

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

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Charles Taylor Will Be Judged Tomorrow

Judgement in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Ghankay Taylor will take place on Thursday, 26 April 2012 in The Hague.

While the Special Court's other trials took place in Freetown, the Taylor trial was moved to The Hague after the UN Security Council expressed concern for security implications in the sub-region if Mr. Taylor were tried in Freetown. The trial was therefore moved, first to a courtroom of the ICC, and later to a courtroom of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, where the delivery of the judgement will take place.

Charles Taylor was indicted on 7 March 2003, but the indictment was kept under seal until 4 June 2003. Mr. Taylor stepped down as President of Liberia two months later, and went into exile in Nigeria. He was transferred to the jurisdiction of the Special Court on 29 March 2006.

The trial opened on 4 June 2007, but it was immediately adjourned following the Prosecution's opening statement after Mr. Taylor dismissed his counsel. The trial resumed, with new defence counsel, on 7 January 2008.

During the trial, the prosecution called 94 witnesses who testified in person, and submitted evidence of 6 other witnesses in the form of transcripts and expert reports. The defence called 21 witnesses to testify, with the first witness for the defence being Mr. Taylor himself.

Closing arguments were concluded on 11 March 2011. Since that time the Trial Chamber, consisting of Presiding Judge Justice Richard Lussick of Samoa, Justice Teresa Doherty of Northern Ireland, and Justice Julia Sebutinde of Uganda, along with Alternate Judge Justice El Hadji Malick Sow of Senegal, have been working on their judgement.

Each judge must read through more than 50,000 pages of witness testimony transcripts, and consider 1,520 exhibits. That process will have taken just over a year, which is consistent with similar complex and high-profile cases at other international tribunals.

The Taylor trial will be the last major trial held by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. It thus marks a critical milestone as the court nears the completion of its mandate.



Several contempt of court hearings are pending in Freetown on allegations of interfering with witnesses who testified before the court. Three other trials, resulting in eight convictions, took place in Freetown.

The Exclusive
 Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Short Commentary

By An Independent Observer

True justice will not be served in Sierra Leone



The world seems to have declared 'mission accomplished' with the arrest of Charles Taylor, but there's still much to be done. "At least they killed you in Rwanda," the woman said to us, her voice laced with bitterness. As she spoke, she held up her arms. Where her hands should have been were two mutilated stumps. It was 2003, and we were in Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone. The woman was one of many survivors we have met from that country's bloody civil war that raged for 11 years until 2002.

Chopping off the hands and feet of civilians was one of the signatures of Sierra Leone's rebel army, the Revolutionary United Front - armed, financed and directed by a warlord from neighbouring Liberia, Charles Taylor. The 64-year-old Taylor is a Libyan-trained guerrilla, who in 1989 launched a civil war to become one of the most powerful warlords in his home country of Liberia. Then, from 1991 on, he used his soldiers and resources to spread civil war in Sierra Leone.

In 2003, after Sierra Leone's war ended, the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted Taylor - by then president of Liberia - for war crimes. Taylor resigned his presidency and fled into exile in Nigeria. He was handed over in 2006 to Liberian and UN authorities. This week, the Special Court for Sierra Leone will announce its verdict on Taylor. Most of the world's eyes have been focused recently on another pocket of Africa and another brutal warlord, Joseph Kony, of Uganda.

We've heard how he recruited child soldiers, and made them commit barbarities. Everything Kony did, Taylor's puppet army had done in Sierra Leone. In the Sierra Leone city of Mak-eni, one of Taylor's former soldiers described to us the indoctrination ceremony he and other boys were put through when they were forcibly recruited.

Taylor's men dragged out a corpse, hacked it into four pieces then made the boys walk through the gore. Then they were forced to eat parts of the body. Taylor's men told the new recruits it was ancient tribal magic that would make them invulnerable to bullets.

An estimated 10,000 children, mostly boys, were turned into fighters during Sierra Leone's civil war. Thousands more girls were taken and forced into sexual slavery. The war's death toll stands at approximately 50,000. Many more survived, but with terrible scars. In our seven visits to the region since the war ended, we have seen few improvements for survivors. Sierra Leone remains one of the least-developed countries in the world. It shares with Afghanistan the dubious distinction of having the world's highest maternal and child mortality rates. Thousands of child soldiers have spent the past decade trying to make a normal life - without much success. At more than 45 per cent, Sierra Leone has the highest youth unemployment rate in West Africa. Western nations bear a burden of responsibility for the plight of Sierra Leone. Our lust for the country's rich diamond resources fuelled the carnage.

Taylor was the funnel for millions of dollars worth of "blood diamonds" from Sierra Leone to the world market, using the money to enrich him-self and supply the rebel fighters. In a bloody vicious circle, much of the fighting in the civil war was focused on controlling the diamond fields, and the profits from diamonds provided the funding to keep the fighting going. Sierra Leone is dependent on foreign aid from countries such as the United States and Europe. (Canada does not help - aside from some funding for the UN World Food Program, we have dumped Sierra Leone from our aid and development budget).

However, even that aid is paltry compared to what other under-developed countries are receiving. According to the World Bank, in 2010 Sierra Leone received \$81 a person in foreign aid, while neighbouring Liberia received \$356 per person. It's as if the world declared "mission accomplished" with the arrest of Taylor and moved on, leaving Sierra Leone to try to heal its own wounds.

Try to remember the last time you saw a news story about Sierra Leone. Supermodel Naomi Campbell got more news coverage in 2010 when it was revealed she had accepted blood diamonds from Taylor (she testified at Taylor's trial) than the people of Sierra Leone have received in years for the suffering they have endured because of those diamonds. It is a mark of the disconnect of the West from Sierra Leone that the UN court trying Taylor has chosen to release its verdict on Thursday - the day before Sierra Leone marks its Independence Day. Perhaps the court felt there was some sort of poetic justice in choosing this date. However, issuing the announcement at a time when emotions will already be running high in Sierra Leone will almost certainly provoke riots, bringing further suffering to people there. We certainly hope Taylor lives out the rest of his life in prison for his crimes. However, for Sierra Leone, true justice will not be served until development occurs.

Politico

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Will Taylor "Be Back"?

Under a spectacle that made many an African leader sit up navel-gazing, Charles Taylor stepped down as president of Liberia in 2003, promising "God willing, I will be back".

It followed mounting pressure both from within and without. A rebel war in his country led by the Liberian's United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) had intensified and was snaking its tail into the capital, Monrovia leaving the man who had first come to power through rebellion on the verge of being ousted by a rebellion.

Diplomatic pressure was also being mounted, after the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone had indicted him on allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity there.

Taylor was wanted for allegedly backing the rebel Revolutionary United Front who had committed heinous crimes against civilians including mass killings, amputation of arms and limbs, recruitment of child soldiers, mass rape and forced slavery. Before the onset of war here, he had threatened that "Sierra Leone will taste the bitterness of war" after it played host to a West African intervention force set up to end the bloodbath in Liberia brought about by Taylor's war which started on Christmas eve in 1989.

In front of the world media and audience, Mr Taylor stepped down as president becoming the first sitting African head of state to be indicted. The West Africa regional grouping, ECOWAS, whose leaders were ambivalent over the indictment of one of their own, had midwived his departure. Its chairman and then Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, promised Mr Taylor a safe haven in his country where he was taken to a posh villa in the southern city of Calabar. After mountain pressure and on the eve of a meeting between president Obasanjo and US president George W Bush, Nigeria which was the largest African donor to the UN-backed court for Sierra Leone, agreed to hand over the war crimes suspect. But that was not to happen without some drama.

Rather inexplicably, the bogeyman of West Africa disappeared from his well-guarded residence. The Nigerian government said at

the time they had no idea how it had all happened. He was later arrested as he tried to escape to neighbouring Cameroon with huge wads of US dollar bills. The Nigerian Government flew him to Liberia where he was shortly taken in by UN troops there who flew him to Freetown to face an initial 17-count charge of war crimes that cost the killings of an estimated 200,000 people, the hacking of the arms and limbs of hundreds of people, the taking-hostage of hundreds of UN peacekeepers and the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Sierra Leoneans. Those counts were later revised to eleven.

But Mr Taylor was to be in Sierra Leone for only a few months. In June 2006 he was flown to The Hague after concerns by West African leaders at the time that putting him on trial in Freetown would pose a security threat to the sub-region. The facilities of the International Criminal Court were to be used even if with Special Court officials trying him there. If he is convicted he is to serve his sentence in a British prison.

Eight other indictees have since been tried and convicted and sentenced in Sierra Leone and are serving their jail terms in Rwanda which also has a war crimes court trying those responsible for its genocide in 1994, but sitting in Tanzania. The court argued that prison conditions, which are appalling in Sierra Leone, did not meet international standards. Among them are three former rebel RUF commanders, including their interim leader Issa Sesay, who were sentenced to between 25 and 52 years. The RUF leader Foday Sankoh died in custody in 2003 before his trial could be completed. So also did the notorious rebel battlefield commander Sam Bockarie alias Mosquito.

Also presumed dead, even if his exact whereabouts are uncertain, is the indicted former junta leader and head of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council Johnny Paul Koroma. But three of his men were also convicted and sentenced to between 45 and 50 years.

Two commanders of the pro-government civil militia group known as Kamajors are also in a Rwandan jail serving between 15 and 20 years. Their relatively lenient sentence, many believe,



was testament to the role they played in ending the war even if they committed atrocities in the process. Their leader who was also the country's defence minister, Chief Sam Hinga Norman and head of the civil militia group, also died in the custody of the court. He had been flown to Senegal for treatment. His family accused the court of foul play but a postmortem examination proved no such.

The conviction of Mr Taylor, the star suspect in this process of what international activists are referring to as a stop to impunity, leaves behind a huge number of war victims most of whom beg on the streets for alms without arms and limbs. It also leaves behind a magnificent edifice, which is to be taken over by the Government of Sierra Leone whose judiciary lacks some of the most basic facilities. A Special Court official told me that the Court House would be the country's Supreme Court, while its detention facilities have already been returned to the prisons department, which donated the site to the Court. Other buildings have been desig-

nated as Peace Museums, memorial and Archives, while others are at present being used by the country's Bar School.

The Special Court was a hybrid arrangement that saw some of the judges appointed by the UN Secretary General while the Government of Sierra Leone appointed others. The same rule applied to the appointment of the Prosecutor and the Deputy Prosecutor. It became the first war crimes court to sit in the country in which the crimes were committed. It has spent hundreds of millions of US dollars since it was established ten years ago.

The verdict is to be passed tomorrow, Thursday 2012. Mr Taylor, who left his country on a one-way ticket promising to "be back", will almost certainly be convicted. He may have had a brilliant lawyer but a prosecution lawyer told me that the evidence against him was "too overwhelming". The coming 24 hours will be crucial for Mr Taylor's family and supporters in Liberia, victims of Sierra Leone's war, campaigners for international justice and conspiracy theorists.

Ariogbo

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

The TAYLOR DIARIES:



Once upon a time the Special Court for Sierra Leone indicted sitting President of Liberia, Charles Ghankay McArthur Taylor



The Special Court for Sierra Leone claimed they have 32, 000 pages of evidence against President Taylor. (E escape tay one mus ketch am)

Exclusive Interview with President Charles Taylor

“I felt three in one”

Ghana 2003

Our Liberian stringer caught up with President Charles Taylor at his Executive Mansion few hours after the controversial president returned from the recent peace talks in Accra, Ghana.

TLL: How did you feel back there in Ghana when news of your indictment reached you?

TAYLOR: Wooosh! My mehn, I felt three-in-one!

TLL: What? Three-in-one? You mean the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost?

TAYLOR: No mehn! I felt like peeing, pooing and throwing up, all at the same time! I was sweating and dehydrating. I can't bless my stars!

Oops! Wait a minute! (he looks down and feels his trousers, below his scrotum)-

Excuse me; I think I'll have to use the men's.

(15 minutes later he returns with a clean new suit). Sorry for keeping you guys waiting. You see, nature is always the master.

TLL: It's okay. I can understand.

TAYLOR: Yes, as I was saying. I can't bless my stars. On the way to the airport, mehn, my legs were shaky. Like a spider's leg carrying my weight. I was in turmoil. Was this end? It's like I was seeing the guys with the handcuffs waiting for me inside the aircraft. Mehn, it was a real bad dream!

By the way did you listen to my speech?

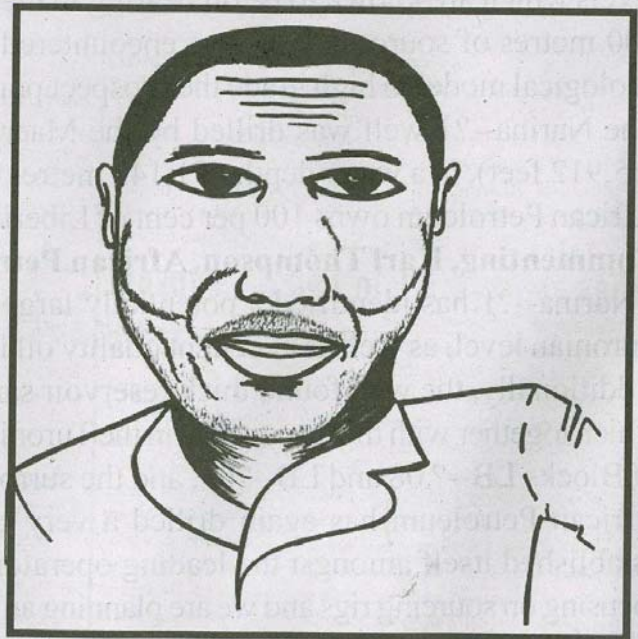
TLL: Yes.

TAYLOR: Only God knows how those sentences came out of my mouth. Mehn, I was not myself. I was just talking. That was a terrible experience! By the way, did I make sense?

TLL: Oh, yes you did. You said if you were the obstacle to peace in Liberia, you were going to step down by not contesting the next elections and give peace a chance.

TAYLOR: Did I say that?

TLL: Oh yeah, that's exactly what you said, amongst other things.



TAYLOR: judgement day tomorrow

TAYLOR: You see that? I did not even know what I was saying. I'm the only hope for peace in Liberia. You people know that. You know I'm more sinister when I'm in the jungle. Talk to these guys (i.e. LURD and MODEL rebels); tell the international community to talk to these guys to lay down their arms and give peace a chance. Let them come out and join me.

(A bulky soldier walks in and whispers to Taylor and that marks the end of the interview).

The Guardian

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Charles Taylor trial could land Liberian ex-president in British jail

The disgraced African former leader is due to hear his fate as a four-year war crimes trial at The Hague draws to a close

Owen Bowcott and Afua Hirsch



Charles Taylor, pictured in 2003. Photograph: Ben Curtis/AP

The former president of Liberia Charles Taylor is due to appear in a war crimes court at The Hague to learn his fate at the end of a four-year trial and begin a journey that may end in a British prison cell.

The first African head of state to be brought before an international tribunal will be in the dock at the special court for Sierra Leone to hear verdicts read out by the judicial panel on 11 charges, including recruitment of child soldiers and looting conflict ("blood") diamonds.

Other offences, alleged to have been committed in Sierra Leone between 1996 and 2002 under his direction, involve terrorising civilian populations, murder, rape, sexual slavery and enforced amputations.

As the former colonial power in Sierra Leone, the UK has offered to make prison space available for the disgraced Liberian leader if he is convicted. Home for Taylor in the coming years could be a solitary cell in a high-security prison, perhaps Belmarsh or Whitemoor.

The gesture of hospitality, made in 2006 by the then foreign secretary, Margaret Beckett, resolved a diplomatic standoff and paved the way for his case to commence. It was proof, she said, of the UK's "commitment to international justice". The Dutch government had said it would host the trial only if another country agreed to imprison him.

But the final decision on where a convicted Taylor serves his time will be made by the president of the special court for Sierra Leone, currently Justice Jon Kamanda, once any appeal is completed. That is a process that may run on into 2013.

Court regulations stipulate that the decision will, among other issues, "take into account the desirability of serving sentences in states that are within close proximity or accessibility of the relatives of the convicted person". The court is even empowered to keep the location secret, if it can.

The "enforcement agreement" between Britain and the special court says the UK will bear the cost of imprisonment and must open the facilities to inspection by the European committee for the prevention of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.

A spokeswoman for the Ministry of Justice confirmed: "We are one of the countries that is able to host [Taylor]. We may give him prison room. We don't comment on prisoner location until the trial is finished. We have hosted other prisoners [from trials in The Hague] before."

But the UK's record on holding such inmates is not unblemished. In 2010, the Bosnian-Serb general Radislav Krstic, who was serving a 35-year sentence in Wakefield prison, was stabbed in his cell by three Muslim inmates.

Krstic was convicted at the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague in 2001 over his role as a senior officer in the Bosnian Serb army, including involvement in the massacre of Bosnian Muslim men at Srebrenica in 1995.

Indrit Krasniqi, Iliyas Khalid and Quam Ogumbiyi were already serving life for murder when they forced their way into Krstic's cell. They were, the prosecution claimed, intent on killing him in revenge for the deaths at Srebrenica.

Whether Taylor will need special protection or a solitary cell inside a British jail may have yet to be decided. In the meantime, he remains incarcerated in Scheveningen prison, in a suburb of The Hague

He has described the cooking in Dutch jail as an "abomination". But for all Taylor's complaints about life inside – he wants conjugal visits, his own cooking and regular basketball – his aides admit things could be worse.

A recent biography, *Charles Taylor and Liberia*, claimed he had managed to father a child by his wife when she called on him in the Dutch jail; others sources suggested it was two.

The Jewish press has reported that Taylor has received regular visits from a rabbi after converting to Judaism. He also has frequent access to the internet.

Scheveningen's prison's spacious, individual cells and family rooms for visits may soon seem luxurious in comparison with the cold comfort of life behind bars in England.

The Guardian

Tuesday, 24 April 2012

Charles Taylor verdict: 'He should taste the bitterness of the law'

People in Sierra Leone and Liberia say what the imminent verdict in the ex-president's war crimes trial will mean

Tamasin Ford and Rachel Stevenson in Monrovia and Freetown



Charles Taylor during his trial at the UN Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown. Photograph: Jerry Lampen/AFP/Getty Images

The start of the rainy season in Freetown doesn't dampen the vibrancy of the city. Blue, pink and green houses line its narrow winding roads. Street sellers wrapped in brightly printed cloth swarm through the never-ending traffic. People are trying to move on from the horrors of Sierra Leone's civil war. Some can even forgive, but very few can forget, the death and devastation of one of the most brutal conflicts in Africa.

"I wasn't a beggar before. Now I have come to be a beggar. Just to get food for my children, to send them to school," says Kadiatu Fofana, who lives with a constant reminder of the atrocities committed in the war. She sits outside her concrete shack in a wheelchair, having lost both her legs after an attack by the notorious Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels.

They came to her village in 1999. As she ran, they started hacking at her legs with machetes. Both legs had to be amputated in hospital.

Between 1991 and 2002, at least 50,000 people were killed across the country, thousands more were mutilated and 2 million displaced from their homes – close to half the population.

For many, there is one man they hold responsible – Charles Taylor, former president of neighbouring Liberia. The first African head of state to be tried in an international court, Taylor will on Thursday hear the verdict of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in his five-year trial on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, sexual slavery and using child soldiers.

Edward Conteh, another of Sierra Leone's amputees who lost his left arm just below the elbow to an RUF axe, wants Taylor punished. "He should never be free to breathe the free air that we breathe again. He once told Sierra Leoneans that we are going to taste the bitterness of war, so Charles Taylor should taste the bitterness of the law."

Taylor is alleged to have said Sierra Leone would "taste the bitterness of war" in an interview with the BBC in 1990. A year later, war came to Sierra Leone – and the RUF entered from Liberia. Taylor is accused of funding and supporting the rebels. But not everyone holds Taylor responsible for the crimes in Sierra Leone and there is a widespread feeling that the court did not pursue all those involved.

Ansumana Fowai, a former RUF fighter living in Freetown, believes there are Sierra Leoneans who have escaped justice for crimes committed in their own country. "Why was Pa Kabbah left out of the trial? Instead they indicted Charles Taylor, while we have people we see every day [in Sierra Leone] who committed atrocities."

'Pa' Kabbah is former president Tejan Kabbah, who was head of state between 1996 and 2007. It was Kabbah who asked the international community for a war crimes tribunal when peace finally came to Sierra Leone. Thirteen people, including Taylor, were indicted. Nine have already been convicted and jailed. But three of the top names, including the RUF leader Foday Sankoh, died before standing trial. Johnny Paul Koroma, leader of another rebel faction, is still missing. That leaves Taylor, who was held in 2006 and shipped to The Hague, as the only big name in the dock. Many lower-ranking commanders were left out of the prosecution.

Peter Andersen, head of public affairs at the Special Court in Freetown, says prosecutors had to draw the line somewhere on who to bring to trial. "The mandate was to try those only who bore the greatest responsibility," he says. "And that means that a lot of the mid-level commanders, the people who noticeably had blood on their hands, escaped from the court. No tribunal can go after everybody. At some point, the country has to move on."

The Sierra Leonean government believes the trial has brought lasting benefits to the country, particularly in strengthening the judicial system. "Justice has been delivered," says Frank Karbo, the justice minister. "The trials have also heightened awareness that you cannot get away with impunity. It was essential that certain persons be taken out of circulation, and that has been done."

Five hours east of Freetown, heading towards Liberia, the Taylor trial seems to figure little in people's minds. The small, dusty town of Kenema looks like any other in Sierra Leone, until you notice the diamond shops. They are everywhere. Dozens of beautifully hand-painted pictures of diamonds decorate wall after wall. Shop owners sit on their porches waiting for their next customer, the windows behind them barred with thick steel. At the bus station, a man clutching two grubby stones asks if anyone thinks they are diamonds.

Kenema is the centre of Sierra Leone's diamond business, a trade at the heart of the allegations against Taylor, who is accused of fuelling the war by selling the rebels weapons and ammunition in exchange for blood diamonds. During the civil war, control of the diamond mines was viciously fought over. Children, women and men were forced to work in the mines in appalling conditions. Yet few details of Taylor's trial seem to have reached this far out of Freetown.

The closer you get to Liberia, the more opinions change. The Taylor family still has a significant presence in the country, where his former wife is a state senator.

"I still don't see the connection of how he could be held responsible for those things done in Sierra Leone when they were actually done by Sierra Leonean armed forces," Jewel Howard Taylor says in her office in Liberia's parliament building. The wall behind her is lined with mementoes from her time as first lady – an honorary plaque from the Liberian national football team, a signed photograph of her with Hillary Clinton and a framed photo of the Taylors with former French president Jacques Chirac.

"I don't think he should be held responsible for problems in Sierra Leone. However, if you talk about the crisis in Liberia, then that's a different story," says Taylor.

Liberia has its own history of war. For 14 years, the country was in an almost permanent state of fighting, with atrocities like those committed in Sierra Leone. War began in 1989 when Taylor led a rebel army to oust the then president, Samuel Doe. In 1997, Taylor was elected as head of state but, within a few years, new groups of rebels were trying to overthrow him. He was forced in to exile in Nigeria in 2003.

As part of its peace process, Liberia chose to have a truth and reconciliation commission, rather than a war crimes tribunal. "I would hate to see a war crimes tribunal brought to Liberia," says Jewel Taylor. "It will not reconcile us.

It will not bring back the past. It will not pay for the destruction of our nation, and it will definitely not put back the fabric of our country that has been destroyed as a result of the war."

A former warlord whose links to Liberia's violent past many cannot ignore ran for president in recent elections. Prince Johnson fought alongside Charles Taylor in 1989 before forming a rival force. He ordered the torture and execution of Doe in 1990 – a video showing Johnson relaxing in a chair with a beer while his men slice Doe's ear off is on YouTube.

"Everyone in life has a past. No-one will ever rejoice even if you kill your enemy, because we are all Liberian, one blood. It is unfortunate for political power we had to fight ourselves. Definitely, it is regrettable," he says, from his home in Monrovia.

He chastises his former comrade. "It's pathetic that he [Taylor] got himself into what he's into. I would have focused on Liberia and developed my country after becoming president rather than promoting a war in another country," he says, adding, "if it is true."

Johnson did not make it to the second round of voting in the elections. Taylor, however, still has strong support in Liberia. He was seen as a freedom fighter in 1989, liberating the country from the corrupt and violent rule of Doe. Despite the years of conflict that followed, many still see him a strong figurehead.

"We want him to come back to Liberia," says Jacob Anjai, breaking off from a game of Scrabble in one of Monrovia's open-air cafes, where people gather to talk politics and play board games.

If Taylor ever returned and stood for president, would they vote for him? About half the customers said they would. "We love him. Even if he stands tomorrow to be president of this nation, I know we will vote for him and he will be victorious," says Anjai.

That neither Johnson nor Taylor have been held to account for atrocities committed in Liberia, however, leaves many people with a bitter taste in their mouth.

Visible signs of Liberia's past are falling away in Monrovia, as bombed-out, bullet-ridden buildings are replaced. The presidential elections in November gave Nobel prize winner Ellen Johnson Sirleaf a second term by Liberians wanting continued peace and development.

Most people have no desire to return to conflict and have spent the years while Taylor has been on trial trying to rebuild their lives. Both Sierra Leone and Liberia are still desperately poverty-stricken, and daily survival can seem more important than justice.

Fofana, sitting in her wheelchair sheltering from the sun in Grafton, knows her life will remain on the breadline, whatever the verdict. "They could jail him for 100 years and it wouldn't make a difference," she says. "I still need to find food for my family."

The Inquirer (Liberia)

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Gongloe, Whitfield On Taylor's Pending Verdict

Story by Morrison O.G. Sayon and Janjay F. Campell

Photo Credit:

As the world awaits the final verdict of former Liberian President, Charles Ghankay tomorrow, a Liberian lawyer has predicted a guilty verdict for the jailed Liberian former leader.

Senator John Whitfield, Secretary General of the former ruling National Patriotic Party (NPP) of Mr. Taylor says any guilty verdict by the Special Court for Sierra Leone sitting in The Hague will be politically motivated and not based on legality.



Sen. Whitfield noted that there are big powers behind the Taylor trial and as a result, the release of the former Liberian leader is very slim. “If Taylor is found guilty, we will move ahead in peace with our lives and then that is his destiny but if he is set free, then we rejoice,” the Grand Bassa County lawmaker averred.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone sitting in The Hague is expected to deliver its final verdict in the trial of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor on Thursday, April 26, 2012, following a trial that lasted for over three years.

The former leader of Liberia is facing 11 charges ranging from war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, allegedly committed from November 30, 1996 to January 18, 2002, but he has since pleaded not guilty to all the charges.

Tiawon Gongoloe, former Labor Minister of Liberia strongly believes that Mr. Taylor will be found guilty. According to him, the former Liberian President was asked if he ever gave arms to fighters of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) but Taylor responded that he did give small amount of arms to the RUF rebels to defend themselves against the United Liberation Movement (ULIMO) during the heat of the Liberian civil unrest.

Lawyer Gongoloe said, “The question did not relate to quantity of arms, but if he (Taylor) ever gave RUF rebels arms.” He said there was no way Liberians could have fought and go with impunity when Mr. Taylor was then above the law.

The former Solicitor General noted, “I feel good that justice will be served, and that justice is an international call.” He said when Taylor is found guilty and the Taylor trial comes to an end, Liberians will reconcile.

Several Liberians back home have also expressed their views on the pending verdict of Mr. Taylor who is still believed to enjoy massive support amongst Liberians despite his long trial in the Netherlands.

Madam Grace Cocublee, a businesswoman in Monrovia, said the former Liberian leader will not be guilty. “There is no evidence to indict Mr. Taylor,” she said. Cocublee said Taylor will come home as a

peaceful citizen of Liberia and not as a politician. She noted that come Thursday, Mr. Taylor will be set free.

Arneya Tokpah, a resident of Monrovia says Mr. Taylor will definitely be guilty. He believed that Taylor has everything to do with the Sierra Leone crisis noting, "He was the godfather of the RUF. Some of us saw what went on in Sierra Leone; there were soldiers with arms crossing into Sierra Leone". He said RUF came to Liberia; some of us saw RUF top officials here in Liberia; Mr. Taylor embraced them and communicated with them regularly," Tokpah intimated.

Another Liberian, James Nimley a student said the international community is making Mr. Taylor to look guilty. He said the former president was arrested without any good reason. Mr. Nimley noted, "President Sirleaf should be blamed if Taylor is guilty; she has not said anything about Taylor trial". "If not guilty, he (Taylor) should come back home and run for president, because he is the only person who can develop Liberia. Sierra Leoneans should be punished; they should pay the cause of Liberia going backward," he stressed.

Kula Fofana, a youth activist said the verdict in the former Liberian leader's case must be based purely on testimonies given by the witnesses who appeared before the judges. Madam Fofana said people must be made to account for crimes they commit without exception.

She stated further that as a former President of Liberia, she will not be pleased to see her former President languishing in jail perpetually but if those crimes were committed by him and if the judges are convinced based on evidence provided during the trial then he must face the music.

Voice of America
Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Verdict in Charles Taylor Trial Due Thursday

A U.N.-backed war crimes tribunal is set to hand down a verdict Thursday in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone charged Mr. Taylor with 11 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other violations of international law for his alleged support of rebels during Sierra Leone's civil war.

The defendant pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Mr. Taylor's four-year trial took place in The Hague because of fears that trying him in Sierra Leone would spark regional violence.

The former president is accused of arming and assisting the rebel Revolutionary United Front in exchange for "blood diamonds" mined in eastern Sierra Leone.

He is specifically charged with being responsible for acts of murder, rape, terrorism, recruitment of child soldiers, and enslavement.

An estimated half-million people were killed during Sierra Leone's 11-year civil war, which ended in 2002.

Mr. Taylor was elected president of Liberia in 1997 after leading a rebel force during that country's civil war. International pressure forced him to resign in 2003 and accept exile in Nigeria, after his indictment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

He was arrested and delivered to the court in 2006, after being extradited back to Liberia.

During the trial, the court heard testimony from 94 prosecution witnesses and 21 defense witnesses, including Mr. Taylor.

The tribunal was established to try the most serious cases of war crimes rising from the Sierra Leone conflict. The Taylor case is expected to be the court's last major trial.

Allafrica.com

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Liberia: Charles Taylor - the Long Wait for Justice Almost At an End

By Colin Waugh, 25 April 2012

Tomorrow in The Hague the judges in what has been one of the lengthiest and most unusual legal battles ever to have been fought on the international stage are due to deliver the verdict on a man who over the past decade has variously been a deposed president under house arrest in Nigeria, a prisoner awaiting trial and a defendant in the dock of a specially-convened international court.

After a process which has run for a combined total of some nine years since his original indictment, Charles Ghankay Taylor now awaits judgement before the judges at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The court, which is a joint project of the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone, was enshrined in the peace agreement which brought the latter country's bloody, decade-long civil war to an end in early 2002.

The verdict in the trial of Charles Taylor, former President of the Republic of Liberia will also mark the climax of the unprecedented experiment in international justice which the Special Court represents. But when the judges announce their decision tomorrow morning it will almost certainly not be the end of the story.

Not only has the process of Taylor's indictment, apprehension and trial been incredibly lengthy, it has been costly and controversial too. The Taylor trial, which began in April 2006 in Freetown, Sierra Leone, before being moved to The Hague, has been characterized by delays of all kinds. The transfer of the court across continents, the changes of counsel, the procedural objections, the need to accommodating the large numbers of witnesses called and cross-examined by both sides and their often extensive testimonies, together with other holdups and hiatuses have all caused the trial to last far longer than anticipated at the outset.

In June 2007, Charles Taylor sacked his entire defence team. Finding and engaging a new lead counsel, the prominent British QC Courtenay Griffiths and his replacement defence team delayed the proceedings by over six months. The original location of the court in Sierra Leone's capital was changed to the Netherlands shortly after the trial began in 2006, due to concerns that the proceedings might reignite hostilities in the war-torn region.

During the trial Taylor received legal assistance of \$100,000 per month, which together with the location of the forum and the five-star calibre of the legal representation of both sides made the process an enormously costly affair, estimated at some \$35-\$40 million per year. By its conclusion, it may end up having cost the international taxpayer (mostly in the United States) close to \$250 million, and probably much more than that, if and when the verdict leads to an appeal.

Charles Taylor's guilt or innocence hangs on whether or not he assisted and directed the Sierra Leonean rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), from the end of November 1996, the date of the signing of the Abuja accord - an international agreement concluded in the Nigerian capital and designed to bring peace to the region - until 18 January 2002, the date when the Sierra Leone Civil War was officially brought to an end.

For most of that time, Taylor was president of Liberia, elected overwhelmingly in an internationally supervised and accepted vote in July 1997, but previously himself the leader of a rebel group in his native country which came close on a number of occasions to taking power by force of arms. The main focus of

the case was to review evidence that Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL), proactively took the side of the rebels in Sierra Leone in contravention of the Abuja agreement and contrary to the pronouncements of the Liberian government itself that it was not involved.

The main thrust of the prosecution's case hinged on showing that in addition to being present militarily in Sierra Leone, Taylor's government and army were responsible for either arming the RUF during that period, or for directing it and its leadership in their actions and thereby being responsible and culpable for the war crimes and crimes against humanity which occurred. Despite the barrage of media rhetoric and international hostility directed against Taylor for his role in the Liberian Civil War and other conflicts in the region, the prosecution was unable to present a definitive paper trail directly linking Taylor to a protagonist's role in Sierra Leone during the period under examination by the court.

Taylor's own testimony in the trial lasted a total of fourteen weeks, during which time he was sometimes allowed leeway to give long and often off-topic answers to relatively straightforward questions. Despite the protests of the prosecution about this on a number of occasions, the court largely gave the accused the benefit of the doubt when their challenges were issued. Some observers have suggested that the apparent leniency extended to the defendant was a result of Taylor's unique position as a former leader from a desperately poor African country, on trial before the world and in a forum largely conceived and almost entirely funded by the great world powers, including states which were former colonists of Africa itself.

The trial's conception, jurisdiction and indeed legal legitimacy have been questioned at various times, not just by the accused and his supporters. Certainly, there are apparent ironies in the way in which justice is being meted out by the Special Court, which only considers events and alleged crimes committed in Sierra Leone, not in Taylor's native Liberia. Although Charles Taylor could allegedly be held responsible for many more deaths and much greater destruction in his own country than he ever caused directly or indirectly in Sierra Leone, it was nevertheless his transgressions of international law in the latter country which finally brought about the issuance of an international warrant for his arrest in 2003 for the second time in twenty years. The first time was in the early 1980s, when he was forced to flee Liberia, then under the brutal dictatorship of the US-backed Samuel-Doe, on embezzlement charges relating to his period as head of procurement in the Doe Administration.

The paradox of the present legal proceedings is poignant for many in Liberian civil society who still hold an unrequited yearning for accountability and reconciliation for the crimes committed against them, despite Taylor's departure from the scene in Monrovia over eight years ago.

Many Liberians who were victims of the struggle in their country remain hungry for justice to be done in respect of their own civil conflict - although others would now rather forget and move on - but whether Charles Taylor should be found innocent or be shown leniency tomorrow by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Liberians denied justice will then wonder what recourse they should then be entitled to, with the international community now unlikely to have the appetite nor the resources for a further lengthy and expensive trial for events which are now over a decade in the past.

Colin Waugh is the author of "Charles Taylor and Liberia: Ambition and Atrocity in Africa's Lone Star State" published in the UK by Zed books.

The Star

Tuesday, 24 April 2012

Charles Taylor's child soldiers struggle as adults in Liberia

MONROVIA, LIBERIA—

It's mid-day in downtown Monrovia and Mohammed Kromah and his friends are mobbing a busy intersection, jumping up and down and shouting at passing cars.

Down the street where it's quieter, Kromah explains that the boys — all in their mid-20s and all former combatants from Liberia's 14 years of civil wars — are just trying to attract customers for a car wash, to help them survive on the country's still-mean streets.

Kromah fought with former Liberian president — and warlord — Charles Taylor and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and later an opposition faction, United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO-K). He was among those who went through the United Nation's disarmament and reintegration programs but those projects were short-lived and inadequate, he says.

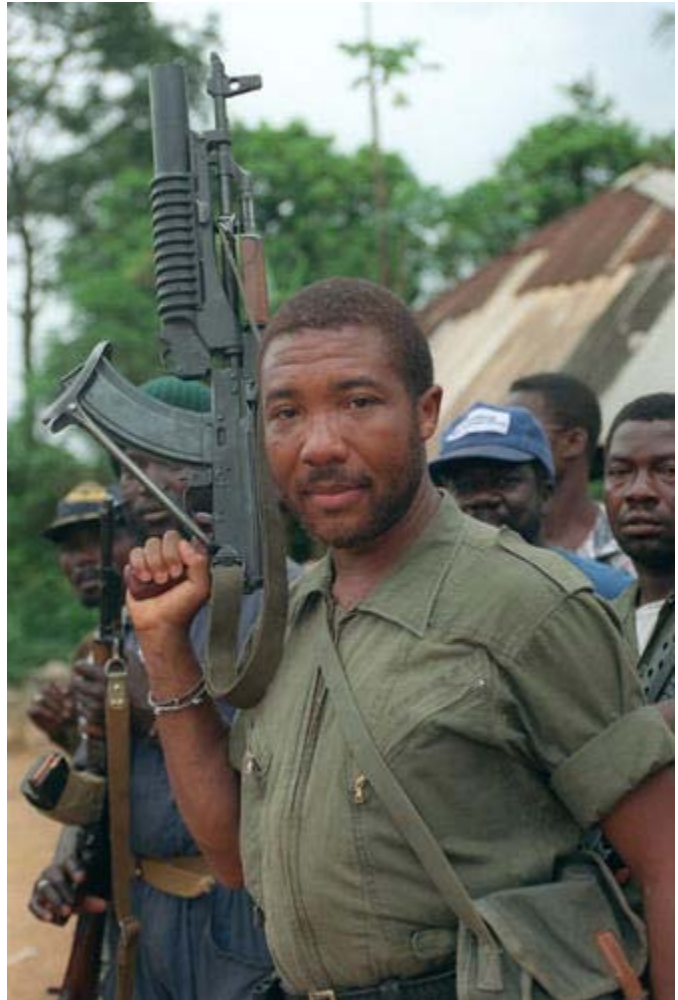
Begun as a peace-building effort after the bloody wars of the 1990s, they were meant to reunite the often illiterate child soldiers with their families, educate them and address their deep psychological problems. But critics complained that they failed to help the combatants and their families to gain adequate education, jobs or stability.

Instead, thousands — like the destitute car-wash crew — ended up drug-addicted, crime-prone and on the streets. While the perpetrators who stole their youth have largely gone unpunished, the former child soldiers continue to pay. Many end up behind bars for petty crimes like stealing a few chickens.

Taylor was arrested in 2006 and tried in The Hague. He is accused of responsibility for atrocities in neighbouring Sierra Leone, and a verdict is due Thursday. But a guilty verdict would mean little in the way of justice for Liberians.

There, the men and women who filled the highest ranks of the conflict's many factions have moved into business or politics, and enjoy comfortable lives free from fears of prosecution.

"We are so frustrated," said Maxwell "Target" Sackor, a friend of Kromah's. Sackor is a former fighter for Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a faction notorious for its recruitment of child soldiers.



“We’ve tried armed robbery, but we felt that was not good for us. So we left armed robbery and we went to the street and tried stealing, but that wasn’t good for us. So we brought ourselves to wash cars.”

Kromah admitted that he’s addicted to heroin, a habit he said he picked up during the conflict. “Most of us are involved in drugs,” he lamented. “It’s like the war is still punishing people.”

During Liberia’s civil unrest that lasted from 1989 to 2003, Kromah and Sackor were never more than low-level fighters in civil wars that were characterized by anarchic brutality. According to a 2009 report by the country’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 250,000 were killed in violence that included widespread forced conscription, looting, torture, rape and cannibalism.

Yet the only individual ever charged for Liberian crimes is Taylor’s son, Chuckie, who was arrested and tried by U.S. authorities for violations of American law.

Those who have prospered after accusations of heinous crimes include Prince Johnson, now a senior senator for Nimba County.

The former leader of a Taylor-allied faction will forever be known best for the video tapes you can still buy in Monrovia’s markets that show Johnson ordering President Samuel Doe’s ears cut off after capturing him when he tried to flee Liberia following a 1990 coup. As Doe bleeds profusely, Johnson raises one ear to the camera and places it inside the begging man’s mouth. Doe is then executed.

Johnson lost a power struggle with Taylor and was forced to flee Liberia — but he returned, re-entered politics and ran against current Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in 2011.

More recently, he was standing before a life-size reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s Last Supper at a school he was building for secondary students.

“Which country has ever had a most-notorious war criminal ever get third place in a democratic electoral process?” he asked. “Is that a notorious criminal? . . . Not in the eyes of the Liberian people.”

Alhaji Kromah, a professor at the University of Liberia, lauded Johnson for his contributions to post-war reconciliation.

“You’ve had people, since the war, who have continually corrected or improved their ways,” he said in his office in Monrovia. “Prince Johnson became an evangelist. He didn’t pick up arms again; he went and taught the democratic process to his people.”

Like Johnson, Kromah — a co-founder of ULIMO and later the breakaway ULIMO-K — argued that it is the country’s so-called “warlords” who have maintained peace in Liberia.

“All the former warring faction leaders have run for political positions, at one time or another,” he noted. “And nobody has gone back to the bush. Why can’t we praise this as an achievement for the whole country?”

Liberian President and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Ellen Johnson Sirleaf seems to agree. This month, she appointed Kromah ambassador at large for Liberia’s ministry of foreign affairs.

Roland Duo, a former general with Taylor’s NPFL, joined the Office of the National Security Adviser. And earlier, George Boley, the former head of another faction allegedly responsible for gross human rights violations, walked free in Monrovia after he was deported from the U.S. under the Child Soldiers Accountability Act.

Frances Greaves belonged to the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace, a group whose 2003 sit-ins are credited with playing a central role in ending the conflict.

She now heads Voice of the Voiceless, a faith-based women's group, and questions what message Liberia's "culture of impunity" sends to future generations.

"Do we want to say that wrongs are right?" she asked, adding that a lot of Liberians are against this culture of impunity. "Many people fear that because of this, we will continue to have civil wars."

Aaron Weah of the International Centre for Transitional Justice believes that those responsible for the worst atrocities will one day be brought to justice.

"The issue of prosecution in Liberia is all about timing," he maintained.

"It is about what is possible now and what could be possible in the near future. Right now, there is a climate of impunity prevailing, and the warlords are appreciating that because they feel protected under that climate. But for how long will they be shielded?"

Young Liberians, maimed during the conflict, are also wondering.

"I lost my mother, I lost my father in the war," says Joseph Dewy, 33, who fought for Taylor. "And after the war, no education, no training."

With files from Massa Kenneh, Al-Varney Rogers and Olivia Ward.

Agence France-Presse

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Angry Liberians want warlord Taylor brought to justice

On trial for list of atrocities

As Charles Taylor's role in Sierra Leone's war comes under the spotlight Thursday, bitterness remains next door in Liberia where atrocities he caused as warlord and president have gone unpunished.

Taylor will be judged in The Hague for his indirect role in war crimes such as murder and terrorizing civilians, rape and recruiting child soldiers in Sierra Leone in return for "blood diamonds" mined by the rebels.

But it was at home in Liberia that as leader of the rebel National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), Taylor pioneered the use of drug-fuelled children in battle and the blood-curdling tactics used to terrify citizens.

Johnson Yarkparolo, 45, a farmer whose brother was killed by Taylor's men during the war, says he does not understand why the man was being prosecuted for crimes committed in Sierra Leone, but not Liberia.

"In my mind, Taylor needed to be prosecuted for the mayhems and atrocity he committed against the people of Liberia."

Taylor led a group of rebels into Liberia in 1989 in a bid to overthrow the hated regime of Samuel Doe, a move which descended into bloody civil war with a panoply of warring factions.

Taylor's NPFL and units of child soldiers carried out massacres, torture and terrorized the population, placing human heads and entrails on sticks at checkpoints to incite fear.

However it was Taylor's alleged role in training and financing Sierra Leonean rebels, who sparked a war in their own country over control of its diamond wealth, which landed him in the dock at the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Prosecutors have tried to link the kinds of crimes seen in Liberia to those committed by rebel groups in Sierra Leone, such as the heads displayed at checkpoints and recruitment of child soldiers.

They have also tried to tie him to deals in which rebels' prisoners would walk hundreds of miles back and forth between the Liberian and Sierra Leone borders to swap "blood diamonds" for weapons.

Alpha Sesay, a legal officer at The Hague for the Open Society Initiative, said Taylor's role in Liberia's conflict would have been a lot easier to prove than that in Sierra Leone, where he did not set foot during the war.

"It is an accepted fact that Taylor was involved in the Liberian conflict ... in cases like that it is easy to establish responsibility."

Taylor even won a 1997 election under the slogan: "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, but I will vote for him."

Whereas Sierra Leone swiftly set up a court to try those responsible for atrocities during its 1991-2002 civil war, Liberia has not done so after back-to-back conflicts between 1989 and 2003 left nearly 250,000 dead.

A Truth and Reconciliation Commission report released in 2009 named Taylor among those who should be prosecuted for war crimes and suggested a list of people including Nobel Peace Laureate President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf be barred from office.

Sirleaf admitted financing Taylor in the early days of his rebellion before she realized the extent of his atrocities, but reconciliation efforts stalled after the highly controversial report.

"There is a serious need to establish a UN-backed warcrime court for Liberia," said Monrovia-based political analyst Isaac Wayea. "We are sitting here, closing our eyes on these realities and acting like all is fine. All is not fine. People are still grieving, and they need to be rendered justice."

Agence France-Presse

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Liberia urges calm ahead of Charles Taylor's verdict

The special court in The Hague is expected to pronounce its verdict Thursday on Taylor, who has been on trial for more than six years on 11 counts of war crimes allegedly committed from November 1991 to January 2002, during the civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The special court in The Hague is expected to pronounce its verdict Thursday on Taylor, who has been on trial for more than six years on 11 counts of war crimes allegedly committed from November 1991 to January 2002, during the civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

Photograph by: Vincent Jannink, Reuters Files , Special To The Sun

MONROVIA - The government of Liberia on Wednesday urged people to stay calm ahead of the imminent war crimes verdict on former president Charles Taylor from the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

"The government calls on all Liberians to remain calm and peaceful and to pray for the nation and peace," President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's office said in a statement.

The special court in The Hague is expected to pronounce its verdict Thursday on Taylor, who has been on trial for more than six years on 11 counts of war crimes allegedly committed from November 1991 to January 2002, during the civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

"The Government reaffirms its confidence in the international justice system, especially as a founding member of the United Nations, and believes that the outcome of the trial will be accepted by all Liberians irrespective of our differences," the statement said.

Taylor will be judged in The Hague for his indirect role in war crimes such as murder and terrorising civilians, rape and recruiting child soldiers in Sierra Leone in return for "blood diamonds" mined by the rebels.

He launched a rebellion in Liberia in 1989 in a bid to overthrow the hated regime of Samuel Doe, a move which descended into bloody civil war with a panoply of factions.

Taylor was elected president in 1997 but two years later civil war broke out anew and fighting only ended when he fled to Nigeria in 2003.

He remained out of reach there until Nigeria in March 2006 bowed to international calls to extradite him.

But while Sierra Leone swiftly set up a court to try those responsible for atrocities during its 1991-2002 civil war, Liberia has not done the same after back-to-back conflicts between 1989 and 2003 which left nearly 250,000 dead.

A truth and reconciliation commission named Taylor among those who should be prosecuted for war crimes, and suggested others including Nobel Peace Laureate Sirleaf be barred from office.

Sirleaf admitted financing Taylor in the early days of his rebellion before she realised the extent of his atrocities, but reconciliation efforts have stalled and Liberia remains deeply divided.

Agence France-Presse

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

SLeone awaits answers on Taylor's trial

By Rod Mac Johnson



Former Liberian President Charles Taylor, left.

Freetown - Momoh Fayia cannot wait to see the look on the face of war-crimes accused Charles Taylor when he is judged Thursday for allegedly fuelling war in Sierra Leone in exchange for diamonds.

“I am going to be as early as possible so that I will not miss out the details of how the verdict was pronounced,” said the 29-year-old, who was enslaved as a child by the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

He said he is particularly looking forward to what Taylor “would look like when the verdict is announced.”

Screens have gone up around the headquarters of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown to show the verdict live from The Hague where the trial was heard so as not to threaten the country's fragile peace.

Ten years after the end of the war, citizens will be glued to their radios listening to the judgement while court officials have been dispatched throughout the country to hold listening sessions at sites of war crimes and mass graves.

Taylor was a warlord and president in neighbouring Liberia, but stands accused of training and financing the RUF who entered Sierra Leone from his country in 1991, providing them with weapons in exchange for “blood diamonds”.

He has pleaded not guilty to 11 charges against him.

Fayia was a child when the RUF captured him as he searched for firewood in Kenema, in the east of the country.

One of the lucky ones he was not forced to fight like many children who were given drugs and AK-47s, but was “mercilessly flogged” and made a mule transporting stolen goods from villages after they were razed by the rebels.

“There was little I could do so I accepted. There and then I was tattooed with the markings RUF... It is only now that the inscription has faded but I have carried this marking much to my embarrassment for a long time...”

Freetown became the theatre of all the war's horrors in 1999 when the RUF launched 'Operation No Living Thing' in which some 6 000 were said to have been killed in a few short weeks.

Women were raped, houses burned, citizens massacred and mass amputations carried out.

Victims were asked to choose between “long sleeve” and “short sleeve”, indicating where their arm would be cut, the kind of brutality by drug-fuelled rebels which left some 400 000 amputees by the end of the war in 2002.

At a video centre in the capital which usually shows films and sports matches, owner Salifu Jalloh said: “Many of my clients have asked me to search international TV channels that will screen the trial. They are willing to pay to watch the proceedings.”

Today the RUF remains in the form of a political party, and its chairman Eldred Collins will watch the verdict at the special screening session but says: “Mr Taylor played no part in Sierra Leone, rather it was Foday Sankoh (RUF leader) who fought the war here.”

He said Sankoh's death in custody in 2003, “closed the chapter” on Sierra Leone's war.

While many want to see Taylor pay for his crimes, others are more concerned with the future as the country faces a resource bonanza against a backdrop of grinding poverty.

“If there is a verdict, well and good but it is nothing that I care much about when I have to daily search for my survival,” said small trader Margaret Sankoh.

Over 70 percent of the country's population of six million still live on less than one dollar per day and life expectancy is 48 years. According to the labour ministry, unemployment is at 46 percent.

But riches are waiting in the wings.

In recent years the country has struck oil and set to mining iron-ore deposits which could make it the largest per capita producer of the mineral in the world.

A sign of the country's looming windfall is International Monetary Fund projections that growth could leap from 5.1 percent in 2011 to 35.9 percent in 2012 - among the highest in the world.

Taylor is accused of instigating and supporting the war for its diamond wealth which fuelled the long war, and concerns are high over how the country will manage its newfound wealth.

Concerns have been raised over corruption and weak mining agreements and much is at stake as the country heads to presidential elections in November which have already sparked clashes between supporters of rival parties. - Sapa-AFP



Taylor trial a triumph for international justice, but case stirs up cordoned-off past

Charles Ghankay Taylor awaits the dubious honour of becoming the first former head of state to be judged before an international criminal tribunal. The former Liberian president's apprehension is the jewel in the crown of international justice, but his criminal case on eleven counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity is hardly clear-cut.

By Thijs Bouwknecht, The Hague

Critics claim Taylor's prosecution was straitjacketed by the trial's limited time frame, thus neglecting to address many issues. Whether or not he is found guilty of a campaign of terror in neighbouring Sierra Leone, Thursday's verdict will leave a trail of questions about atrocities and his relations with Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels during Sierra Leone's civil war in the 1990s.

The plea

"Most definitely, Your Honour, I did not and could not have committed these acts against the sister Republic of Sierra Leone, [...] so most definitely I am not guilty," Taylor told the judges during his first appearance on 3 April 2006 in Freetown. Three years earlier, he had taken refuge in a luxurious villa at the invitation of former Nigerian president Olegun Obasanjo.

But following his arrest and transfer to the custody of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), he has remained the most senior figure in the dock of an international tribunal.

Taylor fired his first lawyer Karim Kahn, but did not try to frustrate proceedings further. The court even allowed him to take the stand himself, for an unprecedented seven-month period, to meticulously detail West African history.

Refuse collection

"Throw it in the bin. That is what we submit the court should do with this body of evidence: get rid of it," said Taylor's lead lawyer Courtenay Griffiths during closing arguments in March 2011. He argued that the

conflict in Sierra Leone was not a Taylor-made catastrophe. On the contrary, he says, Taylor's "role in Sierra Leone was entirely peaceful."

Taylor is accused of "acts of terrorism". This American-flavoured concept burdened the prosecution with a challenge: proving that Taylor forged an illicit conspiracy with RUF leader Foday Sankoh in Libya in the late 1980s to conquer West Africa. Their alleged motive? To become rich off rough diamonds from Sierra Leone. Their alleged modus operandi? A campaign of terror.

Taylor does not deny an orgy of atrocities took place. He simply refutes the charge that he was at the centre of them. But American prosecutor Brenda Hollis has consistently maintained that "the RUF was a terrorist army created and supported and directed by Charles Taylor ... All this suffering, all these atrocities to feed the greed and lust for power of Charles Taylor," she said.

Former aides and enemies

In an effort to tie Taylor to the Sierra Leonean crimes, the prosecution flew 94 witnesses to the Netherlands. The only direct evidence connecting the massacres in Sierra Leone to Taylor comes from his own former aides and enemies. Some had strong reasons to testify against their political rival.

Others were criminals, like Joseph Marzah, known as 'Zigzag'. During a chaotic three-day testimony in March 2008, the former secret service agent confessed to displaying "heads on sticks and car bumpers", killing babies, cutting open pregnant women and eating "Nigerians and white people".

Counterpoint

Producing almost 50,000 pages of transcript and over a thousand exhibits, the Taylor trial offers a unique insight into Liberian and Sierra Leonean history. It also uncovers two diametrically opposed narratives about Taylor's role in West Africa. In Taylor's version, he is a peacemaker carrying the can for the international community. In the prosecution's version, he represents the dark corner of that world.

But the prosecution may only succeed in proving that Taylor – because of his position – "should have known" about the crimes and that he "did nothing to prevent them". They claim he did everything to destroy evidence of links with RUF rebels, accusing Taylor of killing his "favourite" general, Sam Bockarie, and AFRC junta leader Johnny Paul Koroma after they were also charged by the SCSL.

Not the whole truth

For many observers, the SCSL's main shortcoming is that it cannot deal with Taylor's full role in West Africa's history. His participation in Liberia's back-to-back civil wars has been well documented.

Although the SCSL has delved deep into Taylor's history, it can only make findings on established crimes in Sierra Leone committed after November 1996. The era of alleged atrocities in Liberia before then will thus have to be left untouched.

Citifmonline (Ghana)

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

“Charles Taylor's verdict will be irrelevant to Liberians”

A Senior Lecturer at the Legon Centre for International Affairs (LECIA), Dr. Ken Ahorsu, has said the outcome of tomorrow’s verdict for the Charles Taylor trial will not mean much to Liberians.



This is because he will not be imprisoned in Liberia.

The former Liberian president is awaiting a verdict of the trial at the International Criminal Court in The Hague where he was tried for backing rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

Dr. Ahorsu questioned whether Africans have a say in their affairs.

Speaking to Citi News, he said: “The international community arrested him and put him in prison because of a purported view that he will be a threat.

“I think that for us we can say that it is Charles Taylor’s human right that is being trampled upon. However, the question is whether we have a say in international relations as Africans.”

Mr. Taylor’s verdict of the trial will be read on April 26.

Idexonline

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

http://www.idexonline.com/portal_FullNews.asp?id=36707

Charles Taylor War Crimes Trial Ends Thursday

(IDEX Online Staff Reporter)

Naomi Campbell testified to receiving diamonds from Taylor (IDEX Online News) – Judgment in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor will be announced at 11am on Thursday, bringing to an end one of the bloodiest chapters in Africa's history.

Taylor was charged in an 11-count indictment alleging responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed by rebel forces in Sierra Leone during the country's decade-long civil war.

The details of the indictment are a list of horrors. Taylor has been accused of terrorizing civil populations, killings, widespread acts of sexual violence against women and girls, burnings, recruiting children as soldiers, abductions and forced labor, looting and more. He has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

In the nearly five years that past since the trial opened on June 4, 2007 in The Hague, the Court heard live testimony from 94 prosecution witnesses and received written statements from four additional witnesses.

One of the witnesses was British model Naomi Campbell that testified she received diamonds from Taylor in 1997. The stones, suspected to be conflict diamonds, were handed to her after she met Taylor at a dinner by South African President Nelson Mandela. She told the court that two men came to her hotel room late at night and handed her a pouch containing "dirty stones."

Her testimony led to greater international attention to the trial.

During the war in Sierra Leone, Taylor's forces focused on Kono district and its large diamond deposits. Their violent campaign in the region gave rise to the term blood diamonds, diamonds forcibly mined and traded for arms. Taylor also traded lumber for arms to support the war.

The Taylor judgment will be streamed over the internet on April 26 at 11am Hague time / 9am GMT. [Click here](#) or [here](#) to view the judgment.

BBC

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Can Charles Taylor verdict heal the horrors of war?

By Allan Little BBC News, Freetown

A signature atrocity of the rebels that overran Sierra Leone in the 1990s was the chopping off of limbs with a machete or axe, often by child soldiers.

"They caught me and stamped on my chest," Edward Conteh told me.

"I had gone out to try to find food for my children. We hadn't eaten in three days.

"One of the rebels brought an axe and chopped off my left hand - not in one blow. It took five or six."

Mr Conteh is now the chairman of the Amputees' Association, which campaigns for help for those left limbless.

"It is my strong conviction that everything that happened to Sierra Leone is down to Charles Taylor," he said, referring to the former president of neighbouring Liberia, who is awaiting Thursday's verdict in his war crimes trial in The Hague.

"I heard him on the radio threatening to make Sierra Leone taste the bitterness of war. Well we tasted it," he said.

Mr Taylor is accused of arming and funding the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, led by Foday Sankoh, who died in a Sierra Leonean prison cell awaiting trial.

The indictment sheet against Mr Taylor accuses him of crimes against humanity, mass killings, sexual violence, abductions and the use of child soldiers, all of which he denies.

He has been on trial for four years. If convicted, it will be the first time a former head of state has been found guilty of war crimes by an international court.
Complacent?

"Most Sierra Leoneans believe that without Charles Taylor in power in Liberia, there would not have been a war in Sierra Leone," Information Minister Ibrahim Ben Kargbo told me.

"It is no secret that we Sierra Leoneans see Charles Taylor as the man who actually encouraged Foday Sankoh to spread his violent activities.

"Now that Charles Taylor is out of the way, we can easily and safely say that with his absence we are beginning to enjoy peace without having to look over our shoulders."



Many see this as complacent.

The war had its roots in the failure of the post-independence Sierra Leonean state.



Successive post-colonial governments plundered the country's resources, corruption was widespread and poverty deeply entrenched, especially among the rural young.

But 10 years after the war ended, you sense the wheels of recovery starting to turn.

I have visited Yonibana, a village about three hours' drive from the capital, Freetown, several times.

It is home to about 4,000 people, most of them living in thatched huts of mud brick.

Rebels tore through here in an orgy of looting and burning. Many of the houses that were destroyed have yet to be rebuilt.

Nothing much happens or changes in Yonibana.

There is no economy to speak of - the young are educated in the local school but there are no jobs waiting for them at the end.

Now that looks likely to change.

The son of a former paramount chief, Rev Sulaymani Kamara, told me the local authorities have just signed a huge development contract with a Chinese company.

The plan, he said, is to build a rubber plantation, a pineapple plantation, and rice fields to supply resource hungry China.

The ground here is fertile, and water is plentiful.



Rev Kamara believes it will be one of the biggest single investments in Sierra Leone since independence and that it will bring thousands of new jobs.

Outside Lunsar, a town bitterly fought over during the war, there is more evidence still.
Rich reserves

The London Mining Company has reactivated an iron ore mine that has been derelict since the 1960s.

It started producing ore again in December. The company says iron ore reserves here will last 25 years.

"The first phase will last four years," the mine manager Gerhard Hermann said.

"We have recruited between 1,200 and 1,400 workers for that.

"But the second phase will last 20 years, and we'll need a much bigger workforce for that."

Slowly, too, Sierra Leoneans are rebuilding the institutions of democratic accountability.

Since the war ended there have been two successful and transparent elections.

Four years ago, the incumbent government lost and left office peacefully, willingly, and unmolested.

"Democracy in this country is secure," said Mr Kargbo.

"This government came to power after winning an election, removing an incumbent government. It does not normally happen in many parts of Africa."

Another election is due in November.

"If you lose it," I asked him, "will you give up power or try to cling on?"

"We will go, of course, we are not going to be like Laurent Gbagbo!" he said, talking about the ousted president of Ivory Coast who is, himself, now awaiting trial in an international court.

The streets of Freetown will await the Charles Taylor verdict eagerly.

For Sierra Leoneans, the trial has been a way of coming to terms, of making sense of the catastrophe that befell them.

It is another milestone on their long journey back from the horrors they lived through.

Inter-Press Service

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Sierra Leone Still Suffers Legacy of Child Soldiers

By Mustapha Dumbuya



Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier and UNICEF Advocate for Children Affected by War worries about the country's former child soldiers. / Credit:Mustapha Dumbuya

Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier and UNICEF Advocate for Children Affected by War worries about the country's former child soldiers.

Credit:Mustapha Dumbuya

FREETOWN, Apr 25, 2012 (IPS) - When the verdict against Liberia's former President Charles Taylor for war crimes in Sierra Leone is handed down on Thursday, it will be of no help to the many former combatants of the country's brutal civil war who have not been reintegrated into society. Instead, they will continue to pose a threat to Sierra Leone's future stability.

Taylor is being tried by the Special Court for Sierra Leone at The Hague. He is charged with crimes against humanity, mass killings, sexual violence and the use of child soldiers through his support of the rebel Revolutionary United Front in exchange for "blood diamonds". Taylor is alleged to have masterminded the use of drug-fuelled child soldiers in combat.

Ishmael Beah is one of those former child soldiers. He was forced to join Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war at the age of 13, when he was recruited into the government army. While he has been able to turn his life around and was appointed the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) first Advocate for Children Affected by War in 2007, Beah worries about the country's former child soldiers who are now unemployed.

"If Taylor is found guilty, it will be a great victory, not only for Sierra Leone, but for the whole of West Africa," says Beah, who fought in the army for three years before being rescued by UNICEF.

"But if he is acquitted, it will be a big blow to everyone in Sierra Leone and the rest of West Africa."

Beah says that with Sierra Leone's elections approaching in November, the youth should be employed in order to avoid them being used by political parties to disrupt the electoral process.

"One of my greatest fears in Sierra Leone now is, if you have a large number of disgruntled and idle young people who have nothing to do with themselves, you have the possibility of sparking anything," says Beah.

In September 2011, political violence in the southern city of Bo left one dead and 23 injured. The government's Kevin Lewis Commission of Inquiry into the incident found that political parties were using ex-combatants as unofficial bodyguards. Political violence later erupted across the country in January after a by-election.

Unemployed youth are easy targets for recruitment, says Beah.

"The guy hasn't had anything to eat for today, so he is not thinking long term, he's thinking short term, about what he can eat now," says Beah.

"I used to be in that position. You can't expect anybody with short-term thinking to think for the future if you can't provide them with the opportunity to have one."

The U.N. estimates that 10,000 child soldiers were used in Sierra Leone's brutal civil war. During it rebels cut off the arms of those who had voted in the country's elections, and left more than 50,000 people dead.

The U.N.-brokered Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) process was meant to disarm and provide training to former fighters, and support them to rejoin their communities. Ex-combatants received vocational training in areas such as mechanics, driving and carpentry.

According to a 2005 U.N. report titled Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Stability in Africa, about 71,000 ex-combatants were disarmed and demobilised.

But many former fighters say that the programme did not work.

Tamba Fasuluku was known as "Rainu" when he was the commander of a rebel faction called the West Side Boys.

Fasuluku says that he was fortunate to be reintegrated into society and now works as a pastor. But he says that many of the young boys his forces conscripted have not been so lucky.

"It pains me now to see these young boys languishing on the streets without jobs," says Fasuluku. "They have also become easy targets for greedy politicians who use these boys to cause trouble in society."

He agrees that most of the political violence in Sierra Leone is perpetrated by ex-combatants. He says it is because they were given access to arms and exposed to violence at a tender age during the war. He adds that it is also because their families and society are yet to welcome them back as members of the community.

"If the government and other stakeholders do not come together to take these boys off the streets, they will continue to go astray, and that's dangerous for peace," says Fasuluku.

Dr. Alfred Jarret, the head of sociology and social work at Freetown's Fourah Bay College, calls the DDR programme an "abysmal failure".

Bobson Yappo Sesay, a former child soldier, agrees: "I was disarmed and never got any benefit from the DDR programme."

"I can't go home again," Sesay says, explaining that he now lives as an unemployed youth in the capital, Freetown.

Jarret says ex-combatants were not well trained and because of Sierra Leone's high unemployment rate many were unable to find work. According to the Ministry of Labour, the national youth unemployment rate was about 46 percent in 2008. The professor also says that former fighters face discrimination from potential employers and society at large.

Until the government revisits its policy on ex-combatants and tries to engage them, it will pose a serious threat to the country's security, says Jarret.

The government itself says it offers no support to former fighters. Ibrahim Satie Kamara is the spokesperson for the National Commission for Social Action, the government agency responsible for the reparation programme for victims of the conflict.

Kamara says that the government's reparations programmes cater for victims, such as amputees, the severely war-wounded, and children affected by the war.

Ex-combatants, including former child soldiers, fell under the DDR process. There is no government reparation programme for them, he says.

Kamara adds that war victims are discontent with the amount of support being given to former fighters, who are often viewed as perpetrators who unleashed suffering on the people.

Beah says the former DDR programme worked well for some but others missed out or needed more help. And now there is nothing left to help them.

"You can't just take the guns from them and then teach them how to fix a car and expect them to do miracles with their lives when they don't have the resources."