

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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LOCAL NEWS

By Alpha Sesay

A witness for Charles Taylor said yesterday that she neither saw nor heard any evidence that the former Liberian president provided support to Sierra Leonean rebels during the country's 11-year civil conflict. The witness also dismissed the evidence of key prosecution witnesses who testified about Mr. Taylor's links to the rebel forces in Sierra Leone as "lies".

Isatu Kallon, a Sierra Leonean business woman who said she gave support to Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone, has spent days telling the Special Court for Sierra Leone about the role she played in helping RUF leader Foday Sankoh to recruit fighters in Liberia, and the rebel group's battle for the control of Sierra Leone from 1991 to 2002. She has continuously denied any knowledge of Taylor's involvement with the rebel forces.

"During the entire time that you interacted with Foday Sankoh, did the name Charles Taylor come up, did he ever

'Witness never heard of Taylor's support to RUF'

mention the name Charles Taylor?" Anyah asked the witness in a direct question and answer session.

"Never," Mrs. Kallon said.

"While you were in Liberia, did you ever see him and Charles Taylor together?" Anyah asked the witness.

"Never," the witness said.

"You mentioned efforts made by yourself to purchase arms and ammunition for the RUF...did you hear of any instance when Charles Taylor is said to have given RUF arms?" Anyah pressed further.

"I never saw that happen. I did not hear about it," answered Mrs. Kallon.

When asked again whether she ever heard anyone say that he was sent to fight in Sierra Leone by Mr. Taylor, the witness said "no."

Prosecutors have alleged that Taylor bears individual criminal responsibility for the crimes committed by RUF rebels in Sierra Leone because he allegedly instigated and helped to plan the operations of the RUF in their battle for territory of Sierra Leone, including the

country's diamond fields. Prosecutors say that Mr. Taylor served as the main source of support for the Sierra Leonean rebels before and after the invasion of Sierra Leone in 1991. Taylor's defence team has been trying to cast doubt on these allegations through the testimony of witnesses such as Mrs. Kallon.

The witness also responded directly to the testimonies of prosecution witnesses who testified in 2008 about Taylor's alleged involvement with the RUF.

In February 2008, a former RUF radio operator Perry Kamara, commonly known as King Perry, testified that Foday Sankoh sought advice from the former Liberia president on a regular basis and that any time Taylor gave such advice, the RUF would launch a major operation.

"Mr. Sankoh was always advised by Mr. Taylor. At anytime Mr. Sankoh received advice from Mr. Taylor, we would undertake a serious attack," King Perry said in February 2008.

He said such operations based on Taylor's advice included the RUF

attacks on the mining fields in Kono in the eastern province, and Sierra Rutile Mines in the southern province of Sierra Leone.

"Are you aware of this particular mission that Perry Kamara was talking about?" Mr. Anyah asked Mrs. Kallon.

"I don't know about this one," the witness said.

The witness also refuted claims by another prosecution witness, Isaac Mongor, who in March 2008 testified that it was Taylor who sent him to train RUF fighters at Camp Naama in Liberia.

When asked whether Mongor had ever mentioned to her that he had been sent by Taylor to conduct the said training at Camp Naama, the witness said "no."



She added, however, that Mongor told her "that he went to Camp Naama to help Mohamed [another RUF commander] and others to train the boys [RUF fighters]."

According to Mrs. Kallon, Mongor lied when he testified that he

was close to Sankoh, even before the invasion of Sierra Leone.

"Isaac was just a mere bodyguard to John Kargbo [a rebel commander in Liberia]," Mrs. Kallon said.

Her testimony continues on today.

Charles Taylor's Trial

Taylor's Witness Says Taylor's Links With RUF Are Lies

A witness for Charles Taylor said yesterday that she neither saw nor heard any evidence that the former Liberian president provided support to Sierra Leonean rebels during the country's 11-year civil conflict. The witness also dismissed the evidence of key prosecution witnesses who testified about Mr. Taylor's links to the rebel forces in Sierra Leone as "lies".

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"During the entire time that you interacted with Foday Sankoh, did the name Charles Taylor come up, did he ever mention the name Charles Taylor?" Mr. Anyah asked the witness today in a direct question and answer session.

"Never," Mrs. Kallon said.

"While you were in Liberia, did you ever see he and Charles Taylor together?" Mr. Anyah asked the witness.

"Never," the witness said.

"You mentioned efforts made by yourself to purchase arms and ammunition for the RUF...did you hear of any instance when Charles Taylor is said to have given RUF arms?" Mr. Anyah pressed further.

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She added, however, that Mr. Mongo told her "that he went to Camp Naama to help Mohamed [another RUF commander] and others to train the boys [RUF fighters]."

According to Mrs. Kallon, Mr. Mongor lied when he testified that he was close to Mr. Sankoh, even before the invasion of Sierra Leone.

"Isaac was just a mere bodyguard to John Kargbo [a rebel commander in Liberia]," Mrs. Kallon said.

Mrs. Kallon's testimony continues.

Credit charlestaylortrial.org

CharlesTaylorTrial.org (The Hague)

Wednesday, 23 June 2010

Liberia: Witness Provided Assistance to the RUF, Not to Charles Taylor's NPFL, She Says

Alpha Sesay

A Sierra Leonean businesswoman testifying for Charles Taylor said today that while she helped Sierra Leonean rebels during the country's 11 years civil conflict, she did not assist Mr. Taylor's rebel forces in Liberia during its own war.

Lead prosecutor, Brenda Hollis, today sought to establish that the witness, Isatu Kallon, was an influential figure and provided assistance to both the RUF and Mr. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group in Liberia. The witness, while admitting her support for Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF), denied any suggestions that she had links with the NPFL.

"Did you or did you not provide support to the NPFL during the time NPFL controlled Herbel?" Ms. Hollis asked the witness today at the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

"I did not help them," the witness said.

When Mrs. Hollis pointed out that NPFL fighters used to eat the food that the witness cooked for sale without making any payment, the witness responded that "that is not direct assistance."

When confronted with the suggestion that while she was based at NPFL headquarters in Gbarngaha that she did provide assistance for the rebel group, the witness said that she only "used to work at the market" in Gbarngaha.

She admitted that when a rival rebel faction attacked Gbarngaha in the 1990s, she "fled Gbarngaha with NPFL fighters and supporters."

Mrs. Hollis also pointed out that when the RUF signed a peace agreement with the government of Sierra Leone in 1999, the witness was one of the persons selected by RUF leader, Foday Sankoh, as part of a delegation to attend a meeting with Mr. Taylor. The witness agreed that this was the case.

"You were selected because of your close association with both Foday Sankoh and Charles Taylor," Mrs. Hollis suggested.

"No, I don't know about that one," Mrs. Kallon said.

The witness denied claims that during the conflicts in both Sierra Leone and Liberia, she was known by the code name "Iron Lady." According to Mrs. Kallon, nobody ever called her that name and if they ever did, it probably could have been behind her back.

"And they referred to you as Iron Lady because you were such a strong liaison between the RUF and Charles Taylor, correct?" Ms. Hollis asked.

"No. Nobody ever called me that name," the witness said.

The witness agreed that she carried the code name "Sensitive" -- but while admitting that she used that name to communicate with the RUF while she was in Guinea, she denied using the same name to communicate with the NPFL while she was in Danane, Ivory Coast.

"I did not communicate with NPFL," she said.

In her testimony today, the witness also told the court that after the RUF invasion of Sierra Leone in 1991, her business dipped because she had spent a huge portion of her money to finance the RUF. Ms. Hollis retorted that the downslide of her business was because Mr. Taylor and the RUF leader Mr. Sankoh stopped paying her for supplying food to RUF and NPFL trainees at Camp Naama in Liberia.

"No. I only had money business with Foday Sankoh," Mrs., Kallon replied.

As in her testimony yesterday, the witness again today stated that she never heard that Mr. Taylor supplied arms and ammunition to the RUF.

"Someone in your position -- helping the RUF, having given assistance to the NPFL -- you know this was going on," Ms. Hollis said to the witness.

"If I saw it, I'll say it but I did not see it, nor did I hear it," Mrs. Kallon insisted.

The witness also today told the court that while she travelled from Herbel to Camp Naama, where RUF fighters were being trained in Liberia, she did not see human skulls displayed at checkpoints as suggested by prosecutors. She did see small boys with guns among those manning the check points, she said.

When asked whether she saw small boys at these check points on her way to Camp Naama, the witness said that "well, these children, they were there, those children, yes, they had weapons but I was not there when they shot them."

Mrs. Kallon's testimony continues on Thursday.


United Nations Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 23 June 2010

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

UN News in Liberia

Star Radio *(News monitored today at 09:00 am)*

Ivorian Refugees Fear UNHCR Departure from Maryland

- Over 300 Ivorian refugees in Barreken, Maryland County have expressed dissatisfaction over a planned closure of UNHCR offices in the region.
- The refugees said they received reports that UNHCR would close its offices in the county on 30 June 2010.
- The groups' spokesman Ralph Dabie said such early closure amounts to an attempt to abandon them, noting that their country was not yet stable for them to return.
- Mr. Dabie appealed to the UN refugee agency to continue its operations in the area by helping to address some of the critical health and educational needs.
- He spoke during the celebration of World Refugee Day in Barreken.
- UNHCR Harper Officer-in-Charge Musa Konneh assured the refugees the Commission would continue its activities till December.
- Mr. Konneh urged the refugees to remain hopeful and law-abiding.

Truth FM *(News monitored today at 10:00 am)*

UN Official Frowns on Publication of Misinformation on Gender Matters

- The United Nations Development Funds for Women (UNIFEM) Country Representative Dr. Asaduaderis Bris has frowned on the publication of misinformation on gender related matters in the country.
- Dr. Bris said information regarding gender matters should not be published if they are not true.
- Speaking to journalist at a sensitization for media practitioners on gender sensitive reportage and coverage, Dr. Bris called on journalists to desist from being bias in their reportage and seek balanced information.
- She disclosed that the training organized by UNIFEM will pave the way for other trainings of Liberian journalists in other parts of the world.

Local News on Liberian issues

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's Son Linked to over US\$1M Money Transfer Case

[Heritage, Front Page Africa]

- Charles Sirleaf, a son of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, has been linked to the over US\$1m money transfer case.
- The money, US\$1, 171, 751, was transferred from the Central Bank of Liberia (CBL) and Ecobank-Liberia sometime last year.
- Mr. Sirleaf was linked to the transfer deal by Mars Jusu Passawe, the first defense witness who took the witness stand on 22 June 2010 at the Criminal Court 'C' in Monrovia.
- According to witness Passawe, the account from which the US\$2,000 was withdrawn at the Caldwell Junction Branch of the Ecobank-Liberia was allegedly opened by Mr. Sirleaf for the purpose of a trust fund to support groups that are in the business of promoting activities of the Liberian government.
- Witness Passawe told the court that the withdrawal slip for the US\$2,000 was given to Richard Passawe by Gbotee Peabody to get the money from the account at the Caldwell Junction Branch of Ecobank-Liberia.

Debt Relief for Liberia Today

[Daily Observer, Front Page Africa, The Inquirer, The Informer, In Profile Daily]

- Reports from the United States suggest that World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) are set to unanimously endorse Liberia's bid for debt relief today, 23 June 2010 as a meeting of the Board of Governors of the two multilateral institutions.
- According to a dispatch from the US, Liberia has reached the Completion Point of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Completion Initiatives.
- A high-power Liberian government delegation currently in the United States to attend the HIPC meeting said they have begun receiving congratulatory messages and assurances from senior executives of the two financial institutions.
- The news emerged from separate preparatory meetings held Tuesday with the IMF First Deputy Managing Director John Lipsky and IMF Head of the Africa Division Antoinette Sayeh and Liberia's Finance Minister Augustine Ngafuan, when the two IMF officials explained how successfully Liberia has met all of the required HIPC indicators.
- Minister Ngafuan, according to the dispatch expressed Liberia's appreciation to the Fund for what he called "a solid partnership in reaching this milestone".
- Meanwhile, the IMF Board Meets formally tomorrow, 24 June 2010 to make a final decision on Liberia's bid for debt relief having met all of the triggers laid down to reach the completion point by the IMF.

Protesting Lawmakers Force Speaker to Adjourn Session

[Daily Observer, Public Agenda, The Informer, Heritage]

- The sitting of the House of Representatives has again ended in chaos with deep division between Speaker Alex Tyler and some protesting lawmakers.
- Tuesday's disruption of the House sitting by the protesting lawmakers of the six large counties came shortly after the House began normal proceedings.
- The protesting lawmakers led by Bong Representative George Mulbah who boycotted the House sitting dramatically appeared in the House in a noisy fashion.
- They protested that the House did not obtain the required quorum to proceed.
- Earlier Speaker Tyler announced the obtainment of the quorum with 26 lawmakers present, 30 absent, 2 distant, 3 excused and 3 sick.
- The decision of the Speaker to add absentee lawmakers to those present to obtain the quorum prompted the appearance of the protesting lawmakers in noisy fashion.
- The protest by the lawmakers forced Speaker Tyler to adjourn the sitting in anger after his leadership was challenged.

Women Groups Want UN Travel Ban Lifted on Bong County Lawmaker

[Liberian Express, Daily Observer, Front Page Africa, The Inquirer]

- A petition has been submitted to the Legislature seeking its intervention in the removal of the UN travel ban on Bong County Senator Jewel Howard Taylor.
- The petition was submitted Tuesday to the leadership of the Legislature by three women groups including the Bong Chapter of Coalition of Political Parties Women, United Liberia Rural Women and the Sanoyea branch of WIPNET.
- In their statement, the women spoke against the denial of the fundamental rights of Senator Taylor which they claimed amounts to indefinite persecution.
- They described the former Liberian First Lady as a patriotic woman who has demonstrated her commitment in the rule of law and it was unjust to deny her freedom of movement.
- A spokesperson of the women, Esther Walker said their campaign intends to draw government's attention to the case of Senator Taylor.

Ex-police Colonel Gets 15 Years for Rape

[New Democrat]

- Criminal Court 'E' has sentenced a former police colonel to 15 years in jail for rape.
- Kollie Buway, 57 was sentenced Tuesday after being found guilty.
- Buway was indicted during the 2009 August term of court.
- Government arrested him after he was accused of sodomizing a 12-year old girl.
- The former police colonel committed the act in the Parker Paint Community in Paynesville, outside Monrovia.
- Statutory rape is a non-bailable crime in Liberia and is punishable by life imprisonment.

Star Radio (News monitored today at 09:00 am)

Presidential Nominee Finally Confirmed

- The Senate has at long last confirmed Isaac Jackson as Assistant Information Minister for Information Services.
- Tuesday's confirmation vote was taken behind closed door after a report by the Judiciary Committee.
- The Committee headed by Senator Joseph Nagbe recommended the confirmation of Mr. Jackson after dismissing claim that he lied under oath.
- According to the Committee, the complaint by Darius Dillon of the opposition Liberty Party was untrue.
- Mr. Dillon had complained that Mr. Jackson lied to the Senate after claiming to be a bonafide member of Cllr. Charles Brumskine's Liberty Party.
- Tuesday's confirmation vote came two months after Mr. Jackson's confirmation was suspended pending an investigation.

Children Act Shelved Till 2011

- The Senate has voted to defer the passage of the draft Children Act until January 2011.
- The Senate took the vote Tuesday following contention by some Senators against the bill.
- The lawmakers led by Isaac Nyenabo of Grand Gedeh protested that certain portions of the bill were in violation of Liberian laws.
- According to Senator Nyenabo, the bill has several international protocols which have not been ratified by the Legislature.
- He identified the protocols as the African Chapter on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discriminations against Children.
- Senator Nyenabo and other lawmakers argued in the absence of legislations on those protocols it was wrong to include them in the draft Children act.

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(Also reported Truth FM, Sky FM, and ELBC)

Government Launches Massive Demolition Campaign

- Government has begun the demolition of several buildings around the Front Street vicinity in Central Monrovia.
- The demolition exercise is affecting several neighborhoods in Central Monrovia including Robert, Centre, Gurley, Newport and Mechlin Streets.
- National Zoning Officer Elijah Karnley said the waterfront between Monrovia's two major bridges would be cleared of squatters.
- Mr. Karnley said the demolition is part of a comprehensive urban revitalization plan for Monrovia.
- Mr. Karnley hopes the one-month exercise will improve the overall outlook of the city.

Truth FM *(News monitored today at 10:00 am)*

Nigerian Investor Accuses Government Minister, Vice President's Brother

- A Nigeria investor, Onaolapo Delon, has accused the Deputy Lands, Mines and Energy Minister A. Kpandei Fayia and the brother of Vice President Joseph Boakai, Francis Nyumah of duping him of US\$55,000.
- Mr. Delon said Messrs Fayia and Nyumah allegedly took the money under the pretext of giving him a mining bid.
- Mr. Delon said it was unfortunate for a government minister to dupe a foreign investor who has come to invest in the country's development drive.
- He is meanwhile calling on the President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to intervene and ensure that he is refunded.
- When contacted, Deputy Minister Fayia was said to be out of the country attending official duties.
- Meanwhile, the Press Secretary to Vice President Boakai, Terrence Sesay, said the Vice President was seriously concerned about the repeated usage of his name by relatives to dupe investors.
- Mr. Sesay said the Vice President was working to ensure that the Nigerian investor be refunded.

International Clips on Liberia

Liberia's President Offers Cash Prize for World Cup Prediction

www1.voanews.com

Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has promised to give \$1,000 U.S. dollars and a vuvuzela to any Liberian who correctly predicts the two final teams and the winner of the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa. Presidential press secretary Cyrus Badio told VOA all entries must be submitted to the Foreign Ministry in Monrovia before the semi-final matches begin. He said President Sirleaf is only trying to encourage Liberians who have been captivated by the first World Cup ever held in Africa. "The president did receive what has become a spectacular phenomenon at the World Cup in South Africa – the vuvuzela. In addition to presenting the vuvuzela, she decided to add a \$1,000 cash purse for anyone who would correctly predict the two finalists and the winner of the World Cup. The idea behind that is to encourage the youths here in this country, who are so overwhelmed by the World Cup taking place in Africa for the first time," he said. Badio said the competition has already started and Liberians, excited about Africa's first World Cup, have been inundating the local Truth FM radio station with their predictions. "Our understanding is that the local radio station here – Truth FM – has been inundated with calls by people who want to win the cash prize," Badio said. He said President Sirleaf wanted young Liberians to share in the joy of Africa's first World Cup, especially the positive images of Africa that the tournament has been projecting.

GVHS's Interact Club fosters hope for Liberian Orphanage
www.delconewsnetwork.com

The students of the Garnet Valley High School Interact Club partnered with the Bethel Springs Helping Hands Club to make the lives of 17 children in a Liberian orphanage a little brighter. Interact is Rotary International's service club for young people ages 14 to 18. Interact clubs are sponsored by individual Rotary clubs, which provide support and guidance, but they are self-governing and self-supporting. Dr. Karen Williamson, school counselor at the high school, credited Interact co-president, Nicole Wright, with coordinating the effort to assist the Jemima Thompson Parker Children Foundation in Liberia, Africa, which houses 17 abandoned children. The club members of Interact visited with the Helping Hands Club of Bethel Springs Elementary School for one of their meetings. Lynn Cashell, coordinator of the BSES club, asked the high school students to talk about the orphanage. "What types of food do you like for lunch," asked Nicole Wright, as she addressed the young students. Choruses of "Pizza," "Hot Pockets," "Ham and Chees," and "Peanut Butter and Jelly" filled the classroom of second through fifth graders.

International Clips on West Africa

Guinea

General Yakubu Gowon to Lead Carter Centre Delegation to Guinea's June 27 Elections
www.modernghana.com

The Carter Centre announced today that General Dr. Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria's former head of state, will co-lead the Centre's international election observation delegation to Guinea along with Dr. John Stremlau, Carter Centre vice president for peace programs. The Carter Centre mission will also include more than 30 observers representing over 15 different nations deployed throughout the country. The co-leaders will meet with key political stakeholders: transitional government representatives, the National Electoral Commission (CENI), political party leaders, and representatives of domestic and international election observation delegations, among others, and will observe the polls on Election Day and the counting process. The Carter Centre deployed its core electoral observation team on May 1. Eight long-term election observers have been reporting from Guinea's four geographic regions; they were recently joined by more than 20 short-term observers who are being briefed in Conakry prior to their deployment.

Rio says has "firm rights" to full Guinea deposit
Reuters

Global miner Rio Tinto is adamant it has rights to the whole of the Simandou iron ore deposit in Guinea after a newspaper said the government threatened to take away another part of the massive concession. "We have always maintained our firm rights to the entire mining concession that was granted based on the 2003 Mining Convention between Rio Tinto and the Government of Guinea," Rio said in an emailed statement on Wednesday. The Financial Times said the government sent a letter to Rio demanding it renounce rights to two of four blocks that were taken away in 2008 and awarded to a rival mining group. Failure to acknowledge the previous decision might mean that one of Rio's two remaining blocks may also be reclaimed, it added. Rio confirmed that it had received a letter from the government but declined to give details of its content. In March, Rio signed a \$2.9 billion pact with Chinese metals group Chinalco to develop Simandou, which it bills as the world's largest undeveloped iron ore deposit.

Election raises hope for change
www.irinnews.org

When several people in south eastern Guinea were hurt in road accidents during recent election campaigning, a regional public hospital treating eight of the injured ran out of emergency medical supplies. "The hospital used up all the bandages, suture kits and other supplies on hand to treat the accident victims," said a health worker in the regional capital N'zérékoré who preferred anonymity. With all eyes on the presidential election, set for 27 June, health officials and aid workers hope political change will lead to improvements in a broken health system and other social services. A more stable political situation is also expected to pull back much-needed donor assistance. "Shortage of medicines in public health centres is one of our most serious problems," said Mohamed Lamine Tounkara, regional health director in the Kindia region, 137km east of the capital Conakry. But he said he is hopeful that a successful election will help turn things around. After junta leader Moussa Dadis Camara's exit following an assassination attempt in December, the interim military government has moved swiftly to organize elections in which no soldiers are standing.

Ivory Coast

UNOCI pays tribute to Pakistani peacekeeper who died in Bouaké African Press Organization (APO)

The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), on Tuesday, 22 June 2010, during a ceremony at its headquarters in Abidjan, paid a final tribute to the late soldier, Gul Sher, a Pakistani peacekeeper who died on 19 June 2010 at the Ghanaian military hospital, where he had been admitted following an accident at work. Speaking during the funeral ceremony attended by the Deputy Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire, Steven Ursino, Major Mohamed Yasin, Commander of the Pakistani Engineer Company, described Private Sher as "a devoted soldier and an excellent team player and worker". Private Gul Sher, aged 28, is married and the father of two children. He arrived in Côte d'Ivoire on 1st October 2009. His death brings to 45 the number of UNOCI peacekeepers who have died since the Mission was first deployed in April 2004.

Côte d'Ivoire / UNOCI trains political party representatives and other groups on human rights and elections African Press Organization (APO)

The United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) opened a seminar on Monday, 21 June, in collaboration with the Municipality of Gagnoa, 334 km west of Abidjan, on human rights and elections. The two-day seminar brought together 50 representatives of political parties and other organizations in the district who gathered at the town hall. The seminar was opened by the head of social and cultural affairs service at the Mayor's office, Kouassi Kouakou Boiky, who recalled that "since the arrival of UNOCI in 2004, a lot has been done regarding human rights in Côte d'Ivoire, with UNOCI serving as a medium for handling violations of the said rights." He thanked UNOCI for the timeliness of the seminar which comes at time when preparations for elections were underway. He called on the participants to interpret the message to their followers and to educate them in order to avoid abuses during the electoral period.

Case filed over Gaza assault

A war-crimes complaint has been filed in a Belgian court against 14 Israeli officials including Ehud Barak, the defence minister.

The complaint seeks charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed during Israel's war on Gaza in January 2009, Georges-Henri Beauthier, lawyer for the group filing the complaint, said on Wednesday.

Ehud Olmert, who headed the government at the time, and Tzipi Livni, his foreign minister, are also named in the document along with other military and intelligence officials.



Livni, left, and Olmert are among 14 Israeli officials named in the war crimes petition [AFP]

The prosecutor should decide on the merit of the case by the end of August under Belgium's law of universal jurisdiction, which allows Belgians to file such complaints, Beauthier said.

Anouar El Okka, a Belgian doctor of Palestinian origin, is one of the 14 plaintiffs that Beauthier is representing.

Okka claims that his olive grove in Gaza was bombarded and then set of fire with phosphorous by Israeli forces.

War crimes

The complaint also cites the bombing of the Ibrahim al-Maqadna mosque, near the refugee camp of Jabaliya, in which 16 civilians including children were killed.

More than 200 people were inside the mosque praying when it was struck.

The other 13 plaintiffs are all Palestinians who were wounded or lost a relative in the attack which results in about 1,400 deaths of mainly Palestinian civilians.

The 70-page complaint also refers to the conclusions of a UN-commissioned report which accused Israelis and Palestinians of war crimes in Gaza.

The plaintiffs said that they did not trust the Israeli court system, "because it is not independent, reliable, or honest according to the criteria of international law".

Legal history

It is not the first time such legal action has been taken in Belgium. In 2001, a complaint was filed against Ariel Sharon, a former prime minister, over massacres at refugee camps two decades earlier.

That legal move caused a diplomatic spat between Israel and Belgium and led Brussels to change its universal jurisdiction law, allowing it to apply only in cases that involved Belgian nationals.

Last week, Israeli media reported that Barak cancelled an official visit to Paris after French passengers of the Gaza aid flotilla threatened to file a case against him over a deadly raid that killed nine activists.

The passengers, together with three members of the French parliament, threatened to file cases against Barak both in France and in the International Criminal Court, in the Hague.