following Taylor's ouster three years ago, ending nearly 14 years of civil war.

President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Johnson-Sirleaf agreed to consult with colleagues not only in West Africa, but broadly in the international community, to help resolve the question of Taylor's exile 'in conformity with the requirements of the United Nations and the International community,' she said.

Obasanjo allowed Taylor to flee into Nigeria three years ago as part of an international agreement.

'I have also asked that we ensure in any proceedings an environment that protects fundamental human rights,' said Johnson-Sirleaf.

Johnson-Sirleaf, who received a highly-unusual round of applause, twice, from members of the council sitting around their gold-hued horseshoe-shaped table, later told reporters not only would she 'have been more comfortable' if Taylor were turned over to the court without her requesting such a move, 'it would have been the right thing to do.'

But, she recalled, Obasanjo had said he would allow Taylor to stay until an elected government in Liberia made a request for him.

'Taylor was not indicted in a Liberian court,' she reminded. 'He was indicted in a special court of Sierra Leone supported by the United Nations.'

Said Johnson-Sirleaf, 'Please pay in mind that time is of the essence in this regard. Liberia's peace is fragile. There are many loyalists in our country to Taylor, (especially) the many business interests he has. Whatever decision is taken by the African leadership must insure that the safety of the Liberian people and the stability of our nation is not undermined.'

She said her decision was based on 'the increasing international pressure, our sensitivity to the fact that this matter continues to hang over our heads, constraining our effort to move our country forward and to raise the resources that we need for our development.'

The consultations recognize an arrangement in which the leaders participated 'that took Taylor to exile.'

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton, when later asked by reporters outside the council chambers why the consultations were necessary when the U.N.-backed court already had indicted Taylor for supporting rebels in Sierra Leone, he said, 'Taylor is in Nigeria and any action has its political overtones. I am sure that is what President Johnson-Sirleaf had in mind.'

Asked by a reporter if she 'would have been more comfortable' if Obasanjo had sent Taylor to the court without her having to request the move, Johnson-Sirleaf said, 'Not only would I have been more comfortable, it would have been the right thing to do. 'The pressure that is being put on Liberia is in a way unfair,' she said. 'I would have hoped that the international community and the United Nations would have sought -- long before the new government took over -- would have sought to make a decision at the Security Council' instead of Liberia 'inheriting a problem.'

'We are a small country. We have no powers that others have,' the president said. 'We have no security forces to protect our people in the safety of our nation and so we are caught in a situation in which we have to take a major decision that should have been taken long before.'

The country is determined to address its painful past, including the question of impunity, and that was why the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as mandated by the Accra (Ghana) Peace Agreement, was established.

Johnson-Sirleaf said there was an imperative to provide tangible assurances to the Liberian people that democracy would bring change for the better.

They must see early improvements in health and education, as well as economic opportunity, starting with jobs, she said. Liberia would need the support of the United Nations and the international community to make the changes necessary to achieve those important national goals.

At the moment, the Freetown government was putting in place mechanisms that would enhance transparency in governance, consistent with the requirements for the lifting of timber and diamond sanctions, Johnson-Sirleaf said, adding that she had rendered forestry concessions null and void.

Also, the government was meeting most requirements for implementing the Kimberly Process, and that would, hopefully, lead to an early lifting of the ban on diamond exports.

The new measures had been enacted to enhance national revenue flows, so Liberia could depend more on itself in the national reconstruction and development process, Johnson-Sirleaf said.

The Analyst (Monrovia)

17 March 2006

Liberia: Freetown Or the Hague - African, Court Officials Seek Venue Change for Taylor

Fugitive Charles Taylor is likely to be tried in Hague, The Netherlands, rather Freetown if ongoing discussions within official corridors of some Western countries, ECOWAS, AU, and the Special Court in Sierra Leone are anything to go by.

Media reports yesterday quoted a number of Western and African leaders as saying that the consideration for the change of venue was necessary to take into account the peace and security that would be put at risk were Taylor to be tried in the region.

The report did not name the countries involved in the discussions, but indicated that the discussions bore upon arguments inside Liberia and the subregion that Taylor's trial in Sierra Leone is liable to spark unrest inside Liberia.

While many are yet to see the parallel between Taylor's trial, which is advised by the need to curb impunity, and military or civil discontent in Liberia, the activities of anti-extraditionists forces in Monrovia headed by former Taylor crony, Sando Johnson, rings a bell, according to observers.

They say the argument that is raging in Liberia now needs consideration given that the United Nations peacekeepers are due to leave Sierra Leone by the end of the year, potentially leaving the court and the country more vulnerable to attacks.

"A trial in The Hague might also placate the fears of some Liberians who fear Mr. Taylor would not receive a fair trial in the Sierra Leone capital, Freetown," a BBC report quoted Sierra Leone government sources as saying.

The fear about unfair trial for Taylor though may not be without merits.

"That man is a great enemy to our country. If people see him here, they will want to kill him," said Sierra Leonean taxi-driver Gibrilla in a recent interview with a BBC reporter in Freetown.

Former Liberian president Charles Taylor was indicted in 2003 by the Special UN-backed War Crimes Tribunal for Sierra Leone on a 17-count charge of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

A court warrant was served on him while in Ghana to initiate deliberations on a formula for the formation of Liberia's power-sharing government.

Taylor returned to Monrovia amidst controversy before he was served the indictment that would have enabled his extradition to Sierra Leone from Ghana.

Instead of pressing for his extradition, Nigeria reportedly reached an agreement with the United States, Britain, France, AU, and ECOWAS countries to grant Taylor asylum.

The U.S. and other governments that were reportedly involved in the negotiation have since been requesting for the resumption of the execution of the indictment, but Abuja has been insisting that

allowing Taylor's extradition without the acquiescence of the Liberian government was a violation of the terms of the deal that culminated into Taylor's asylum in Calabar.

Washington tried in vain to twist arms in Abuja, but it seems it has resolved to let the Obasanjo Administration safe face in obedience to the deal.

Meanwhile, it has turned to the Sirleaf Administration for alternative.

But the question observers are asking is, "Was there a deal, and if there was, what the terms were?" Recently the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court in Freetown, Desmond de Silva told newsmen that there was hardly any deal worth the strength of Nigeria's intransigence.

"Mr. de Silva denies that agreement ever involved an amnesty from prosecution and that even if it did, a small group of countries cannot grant immunity for crimes allegedly committed against the whole of mankind," said a recent BBC report.

But notwithstanding the argument about deal not shielding Taylor, Congressional pro-extraditionists in Washington are convinced that the infant government in Monrovia will take the bull by the horns.

"Taylor remains a threat to the region and an affront to justice. Many have been waiting for President Johnson-Sirleaf to call President Obasanjo on his commitment. We're still waiting," said Representative Ed Royce, Vice-Chairman of the Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations when he welcomed President Sirleaf yesterday on Capital Hill.

While Royce welcomed the Liberian President, he raised concern about the continued cushy exile former Liberian president Charles Taylor enjoys in Nigeria.

Up to press time last night, there was no information on the decision about where Taylor will be taken, but it is an open secret that even the staunchest supporters of the Sierra Leonean Court would appreciate a compromise that many say will take the Taylor factor out of the heat of the subregion to The Hague.

Radio Netherlands

21 March 2006

Nigeria asked to hand over Charles Taylor

by Richard Walker and Claire Cavanagh



The luxurious life in exile led by Liberia's former president Charles Taylor could be coming to an end. The new Liberian leader Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has asked Nigeria to hand him over to the special tribunal in Sierra Leone, where he's been indicted on charges of crimes against humanity.

So far there's been no reply, but Ms Johnson-Sirleaf is confident that her Nigerian counterpart will respond positively. President Olusegun Obasanjo has already agreed to consult with other African leaders involved in the 2003 exile agreement about Mr Taylor's continuing asylum.

Civil war

Between 1991 and 2002, civil war raged in Liberia, claiming 250,000 lives. However, Charles Taylor is not facing charges over his role in that conflict, but with supporting rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone in return for diamonds and weapons, in a war that left 50,000 people dead and spread massive instability in many West African countries.

Since 2003, Charles Taylor has been living in a renovated villa in Calabar in south-eastern Nigeria, after being granted asylum by President Obasanjo. Now he faces the prospect of being handed over to a detention centre for the tribunal in Sierra Leone. Chief prosecutor for the court, Desmond de Silva told Radio Netherlands it's time for Nigeria to act:



Chief Prosecutor Desmond de Silva

"One must remember that when it comes to crimes of this kind and when it comes to former heads of state, politics does enter into it. [...] Of course we would appreciate it if President Obasanjo, who has for years said that he would heed the call of a newly democratically elected government in Liberia, [...] surrender Charles Taylor. We look forward to President Obasanjo heeding that call."



Click to listen to an interview with prosecutor Desmond de Silva

Nine suspects

Already the court in Sierra Leone is trying nine suspects for war crimes; three former government militia; three from a former military junta and three from the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The trials have proved painful and politically sensitive, reviving memories of the suffering during a war in which civilians were raped and killed or had their hands, feet

and ears cut off by RUF rebels.

Of course the prospect of Charles Taylor being in the dock would be a real coup for the tribunal but despite the accusations he faces, he still enjoys significant support in Liberia. Because of this,

there's been some suggestions that by putting him on trial, fresh tensions could be stirred up in both Sierra Leone and Liberia. But prosecutor Desmond de Silva says that's not a valid argument:

"We saw that with Milosevic, he had his own constituency, in Serbia [and] to this very day in Tokyo, there are people laying flowers in memory of Japanese war criminals, who were executed after the Tokyo tribunal after the Second World War."

"[...] Therefore it comes as no surprise to me that there is a body of opinion that says, 'oh well, if Charles Taylor is tried, that trial will upset the balance of stability', but this is in fact total nonsense. Charles Taylor being under lock and key is much more likely to lead to stability than Charles Taylor being on the loose as he is in Calabar [in Nigeria]."

Cocorioko website

22 March 2006

<http://www.cocorioko.com/>

QUESTION TIME AT COCORIOKO

Wednesday March 22, 2006

What security mechanisms has the SLPP government started putting in place in anticipation of the arrival of Liberia's warlord Charles Taylor for trial ? Is the government going to treat the matter with levity as it has always done with issues of national interest ? Why has President Kabbah not uttered an opinion on the wrangles to bring Taylor over since they started ? Why is Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf taking all the heat alone ? Is the government aware about what it will entail to have Charles Taylor incarcerated within her borders ?

Why is President Kabbah so silent about his much-touted retirement before the 2007 General Election ? Will the President declare his assets before he quits ? Can Kabbah lay his hands on the Quoran and swear that he has not built a retirement home in Guinea ? Is Kabbah aware about the mansions owned by some members of his government ?

Liberia: The Handover Of Charles Taylor Is Done Deal, Says President Obasanjo

Mar 20, 2006

by Michael Kpayili / Staff Writer



Charles Taylor And Foday Sankoh

The Federal Government of Nigeria has approved the handover of former Liberian President Charles Taylor. The Special Assistant to President Olusegun Obasanjo said the handover of Mr. Taylor is in line with the promise that President Obasanjo made that he would only handover Taylor to a democratically elected government of Liberia. The approval came after Liberia President Johnson-Sirleaf on last Friday, asked Nigeria President Obasanjo to deliver Taylor for justice sake. Sirleaf said: " It is time to put the Taylor's issue to rest.

Charles Taylor, the fugitive former leader of Liberia, was forced into exile in a peace deal that had the support of African Union leaders, the United States and the United Nations. Taylor is 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 war.

In a release, the University of Liberia Students Union (ULSU) said that the Union is backing President Sirleaf to have former President Charles Taylor turned over to the Special War Crimes Court in Freetown, Sierra Leone. According to ULSU, the Taylor issue is a "national priority, anything contrary would leave us to think that all campaign promises of the ruling party relative to justice were mere rhetoric." ULSU's release was under the signature of its Secretary General, Kwame E. Ross and President Patrick Saah Lamin Mbayo.

Another very active group in Monrovia, the Patriotic Consciousness Association of Liberia (PACA) will tomorrow turn out en mass at the Capitol Building, at about 2:00 pm to petition the National Legislature to prevent Taylor's extradition to Liberia. In two separate letters sent to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Liberian Senate, according to a PACA press release, signed by National Executive Chairman/Coordinator, E. Frederick Baye, "[We] hereby petition the National Legislature of the Republic of Liberia to compel President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to immediately halt any other action on her unilateral decision to unlawfully transfer former President Charles Ghankay Taylor to Sierra Leone for trial (conviction to death) along with scores of other Liberians referred to in her formal request to Nigerian President H.E. Olusengun Obasanjo as [subordinates] of the formal President Taylor,"

One political observer put it clearly, if you one Taylor that bad, take him straight to Freetown, "there is an empty cell awaiting him." Bringing Taylor to Liberia is a waste of fuel and resources, and may lead to another round of violence and Taylor's own life same as General Mosquita and Foday Sankor, the observer said. "Denying Taylor and his victims justice is not the way to go for the Mano River peace initiative."

Liberian Times

20 March 2006

Liberia: The Request To Turn Charles Taylor Over-A Ploy?

Mar 20, 2006

by Nimely-Sie Tuon / Contributing Writer



In 2003 when Charles Taylor made his disgraceful exit from power, African leaders entered a secret deal with him. The deal called for his exit or resignation and would be given a safe haven in Nigeria. We are told the deal did not involve the turning over of Taylor to the UN special court at a later date.

Immediately after Taylor's exit, pressure began to mount on his host and close friend, Nigeria's president Olussegun Obasanjo. To ease the mounting pressure, Mr. Obasanjo said he would turn Taylor over if an elected government in Liberia requested that he be turned over. Again, this statement by President Obasanjo, which he repeated over and over, did not involve further consultation with other African leaders once the request was made.

Now we are told that Liberia's President Ellen Sirleaf made a formal request to have Taylor turned over. It is not clear if Liberia's request to turn Taylor over specifically states

that he be turned over to Liberia or to the UN special court. No news report has specifically quoted the letter containing the request given to Nigeria from Liberia. In other words, we don't know what's in the letter.

Not with standing, Nigeria has added another condition after receiving the letter, and that is consultations with other African leaders. A condition that was not part of the deal. A move many in the human rights community are describing as a delay tactics aimed at undermining any move to turn Taylor over.

The human rights community is also skeptical if the request made by Liberia, which was vehemently denied by Liberia's Information Ministry, when it was first revealed by Taylor's ex-wife, is genuine. Whether this move by President Sirleaf was simply to ease the pressure on her ahead of her visit to the United States where the calls to turn Taylor are loud.

Mrs. Sirleaf, in her address to the joint US Congress did not specifically say Taylor will be turned over, and did not clearly mention that she made the request. The Taylor issue was mentioned along with other issues facing Liberia which she said must end, and that justice must be served.

Many are not sure if African leaders will agree to turn over their own to be tried. It is clear Taylor will not leave Nigeria very soon. Remember, the crimes Taylor is charged with were committed with support from other African countries. Don't forget Burkina Faso. Nigeria is expected to present the request before other African leaders in June or July at an upcoming meeting of African leaders. The world will be watching to see what happens in the next few weeks.

United Nations



Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 21 March 2006

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

International Clips on Liberia

Taylor warns of Liberia 'destabilization' if extradited: spiritual adviser

By Dave Clark

CALABAR, Nigeria, March 21, 2006 (AFP) - Liberia's exiled former leader Charles Taylor expressed concern Tuesday that his country may fall back into chaos if he is extradited from Nigeria to face war crimes charges, his spiritual adviser said. Taylor met Tuesday with the renowned Indian evangelist Kilari Anand Paul in the eastern city of Calabar an AFP correspondent saw -- as pressure rose on Nigeria to extradite him to face war crimes charges. Paul told journalists after meeting Taylor: "He said 'there will be tremendous destabilization in Liberia if the extradition takes place.'" "There is no question in my mind that there will be chaos," added Paul. The evangelist said he had spoken to "nine of Taylor's top 10 generals" and that he feared that Taylor could have sufficient support in Liberia so that his extradition and prosecution for war crimes could provoke violent unrest.

Sierra Leoneans fear Taylor trial may stir unrest

By Victoria Averill

FREETOWN, March 21 (Reuters) - Sierra Leoneans fear moves to bring former Liberian leader Charles Taylor to trial for war crimes in their country will reopen old wounds and risk undermining a fragile peace in the ex-British colony. The former warlord is seen as the mastermind behind once intertwined civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia, two of modern Africa's most brutal conflicts that cost tens of thousands of lives and spawned a generation of young gunmen. Newly-elected Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has asked Nigeria, where Taylor lives in exile, to consider handing him over so he can stand trial at a U.N.-backed court in Sierra Leone, where he has been indicted for war crimes. But many people on the streets of Freetown fear Taylor's presence on Sierra Leonean soil, where the rebels he supported were notorious for hacking the limbs off civilians during the 1991-2002 civil war, would stir fresh instability. "We really don't want Charles Taylor to come here. We have been through this war and just now we are having peace," said John Kamara, a computer technician.

Liberian diplomats took bribes from online diploma mill, court filings indicate

Source: AP Alert - Financial Date: March 21, 2006

SPOKANE, Washington Three Liberian diplomats were paid more than \$43,000 (euro35,400) to provide bogus accreditation for an online diploma mill that awarded fake college degrees in a worldwide scandal, according to documents filed in federal court. The diplomats were given cash payments in Liberia, Ghana and Washington, D.C., according to documents filed Monday in U.S. District Court where Richard John Novak pleaded guilty to conspiracy and violating the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act. Novak could face up to 10 years in prison and millions of dollars in fines.

International Clips on West Africa

With Cote d'Ivoire Election Commission Up and Running, UN Official Departs

Mar 18, 2006 (UN News Service/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) --Now that Cote d'Ivoire has established its Independent Electoral Commission (IEC), the United Nations High Representative for elections in the country has departed,

the world body's peacekeeping operation there (ONUCI) announced today.

Prime Minister Banny tells rebels, militias to bury hatchet

ABIDJAN, March 20, 2006 (AFP) - Ivory Coast's interim Prime Minister Charles Konan Banny, named to reunite the country, has called on rebels and militias who claim to back President Laurent Gbagbo to bury the hatchet and play responsible roles to end the crisis.

Local Media – Newspapers

Presidents Johnson-Sirleaf and Bush Meet Today

(The News, The Inquirer and New Democrat)

- President George Bush will today meet with his Liberian counterpart, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Washington to hold bilateral talks. The discussions are expected to be dominated by the continuing cooperation in the areas of reconstruction, education, health, trade, asset recovery, security sector and democratic reforms, as well as the need to bring former leader Charles Taylor to justice, a press statement issued by the White House Press Secretary said yesterday.
- Meanwhile, diplomatic sources said that a selection process of 300 to 500 American Secret Service personnel had been concluded and they would be dispatched to Liberia to beef up VIP security following today's meeting between Johnson-Sirleaf and Bush.

Nigeria President Endorses Taylor's Extradition

(The News, The Inquirer and The Forum)

- Nigerian media reports recently quoted a presidential spokesperson as saying that President Olusegun Obasanjo had endorsed the extradition of Taylor in line with his commitment to grant an official request from an elected government in Liberia.

World Bank Commits US\$25 Million to Rebuild Liberia's Roads

(The Analyst)

- Speaking during a meeting with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in New York yesterday, World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz announced a US\$25 million grant to help rebuild Liberia's roads.

Japan Donates US\$2 Million to UNDP Arms for Development Program

(The News and The Forum)

- Speaking at a signing ceremony for a Japanese grant of US\$2 million to Liberia yesterday, Foreign Minister George Wallace lauded Japan for donating to the UNDP's Arms for Development Program in Liberia.

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

President Constitutes Veteran Advisory Committee

- An Executive Mansion press statement said yesterday that President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had constituted an Ad Hoc Veteran Advisory Committee and named Armed Forces of Liberia former Chief of Staff Rtd.-Gen. Henry Dubar as Chairman and Deputy Finance Minister Dr. Edward Liberty as Co-Chairman.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

World Bank Commits US\$25 Million to Build Liberia's Roads

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Japan Donates US\$2 Million to UNDP Arms for Development Program

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Education Ministry to Reintroduce Higher Teachers Training Program

- Dedicating a Catholic-church funded multi-purpose technical center in Tubmanburg, Bomi County yesterday, Education Minister Dr. Joseph Korto announced plans to enforce training programs for teachers at degree and certificate levels.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Japan to Recondition Liberian-Japanese Friendship Maternity Hospital

- Addressing journalists in Monrovia yesterday, John F. Kennedy Medical Center Acting Administrator, Dr. Samuel Dopoe said that Japan had consented to recondition the Liberian-Japanese Friendship Maternity Hospital.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Vulnerable Protection Group Wants Fast Track Court for Suspected Rapists

- Addressing a news conference yesterday, Shelter for Abused Women and Children Country Director Marayah Faneah called on the government to establish a Fast Track Court to speedily try rape suspects. She lamented that courts in the country were slow in hearing rape cases simply because they lack specialized judges.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

ELBS RADIO *(News monitored yesterday at 19:00 pm)*

Prison Superintendent Says Government Violates Prisoners' Rights

- In a press interview yesterday, Monrovia Central Prison Superintendent James Dickerson accused the Liberian government of violating the rights of prisoners, by detaining them for over 300 days without trial. He noted that the delay in prosecuting the accused had congested the prison.

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

WFP Launches Feeding Program to Curb Early Marriages

- The World Food Program (WFP) has launched a special feeding program to minimize early marriages among girls of school-going age, WFP Tubmanburg Program Assistant Dexter Merchant told Star Radio yesterday.

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.

Cocorioko website

22 March 2006

http://www.cocorioko.com/features_2

Also published on the Patriotic Vanguard website,

http://www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/article.php?id_article=455, under the name "Hinga Norman Affair: The Week of All Weeks"

WEEK OF GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Wednesday March 22 , 2006

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, .. the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

(Charles Dickens: A Tale of Two Cities.)

So for those who have become morbidly tired of all the noise surrounding the Hinga Norman affair, this may be the week to turn off the hearing aids or go into hibernation or self-induced coma. For if there are any bowels of compassion for the wives and children of the indicted CDF leaders; if there is any element of shame left at State House or any testicular fortitude at the Supreme Court or the so-called special court for Sierra Leone, this is the week may be what many of us have been looking forward to for the past three years. It is the tale of two trials, one pitting the world against Sierra Leone war hero, Sam Hinga Norman, and the other pitting Sam Hinga Norman against the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP).

On Tuesday, 21 March, the Supreme Court will meet to deliberate or perhaps give a ruling on whether the SLPP acted unconstitutionally when it met last September to elect a sitting Vice President as Party Leader in contravention of various provisions of the Sierra Leone constitution which state in so many words that "No political party shall have as a leader a person who is . for the time being the President, the Vice-President, a Minister or a Deputy Minister under the provisions of this Constitution. If the court rules according to law rather than out of fear or favour, then Solomon Berewa and the entire SLPP leadership elected at the SLPP Delegates Conference in Makeni are, as we say in Indiana, up the creek with no canoe.

Whatever the eventual outcome of the case, it will be a landmark decision and either a shift into high gear or a shift into reverse for democracy in Sierra Leone. For Chief Hinga Norman and his beloved SLPP, it could also be that "the stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone", biblically speaking.

Meanwhile at the other trial on the other end of town, where former British child soldier, Hinga Norman, has now become the first person in history to be tried for recruiting and enlisting persons under the age of 15 into armed conflict, the drama between Chief Hinga Norman and his accusers continue. The Trial Chamber meets on Wednesday to review Norman's witness list. The prosecution continues to demand written statements from Mr. Norman's remaining witnesses. Norman refuses to budge. If the court wants a witness statement, says Norman, it should first get it from Defence Witness No. 1, President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Mr. Kabbah so far has refused to appear as a witness and the court has yet to rule whether Kabbah has a just cause why he should not appear as a witness for Mr. Norman as demanded by a subpoena ad testificandum,

recently submitted by Counsels for Defence for Chief Norman and co-defendant, Moinina Fofana. It is like two wise guys going into a suicide pact with neither willing to take the first plunge. So the charade continues. If the court rules that Kabbah must appear as a witness, as we expect them to, that will only be the beginning of woes for Mr. Kabbah who dragged the UN-backed tribunal to Sierra Leone.

Some times this week we expect the Hinga Norman Defence to present clear and convincing evidence to the court that Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, as Minister of Defence and Commander-in-Chief of Sierra Leone did knowingly and with forethought sign and execute documents compelling Hinga Norman and others under Kabbah's command to plan, fund and execute various aspects of the war contrary to Mr. Kabbah's previous statements before the TRC. We also expect that the Chamber will be availed with clear and convincing evidence that Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, contrary to previous statements, did knowingly and with forethought plan and direct commanders of the CDF to execute various battles during the war. And that that Mr. Kabbah did command ECOMOG to bomb and terrorize civilian populations in Freetown and other parts of the country in the same way, Chief Hinga Norman is alleged to have directed the destruction of civilian property in Koribondo in pursuit of the AFRC.

We also expect that the international community will be presented with clear and convincing evidence that the so-called special court for Sierra Leone in concert with the government of Sierra Leone used funds provided by international donors to recruit, arm and deploy elements of the Civil Defence Forces and other ex-combatants to wage war on the territory of the Republic of Liberia and to destabilize the government of Charles Gbankay Taylor. We also assume that some of those ex-combatants included persons fifteen years of age or younger in violation of various statutes of ordinary humanitarian law.

It will also be relayed to the international community that similar funds were used by the court to recruit and deploy mercenaries to unlawfully fly a fixed wing aircraft to the Republic of Togo in a failed attempt to effect the arrest of alleged accomplices of Charles Taylor. And that the government of Sierra Leone did allow Sierra Leonean territory to be used for insurgency and terrorist activities against the people of Liberia in contravention of international laws. And that such violations of international law contributed to the involvement of Charles Taylor in the Sierra Leone civil war and the destabilization of the sub-region.

In short, we expect this week that the grease will hit the frying pot; the push will get to the shove and those who actually bear the greatest responsibility for war crimes in Sierra Leone and Liberia will be exposed for what they are. And if the Sierra Leone Supreme Court acts according to law and fundamental principles of justice, some of those people will not only be exposed, but will also be out of work.

Alfred Munda SamForay,
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The Committee to Elect Hinga Norman