

**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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Tuesday, 25 June 2013

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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For di People
Tuesday, 25 June 2013

CARL Calls For The Prosecution Of Former Mercenary In The Sierra Leone Civil Conflict

From Page 5

Sierra Leone, in Freetown would set an important precedent and be possibly one of the first instances in which a foreigner was finally held to account in the country which suffered the consequences of his greed. One does not need to imagine the positive

effect this could have in places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo where outsider resource exploitation extremely aggravates the conflict.

Now that Mr. Bah is reportedly in the custody of the police, he should be tried in Sierra Leone for stealing the diamonds of Kono during the war, which is at the same time a war crime of pillage and

also a common crime of theft. The government would let down the people of Sierra Leone if they let him go by simply deporting him. CARL calls on the government to suspend any deportation plans and refer this matter to the appropriate prosecution authorities within the government.

CARL Calls For The Prosecution Of Former Mercenary In The Sierra Leone Civil Conflict

CARL Calls for the Prosecution of former mercenary in the Sierra Leone Civil Conflict

The Centre for Accountability and Rule of Law (CARL) today urged the Sierra Leone Government to investigate and determine if probable cause exists to prosecute Ibrahim Bah, a close associate to former Liberian President Charles Taylor and a private businessman, for his role in pillaging Sierra Leone's diamonds and other

crimes. Recent newspaper reports indicate that Ibrahim Bah has been residing in Sierra Leone for a long time, but was recently arrested by the Sierra Leone Police. The government has refused to confirm or deny the reports.

"If Mr. Bah is in the custody of the Sierra Leone Police, the government must do the

right thing by the people of Sierra Leone by immediately bringing him to justice for the crimes he allegedly committed against us". CARL's Executive Director, Ibrahim Tommy said today.

There is significant evidence that Mr. Bah, in conjunction with Charles Taylor and the RUF, facilitated forced labour in the Kono and Kenema diamond fields and reaped the benefits for nearly two years after the Lome Peace Accord. For this and other associated conduct, there is reasonable cause to believe

that Mr Bah would be criminally liable under the relevant laws of Sierra Leone that relate to pillage, forced labor/slavery and possibly looting. The SCSSL's Trial Judgment in Taylor, several UN Panel of Expert Reports and other credible NGO reports speak to Mr. Bah's critical role in the overall sustaining of the conflict.

For instance, one witness testified that Issa Sesay said he gave "diamonds

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Awoko

Tuesday, 25 June 2013

Congress man calls on Salone to investigate Ibrahim Bah

US Congressman Frank R Wolf has urged the US Secretary of State John Kerry to urge Sierra Leone to open criminal investigations against suspected RUF supporter Ibrahim Bah who authorities have confirmed is in their custody.

In a strongly worded letter, the Congressman said "I write

to urge the State Department to press the government of Sierra Leone to open a criminal investigation into Ibrahim Bah."

The release went on that "as part of the co-sponsor of the Clean Diamond act in the Senate your voice in pressing Sierra Leone to take effective action against Ibrahim Bah is critical."

The Owl
Tuesday, 25 June 2013

Taylor's Trusted Ally Arrested



Sierra Leone's rebel leader Foday Sankoh (2nd R) is flanked by senior aides at the formal opening in Lome, Togo of talks. Others (from left) are Sankoh's military adviser General Ibrahim Bah, Solomon "Pa" Rogers and Omrie Golley, If report filtering into this press is anything to go by then the man suspected of heavy involvement in the transfer of arms and "blood diamonds" during Sierra Leone's brutal civil war is now in police net. He has been found living in the capital city, Freetown. Rights groups are calling for a criminal investigation of Ibrahim Bah, who

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[Not continued]

Exclusive
Tuesday, 25 June 2013

“Prosecute RUF Arms Dealer Now”!

-Says Human Rights Group

See story page 2



Ibrahim Bah

Prosecute RUF Arms Dealer Now

A human rights group is calling on Sierra Leonean authorities to investigate a suspected arms dealer. UN investigators have alleged that Ibrahim Bah supplied arms to rebels during Sierra Leone's civil war that is already in custody of the Sierra Leone Police.

Listen to De Capua report on Ibrahim Bah

The civil war lasted 11 years, ending in 2002. During that time, RUF and AFRC rebels committed many atrocities, including murder, amputations, rape, kidnapping and torture. Ibrahim Bah, also known as Ibrahim Balde, allegedly provided arms and other forms of logistic support to the rebels.

"Ibrahim Bah was for many years - well over a decade -- a key figure in rebel operations in West Africa. He was a key go-between, financial comptroller and liaison between Charles Taylor and then the RUF and AFRC, the two rebel groups in Sierra Leone," said Corrine Dufka, senior West Africa researcher for Human Rights Watch.

Dufka said that Bah allegedly helped smuggle blood diamonds out of Sierra Leone.

"He was a key and central figure that Taylor used in order to ensure transaction between blood diamonds and then logistics needed for the RUF and the AFRC."

Bah is a Senegalese national believed to have spent time in Libya during Moammar Ghadafi's rule and believed to have fought with the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan against the Soviets. Dufka said it appears Bah first met Taylor in 1988.

"He sort of melted away in 2000/2001/2002 and was believed to have gone to Burkina Faso. Then, just this year, with

the publication of the panel of experts report - that's the U.N. panel of experts report for Liberia - he was found by one of the researchers to be living in, of all places, Sierra Leone. And evidently he had been living there since 2008," she said.

Bah had been under a U.N. travel ban since 2004 and was thought to be in Burkina Faso. Why Sierra Leone authorities did not alert the U.N. about his presence remains an unanswered question.

"What Human Rights Watch and the local human rights groups in Sierra Leone are asking is that the Sierra Leonean government investigates this individual for his involvement in war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone," she said.

The U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone handled many cases relating to the civil war. This includes that of Charles Taylor, who's on trial for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. Dufka said that an investigation of Bah by Sierra Leone would be the country's "first purely domestic prosecution relating to war crimes or crimes against humanity."

What's more, Dufka said Bah may have had links to Al Qaeda prior to the terrorist attacks in the United States on September 11th, 2001. The Washington Post had reported that some Al Qaeda members had gone to Liberia to obtain blood diamonds to fund their activities, knowing that their assets would be seized or frozen after the attacks.

Dufka added there are unconfirmed reports that Bah was not prosecuted by the Special Court because he was cooperating with intelligence services. The court is now winding down its operations.

Exclusive
Monday, 24 June 2013

In Freetown... Close Taylor Aide Arrested



FASTEST SELLING NEWSPAPER

Sierra Leone's rebel leader, Foday Sankoh (2nd R) is flanked by senior aides, at the formal opening in Lome, Togo of talks. Others (from left) are Sankoh's military adviser General Ibrahim Bah, Solomon "Pa" Rogers and Omrie Golley.

Reuters

Close Taylor Aide Arrested

A man suspected of heavy involvement in the transfer of arms and "blood diamonds" during Sierra Leone's brutal civil war has been arrested in the capital city, Freetown by the Sierra Leone Police force. Ibrahim Bah was a top associate of former Liberian president Charles Taylor during the eleven years conflict in the West African country.

The Senegalese national has been under a UN travel ban since 2004, for his alleged role in helping former Liberian war lord Charles Taylor in trafficking arms and ammunitions to Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front rebel group, fuelling the war. That support, the UN says, helped destabilize the country, while granting Taylor access to Sierra Leone's diamonds.

Last year, the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone found Taylor guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity, sentencing him to 50 years in prison. In their ruling against the former Liberian president, judges said Bah was a "trusted emissary" between Taylor and the rebels, who killed and maimed thousands of people during the war.

Bah's whereabouts were unknown until last month, when a U.N. expert panel

placed him in Freetown, saying he had been living there since 2008.

The executive director of the Center for Accountability and Rule of Law in Sierra Leone, Ibrahim Tommy, said it is important that all main perpetrators of the war be tried for their actions during the civil war, even if they were not as famous as Taylor.

"Ibrahim Bah was one of the key supporters, one of the key aides to former Liberian president Charles Taylor and the RUF, who helped him pillage Sierra Leone's diamonds and even allegedly committed forced labor and enslavement against the people of Sierra Leone," Tommy said. "We think that bringing him to justice will help combat the impunity gap that currently exists in the country, particularly for mid-level commanders who participated in the conflict, but also for foreign nationals whose only interest in the conflict in Sierra Leone was to loot the country's resources."

In a statement past Wednesday, the New York-based watchdog noted the case would be the "first purely domestic prosecution" concerning international crimes committed during Sierra Leone's 11-year conflict, which ended in 2002.

Peep!
Monday, 24 June 2013

Monday, June 24, 2013

PEEP! MAGAZINE

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FROM OUR ARCHIVES

People Power and the Lome Peace Accord..

Only the blind believed that Sankoh could be bought off by offices and titles

O.R. Awoonor-Gordon

The road to peace in Sierra Leone ran through Abidjan, Conakry, then Lome - but none of these agreements actually took us where we wanted to go. Both sides - the SLPP government, RUF (later AFRC-RUF), were only partly sincere and each betrayed key sections of the various peace arrangements.

Not sincere

In the end was People Power. The largest demonstration Freetown has ever seen involved at least 200,000 people marching on Foday Sankoh's Spur Road mansion, in protest at RUF abduction of U.N. peacekeepers.

I consider this event decisive because it broke the mystique of Sankoh. It also showed, unlike the SLPP government of appeasers, that the people did not want 'peace at any price'.

It took time for some Sierra Leoneans to accept that 'peace at any price' was no peace at all.

Resolve

In 1999 the Consultative Conference on the Peace Process had shown the resolve of ordinary Sierra Leoneans to endure more hardship and suffering to ensure that the RUF did not take power.

Our elected government ignored this resolve and negotiated the shameful appeasement of Lome. The Lome agreement did, for a while, divide public opinion. But less than a year later, the people had realized that Sankoh and the RUF did not want peace. Sankoh wanted power. 26 people, journalists, traders, ordinary folks, died to stop him.

They awoke to the realization of Sankoh's duplicity long before our government did.

Adventure

The second decisive event in ending the rebel war was the RUF/Guinea dissidents' armed foray into Guinea.

The Guineans government had committed far less to the war against the RUF than the Nigerians.

But once their home soil was attacked the same patriotism which had seen them chase Portuguese backed invaders out of their country in November 1970 came to the fore.

Invoking the internationally recognized right of hot pursuit, the Guineans chased the rebel forces across our borders in Kambia, Kailahun and Kono.

Their military response was crude (mass bombardment, ruthless combing of border refugee camps extra-judicial killings of the RUF's best fighters died in their ill-fated adventure. The rest began to see the folly of endless war.

British role

We can't ignore the role of British troops either - though that role has often been exaggerated. British troops did not 'save Freetown' in May/June 2000; the RUF was in no position to mount an attack on the capital.

However it did show that Britain was (finally) prepared to intervene on the side of the legitimate government (it had not shown the same resolve during the AFRC-RUF interregnum, and in fact had sacked Peter Penfold for 'going beyond his brief' as U.K. High Commissioner).

British diplomatic efforts at the U.N. finally got a stiffer mandate for the U.N. peace-keeping force. With the death of Sani Abacha, frictions with the Nigerians, which had hampered earlier peace keeping interventions, were smoothed out.



Late Corporal Foday Sabana Sankoh as answered the Special Court before his death

Late Corporal Foday Sabana Sankoh answered the Special Court before his death

Foday Sankoh

The backbone of a strengthened UNAMSIL were Nigerian troops whom had served in ECOMOG and were battle hardened.

The point is that none of this had anything to do with Lome and still less with Kabbah.

Bogus claims

His claims to have been the one to have 'brought peace' are, to borrow a phrase, bogus. Peace came on his watch.

This is all. Kabbah's period in power, from 1996 onwards, saw on intensification of the war, its extension to areas which pre-1996 had been relatively unaffected (the North, Freetown).

His errors of judgment - especially his lackadaisical attitude to kamajor - SLA skirmishes in early 1997, his failure to act promptly on rumours of a pending coup in May 1997 and his appeasement of Sankoh - the most dangerous Sierra Leonean who has ever lived - almost, led this nation to complete disaster.

No credit due

Future historians will not look kindly on a man who takes credit for ending the war; but blamed somebody else ('Israeli Mafia') for the AFRC-RUF invasion of Freetown.

Right until the moment the rebels entered the capital, his government was still ignoring signs of a holocaust to come.

They were even detaining journalists who warned of the coming storm (in badly chosen words - 'manna from Heaven' implied the direct opposite of the evil to come).

Bizarre

One of the most amazing episodes of the entire war was Kabbah's bizarre idea of fleeing offshore, in the early hours of Wednesday, January 6, 1999, to visit Sankoh in his detention cell onboard a Nigerian warship, to arrange a 'ceasefire' with the rebel warlord.

Only a small detachment of CDF volunteers, SSDs and Nigerian troops held Congo Cross bridge and prevented the AFRC-RUF over-running the entire city.

Liaison

With no effective machinery of government in place and the Commander-In-Chief missing in action, it was Alie Bangura, Julius Spencer and Abdulahi Mustapha who liaised with ECOMOG command, helped get services running and appropriated trucks and equipment until Nigerian reinforcements arrived.

Logic

Yet barely six months later, Kabbah still believed in Sankoh and signed Lome. If he didn't keep his promise

of a ceasefire when he was a helpless captive in Nigerian hands, then why should he keep his promise of peace and disarmament when at liberty and elevated to the powerful position 'equivalent of vice president' and head of the Strategic Minerals Commission? The logic escapes me...

Despite all I've written, Lome was not a far-reaching reform to the corrupt, neo-colonial structure of Sierra Leone.

But the ruling political elite - as represented by the SLPP government - had no real intention of implementing them.

The Commission for the Strategic Mineral Resources Management, for example, was supposed to ensure that "all gold and diamonds extracted or... sourced from Sierra Leonean territory shall be sold to the government" (Lome Peace Accord Article 7 (3)).

Proceeds from mineral sales were also meant to enter a special Treasury account to be spent exclusively on "the development of the people of Sierra Leone" and go to public education, public health, compensation for war victims like the amputees (Article 7(6)).

Lome proposed a Council of Elders and Religious Leaders to serve as arbiters of the Accord (Article 8). This was never created.

Ignored TRC

Although Lome proposed the TRC and it was set up, the SLPP has acted on few of its recommendations and SLPP M.P.s have the guts to denounce its findings as 'bogus'.

The Commission for Consolidation of Peace appears to have died a natural death, while the Human Rights Commission is yet to take shape in any viable or durable form.

Bad faith

There was bad faith, on both sides, in implementation of the Lome Peace Accord. But while some were clear-sighted enough to realize that appeasement only emboldens the aggressor, that the culture of impunity only breeds more violence and, specifically, that Foday Sankoh and his band of rebels were motivated mainly by lust for power and money, not any 'revolutionary' ideology - Kabbah and his government either chose to ignore these facts or believed that they could micro-manage the resultant problems.

Failed

May 8, 2000 showed they failed to do that. Their subsequently behavior shows that they too were motivated mainly by their desire for wealth and power - not love for the people.

Northern Star (Australia)

Tuesday, 25 June 2013

She prosecuted war criminals

Marnie Johnston



Kirsten Keith, International lawyer, specialist in international humanitarian Law, was presenting a public seminar in Bangalow about protecting women in war.

LAWS on sexual violence in war was the topic at Kirsten Keith's seminar in Bangalow yesterday.

The former legal officer for the prosecution at the Special Court for Sierra Leone now lives in Bexhill.

Ms Keith is a specialist in international humanitarian law who spent more than 10 years working for the prosecution at the international criminal trials for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The trials prosecuted and convicted perpetrators of sexual violence against women.

She was also part of the team that prosecuted Charles Taylor, the former warlord who was sentenced to 50 years in prison last year for his role in atrocities committed in Sierra Leone during the 1990s.

The seminar yesterday was facilitated by Red Cross Australia and focused on the development of the law against sexual violence during armed conflict, and looking at the different tribunals that have been set up and some of the groundbreaking the tribunals have seen.

Having been a part, from the beginning, of the first war crimes trial since the Second World War when she was working at the Yugoslav tribunal, she said her job had been very gratifying and very humbling.

"You get to meet a lot of the victims and witnesses and it's very humbling to actually meet them and have them share their stories with you," she said.

"They've been subject to really horrendous atrocities and yet throughout everything they've experienced, they remain dignified and they continue to get on with their lives - they don't play the victim really at all."

Having seen the law come so far, she still thinks there is a long way to go.

"I'm pleased the law has got to where it is, and it's very clear that it is a crime, but now what I really want to see is more prosecutions - domestically as well as internationally.

"The UN tribunals can only do so much - there really needs to be a push now on a domestic level."

"It's good to see now it's finally at the forefront of the media."

Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts in Cambodia

Tuesday, 25 June 2013

Engaging men and women in uniform

About 800 young men and women in combat fatigues filled the gymnasium at the Infantry Institute in Kampong Speu gymnasium to capacity in the morning of Friday 21 June. They had come to listen to a presentation by staffers from the ECCC's Public Affairs Section.



Students at the Institute are considered soldiers, even as they work toward bachelor's degrees. It was Public Affairs' second visit to the Infantry Institute in less than a year; national-side spokesperson Pheaktra Neth spoke there in July 2012. However, to maximize its educational effect, the event's organizers ensured there was no overlap between the two audiences.

The presentation began with an overview of the Khmer Rouge regime, progressing to the founding of the ECCC in 2006 and then to sometimes-opaque, legalistic aspects of concluded Case 001, ongoing Case 002, and proposed cases 003 and 004. Three hours after it began, the presentation was still not over, as students took advantage of a Q&A session to fill gaps in their knowledge of the Khmer Rouge and ECCC.

Some students asked about the financial health of the ECCC. Could Cambodia stage the trials without international assistance? Will Cambodia be expected to pay back donations? How long will donors support the court? Others ventured into the political realm, asking, for example, why the ECCC was only established decades after the Khmer Rouge fell from power. Still others asked questions that must occur to every Cambodian at one time or another: How could Pol Pot, who claimed to embody Khmer nationalism, oversee such slaughter of his people? Why do the trials take many months, since, in the

words of one student, “we already know the crimes took place“? Altogether, Mr Neth fielded 70 questions, ranking Friday’s Q&A among the longest since outreach began seven years ago.



Sok San, a professor of military history, organized the visit on the Institute’s end. He says he devotes time in all his classes to the Democratic Kampuchea era, but encourages students to broaden their knowledge independently. Some had already visited the ECCC at his urging. Others had long been curious about the tribunal, but had no one to answer their questions. He says he hopes the ECCC’s latest outreach will inspire more of his students to travel to Phnom Penh to observe the ongoing hearings.

Public Affairs representatives ended the trip by distributing ECCC t-shirts, caps and educational materials to the assembled students, who stood and saluted as their visitors exited the building.

The Economist
Monday, 24 June 2013

The International Criminal Court on screen

Ready for its close-up
by S.S.



SOME posters for "The Court" feature four stern-looking legal eagles and Angelina Jolie. One could be forgiven for thinking the film is a Hollywood courtroom drama. Indeed, the film's storyline has all the makings of a proper thriller: an epic 'good versus evil' plot, a host of terrifying baddies and a charismatic if flawed hero, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, the first prosecutor for the International Criminal Court (ICC) at The Hague. Yet "The Court", directed by Michele Gentile and Marcus Vetter and released recently in Germany, is no blockbuster, but a fascinating documentary about the pioneering work of the first world court.

Created in 2002, the ICC is designed to mete out international justice, handling cases of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity that can't be tried on national soil. The court's aims are pure, but its work has been unwieldy and controversial. Without any sort of enforcement mechanism, the ICC relies on individual nations to carry out its arrest warrants. Its jurisdiction is limited to the 120 countries that have signed up.

These challenges form the backdrop of "The Court", which tells the story of the ICC from the perspective of Mr Moreno-Ocampo, whose term as prosecutor ended in June 2012. Messrs Gentile and Vetter followed the Argentine prosecutor for six years and across four continents as he worked to bring an array of warlords and genocidal dictators to justice. Clocking in at less than 90 minutes, the film offers a dizzying snapshot of the range of the ICC's work and the horror of the crimes, as well as a sense of Mr

Moreno-Ocampo's boundless energy. A magnetic man fuelled by conviction, he is constantly on the move, from the killing fields of Uganda, Darfur and the Congo to the war-torn streets of Libya and Gaza, with regular visits to the UN Security Council. The film offers a sympathetic portrayal of the hard work of the ICC, which is often accused of being slow and ineffectual. Viewers are led to understand that if Mr Moreno-Ocampo had few verdicts on his watch, it was not for lack of trying.

That it took over a decade before the ICC secured its first successful prosecution may be seen as evidence of its incompetence. But for Mr Moreno-Ocampo the conviction in 2012 of Thomas Lubanga, a Congolese warlord, was a historic triumph, and it forms the spine of the film. "The Court" dips in and out of Mr Lubanga's trial, from its start in 2009 to its climactic finish, when he was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment for forcing children to serve as soldiers in Democratic Republic of Congo. At the well-attended final hearing (where the camera lingers on Ms Jolie, who witnessed the decision), the court is addressed by Benjamin Ferencz, a former prosecutor for the Nuremberg trials, who at 93 was invited by Mr Moreno-Ocampo to be an honorary prosecutor for the occasion.

Messrs Gentile and Vetter ultimately tidy the mess of international justice into a heart-warming story worthy of Hollywood. Mr Lubanga's conviction marks the end of Mr Moreno-Ocampo's nine-year tenure as prosecutor. The film follows him as he clears out his office and says his final farewells. Following the credits is a postscript reminiscent of "Shawshank Redemption", with Messrs Moreno-Ocampo and Ferencz walking together on a beach in Florida. "Without dreams there is no progress," Mr Ferencz tells the camera.



This is not the first time Mr Moreno-Ocampo and the ICC have been the subject of a documentary. Given the uncritical approach taken by "The Court", it would be wise to make time to watch "Prosecutor" as well. This 2010 documentary, directed and narrated by Barry Stevens, also follows Mr Moreno-Ocampo, though only from 2008 to 2009. But where "The Court" sidesteps criticisms of his work, "The Prosecutor" faces them head on. Critics of the ICC are heard accusing Mr Moreno-Ocampo of "grandstanding", "woolly-thinking" and of straying too far into politics. The film also explores accusations that the ICC has deliberately ignored possible war crimes in Afghanistan and Iraq in order to make "an accommodation with American power".

One of the thorniest issues of international justice is the so-called 'justice versus peace' dilemma: namely whether threat of prosecution may actually prolong a conflict. Though it is conventional to believe that there can be no real peace without justice, some argue that the prospect of imprisonment deters warring parties from surrendering and engaging in negotiations. "Prosecutor" considers how the ICC's 2009 decisions to indict Omar al-Bashir, Sudan's president, and Joseph Kony, the head of Uganda's brutal Lord's Resistance Army, influenced the conflicts in Darfur and Uganda. Days after he was indicted, Mr al-Bashir expelled 13 international aid organisations from Darfur and dismantled three domestic aid NGOs. Yet the humanitarian crisis in Darfur did not turn into a regional disaster, and Sudan even signed a peace treaty with the main Darfuri rebel group. As for Mr Kony, he fled to Congo soon after a warrant was issued against him, and has continued to commit atrocities in the region.

"Prosecutor" hems and haws about the work of the ICC, but ultimately offers a view that is similar to that of "The Court". "If we want a less violent world," Mr Stevens concludes, "What alternative is there to the rule of law?"

Associated Press
Monday, 24 June 2013

UN court prosecutor to appeal recent acquittal

By MIKE CORDER — Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — The chief prosecutor of the U.N. Yugoslav war crimes tribunal voiced concern Monday at the "destructive" effects of a critical letter written by one of the court's judges that suggested the United States may have tried to influence verdicts.

The letter, which leaked into the media earlier this month, offers no evidence of possible outside interference, but even so it has ignited a storm of criticism of the court among survivors of the Balkans wars and led to calls for the tribunal's American president, Theodor Meron, to quit.

Washington has emphatically rejected the suggestions in the letter written by Danish Judge Frederik Harhoff in the aftermath of three high-profile acquittals of senior suspects from Serbia and Croatia of orchestrating atrocities.

"I am sitting here with a very uncomfortable feeling that the court has changed direction under the influence of pressure from 'the military establishments' in certain dominant countries," a translation of the Danish-language letter says.

Elsewhere, the letter reads: "Have any American or Israeli officials ever exerted pressure on the American presiding judge (the presiding judge for the court that is) to ensure a change of direction? We will probably never know."

U.S. Ambassador-at-Large for war crimes issues Stephen J. Rapp told The Associated Press in an email last Friday that U.S. officials "respect the independence of the tribunals (for Yugoslavia and Rwanda) and do not seek to influence their decisions in any case."

"We wish always to see a fair process with guilt decided solely on the evidence based on legal standards that are consistently applied," Rapp added.

The tribunal's press office denied repeated AP requests to interview Meron; Harhoff, when reached by phone, also refused comment.

In the first public comment about the scandal by a senior official of the tribunal, Chief Prosecutor Serge Brammertz said Monday he is "concerned about destructive elements in the debate" that followed the letter's publication. He also announced he will appeal the most recent acquittal and is considering seeking a review of another of the cases.

The first of the three shock acquittals came last November when the appeals chamber led by Meron cleared two Croat generals, Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac, of atrocities against Serbs in a 1995 offensive. It was followed by another acquittal by Meron's appeal's chamber of Gen. Momcilo Perisic - a former chief of staff of the Yugoslav National Army who was convicted in 2011 and sentenced to 27 years for aiding and abetting Bosnian Serb forces responsible for vicious crimes throughout the 1992-95 Bosnian war.

Finally, last month, a tribunal trial chamber acquitted two former senior members of Serbia's secret service of arming and supporting murderous Bosnian Serb paramilitaries during the wars in Bosnia and Croatia.

The judgments were seen by experts as significantly raising the legal threshold for holding commanders responsible for the crimes of their subordinates and reversing years of jurisprudence at the groundbreaking 20-year-old court.

The acquittals of Perisic, Jovica Stanisic and Franko Simatovic coupled with Harhoff's letter outraged Bosnian survivors, who are now urging Meron to resign.

"If he does not do it himself, we will make sure he will be replaced and we will even initiate a legal procedure," said Satko Mujagic, a survivor of the notorious Serb-run Omarska prison camp during Bosnia's 1992-95 war.

The Association of Victims and Witnesses of Genocide, which groups of about 15 different associations, also called on the American judge to quit.

And it is not only victims who are concerned by the letter.

Prof. David Crane, an international law expert from Syracuse University College of Law and former prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, said the tribunal has to publicly establish the truth or risk an indelible stain on its reputation.

"If this type of alleged - and I underscore alleged - manipulation if going on this is really quite problematic; it brings the whole system into question," said Crane. "And it certainly is a huge black mark on the ICTY. That's why I'm saying they've got to move quickly, neutrally, openly and fairly to get to the bottom of this so they can move on."

Crane said he had never been put under any pressure by U.S. authorities during his time with the Sierra Leone court.

Another tribunal watcher, Dov Jacobs, an assistant professor of international law at Leiden University, agreed that there could be cause for an investigation.

"If they're asking the court to investigate the fact that Judge Meron might have received directions from his government then I think that's fair enough," he said. "There's no evidence so far, but that would be a legitimate cause for investigation."

But Jacobs said the recent acquittals of top Serbian officials for involvement in Bosnian atrocities was in line with another ruling - by the U.N.'s highest judicial organ, the International Court of Justice - that in a landmark 2007 ruling refused to point to Serbia as chief architect of the 1995 Srebrenica massacre in which some 8,000 Muslim men and boys were murdered by Bosnian Serb forces.

"The ICJ clearly said that Serbia did not commit genocide, was not an accomplice in genocide and only - if you can use the term - only failed to prevent genocide," he said. "So there is a consistency there."

Associated Press Writers Jan Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark, and Aida Cerkez in Sarajevo, Bosnia, contributed to this story.