

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
Martin Royston-Wright
Ext 7217

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Special Court for Sierra Leone
Outreach and Public Affairs Office

PRESS RELEASE

Freetown, Sierra Leone, 26 April 2012

Charles Taylor Convicted on all 11 Counts; Sentencing Scheduled for 30 May

Charles Ghankay Taylor, the former President of Liberia, was convicted today on all counts of an 11-count indictment which alleged that he was responsible for crimes committed by rebel forces during Sierra Leone's decade-long civil war. The Special Court's Trial Chamber II found unanimously that Mr. Taylor aided and abetted RUF and AFRC rebels in the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Taylor was convicted on Count 1 for acts of terrorism (a war crime), on Count 2 for murder (a crime against humanity), on Count 3 for murder (a war crime), on Count 4 for rape (a crime against humanity), on Count 5 for sexual slavery (a crime against humanity), on Count 6 for outrages upon personal dignity (a war crime), on Count 7 for cruel treatment (a war crime), on Count 8 for inhumane acts, including mutilations and amputations, (a crime against humanity), on Count 9 for the recruitment, enlistment and use of child soldiers, on Count 10 for enslavement (a crime against humanity), and on Count 11 for pillage (a war crime).

The Prosecution had not alleged that Mr. Taylor had committed these crimes in person, but that he participated from Liberia in the commission of crimes by AFRC and RUF rebels and, under Articles 6.1 and 6.3 of the Special Court Statute, was individually responsible for them. The Chamber found that he had aided and abetted the rebels by providing them with arms and ammunition, military personnel, operational support and moral support, making him individually responsible for their crimes.

Charles Taylor is the first head of state to be indicted, tried and convicted by an international tribunal.

The Chamber has scheduled a sentencing hearing for Wednesday, 16 May 2012, and the sentencing judgement will be delivered on Wednesday, 30 May 2012. Under the Special Court Rules, sentences must be given in a specified term of years. The Special Court may not impose a life sentence or the death penalty.

Mr. Taylor was ordered remanded in custody until the 16 May hearing.

At the Special Court, both Prosecution and Defence may appeal. A notice of appeal must be filed within 14 days of the full judgement and sentence.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone is the first "hybrid" tribunal, created by an agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone, and is the first modern court to have its seat in the country where the crimes took place. It is the first court to convict former rebel and militia leaders for the use of child soldiers, for forced marriage as a crime against humanity, and for attacks directed at United Nations peacekeepers.

With today's judgement, the Special Court has reached a major milestone, and is on course towards being the first modern international criminal tribunal to complete its mandate.

#END



SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE

OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTOR

JOMO KENYATTA ROAD • NEW ENGLAND • FREETOWN • SIERRA LEONE

PHONE: +1 212 963 9915 Extension: 178 7000 or +39 0831 257000 or +232 22 297000

FAX: Extension: 178 7366 or +39 0831 257366 or +232 22 297366

PRESS RELEASE

The Hague, 26 April 2012

Prosecutor Hollis hails the historic conviction of Charles Taylor

The Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Brenda J. Hollis, today applauded the conviction of Charles Taylor, former President of Liberia, for crimes against humanity and war crimes committed in Sierra Leone during its eleven-year civil war. Hollis lauded the conviction as another victory in the fight against impunity.

“Today is for the people of Sierra Leone who suffered horribly because of Charles Taylor. This judgment brings some measure of justice to the many thousands of victims who paid a terrible price for Mr. Taylor’s crimes.” said Hollis.

Charles Taylor, who was indicted while he was still President of Liberia, is the first former Head of State to be convicted by an international criminal tribunal since the Nuremburg trials in 1946. He is the first Head of State at the time he was indicted to be convicted by an international criminal tribunal. Mr. Taylor was convicted on all 11 counts of the Indictment.

“Today’s historic judgment reinforces the new reality, that Heads of State will be held to account for war crimes and other international crimes,” said Hollis. “This judgment affirms that with leadership comes not just power and authority, but also responsibility and accountability. No person, no matter how powerful, is above the law.”

“The judges found that Mr. Taylor aided and abetted the crimes charged in counts 1 through 11, and that he planned with Sam Bockarie the attacks on Kono, Makeni and Freetown in late 1998 and January 1999 during which the charged crimes were committed. The Trial Chamber’s findings made clear the central role Charles Taylor played in the horrific crimes against the people of Sierra Leone.”

The Court convicted Mr. Taylor of the war crime of ‘Acts of Terrorism’ against civilians, making it clear that he participated in the deliberate targeting of innocent men, women and children. “These acts of terror victimized and traumatized the people of Sierra Leone, and spared no one,” said Hollis.

“Mr. Taylor’s conviction for murder acknowledges the thousands who were brutally killed. These men, women and children were violently taken from their family and friends, and many were killed in remote locations known only to their killers. Victims’ families were left destitute, with emotional wounds that will never heal.”

The judges convicted Mr. Taylor on all three counts of sexual violence, including rape and sexual slavery. “Sexual violence against women and girls was a key part of operations in Sierra Leone.

Victims were savagely and repeatedly raped, and were then used as sex slaves, handed from owner to owner. The emotional and physical trauma suffered by these victims will continue for a lifetime.”

“Mr. Taylor’s conviction for physical violence acknowledges the suffering of those victims who were mutilated and maimed,” said Hollis. “Victims lost not only their limbs, but also the means to support themselves and their families. Others carry ‘RUF’ and ‘AFRC’ carved on their bodies, marking them forever as victims of Mr. Taylor’s crimes.”

The Court convicted Mr. Taylor of conscripting, enlisting or using children under the age of 15 years in hostilities. “Children were taken from their families, and not only used to fight, but also to commit crimes against their fellow Sierra Leoneans. This robbed these children of their childhood, and the judges have sent a clear message that this will never be tolerated.”

The judges convicted Mr. Taylor of enslavement. Enslavement was used to exploit Sierra Leone’s people and wealth. Men, women and children were taken from their homes and held captive – sometimes for years – at the mercy and whim of their captors.”

“I appreciate the work of the judges who have presided over the conduct of this trial. The Trial Chamber held the Prosecution to very high standards of law and procedure.” said Hollis.

“I also appreciate the courage and commitment of the witnesses who came forward to testify both for the Prosecution and the Defence.”

“As I said today is for the people of Sierra Leone. This trial would not have taken place – indeed this Court would not have existed – without their resilience and commitment,” said Hollis. The Special Court for Sierra Leone exists because the people of Sierra Leone demanded accountability for the crimes committed during the eleven-year civil war.

Following today’s judgment both parties will make submissions on sentencing, which is expected to be pronounced in the near future. The final stage in the case will be the appeals phase. The Prosecution will closely review today’s judgment to identify any potential appellate issues.

END

11:00 a.m. Judgement Time Today

Judgement in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor will be delivered at 11:00 a.m. Hague time (9:00 a.m. GMT) on Thursday, 26 April 2012.

Thursday's judgement will be delivered by Trial Chamber II, consisting of Justice Richard Lussick of Samoa (presiding), Justice Teresa Doherty of Northern Ireland, Justice Julia Sebutinde of Uganda, and Alternate Judge Justice El Hadji Malick Sow of Senegal. Prior to the Taylor trial, Trial Chamber II sat on the trial of three former leaders of Sierra Leone's Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

Charles Taylor is charged with 11 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. He has pleaded not guilty

Contd. paeg 4



11:00 a.m. Judgement Time Today

From front page

to all of the charges. Mr. Taylor is the first head of state to face judgement before an international tribunal.

Although the judgement will be delivered in The Hague, the proceedings will be streamed live to the Special Court compound in Freetown, where local and international journalists, diplomats, members of government and the judiciary, victims, civil society members, and members of the public are expected to watch the proceedings. Throughout the country Outreach field officers will hold meetings with local communities at crimes scenes and the sites of mass graves, and will play the proceedings by radio.

The proceedings will be streamed by internet over one of two links, beginning at 9:00 a.m. GMT:

<http://hosting.dutchview.nl/asx/stl-floor.aspx>

[http://hosting.dutchview.nl/asx/stl-](http://hosting.dutchview.nl/asx/stl-english.aspx)

english.aspx

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 tried by 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.

Telegraph

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Charles Taylor convicted of war crimes in Sierra Leone

A United Nations-backed court convicts former Liberian president Charles Taylor of war crimes, the first time an African head of state has been found guilty by an international tribunal.

Taylor, 64, was charged with 11 counts of murder, rape, conscripting child soldiers and sexual slavery during wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, during which more than 50,000 people were killed.

The court took more than two hours to read out the charges, evidence and its final ruling.

Presiding Judge Richard Lussick listed, among the court's findings:

"A civilian was killed in full public view and then his body was disembowelled and his intestines stretched across the road to make a checkpoint. Women and girls were raped in public; people were burned alive in their homes. The trial chamber finds, beyond reasonable doubt that the purpose of these atrocities, charged in counts two to eight, was to instil terror in the civilian population."

Lussick said Taylor was criminally responsible for aiding and abetting 11 listed crimes, including acts of terrorism, murder, rape, sexual slavery and inhumane actions.

The judge said Taylor was not guilty of senior criminal responsibility.

Taylor, wearing a dark blue suit and maroon tie, looked calm and subdued as he stood up before the court to hear the verdict.

The first African leader to stand trial for war crimes, Taylor was accused of directing Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in a campaign of terror to plunder Sierra Leone's diamond mines for profit and weapons trading.

Taylor denied the charges, insisting he tried to bring peace to the region and arguing his trial was a politically motivated conspiracy by Western nations.

Telegraph

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Charles Taylor commentary: conviction brings brutal era of impunity to an end

Charles Taylor behaved with the swagger of a natural showman and the cruelty of a bloodstained warlord during his heyday in Liberia. Anything seemed possible during that surreal era – except the idea that, one day, he would face justice.

By David Blair

One moment, Taylor would be ringing the BBC World Service and inviting himself on to “Focus on Africa”, hijacking the airwaves to deny arming Sierra Leone's rebels; the next, he would be posing on a wooden throne, clad in flowing robes and surrounded by supplicants. And all the while, he was pillaging Liberia, butchering his enemies and stoking a civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone. By the time he was overthrown in 2003, Monrovia was the only capital in the world with no publicly-provided electricity or even water.

But the once unimaginable came to pass yesterday. Nine years after being indicted by a United Nations Special Court, Taylor was held accountable for his actions. All those adamant denials turned to dust as the judges found that Taylor had supplied Sierra Leone's rebels with guns, cash, training, bases and recruits, in return for diamonds taken from illegal mines, often with the aid of slave labour.

The people of Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, talk about “January 6” in the way that Londoners mention “7/7”. For them, that phrase sums up the events of 6 January 1999 when insurgents from the Revolutionary United Front launched a bloody assault on the city, butchering and mutilating innocent civilians on the Kissy Road. The court found that Liberian fighters, dispatched by Taylor, had taken part in this attack.

As such, Taylor was guilty of “aiding and abetting” the atrocities of Sierra Leone's rebels. He will, in all probability, see out his days in a British prison.

International justice has many drawbacks: this case has been long, costly and far removed from the lives of Taylor's victims. Perhaps inevitably, justice is also selective. President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda and President Paul Kagame of Rwanda have both armed rebels who pillaged a neighbouring state – in their case, the victim country was the Democratic Republic of Congo. They would be vulnerable to the same prima facie case as Taylor, but no one urges their prosecution.

Agence France-Presse

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Cheers, quiet relief in S. Leone as Taylor found guilty

By Fran Blandy (AFP)

FREETOWN — Sierra Leoneans cheered or quietly let the news sink in on Thursday as ex-Liberian president Charles Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting a terror campaign by rebels during their country's 11-year civil war.

Victims, leaders and civil society representatives packed the headquarters of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL), a modern building in the lush, hilly capital, to watch on monitors as the verdict unfolded in a courtroom thousands of kilometres (miles) away.

People fidgeted uncomfortably on the hard seats as complex details were read out, their faces hard to read as they were reminded of terrors such as human heads and entrails being used at checkpoints to instill fear.

Al Hadji Jusu Jarka, former chairman of the association of amputees mutilated by the rebels, watched the nearly two-hour judgement stony-faced, using his prosthetic arms to clasp a handkerchief to wipe his face in the heat.

"I am happy ... I feel justice has been done," Jarka said, after calmly listening to judge Richard Lussick announce Taylor was guilty of arming the rebels who in 1999 hacked off first his left, then his right arm as he was pinned to a mango tree.

"We as victims expect that Taylor will be given 100 years or more in prison," he added.

Sentencing will take place on May 30, Lussick said, ending some five years of hearings before the SCSL in a special courtroom on the outskirts of The Hague.

While victims quietly filed out of the court building in Freetown, another hall packed with victims and tribal chiefs from around the country erupted into cheers as they turned to congratulate each other.

"People were so happy," said a broadly-smiling P.C. Kaimpumu, paramount chief for the southern Bonthe district, adding that he was "perfectly pleased."

The verdict served as a warning to the country that "you can't just commit crimes without impunity," he said.

Outside, the Accountability Now Club (ANC) silently held up posters reading: "Shame on you Taylor" and "Please give us our diamonds back before you go to prison".

Information Minister Ibrahim Ben Kargbo said he was "satisfied" with the verdict that would allow the country, which has to contend with grinding poverty on top of its war wounds, to move on.

The verdict "gives us the opportunity to work to a way forward, after so many years of fighting, to put in place structures for development, to put aside impunity, to ensure human rights are protected," he said.

Eldred Collins, a spokesman for the rebels during the war, is now the chairman of their political offshoot, the Revolutionary United Front Party (RUFFP)

He maintains it was former RUF leader Foday Sankoh, who died in custody in 2003, who should have had his day in court.

"It (the verdict) is the court's decision, but Foday Sankoh should have been tried. Charles Taylor wasn't directly involved," he said.

Mohammed Bah, 35, who was forced to become a combatant at age 24 and also later had his left arm amputated during the war, said he "feels great" at the decision.

However former child soldier Mohammed Lamin Fofana, now 25, said the verdict did little to free him from his memories.

"Charles Taylor has disrupted our lives and the lives of all Sierra Leonean youth. Now my life has been changed, for this I will never forgive him."

Posseh Conteh, 18, struggled to voice her recollection of the war. She was four when rebels hacked off her left leg as she and her family ran from their village.

"I was very small," she smiled shyly. "I want him (Taylor) to be convicted to jail."

Others felt Taylor's conviction did nothing to change the hardships they had been through.

"You can try Taylor, jail him, but what about us the victims? What will now happen to us?" asked Ken Sesay, who lost his left leg. "Why aren't we being helped?"

Reuters

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Taylor's victims, critics soothed by court conviction

By Simon Akam

FREETOWN | Thu Apr 26, 2012 10:18am EDT

(Reuters) - Fighters in Sierra Leone raped and killed Halimatu Jalloh's sister during the country's civil war, but on Thursday the 27-year-old student felt the pain of her loss ease with the conviction of Charles Taylor, the Liberian leader who backed the rebels.

Standing outside the local seat of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown, Jalloh's hand-painted sign said it all: "Orphans, widows, widowers, rape victims, amputees, and all the war affected, wipe your tears as the dawn of justice has come."

A United Nations-backed court in The Hague on Thursday convicted Taylor, Liberia's former president, of war crimes, marking the first time a head of state has been found guilty by an international tribunal since the Nazi trials at Nuremberg.

Taylor, 64, was charged with 11 counts of murder, rape, conscripting child soldiers and sexual slavery during intertwined wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, during which tens of thousands of people were killed.

For many victims of the fighting, the verdict soothed years-old pains and offered some hope that similar atrocities around the world could be avoided in the future.

"It's good, this one is good, it's a signal to other people that they should not completely use their money on war, ammunition, to destroy lives," Jalloh said.

But for others in Sierra Leone and neighboring Liberia, among the world's poorest nations with crumbling capitals lacking power, water and paved roads, the trial was at best a distraction from a difficult existence.

"A lot of people, instead of concentrating on the verdict, they are struggling to find money for food," said Allieu Komba, a 35-year-old theology student in Freetown. "During the war, everyone was engaged in it, but it is over now."

In Liberia, ethnic and regional allegiances also means former president Taylor maintains pockets of strong support.

"The international community should let him free and for him to return to Liberia, that would make us very happy," said Prince K. Forkpa, 29, a money change, at the ministry of education building in downtown Monrovia.

'TAYLOR MUST PAY'

Alhadji Jusu Jarka had both hands hacked off by fighters from the Sierra Leone RUF rebel group during a January 6, 1999 assault on Freetown, and he now hopes Taylor - accused of leading the group from his base across the border in Liberia - will pay for the crime.

Such amputations were common during Sierra Leone's 11-year conflict, which by 2002 left more than 50,000 dead.

"His assets should be sold and that money should be given to the victims of the war," the unemployed 46-year-old said. "My hopes are it will be in the range of 100 or more years (of jail) given to Taylor."

U.K.-based human rights group Amnesty International said Taylor's conviction was an important step to ending impunity since the war but needed to be accompanied by additional prosecutions and reparations for victims.

Taylor's conviction by the Special Court for Sierra Leone - a so-called "hybrid" court staffed by both international and local personnel - comes amid mixed feelings across Africa about the role of internationally-backed courts in the continent's affairs.

The International Criminal Court, all of whose current cases are from Africa, has been accused of unfairly targeting people on the continent instead of looking at atrocities committed by leaders in the West.

"We really should be asking, why always focusing on Africa, is Africa really worse than Europe in terms of human rights? I don't think so," said professor Pilo Kamaragi, a sociology lecturer from Ituri in Democratic Republic of Congo.

"George Bush destroyed Iraq, what has happened to him?" he said, referring to the former U.S. president.

But in Sierra Leone, Taylor's conviction was seen in simpler terms. "We are happy because he brought in anarchy to us," said Foday Momoh Gulama, 50, a paramount chief of Kaiyamba Chiefdom in Moyamba district.

(Additional reporting by Alphonso Toweh and Clair MacDougall in Liberia, and Bienvenu Bakumanya in Congo; Writing by Richard Valdmanis; Editing by Giles Elgood)

BBC

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Taylor verdict: Implications for international justice

By Jon Silverman Professor of media and criminal justice



Picture of Charles Taylor in court The trial of Charles Taylor took almost five years

In evaluating the significance of the Charles Taylor trial, it is necessary to strip away the partisanship with which many have responded to its judgment.

For proponents of international justice, it represents an "end to impunity" for the perpetrators of egregious crimes. For detractors, it symbolises the triumph of power politics over justice. As ever, the truth lies somewhere in between.

The achievements of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) should not be under-estimated.

In 2007 an earlier trial of three leaders of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council made history when the court handed down convictions for the recruitment of child soldiers.

This finding paved the way for the first successful prosecution at the International Criminal Court (ICC), of Thomas Lubanga who was a military leader in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

And the SCSL was the first international court to create the post of Principal Defender to represent the interests of the defence.

The indictment of Charles Taylor took war crimes jurisprudence to a new level, establishing the principle that a serving head of state was not immune from prosecution.

The later indictments by the ICC of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir and Laurent Gbagbo, of the Ivory Coast, are a testament to the significance of the Taylor precedent.

Mr Gbagbo, who shares a prison compound in The Hague with Taylor, will undoubtedly feel less sanguine about the outcome of his trial as a result of the conviction of his fellow African former head of state.

The same is true of Jean-Pierre Bemba, former vice-president of the Democratic Republic of Congo, on trial at the ICC for war crimes.

Picture of Saddam Hussein after he was captured Saddam Hussein was found hiding in a tiny cellar near his hometown, Tikrit

Unlike the former Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic, Taylor survived to the end of his trial, despite the odd health scare.

And the sight of a convicted defendant facing justice in a courtroom as a contrast to the squalid ends suffered by Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi is a relief to those who argue the case for the integrity of international war crimes law.

Down side

But there is a debit side too.

The prosecution failed to establish two of its principal charges: That Taylor had effective command and control of rebel forces in Sierra Leone and therefore bore individual criminal responsibility for their crimes; or that he was part of a joint criminal enterprise.

Continue reading the main story

“Start Quote

It took close to five years, including thirteen months for the judges to write their judgment”

Lawyers will be studying this section of the judgment closely to see what implications it may have for the trials of Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

It took some hard politicking and pressure from the United States to prise Taylor away from Nigeria where he took refuge after leaving Liberia in 2003, believing that he was protected by an amnesty agreement.

It is a tactic which can probably be tried only once and the chances of persuading Robert Mugabe to relinquish power in Zimbabwe on the promise of a prosecution-free exile are slim to non-existent. Mr Mugabe is said to have watched the Taylor case with interest.

Lengthy trial

Then there is the inordinate length of the proceedings. Early predictions that the trial would be over in 18 months were laughably off the mark.

It took close to five years, including 13 months for the judges to write their judgment.

This was not solely due to the sheer weight of evidence. There was reported to be friction between the judges, with the one African judge, Julia Sebutinde of Uganda, suspected of delaying matters so that she could preside over the judgment.

The suspicion was shared by the US, according to diplomatic cables revealed by Wikileaks in 2010. Sierra Leone-Liberia map

Focus on Africa

One of the ironies of the Taylor trial is that, while it is of great significance for Africa, it has also highlighted concerns that, for international tribunals, the continent has been a convenient laboratory to test concepts which have not been applied to other parts of the world.

All seven conflicts investigated by the ICC have been in Africa. What about crimes committed in Syria, Iraq or Chechnya, ask the critics.

The appointment of Gambia's Fatou Bensouda as chief prosecutor of the ICC is regarded by some as a watershed moment that may signal a willingness to pursue crimes committed in continents such as South America and Asia.

The sentencing of Charles Taylor at the end of May will be watched with great interest.

In an earlier trial, one of the convicted RUF leaders, Issa Sesay, received a sentence of 52 years, while a fellow accused got 25 years.

This highlighted the inconsistency of sentencing practice at international tribunals which, unlike many domestic courts, do not adhere to a set of agreed guidelines.

Charles Taylor's sentence will provide another building block in an area of international criminal law still under construction.

Jon Silverman is Professor of Media and Criminal Justice at the University of Bedfordshire.

CNN

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Court finds Charles Taylor guilty of aiding war crimes

By Faith Karimi and Moni Basu

(CNN) -- In a landmark ruling, an international tribunal found former Liberian President Charles Taylor guilty Thursday of aiding and abetting war crimes in neighboring Sierra Leone.

It was the first war crimes conviction of a former head of state by an international court since the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders after World War II.

Prosecutors, however, failed to prove that Taylor had direct command over the rebels who committed the atrocities, said Justice Richard Lussick of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Taylor remained stoic throughout the reading of the verdict. Dressed in a charcoal gray suit, a white shirt and a burgundy tie, he stood quietly as the judge delivered the guilty verdict.

The mood was decidedly different in Freetown, the Sierra Leone capital, where, as one resident described it, every television set was on.

Charles Taylor verdict 'momentous'

Charles Taylor's 'crimes against humanity'

"Relief. Relief," said Jennifer Harold, national director of the charity World Vision. "Everybody is thrilled."

Harold said Taylor's conviction was a big psychological victory for his victims.

"People can be very cynical about justice," she said. "But now you have someone finally getting caught, finally getting justice."

A three-judge panel issued a unanimous decision that Taylor was "criminally responsible" for aiding and abetting crimes during a protracted and notoriously brutal civil war. He was accused of murder, rape, sexual slavery, conscripting children under the age of 15 and mining diamonds to pay for guns.

The former warlord maintained his innocence and pleaded not guilty to all 11 charges against him. A sentencing hearing is set for May 16.

There is no death penalty in international criminal law and Taylor would serve out any sentence in a British prison.

United Nations human rights chief Navi Pillay described the conviction as "immensely significant," saying it sends out a message that even the most powerful are not above the law.

"It is important to recognize that Taylor may appeal the verdict, and that his guilt is not fully established until the end of the judicial process," Pillay said.

"Nevertheless, whatever the final outcome, this is undoubtedly a historic moment in the development of international justice. A former president, who once wielded immense influence in a neighboring country where tens of thousands of people were killed, mutilated, raped, robbed and repeatedly displaced for years on end, has been arrested, tried in a fair and thorough international procedure."

Prosecutors accused him of financing and giving orders to Revolutionary United Front rebels in the decade-long civil war in Sierra Leone that left 50,000 dead or missing. His support for rebels fueled the bloody war, prosecutors said.

Fighters included teenagers forced to kill, rape and plunder under the influence of drugs to provoke violent behavior.

Witnesses testified about grisly violence by the rebels during the conflict, including chopping off the arms of civilians, and shooting and disemboweling pregnant women and children.

"Brave men, women and children have taken the stand against Charles Taylor," the prosecutor's office said in a written statement. "They have included amputees, rape victims, former child soldiers, and persons enslaved, robbed, and terrorized. We are awed by their courage."

Prosecutors said Taylor financed the war with proceeds from the so-called "blood diamonds" used to fund rebels in several African conflict areas.

Taylor was president of Liberia for six years until 2003, when heavy international pressure forced him out of office.

He has been on trial since 2007 at the special court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, Netherlands. United Nations officials and the Sierra Leone government jointly set up the tribunal to try those who played the biggest role in the atrocities.

The court was designed to avoid instability in Sierra Leone, where emotions about the civil war still run high.

"While today's conviction brings some measure of justice to the people of Sierra Leone, Taylor and the others sentenced by the Special Court are just the tip of the iceberg," said Brima Abdulai Sheriff, director of Amnesty International in Sierra Leone.

"Thousands of persons suspected of criminal responsibility for incidences of unlawful killings, rape and sexual violence, mutilations and the use of children in Sierra Leone's armed conflict have never been investigated, much less prosecuted."

During the trial, judges heard testimony from more than 100 people, including Taylor and supermodel Naomi Campbell, whom prosecutors put on the stand in an effort to tie him to blood diamonds.

Campbell told the special tribunal that she received "dirty-looking stones" she assumed were gifts from Taylor after a dinner hosted by then-South African President Nelson Mandela in 1997.

"When I was sleeping, I had a knock on my door. I opened the door and two men were there. They gave me a pouch and said, 'A gift for you,'" she said. "The men didn't introduce themselves or say anything else."

Taylor has been a pivotal figure in Liberian politics for decades after he overthrew the regime of Samuel Doe in 1989, spiraling the country into a bloody civil war that left 200,000 dead over the next 14 years.

After he was forced out of office, he lived in exile in Nigeria, where border guards arrested him in 2006 as he was attempting to cross into Chad amid international pressure.

UNICEF

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Press Release

Charles Taylor verdict serves as warning to war-time leaders, says UNICEF

NEW YORK/GENEVA, 26 April 2012 – The verdict against former Liberian President Charles Taylor by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone is a victory for children recruited and used in war and will serve as a warning to other war-time leaders and warlords, UNICEF said today.

Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting crimes against humanity, war crimes and other grave violations of international law committed by rebel forces in Sierra Leone. At his trial in The Hague he faced an 11-count indictment including the enlistment, recruitment and use of children under the age of 15.

The prosecution argued that he was one of those bearing the greatest responsibility for crimes committed by rebel forces between 1996 and 2002.

“For the thousands of children brutalized, scarred and exploited as weapons of war, today’s verdict against Charles Taylor may not wipe out the atrocities they suffered, but we hope it will help to heal their wounds,” said Anthony Lake, UNICEF Executive Director. “This is the first conviction of a former head of state for aiding and abetting such crimes. It is a clear victory year for children -- and against impunity, even for the powerful.”

The verdict against Taylor follows the conviction by the International Criminal Court on March 14 of former Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga of war crimes for enlisting and conscripting children under the age of 15 years into his armed movement in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2002 and 2003.

The recruitment and use of children in hostilities is prohibited under international law, and constitutes a war crime when children are under the age of 15. Often it is the most vulnerable children who are at risk of becoming associated with armed forces or groups, whether through forced conscription or driven by factors such as poverty, violence, and ideology.

During the civil war in Sierra Leone, UNICEF intervened directly with all parties to rescue children who had been recruited. In some cases children who had been branded and scarred by rebel forces received plastic surgery to help them to be accepted into their communities. UNICEF also led efforts to release and reunite children with their families and reintegrate children into their communities by providing skills training, education and psycho-social support.

Children were also used as human shields, sex slaves and as labourers in diamond mines. After the end of the war, 7,000 children were released and reintegrated into society. Ninety-eight per cent were reunited with their families. Another 7,000 separated children were supported for reintegration, among them girls who had been associated with the rebels.

“Those who exploit children for military gain violate their rights and rob them of their childhood,” said Lake. “We all should be heartened that grave violations against children are now being successfully prosecuted and perpetrators are being brought to justice.”

Chatham House (London)

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Opinion

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201204261156.html>

Sierra Leone: The Importance of the Charles Taylor Verdict for Africa

By Alex Vines

analysis

The guilty verdict by the judges of the Special Court for Sierra Leone against Liberia's former president Charles Taylor is important for both Africa and the international community.

As UN sanctions inspector from 2001-03, I saw Charles Taylor regularly moving between Sierra Leone and Liberia as he orchestrated violence and criminality in both countries. At the time, mixing with child soldiers, gun runners and diamond smugglers, I would never have imagined the positive transformation Sierra Leone and Liberia have enjoyed over the last decade. Massive challenges remain but both countries are peaceful with fast growing economies.

A key reason for almost a decade of peace in both countries was the containment of Charles Taylor through UN sanctions, military action, and the indictment by the Special Court. This resulted in Taylor accepting the offer of a soft landing via exile in Calabar from then Nigerian President Obasanjo in late 2003. Eventually, in March 2006, Nigeria arrested Taylor and extradited him to Liberia which handed him to the Special Court in Freetown but he was transferred for security reasons to The Hague. Despite being elected Liberian President, Charles Taylor never graduated from being a warlord, seeking riches from his alliance with brutal Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in Sierra Leone as part of his ambition for a 'greater Liberia'.

The case has not been without problems. I still believe that the March 2003 indictment by the Special Court on 17 initial counts against Taylor upset sensitive negotiations with him that were taking place in Ghana. The result was to have Taylor rush back to Monrovia and an unnecessary spike in conflict, claiming thousands of civilian lives. Prosecutors need to consider carefully the timing of indictments - at the end of the day the timing of issuing an indictment is a political one. The indictment timing by the International Criminal Court (ICC) of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan greatly complicated international mediation efforts in Sudan.

Hopefully lessons can be learned, as clearly a 'just' peace, is better than just peace. In Taylor's case, Britain played an important role. The UK has supported stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone and continues to engage deeply there. In 2006 then Prime Minister Tony Blair helped by offering a UK jail to host Charles Taylor if he was convicted by the Special Court. This was a brave political decision, as there were no other offers and the Netherlands did not want to host Taylor beyond the trial. This gesture helped stabilize the relationship between the two countries, resulting in declining aid and increasing trade - all in Britain's interests. This autumn the UK is reopening its embassy in Monrovia with a resident ambassador there for the first time since 1991 and is well placed to benefit from the generosity it has shown in supporting peace in the region.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone predates the setting up of the International Criminal Court in 2002. In December 2011 the former president of Cote d'Ivoire, Laurent Gbagbo was transferred to the ICC in The Hague to face four charges of crimes against humanity in the wake of the disputed presidential elections in late 2010. He is the first former head of state to appear at the ICC and will no doubt will have been

watching Charles Taylor's plight closely. The ICC is currently hearing six other cases, all relating to crimes committed in Africa, including from Uganda, Kenya and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As a new chief prosecutor takes over from Louis Moreno-Ocampo at the ICC, hopefully lessons from past efforts can be learned. The former President of Mozambique Joaquim Chissano, speaking at Chatham House, observed that Mozambique's successful peace agreement twenty years ago with the then brutal rebel group Renamo would have not been achieved if its leader Afonso Dhlakama had been indicted by the ICC. I don't fully agree with this, but do believe that timing and context play a role. The skill of the chief prosecutor is to obtain compelling evidence but also not be so focused on an individual prosecution that the wider human rights context is forgotten and a sustainable settlement can be reached.

Alex Vines is Head of Africa Programme, Chatham House and from 2001-3 a member of the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia.

CNN

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Opinion

Do war crimes trials really help victims?

By Phil Clark, Special to CNN



Editor's note: Phil Clark is a lecturer in comparative and international politics at SOAS, University of London, and co-founder of Oxford Transitional Justice Research.

(CNN) -- The long overdue verdict in the case of the former Liberian President Charles Taylor will be widely celebrated as a critical achievement for international criminal law. Taylor has been on trial at the special court for Sierra Leone since 2006 on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, pillage and the conscription of child soldiers.

Champions of international justice will highlight the unquestionable importance of prosecuting a former head of state, which signals that political seniority is no guarantee of immunity. They will also see the child soldier charge against Taylor as particularly pertinent, given the recent focus on this crime in Africa by the Kony 2012 internet campaign and the International Criminal Court's (ICC) conviction of Congolese warlord Thomas Lubanga.

But amid the celebrations at the end of the Taylor trial, important questions should be asked about the future of international justice. In the next few years, the war crimes tribunals for Sierra Leone, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia, Lebanon and Cambodia will all close their doors, leaving the ICC as the sole international judicial institution. The Taylor trial asks two main questions that impinge on the ICC's ongoing work: does international justice genuinely help victims of mass crimes and are lengthy, expensive international trials a worthwhile investment by foreign donors in the age of austerity?

One answer to these questions is that it is of greater benefit to victims and better value for donors to invest in rebuilding domestic judicial institutions in conflict-affected countries rather than whisking atrocity suspects off to The Hague.

The Taylor trial highlights three main shortcomings of all international criminal justice institutions.

First, the length of the Taylor trial is unjustifiable, delaying justice for his victims, dulling the societal impact of the case and increasing the financial costs. That it has taken the special court six years to deliver a verdict is partly due to the legal complexity of the case but also to the histrionics of international defense and prosecution lawyers, who have constantly sought media and donor attention.

Charles Taylor guilty of aiding rebels

Key grandstanding moments during this trial included Taylor and his defense counsel twice walking out when judges demanded their participation and the prosecution's distraction of calling Naomi Campbell as a star witness. The case has also been delayed because several of the international legal personnel have other professional commitments alongside their work for the court. These included Taylor's defense counsel and one of the judges, who halfway through the trial took up a new role at the International Court of Justice.

Second, the Taylor trial suffered -- as all international criminal cases do -- from the narrowness of the charges against him. Because of the inherent length and expense of international trials, prosecutors typically focus on crimes that they can most easily prove, rather than those that may be most representative of the suspect's atrocities or most salient in the eyes of affected populations. While the 11 charges against Taylor are more expansive than those brought against most international suspects, they still ignore arguably Taylor's most egregious crimes, namely those committed in his home country, Liberia, which the special court ignored entirely.

The trial also overlooks the role played by Taylor's various foreign backers, which during the conflict in Sierra Leone included Libya, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and a host of international corporations that profited from the blood diamonds used by Taylor-backed rebels to fund their military campaign. Without the training, logistical and financial support of these outside actors, Taylor could never have wrought such destruction on Sierra Leonean soil. The length of the Taylor trial is unjustifiable, delaying justice for his victims, dulling the societal impact of the case and increasing the financial costs

Phil Clark

Finally, the Taylor trial was weakened by the distance of the trial from the location -- and the victims -- of his crimes. In 2006 because of security concerns, the Freetown-based Special Court for Sierra Leone transferred Taylor to The Hague to be prosecuted in a courtroom leased from the ICC. This denied victims the opportunity to see firsthand the justice being done in their name. The distance also limited the number of Sierra Leoneans who could be called as defence and prosecution witnesses, which decreased the quality of evidence weighed by the Court.

The problem of distance for international institutions is more than geographical and also one of a particular international legal mentality. Even international courts such as those for Sierra Leone and Cambodia, which are based in-country, are often wilfully detached from those societies, citing the need to remain neutral and impartial from domestic political influences. The transplant of foreign modes of law, with its wigs and gowns, and imposing, high-security courtrooms separate international law from local populations, even when those courtrooms are physically located in conflict-affected countries. Further highlighting this separation, when these international institutions pack up and leave in the coming years, they will have contributed little to the building of domestic legal infrastructure or training of local judicial personnel, who will have to carry on the task of delivering justice long after foreign lawyers have departed.

These problems in the Taylor case highlight the inherent limitations of international criminal justice. Meanwhile, the recent example of high-level Rwandan genocide suspects being extradited home to face justice in a heavily reformed domestic system -- and in front of the Rwandan population -- highlights other important possibilities. In particular, it suggests that a new donor focus on supporting domestic judiciaries around the world might not only make financial sense but also deliver more tangible benefits to victims and societies recovering from mass conflict.

Associated Press
Thursday, 26 April 2012

Taylor conviction and the fates of other leaders



Former Liberian President Charles Taylor is part of a long parade of leaders accused of war crimes in modern history. Here is what happened to some:

LAURENT GBAGBO

The former Ivory Coast president is also jailed in The Hague awaiting trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The crimes were allegedly committed as he attempted to cling to power last year after losing a presidential election.

OMAR AL-BASHIR

The ICC accused the Sudanese president of orchestrating genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur and issued an arrest warrant for him. However, he remains free in Sudan, which is locked into hostilities with South Sudan. The U.N. estimates that 300,000 people died and 2.7 million were displaced in the Darfur conflict.

MOAMMAR GADHAFI

Libya's leader became the first ruler killed in the Arab Spring uprisings that swept the region in 2011. He ruled for nearly 42 years with an eccentric brutality, turning Libya into an isolated pariah, then an oil

power courted by the West, then back again. The rebels who toppled him were backed by a NATO bombing campaign.

SADDAM HUSSEIN

The former Iraqi dictator was hanged at age 69 in 2006 after an Iraqi trial. His brutality kept him in power through war with Iran, defeat in Kuwait, rebellions by northern Kurds and southern Shiite Muslims and international sanctions. A U.S.-led invasion drove him from power in 2003.

GEN. AUGUSTO PINOCHET

The former Chilean president died in 2006 at age 91 in a military hospital, ending a decade of intensifying efforts to bring him to trial for human rights abuses blamed on his regime. He had terrorized his opponents for 17 years after taking power in a bloody coup in 1973.

SLOBODAN MILOSEVIC

The former Serb leader was found dead in 2006 in his prison cell in The Hague, Netherlands. That abruptly ended his four-year U.N. war crimes trial for orchestrating a decade of conflict in the Balkans which left 250,000 dead and the Yugoslav federation torn asunder. He was 64.

IDI AMIN

Uganda's deposed dictator lived in exile in Saudi Arabia until his death around the age of 80 in 2003. His regime was notorious for torturing and killing suspected opponents in the 1970s. His cruel, extravagant ways led to social disintegration and economic decline in his landlocked African nation.

POL POT

The toppled Khmer Rouge leader died in the Cambodian jungle at age 73 in 1998, cheating pursuers who believed they were days away from capturing him for prosecution in the deaths of as many as 2 million countrymen. He ruled Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, seeking to create a Marxist agrarian regime but leaving one person in five dead of starvation, illness or execution.

ADOLF HITLER

The Nazi dictator, who committed suicide in his Berlin bunker in 1945, was responsible for the Holocaust and the deaths of millions during World War II.

The Independent

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Judgment day for Liberia's warlord

Nine years after his war crimes indictment, Charles Taylor is finally facing a verdict. Daniel Howden visits his mansion in Monrovia – and meets the wife he left behind



The final judgment on Charles Taylor will come in a sterile courtroom in the Netherlands, far from the tropical forests and humid cities where blood was spilt in his play for power in West Africa. Prosecutors have portrayed him as the warlord most responsible for the limbless veterans known as "shortsleeves" on the streets of Sierra Leone's capital Freetown and the countless other victims of a maelstrom of atrocities in the region's civil wars during the 1990s.

Tomorrow's verdict will be heralded either as a milestone for international justice or its

most damaging defeat. The pronouncement may even disturb the gilded life of a one-time supermodel who was forced to testify at his marathon trial.

Among the great and good who would celebrate Taylor being found guilty will be many who were once seduced by his unusual charisma. They might be embarrassed to know that their tributes, signed



photographs and gifts to a guerrilla leader who terrorised and captivated Liberia still decorate White Flower, Taylor's modernist mansion on the outskirts of the capital, Monrovia.

Six years on from his arrest it's a mouldering heap, where his young wife Victoria and their daughter, conceived during a conjugal visit to the Netherlands, wait for him to come home.

Sitting in the courtyard with its poor copy of Rome's Trevi Fountain and a collection of rusting sports cars, she maintains that her husband has been the victim of a deep

conspiracy.

"He's not what the international community demonised him to be," she says of someone charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and the recruitment of child soldiers.

Propped up on an armchair with the stuffing falling out, serving tea in chipped cups, she talks of "big hands behind the [court] case". She blames the United States and the UN for transforming her man into

the "demon" whose minions cut babies from their mothers' wombs, according to evidence given at the Special Court for Sierra Leone. There is a real sense of betrayal among Taylor's inner-circle who believe that a man whom the US admitted last year was on its payroll with the CIA has been made a scapegoat.

The former president is in "high spirits", according to his wife, who says he's absorbed in the detail of his



own trial, the last case remaining for the Sierra Leone tribunal. She speaks of the six years of hearings, as though he were away at university, insisting that he has used the time to study law and manage his defence. If that effort and any subsequent appeal fails he will serve his sentence at a prison in the UK.

As always with the showman Taylor there have been surprises. There was the arrival of Charlize, his third daughter, conceived during one of the conjugal visits. And the former lay preacher's abrupt conversion to Judaism.

Vicky, as she prefers to be called, speaks of her husband with a girlish pride as a "family man" who has been "misunderstood". As for his new faith "he told me that ever since he was a little boy he had questions about God".

"Since he got to The Hague he found a Rabbi and he has found the answers."

She is less forthcoming about his missing fortune – said by prosecutors to run to billions of dollars – amassed while looting the forests of Liberia and the diamond fields of Sierra Leone and Guinea. These were the "dirty little pebbles" that model Naomi Campbell said she received from Taylor's aides after a charity dinner attended by actress Mia Farrow and Nelson Mandela in 1997.

In the dock, the defendant has gamely insisted that he's penniless, forcing the ICC to cover his defence costs which ran to \$100,000 a month. Yet reports at the time of his arrest, while trying to escape Nigeria, had him fleeing in a luxury car stuffed with cash. His wife snorts at stories of Jaguars and stolen fortunes.

"They say he stole \$3bn. Where is that \$3bn?" Vicky says gesturing around the decaying White Flower.

Indeed, the grand residence, built in four steps down the side of a hill in the once upscale neighbourhood of Congo Town, has seen better days. Dead birds and palm fronds compost in the drained swimming pool and stray dogs wander across the wrecked courts where tennis enthusiast Taylor used to play.

The inside has fared a little better and the chapel on the ground floor has Jewish Menorah candlesticks in homage to his new religion. The house's bric-a-brac of politics and high living is at odds with her claim that he wants to return to Liberia to be a farmer.

The often bizarre and contradictory path of Taylor's life is mapped out across the dusty reception room at his former residence. Kofi Annan smiles from a signed portrait stacked on the floor with similar keepsakes, a copper plaque commemorates a "peace award" given to him by the regional power bloc ECOWAS. Bearing down on the room's white and gold French furniture is an oil painting depicting a serene Charles rising through clouds towards a smiling Christ. Among the family portraits lies a well-thumbed copy of the book *Israel* at 50.

The name of the home where she keeps vigil comes from the war years when the then-rebel commander would name all his camps White Flower to symbolise his purity. It was all part of the relentless self-mythologising that means Taylor still divides Liberians. Vicky says that Liberia hasn't fallen out of love with the man who won the post-war election in 1997 with the slogan: "He killed my ma, he killed my pa but I'm gonna vote for him".

His ex-wife Jewel Taylor is an elected senator and fiery critic of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize largely on the strength of Liberia's recovery after Taylor was forced into exile.

The Taylor family reserves a special ire for Ma Ellen as she's known to Liberians: "She's not a mother, she's a monster," says Vicky. "Every war that was fought in this country she had a hand in. If you can give her a Nobel Peace Prize then you can give one to Prince Johnson [the warlord who killed the late Liberian President Samuel Doe]."

No court verdict can settle all the arguments over what went on in West Africa's civil wars but it will go some way to deciding whether there's an unlikely homecoming to Monrovia or if a small corner of a British jail is about to be rechristened White Flower.

Deutsche Welle
Thursday, 26 April 2012



Charles Taylor verdict imminent

It's taken more than five years. But now Liberia's former president Charles Taylor is set to be sentenced. The trial was difficult at times.

During the hearings in The Hague, Charles Taylor looked like a successful business-man. The former Liberian president was impeccably dressed in a suit and tie. This Thursday, the UN special tribunal for Sierra Leone will hand down its verdict in the trial against him. If found guilty, he will be the first African head of state to be made accountable for human rights violations by an international court.

Mohammed Wan cleaning the grave sites of Sierra Leonean army soldiers killed in the 10 -year civil war which ended early 2002 at a veterans cemetery in Freetown, Sierra Leone

Half a million people died during Sierra Leone's civil war.

Lawyer, Alpha Sesay, has followed Taylor's trial since it began in June, 2007. He has worked in Sierra Leone for the Human Rights organization "Open Society Justice Initiative." The trial was "extremely important" for the people of Sierra Leone, said Sesay. It is alleged that the former Liberian president supported rebel forces in Sierra Leone. He is also accused of trying to control the country's diamond fields. More than 50,000 people died in fighting between rebel forces and the army.

Hard evidence

The challenge for the prosecution is to provide evidence indicting Taylor for these crimes. "There were difficulties finding appropriate evidence because there wasn't a paper trail," said Harmen van der Wilt, professor of international criminal law at the University of Amsterdam. This made the process exceptionally long – but outstretched trials in the world of international criminal law are nothing out of

the ordinary. The trial of Congolese warlord, Thomas Lubanga, lasted six years, although evidence at his trial was much stronger. "These lawsuits are complicated," said Harmen van der Wilt in an interview with DW.

Isatu Kaigbo, 13, right, whose two hands were hacked off by rebels almost a year ago, and four-year-old Abas Sesay, left, also an amputee, sit together in front of a tent at the Camp for War Wounded and Amputees in Freetown, Sierra Leone,

The UN special tribunal is set to decide whether Taylor orchestrated the crimes for which he is being tried.

No one denies there were serious human rights violations that occurred during the Sierra Leone civil war. "The defense even admitted the offences," said Sesay. The problem for the prosecution was proving whether Charles Taylor personally ordered the crimes to be committed. The 64-year-old was tried on 11 charges: he is accused of orchestrating crimes ranging from rape to murder. "He never went to Sierra Leone during the entire period of the conflict," said Sesay. Rather, he said, rebel forces travelled to Liberia to carry out Taylors demands.

A supermodel in the witness box

The prosecution called witnesses with particularly close connections to Taylor. They wanted to reveal the chain of command and show Taylor was responsible for the human rights violations. "Even Liberia's former vice-president testified," said Sesay. The fact the trial is taking place in Europe and not in Sierra Leone, has helped to get witnesses to testify, the lawyer believes.

Naomi Campbell is seen on a screen in the pressroom of the U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in Leidschendam, Netherlands.

Supermodel Naomi Campbell gave evidence in the Taylor trial.

Notably, the most famous witness in the trial had nothing to do with politics: in August 2010, supermodel Naomi Campbell was asked to give evidence against Taylor. To the prosecution's disappointment, she said she could not confirm with absolute certainty that she had received blood diamonds from Charles Taylor. Many believe the diamonds were the main motivation for Taylor's involvement in the Sierra Leone civil war.

No subpoena for Gadhafi

There was strong criticism too: moving the trial from Sierra Leone's capital city, Freetown to The Hague. For security reasons the trial couldn't be held where the atrocities occurred. Then there was criticism of how Libyan dictator Gadhafi's role in the chain of events was ignored. In 2003, the UN Security Council drew light on his role in the Sierra Leone conflict. He is said to have provided rebel forces with money, weapons and ammunition.

Sesay believes nevertheless that this trial will set a precedent. "Very powerful people, whatever their positions are, could be held to account if they are accused of having been involved in the commission of crimes."

Author: André Leslie / jw

Editor: Daniel Pelz

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Judges prepare to deliver Charles Taylor verdicts

LEIDSCHENDAM, Netherlands – Judges at an international war crimes tribunal will deliver landmark judgments Thursday in the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who is charged with sponsoring brutal rebel groups in neighboring Sierra Leone's civil war.

Prosecutors alleged at Taylor's trial that the charismatic war lord-turned elected president funneled arms, ammunition and even mining equipment to rebels in return for blood diamonds and power in the volatile West African region.

Taylor insists he is an innocent victim of neocolonialism and a political process aimed at preventing him from returning to power in Liberia. In seven months testifying in his own defense, he cast himself as a peacemaker and statesman in West Africa.

But prosecutors dispute that and called two vicious rebel groups Taylor's "proxy army." They were notorious for hacking off limbs of their enemies in what became the signature atrocity of Sierra Leone's bloody civil war.

Taylor pleaded not guilty at the Special Court for Sierra Leone to 11 charges including murder, sexual slavery and recruiting child soldiers. He faces a maximum life sentence, to be served in Britain, if convicted.

His trial ended a year ago and judges have been considering their verdicts ever since.

If he is found guilty, Taylor would be the first African head of state convicted by an international court.

He may not be the last. Former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo is also jailed in The Hague awaiting trial at the International Criminal Court on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed as he attempted to cling to power last year after losing a presidential election.

The same court also has indicted Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir on charges including genocide for his regime's brutal crackdown on rebels in Darfur. Al-Bashir remains at large in his country, which does not recognize the ICC.

The verdicts — whatever they are — will be a watershed moment for international justice. The only other head of state convicted by an international tribunal was Karl Doenitz, a naval officer who briefly led Germany after Adolf Hitler's suicide, and who faced justice at Nuremberg.

Elise Keppler, international justice senior counsel at Human Rights Watch, said delivering justice is vital to nations struggling to rebuild in the aftermath of atrocities.

"Sierra Leone and other countries in West Africa have been devastated by horrific human rights abuses. Justice for the worst crimes is a way to bring a new era in Sierra Leone and West Africa and promote a human rights-respecting order," she said.

Ex-Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic was tried at the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal for fomenting the Balkan wars of the 1990s, but he suffered a fatal heart attack in his cell before the case reached a conclusion. Prosecutors at the same court are close to wrapping up their case against former Bosnian Serb

leader Radovan Karadzic, accused of masterminding atrocities including genocide during Bosnia's 1992-95 war.

The ICC last year indicted Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi with crimes against humanity as he resorted to murdering and persecuting civilians to put down protests against his regime, but he was captured and killed by rebel fighters before he could face a court of law.

Taylor — who once received military training from Gadhafi's regime — was indicted in 2003 on charges including murder, terrorizing civilians, rape, sexual slavery, and recruiting and using child soldiers during the Sierra Leone war that ended in 2002 after costing more than 50,000 lives. He was arrested in 2006 and flown to The Hague for trial.

Taylor's is the final major trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which has already convicted eight other rebel leaders.

The court's headquarters and courtroom are in the capital, Freetown, but Taylor's case was moved to The Hague after the U.N. Security Council voiced fears trying him in Sierra Leone could destabilize the West Africa region.

Jabati Mambu, whose right hand was hacked off by rebels more than 13 years ago attended the start of the trial and can't wait for its conclusion.

"The trial is very important to all victims because it will help to heal our wounds," he told The Associated Press in Freetown, the Sierra Leone capital where he lost his hand.

Associated Press writer Clarence Roy-Macaulay contributed to this report from Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Kansas City Star
Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Is International Criminal Court the best way to stop war crimes?

By Roy Gutman
McClatchy Newspapers

THE HAGUE, Netherlands -- Operating out of a converted parking garage and a modern high-rise in the Dutch capital, the International Criminal Court has toiled in relative obscurity for most of its 10 years, apart from the occasional negative headline, such as when President George W. Bush decided to undo Bill Clinton's decision to join it.

Then last month, a YouTube video suddenly catapulted the court to global fame. "Kony 2012" portrayed Joseph Kony, a Ugandan militia leader charged with abducting children and turning them into slaves and killers, as World Villain No. 1. The video's star was the man who indicted him, ICC Chief Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo of Argentina, and he denounced Kony as a criminal who should be arrested.

"Joseph Kony was committing crimes for 20 years, and no one cared," he said. "We care."



For the ICC, which started work in July 2002, and until last month hadn't completed a single case, the Kony video may have been great public relations – it had had 88 million hits through Tuesday – but it also was a display of the court's impotence. Kony is still at large, despite the court's 2005 indictment charging him with crimes against humanity. U.S. special forces troops dispatched to the Central African Republic haven't been able to find him, and the aim of the video was to build public pressure on the U.S. and other governments to act.

On Thursday, The Hague will host a major event in international justice, when the Special Court for Sierra Leone hands down its verdict against Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia. The court, an ad hoc tribunal set up by the U.N. and the Sierra Leone government, charged Taylor with 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, accusing him of fueling the civil war in Sierra Leone, Liberia's neighbor. Among the charges: terrorizing civilians, murder, rape, sexual slavery, mutilation and enslavement. Taylor could be sentenced to life in prison, but whatever the outcome, it will be a day of history.

The Sierra Leone tribunal is separate from the ICC. But even as the first verdict since the Nuremberg tribunal of the 1940s was being prepared against a former head of state, the question can be asked whether the ICC is the most effective way to deter the world's most serious crimes: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Might political initiatives launched in sub-Saharan Africa, where so many war crimes have occurred, or at U.N. headquarters eventually render the ICC superfluous?

To date, the only suspects the ICC has indicted are government and militia leaders from Africa. In the first verdict the court ever reached, in mid-March, it found Thomas Lubanga, a rebel leader in eastern Congo, guilty of conscripting child soldiers.

A much bigger case will be that of Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast, whose trial on charges of crimes against humanity is to begin shortly. Four senior Kenyan political figures also are to go on trial early this summer on charges of crimes against humanity, accused of helping to fan the violence after Kenya's 2007 elections. Other than Kony, the court's most prominent indictee is Sudanese President Omar al Bashir, who's charged with genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes in Darfur.

To an outsider, the court's annual budget of 108 million euros (\$142 million) and its 700 employees look big, and its plan for a massive permanent headquarters costing 120 million euros (\$158 million), grandiose.

Could the court have accomplished more in its first decade? "It really takes time for a new court to take off," said Navi Pillay, a former judge on the ICC and the ad hoc international tribunal on Rwanda who's now the U.N.'s high commissioner for human rights. "It's significant that in 10 years, without any mechanism of empowerment, they were able to secure the arrests of a number of high-ranking accused persons," she told McClatchy.

She noted that it took the European Court of Human Rights six years to get its first case, and now it has a backlog of 60,000.

One reason for the ICC's record is the absence of key powers from the list of nations that have signed the 1998 treaty that set up the court. The ICC has 121 state parties, which provide political and financial support and recognize its jurisdiction, the latest being Guatemala, but the U.S., Russia, China and Israel have refused to join.

"It is essentially ineffective because the major powers are not members," said Yehuda Bauer, a historian and academic adviser to Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to the Holocaust, in Jerusalem. "The whole issue of international law is problematic," he said. "The moment a country decides its interests are contrary to international law, they just ignore it."

He gave as an example Israel's policy of building settlements on occupied Arab land, which is "in so many words contrary to international law."

That brings up a sore point for ICC observers.

Early this month, Moreno-Ocampo rejected a three-year-old request by the Palestinian Authority to become a member state so that the ICC could investigate the Israeli assault on Gaza at the end of 2008 for possible war crimes. Moreno-Ocampo cited the technical grounds that the U.N. General Assembly hadn't recognized Palestine as a state.

The ICC is a relative latecomer to the scene of international justice, and when the ad hoc tribunals that preceded it – for the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Cambodia and Sierra Leone – close their doors, it will have the field to itself.

But the world's horror over mass atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Rwanda, which gave birth to the ICC, also led to the creation of other international institutions, and while they operate mostly outside the public eye, they're intended to deal with volatile situations before they explode into genocide and other crimes against humanity.

The United Nations now has an undersecretary-general whose job is to advise on the prevention of genocide – to sound the alarm if there appears to be a risk of genocide occurring anywhere in the world. Francis Deng, the Sudanese-born human rights champion, has held the post for the past five years and has focused on reminding sovereign states of their obligations to uphold human rights.

Another creation is the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, a grouping of 11 east African countries that's intended to raise awareness of genocide, rape and other atrocities that occur in war. Liberata Mulamula, the first executive secretary of the group, said the initiative was founded on the idea that countries themselves must take responsibility for making certain their internal conflicts don't lead to major crimes.

"We committed ourselves to making the region genocide-free, by addressing the root causes," she said of the countries in the group, which include Rwanda, Burundi and the Congo.

Sudan is also a member, though its leader, Bashir, is under indictment on war crimes charges. So far, Bashir's main concession to the group is to allow a fact-finding mission to Darfur to determine who the perpetrators of the war crimes were, but he blocked the mission from visiting the states of South Kordofan and Blue Nile, where the Sudanese military is repressing restive populations. The report of the technical team won't be published.

Still, Mulamula said the initiative was having an impact. "Five years ago, nobody expected that the Great Lakes region would be relatively quiet and peaceful," she said. "For the first time, the Great Lakes region is not on the international agenda. If we continue and consolidate, we might have a completely different face on the region."

Until then, Mulamula, a career diplomat, thinks the ICC is performing a useful role. "For people who have suffered mass atrocities, it is the only form of justice that can restore confidence in the international justice system," she said. "It can be a big deterrent to whoever wants to commit crimes."

She criticizes the ICC, however, for indicting only Africans so far, and even in those cases moving against a relatively small number of people. "In my view they should widen the net," she said.

Bauer, the Israeli historian, has a different approach: convincing sympathetic governments to join a bloc at the United Nations that will press the major powers. "Regional conferences are extremely important and can create pressure on the major powers to change their ways," he said. "A group of 30 to 40 countries at the United Nations, if it can be done, is much more persuasive than any delegation."

At the ground level in Africa, however, there are many who view the ICC as the best immediate solution available.

"The general opinion in Kenya is that the ICC is the best thing for the country," said Raymond Kitevu, a Kenyan consultant with the U.N.'s office for the prevention of genocide. "Impunity is the experience here. There have been clashes in the past, and no one's ever been tried. The ICC will do the punishing. There will be a lesson. It is really worth having."

email: rgutman@mcclatchydc.com

Accounting for the 'worst of human crimes'

The verdict on Charles Taylor, the first former African president brought before an international war crimes tribunal, is expected Thursday. Here is a look at notable cases in The Hague. Read related article.

CASES AT INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Omar Hassan al-Bashir

Sudanese president who in 2009 became the first sitting head of state to be charged by the ICC.



Status: Free and in power in Sudan.

Saif al-Islam Gaddafi

Son of former Libyan leader Moammar Gaddafi, he was charged in June with two counts of crimes against humanity.



Status: Arrested in November; could be transferred to ICC.

Laurent Gbagbo

Former Ivory Coast president charged with four counts of crimes against humanity in post-electoral violence.



Status: Awaiting trial.

Joseph Kony

Leader of the Lord's Resistance Army in central Africa. The ICC accused him in 2005 of 12 counts of crimes against humanity and 21 war crimes.



Status: Whereabouts unknown.

Abdullah al-Senussi

Libyan armed forces colonel and head of military intelligence. He was charged with two counts of crimes against humanity.



Status: Arrested in March; could be transferred to the ICC.

Charles Taylor

Former Liberian president arrested in 2006. He was charged with war crimes and tried in the Special Court for Sierra Leone.



Status: Awaiting verdict.

CASES AT INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL TRIBUNAL FOR THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Slobodan Milosevic

Former president of Serbia and Yugoslavia, he was charged with genocide, deportation and murder, among other crimes. He died in prison in The Hague in 2006.



Status: Case closed.

Radovan Karadzic

Former president of the Bosnian Serbs during the war in Bosnia, he was charged with genocide, extermination and murder, among other crimes.



Status: Trial is ongoing.

Ratko Mladic

Commander of Bosnian Serb army, he was charged with genocide, extermination and murder, among other crimes.



Status: Trial scheduled for May 16

Washington Post
 Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Charles Taylor verdict expected in international court's war-crimes trial



THE HAGUE — For the thousands of young men whose limbs were hacked off, the verdict will come way too late. Too late as well for the teenage boys sent into battle high on dope. And for the pubescent girls turned into rebel warriors' sex slaves, who will harbor unspeakable memories until they die, no matter what the court decides.

But on Thursday morning, a full decade after the vicious Sierra Leone war was quelled, the U.N. Special Court for Sierra Leone will hand down a verdict on the responsibility of former Liberian president Charles Taylor in promoting and financing the butchery in West Africa.

Accounting for the 'worst of human crimes'

The decision handed down by the court in a leafy suburb of The Hague will mark a milestone in an accelerating and sometimes controversial effort to create an international justice system.

Taylor will become the first sitting or former head of state to be judged for conduct in a war that was considered — by still-emerging international standards — so treacherous as to be illegal. Prosecutors allege that he used his power as president of neighboring Liberia to advise and provide resources and weapons to Sierra Leone's rebels, whose uprising he viewed as similar to the guerrilla movement he had led in his own country.

Some critics say such courts have become an impediment to ridding the world of some unsavory leaders, who cling to power for their own protection. But international justice activists counter that the goal is to make atrocities dangerous for wartime leaders, so that they will think twice before ordering or committing them.

“We have the International Criminal Court, permanent, increasingly powerful, casting a long shadow,” U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said recently. “There is no going back. In this new age of accountability, those who commit the worst of human crimes will be held responsible.”

As soon as the recent war in Libya wound down, for instance, Moammar Gaddafi’s son Saif al-Islam and his intelligence chief, Abdullah al-Senussi, were charged by the International Criminal Court (ICC) here for their roles in supervising the killing of civilians during the uprising against Gaddafi’s rule. The rebels have refused to hand over Saif al-Islam, however, and Senussi is being held in Mauritania while the government there figures out what to do with him.

Gaddafi also was charged, but he was killed soon after his capture by rebel forces.

The pace of the proceedings in The Hague’s tranquil international courtrooms has been cited as one of the major problems with the half-dozen international courts headquartered here. The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, for instance, has been grinding away for nearly two decades, at a cost of more than \$120 million a year financed mostly by taxpayers from U.N. member countries.

In addition, international justice has pursued only war leaders whose prosecution is politically acceptable, such as despised African warlords or the losing side in the former Yugoslavia. Moreover, the United States has refused to ratify the 1998 treaty founding the ICC, fearing that U.S. troops or officials could get dragged into uncontrollable proceedings by victims of U.S. foreign wars.

National Post

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

<http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2012/04/25/charles-taylor-verdict/>

Goodspeed Analysis: After five years and 115 witnesses, Charles Taylor faces his day of reckoning at The Hague



Former Liberian president Charles Taylor has been a preacher, a war-lord, a gun runner and a diamond smuggler, but on Thursday he may become the first former head of state to be convicted of crimes against humanity by an international court.

At 11 a.m. Thursday, a special court in The Hague will bring an end to an historic five-year legal odyssey when a three-judge panel delivers verdicts on 11 charges against Mr. Taylor, including accusations of mutilation, rape, murder, sexual enslavement and the recruitment of child soldiers.

A descendant of freed American slaves, Mr. Taylor is thought to have salted away more than US\$3.8-billion during two decades in which he turned much of West Africa into a wasteland of corruption, poverty and death.

A patron of mayhem and mass murder, he is accused of being instrumental in terrorizing an entire region by having soldiers hack off the limbs, ears, noses and lips of civilians; using rape as a military tactic, drugging child soldiers; and pillaging the poor.

It is estimated that up to 250,000 people died in seven years of civil war in Liberia that preceded Mr. Taylor's seizure of power in 1996 and another 200,000 died and thousands more lost their limbs during a decade of war in Sierra Leone.

Prosecutors say Mr. Taylor tried to plunder neighbouring Sierra Leone's diamonds by destabilizing the country and its government and controlling and arming rebel armies. He planned the atrocities committed by Revolutionary United Front rebels, whose trademark was to hack the limbs off civilians, they argued, insisting he regularly issued orders to the rebels while supplying them with weapons, ammunition and supplies in exchange for diamonds.



National Public Radio

Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Charles Taylor Faces Verdict From Brutal African War

The International Criminal Court is set to deliver its first verdict Thursday for a head of state charged with international war crimes.



Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, is on trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, Netherlands. He is charged with 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity — including murder, rape, sexual slavery and the use of child soldiers — in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Tens of thousands died during Sierra Leone's vicious civil war, one that was infamous for the brutal hacking off of limbs.

Today, survivors of these atrocities make up the members of a soccer team in Makeni, a city in central Sierra Leone. On a recent day, the team gathered before practice, singing songs of peace.

These men, like thousands of others, lost legs and arms during Sierra Leone's brutal 11-year conflict.

It began in 1991, as the Revolutionary United Front, the RUF, crossed the western border from Liberia in an attempt to topple Sierra Leone's government. They came with promises of a new era, one in which everyone would share the country's diamond riches. Instead, they became a ruthless and terrifying band of thugs, killing some 50,000 people before the war officially ended in 2002.

Death Or Amputation

Santos Kallon, the goalkeeper on the soccer team, is among those who survived. He was 18 when gangs of armed men broke into the family home. His parents and sisters managed to escape out the back, but Santos and his younger cousin were trapped. The attackers gave them the choice of death or an amputation — the macabre signature of the RUF rebels. They both chose to live.

"Right inside my bedroom, they amputated me," Santos says. Using his own knife, they cut off Santos' right hand.

"I think like it was the death for me. How can I live again? That is my question I asked God," he says.

But Santos did live.

The 32-year-old learned how to become a woodcarver. He sells elaborately carved chairs and ornaments, making just enough money to support his wife, Asiatta, and their three children.

As for responsibility for the war in Sierra Leone, many blame one man: Charles Taylor, president of neighboring Liberia from 1997 to 2003.

"He has destroyed so many people in the world," says Asiatta. "That is what I decide in my own heart. They should detain him and jail him."

Links To Sierra Leone's Civil War

While Liberia was going through its own long and bloody civil war, Taylor is accused of fueling the war in neighboring Sierra Leone. Prosecutors say he armed rebel factions with guns and ammunition in return for "blood diamonds." These rebel factions were notorious for using drugged-up child soldiers, sex slaves and brutal torture techniques like amputation.

Foday Sankoh, former head of the RUF rebel group, is now dead. But his friendship with Taylor was well-known. However, the case in The Hague hinges on whether it can be proved Taylor, while never entering Sierra Leone, orchestrated the war from afar.

In Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, there are many like Santos and Assiata who want to see Taylor locked up for life. But there are some who feel the former Liberian president is being used as a scapegoat.

Sidie Koroma was Foday Sankoh's former bodyguard.

"I don't see any element of truth in what they're accusing him of, for supporting the RUF," Koroma says. "If RUF was receiving arms and ammunition from outside, we should have won the war militarily."

The Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague charged 13 people with crimes during the war. Eight were found guilty. Two have since died, including Sankoh, the RUF leader. Another is still missing. That leaves just one man, Taylor, awaiting his verdict.

In Liberia, Supporters Still

In neighboring Liberia, Taylor still has his supporters. This past weekend, a concert in support of Taylor was held in the capital, Monrovia.

During Liberia's civil war, up to one-quarter of a million people were killed and there are many in the country who suffered. Nonetheless, the charismatic leader still has huge backing. As president, Taylor was given to moments of largesse, handing out bags of money. He also made sure rice — the staple food of Liberia — was cheap.

On a recent day, Mamie Sombai sat on her father's porch in Monrovia. Her meager business — selling a small array of soaps, sweets and toothpaste — was spread out on the table in front of her.

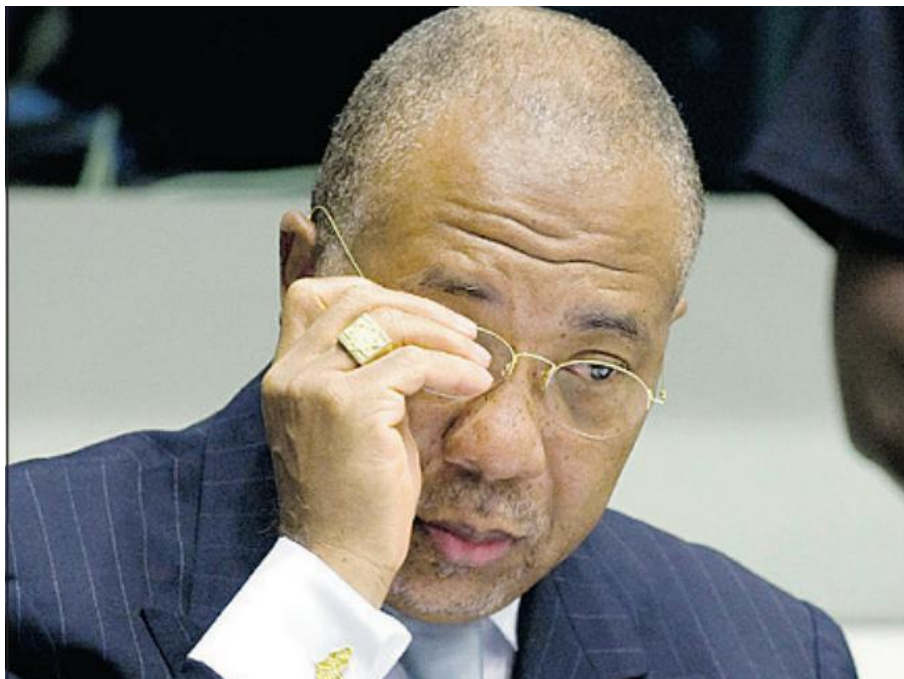
She will not be happy if Taylor is found guilty.

"I will feel bad because I love Charles Taylor," she said. "I will not lie to no one. I love him."

Daily Telegraph
Wednesday, 25 April 2012

Day of reckoning as warlord Taylor awaits verdict at The Hague

By Mike Pflanz, The Daily Telegraph



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

Charles Taylor, the warlord who rose to lead Liberia, could become the first ex-president to be consigned to a British prison cell after judgment is delivered in his war crimes trial Thursday.

Taylor, who ruled Liberia from 1997 until his downfall in 2003, is the first deposed head of state to face a verdict from international justice since Grand Admiral Karl Donitz, who briefly succeeded Hitler as head of the Nazi state, at the Nuremberg trials.

Taylor, the Baptist lay preacher, is accused of 11 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

He allegedly armed and trained a rebel army, styling itself the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which laid waste to neighbouring Sierra Leone during that country's civil war between 1991 and 2002. The RUF's fighters were infamous for their terror tactics, which included amputating their victims' limbs, either at the elbow - known as "short sleeves" - or at the wrist, called "long sleeves".

As many as 120,000 people died in Sierra Leone's conflict, many at the hands of children drugged on mixtures of cocaine and gunpowder poured into cuts inflicted on their arms. Taylor is accused of fuelling this war by giving the RUF guns in return for diamonds during his time as Liberia's leader.

His aides allegedly passed on a pouch of these diamonds to Naomi Campbell after a dinner hosted by Nelson Mandela, then South Africa's president, according to the supermodel's testimony. Miss Campbell told the court that Taylor's aides had given her what looked like "dirty stones".

Nine years after he was first indicted by a United Nations Special Court - and six years after being arrested in Nigeria, where he was living in exile - four judges will deliver their verdict in The Hague today.

"There really has never been anything like this: it is a landmark," said Patrick Alley, director of Global Witness, a British charity focused on the link between human rights abuses and the exploitation of natural resources.

"If he is convicted, it sends a very clear message that anyone who thinks they can carry out activities that lead to crimes against humanity - or who try to loot state resources to carry out abuses - can no longer do so with impunity."

If Taylor is convicted, Britain has offered to hold him in a high security prison. No jail in West Africa is considered secure enough to keep him behind bars.

In Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, few people will be able to watch today's proceedings over the Internet.

But many will take a great interest in the verdict, said Henry Sheku, of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone. "It's in the papers, it's on the radio, it is the thing that people are talking about," he said.

"There is a strong feeling that this is the time for justice finally to prevail, which is something that especially those most harmed by the evil that he brought to our country have been waiting for too long."

On January 6 1999, the RUF attacked Freetown - allegedly with Taylor's help - and inflicted terrible bloodshed on the city. The people of Sierra Leone will be watching to see whether the man accused of being an architect of that traumatic event, popularly known as "January 6", will face punishment.

Taylor, 64, invaded Liberia as the head of a guerrilla army on Christmas Eve 1989, waging a brutal war before winning a presidential election in 1997. He won that poll with the unusual slogan: "He killed my Ma, he killed my Pa, he gets my vote". For a short time, this election victory gave Taylor a veneer of respectability, allowing him to attend dinner parties with the likes of Mr Mandela.

However, Liberians remembered that he openly recruited child soldiers during their civil war, even forming a specialist "Small Boys Unit".

Taylor's rule was so corrupt and brutal that another rebel alliance emerged dedicated to his overthrow.

In 2003, they attacked the capital, Monrovia, forcing him to flee into exile in Nigeria. He lived under the shadow of his indictment until Nigeria handed him over for trial in 2006.

Witnesses have testified about radio exchanges between Mr Taylor and the RUF, while weapons were allegedly smuggled into Sierra Leone in sacks of rice, paid for with diamonds sent over the border to Liberia in a mayonnaise jar.

Taylor has called the charges "diabolical lies".

United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations

Thursday, April 26, 2012

Foreign Secretary William Hague welcomes Charles Taylor guilty verdict

Commenting on the news that the Special Court for Sierra Leone has found Charles Taylor guilty of war crimes in Sierra Leone, the Foreign Secretary William Hague said:

“I welcome the verdict reached by The Special Court for Sierra Leone in the trial of Charles Taylor, for the war crimes and crimes against humanity for which he was responsible during that country’s bloody civil war. This landmark verdict demonstrates that those who have committed the most serious of crimes can and will be held to account for their actions; it demonstrates that the reach of international law is long and not time limited and it demonstrates that Heads of State cannot hide behind immunity. The verdict can only be a small comfort for the victims and relatives of those killed. But the Court’s authoritative view of what occurred will play an important role in helping the people of Sierra Leone come to terms with the past and consolidate national reconciliation.

“I also want to congratulate all those who have worked tirelessly to bring Charles Taylor to justice and for the professional and independent manner in which the trial was conducted.

“The British government will continue to be a strong supporter of the work of the Special Court for Sierra Leone as it draws its proceedings to a close. To this end I firmly support the Court’s efforts to secure further voluntary contributions for any forthcoming appeals process.

“But the work of the Special Court does not stop here. A small Residual Special Court needs to continue, in order to protect witnesses, manage the detention of those convicted, and protect the archives. With this in mind, I urge States to consider making voluntary contributions to fund the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone, to ensure its legacy is protected.”

Kind regards,

Newsdesk

Press and Digital Department | Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Human Rights Watch

Thursday, April 26, 2012

Sierra Leone: Landmark Conviction of Liberian Ex-President

World Less Hospitable for Leaders Who Commit Grave Crimes

The conviction on April 26, 2012, of Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, for serious international crimes during Sierra Leone's brutal armed conflict provides justice for victims and shows that no one is above the law, Human Rights Watch said today. Taylor was convicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity before the United Nations-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone on charges that stemmed from his support for rebel groups there.

"Powerful leaders like Charles Taylor have for too long lived comfortably above the law," said Elise Keppler, senior international justice counsel at Human Rights Watch. "Taylor's conviction sends a message to those in power that they can be held to account for grave crimes."

Taylor is the only former head of state since Nuremberg to be convicted for war crimes or crimes against humanity by an international or hybrid international-national tribunal. Slobodan Milosevic, president of the former Yugoslavia, was tried by an international tribunal, but he died before a judgment was issued. Karl Doenitz, who was a German naval commander and president of Germany for approximately one week at the end of World War II, was convicted by the International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg.

The judgment in Taylor's case comes five months after Laurent Gbagbo, the former Côte d'Ivoire president, appeared before the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of crimes against humanity during Côte d'Ivoire's 2011 political and military crisis. President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan is also subject to an ICC arrest warrant, but he remains a fugitive from justice.

The Special Court found Taylor guilty of the war crimes of terrorizing civilians, murder, outrages on personal dignity, cruel treatment, looting, and recruiting and using child soldiers; and the crimes against humanity of murder, rape, sexual slavery, mutilating and beating, and enslavement.

"Not since Nuremberg has an international or hybrid war crimes court issued a judgment against a current or former head of state," Keppler said. "This is a victory for Sierra Leonean victims of Taylor's brutal crimes, and all those seeking justice when the worst abuses are committed."

Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting, as well as planning war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), Sierra Leonean rebel groups whose fighters were responsible for numerous atrocities during Sierra Leone's 11-year armed conflict, which ended in 2002. The Special Court for Sierra Leone previously convicted a total of six members of both armed groups for their involvement in these crimes.

The defense team has 14 days from the receipt of the full judgment to notify the court of its intention to appeal. The sentence against Taylor will be pronounced on May 30. He will serve any prison term in the United Kingdom based on an agreement with the Netherlands.

The judgment has significance for people across West Africa, Human Rights Watch said. Taylor is implicated in human rights abuses and fomenting instability in countries throughout the sub-region. Forces under Taylor's command were implicated in horrific abuses against civilians in his native Liberia, including summary executions and numerous massacres, widespread and systematic rape, mutilation and torture, and large-scale forced conscription and use of child combatants.

The Special Court's work is limited to crimes committed in Sierra Leone. The Liberian government has not initiated any prosecutions for serious crimes committed during its armed conflict, which ended in 2003.

"The Liberian government's lack of progress in bringing prosecutions against those implicated in war crimes during its own armed conflict is hugely disappointing," Keppler said. "Liberian victims of massacres, rape, and torture are every bit as deserving of justice as victims in Sierra Leone."

Lessons should be drawn from the Taylor trial to promote the best possible practice in future trials of such high-level leaders, Human Rights Watch said. The Taylor case largely avoided the major disruptions and delays that have marred some other major international proceedings.

The Taylor judgment is a milestone for the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Human Rights Watch said. Upon the conclusion of this case, the Special Court is set to become the first international or hybrid tribunal to complete its trials and wind down its operations. The International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda are nearing completion, but continue to conduct cases.

Background

From 1989 to 1997, Taylor led a rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), which sought to unseat Liberia's president at the time, Samuel Doe, and to take control of the country. Taylor was sworn in as president on August 2, 1997, after elections that were part of a peace agreement brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Taylor's presidency, which lasted until 2003, was characterized by repression of dissent and harassment of the media, civil society, and the political opposition. In addition to abuses in Liberia, his forces participated in armed conflicts and cross-border raids in neighboring countries, including Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire, where they committed numerous abuses. There was near-total impunity for those responsible for these abuses.

Taylor's repression in Liberia fueled a rebellion to unseat him. Following rebel incursions into Monrovia, the Liberian capital, and the unsealing of Taylor's indictment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Taylor stepped down as president in August 2003. He was offered safe haven in Nigeria, where he stayed until his surrender to the Special Court in March 2006.

The Special Court on March 7, 2003, indicted Taylor for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during Sierra Leone's armed conflict. The indictment was amended in March 2006 and the counts reduced from 17 to 11, shortly before Taylor was apprehended.

Taylor was transferred to the custody of the Special Court on March 29, 2006. Because of concerns over regional stability in West Africa, the trial was moved from Freetown to the Netherlands. The trial began on June 4, 2007, but was adjourned the same day when Taylor dismissed his legal team. New counsel was assigned the following month and proceedings restarted in January 2008. The trial phase was officially closed on March 11, 2011.