

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

Enclosed are clippings of the latest local and international press on the Special Court and related issues obtained by the Press and Public Affairs Office as of:

Friday, November 26, 2004

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
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WITNESS TESTIFIES ON KAMAJOR ATROCITY

**7 CHOPPED
TO DEATH
IN BO TOWN**

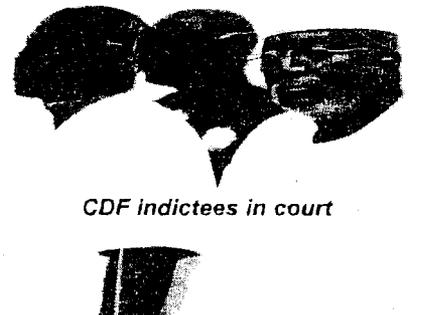
By Mohamed Mansaray

The 31st Prosecution witness in the trial of CDF indictees of the Special Court, TF2-030 told the court yesterday that Kamajors murdered her husband using machetes at a swamp in Bo sometime in 1998.

The witness told the court that six other people were also slaughtered in the same location where her husband was killed. She was led in evidence by a prosecution lawyer, Adoa Wiawe at Court Room No. 1, New England, Freetown.

The witness testified that her husband had just returned home from town to purchase food for their newly born baby when he was surrounded by 15-outlass-toting Kamajors. The 36-year-old witness told the court that some of the Kamajors

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CDF indictees in court

Wife Tells How Kamajors Killed Her Husband

who attacked her husband also carried what she described as sharp weapons but that none of the Kamajors who attacked them carried guns.

She testified that her husband met his death after he made an attempt to escape from the Kamajors but that he was pursued and murdered. "The Commander ordered his boys to kill my husband," she said but could not recall the name of the Commander. "When my husband was wallowing in a pool of blood after his attackers had left, I went to him and he told me to take care of the children," she said, adding that her husband was buried on February 23, the day ECOMOG entered Bo town.

The witness who was under emotional stress during her testimony, informed the court that Kamajors looted the town comprehensively and retreated to the surrounding villages around Bo before ECOMOG entered the town.

In her examination-in-chief earlier, the witness told the court that Kamajors entered Bo using the route by CKC, two days after the AFRC forces withdrew from the town. The witness was born in the Bo district and she gave her testimony in Krio through an interpreter in English from the witness protection box.

The trials continue.

THE EXCLUSIVE

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Friday November 26, 2004

More Kamajor Atrocities Exposed

By Joseph Turay

31st witness of the prosecution at the Special Court, TF- 2030 Wednesday explained to the court that her husband and seven others were

hacked to death by Kamajors in Bo town.

The witness, a 39 year old widow who is a resident of Bo said when the Kamajors entered the town in 1998,

they passed through Christ the King College (CKC) dressed in their usual attire.

Two days later, they started looting and killing civilians

which made many civilians flee the town and its surrounding villages.

The witness recalled the 22nd February 1998 when she was

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More Kamajor Atrocities Exposed

From front page

with her husband at home with their children when Kamajors surrounded her husband who was sitting in the kitchen smoking a cigarette.

She narrated that her husband ran to a nearby swamp after he had noticed that they wanted to kill him, but unfortunately for him, the Kamajors caught him, and hacked at him with machetes.

The witness said she heard her husband calling for help after the Kamajors had gone. Eventually she went and saw her husband lying in a pool of blood in the muddy swamp. She dragged him from the mud to a safe place where he died.

The widow explained that before she went to call her husband's family for the burial of her husband. Six

other persons had also been hacked to death in the same swamp by the same Kamajor militiamen whom she said mostly carried machetes and had iron bars in their hands.

Witness told the court that after the burial of her husband, she was taken from the town with her children by her husband's family to settle in the town of Port Loko where she stayed with her children for a long time.

26 Nov 2004

Global Bar chief asks Nigeria to hand over Taylor to UN tribunal

From Oghogho Obayuwana, Abuja

NIGERIA will do its international image some good if it nullifies the political asylum granted to former Liberian President Charles Taylor and hand him over to United Nations (UN) war crimes tribunal without any further delay.

This was the position of the Executive Director of International Bar Association (IBA), Mr Mark Elvis, when he spoke in Abuja on the Rule of Law and Institution Building.

Elvis is in Nigeria as one of the resource persons participating in Inter Action, a pan African conference put together by British Council to strengthen African democracies as the continent faces the challenges of underdevelopment and poverty.

Fielding questions from *The Guardian* after his main presentation, Elvis said Taylor should not be given a safe haven in Nigeria.

His words: "An internationally recognised tribunal has indicted him after he was alleged to have committed gross violations of international humanitarian law," adding

that "it was the responsibility of every country including Nigeria to uphold the standards of international laws. This requires that Taylor be brought to justice and not be provided with a safe haven."

The bar chieftain was not persuaded by counter reasons to the effect that Nigeria's action was premised on the political agreement reached with the international community to ease out Taylor from the war torn Liberia and bring normalcy back to the country.

He said, "if you create a political solution like you have now, then you undermine the entire foundation of international law.

"You minimise the importance of requiring leaders to adhere to the basic principles of international law which in this case means that you are not going to commit genocide, you are not going to commit crimes against humanity, you are not going to violate the Geneva conventions.

"These are the most fundamental of international human rights that exist in our world and so its not enough for us to hold that, well in order to get some political resolution we are going to provide immunity to somebody who was alleged to have committed crimes."

He said what needs to be done was to hold him accountable for those crimes. "That's how you adhere to justice, that's how you create a system based on justice and the rule of law."

The IBA boss, who said his comments on the asylum largely represents his personal view as an international lawyer, had earlier presented a 10-paged position paper which in the main, is on the importance of an independent bar, governance, setting the rule of law in its proper perspective in an emerging democracy as well as the all important role of institution building for an enduring democracy.

He maintained that for the rule of law to be sustained in Nigeria it requires not just an independent judiciary but also a broad based coalition of supporters from both within and outside the judiciary.

Elvis also noted that the UN's basic principles on the role of an independent legal profession as agent in the administration of justice mandate lawyers in various countries to "become more involved and seek justice through the law and even in the face of hostility, speak out against abuse of justice and human rights."

<http://www.expatica.com/source/>

Union boosts defence ambitions

European Union defence ministers have backed a plan to set up 13 elite rapid reaction battle groups by 2007 to tackle emerging global crises.

The decision marks another step in the EU's growing military ambitions and attempts to gain more clout on the world stage.

The ministers committed national troops to a pool of 13 battalions of 1,500 troops that are able to react within 15 days to humanitarian disasters and peacekeeping emergencies.

From 2007, two battle groups would be available at any one time to respond to a sudden crisis.

British and French rapid reaction units will form the initial core of the battle group concept, having pledged to ensure at least one 'high readiness' battalion between them as early as January 2005.



Increased EU peacekeeping role

The forces have been billed as potential support units for United Nations and African Union operations and are expected to focus efforts mainly on the African continent.

Countries such as Sierra Leone or Ivory Coast could be potential areas for future intervention.

There are no plans on the table to send EU troops to the Darfur region in war-torn Sudan, and EU officials say battle groups would not be deployed to the Middle East or Iraq.



War justice at 'turning point'

By Ishbel Matheson
BBC News in Arusha, Tanzania

The international justice system is at a turning point, top war crimes prosecutors have heard at a conference in Tanzania.

Furthermore, a global system of justice is necessary if peace is to be maintained, the prosecutor for the Rwandan war crimes tribunal said.

The Challenges of International Criminal Justice conference focused on obstacles facing crimes courts.

But it also was a chance for delegates to take stock of accomplishments.

Ten years ago, international justice was in its infancy.

The Rwandan and Yugoslav tribunals had just been set up amid a great deal of scepticism.

Some saw them simply as a means for the international community to salve its conscience after the terrible atrocities of the 1990s.

A decade on, lawyers gathered at the three-day conference at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in Arusha, Tanzania, examined their achievements.

Benchmarks

On one hand, important legal benchmarks have been set.

The Rwandan tribunal, for example, was the first to try and convict a head of state of genocide.

Some say the fear of prosecution may now be a real deterrent.

"We have done something to deter not only top leaders but perhaps those at more of the nasty level of command where people might be expected to have blood on their hands," says Gavin Rukston of the Yugoslav tribunal.

But it is also clear the challenges of operating an international war crimes court are formidable.

Many felt the treatment of witnesses - some of whom are in fear for their lives - has been less than perfect.

The prosecutor of the special court for Sierra Leone also spoke of the danger of indifference and of how a war-wearied international community was increasingly reluctant to participate in the quest for justice.

Nevertheless, the feeling among these lawyers was a global criminal justice system was slowly being built and war criminals wherever they are in the world could no longer be sure of escaping justice.



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UN officials stress need to eliminate violence against women

25 November 2004 – United Nations officials, led by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, today stressed the need for building a world in which women enjoy their rights and freedoms on an equal basis with men.

“Violence against women is global in reach, and takes place in all societies and cultures,” he said in a statement marking the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. “It affects women no matter what their race, ethnicity, social origin, birth or other status may be.”

Noting that gender-based violence is particularly pervasive in situation of armed conflicts, when women and girls become victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence, the Secretary-General said ending the impunity for such crimes is an important step.

Referring to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, he said for the first time forced marriage would be prosecuted as a crime against humanity.

Describing violence against women as “a challenge in itself,” since it could cause HIV infection, the Secretary-General observed that sexual violence increases women's vulnerability to the virus.

“All too frequently, the threat to violence forces women to have unprotected sex,” he said. “Violence can also make it impossible for women to seek information, follow treatment or even raise the subject for discussion.”

He said the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women continued to play a dynamic role in ensuring that the issue was a high priority for the international community, noting that the Optional Protocol to the Convention “gives women the right to petition, and has the potential to become a highly effective tool for addressing gender-based violence.”

Meanwhile, the head of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) also pointed out that systematic use of rape as a weapon of war was a violation of human rights that demands urgent attention and an end to impunity.

“The prevalence of rape and sexual violence during armed conflict is not a new problem, but it is as serious as it has even been,” said Executive Director Carol Bellamy. “Perpetrators of sexual violence during armed conflict are violating international law. States must hold them accountable, and there must be resources for victims to seek justice.”

She saw the use of rape in wars as “one of the most disturbing phenomena” of the past two decades. “In situations of armed conflicts, girls and women are routinely targeted in campaigns of gender-based violence, including rape, mutilation, prostitution, and sexual slavery,” she said.

Referring to conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan, the UNICEF chief observed that militias had routinely engaged in rape of young girls and women of all ages. “That conflict has forced more than a million people to leave their homes and seek refuge in makeshift camps,” she said. “But even there, women and girls are in grave danger of being sexually assaulted, particularly when they go beyond the camp for firewood.”

VOA

Annan Sees No Military Solution In Ivory Coast

By Nico Colombant, Abidjan, 25 November 2004

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan says peace in divided Ivory Coast cannot be accomplished militarily. His comment late Wednesday came as foreign ministers at a meeting of French-speaking nations in Burkina Faso condemned the Ivorian military for resuming hostilities earlier this month.

Speaking in French at a reception in Ouagadougou where he received Burkina Faso's highest honors for his peace efforts, Secretary-General Annan appealed for negotiations to take precedence in Ivory Coast.

He says Ivorians must use dialogue to work together and save their country, instead of attacking each other.

He also called for more efforts to apply successive peace deals, the last of which was agreed in a meeting he chaired in Accra last July.

Meanwhile, foreign ministers drew up a resolution concerning the Ivory Coast crisis ahead of a two-day summit of about 30 French-speaking heads of state starting Friday. The draft text, which will be submitted to the heads of state, condemns the Ivory Coast military for violating an 18-month cease-fire by bombing rebel positions.

It also backs an arms embargo against Ivory Coast which was passed by the United Nations following those attacks.

Ivory Coast was represented at that meeting by its ambassador to Burkina Faso. He had no comment.

But the head of the government in Canada's French-speaking province, Quebec, Premier Jean Charest, says the group known as the International Organization of Francophonie is becoming increasingly political.

He says it's important the group, now in its 10th year, weighs in on helping to end conflicts in French-speaking areas such as Ivory Coast and Haiti, rather than focusing just on culture and development.

The group includes France's former colonies as well as other countries, including Switzerland.

Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo will not be attending. In a recent interview broadcast on state television, he called on French forces in Ivory Coast to aggressively disarm rebels.

Mr. Gbagbo says he resumed hostilities earlier this month because rebels were refusing to disarm by an agreed date of October 15. During government air raids, a French military position in the rebel-held north was hit, resulting in the deaths of nine French soldiers.

Several thousand French troops are helping more than six-thousand U.N. peacekeepers enforce the cease-fire.

France responded by destroying all Ivorian military aircraft and calling for the arms embargo. This prompted mass rioting in southern Ivory Coast and the evacuation of thousands of French and other foreign nationals.

Mr. Gbagbo says he is also eagerly awaiting a return mediation visit by South African President Thabo Mbeki next week. Northern-based rebels, who have also met with Mr. Mbeki, say Mr. Gbagbo is not a reliable negotiating partner, accusing him of blocking the power-sharing peace deals.

Cote d'Ivoire: Ivorian rebels hold villagers to ransom in northern sector

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

ABIDJAN, 25 November (IRIN) - Government bombs may have stopped falling on towns in the northern half of Cote d'Ivoire, but now rebels are taking residents hostage for ransom, reports of human rights violations are on the increase, and the price of essential items such as bread and fuel has doubled.

Rebel forces, who hold the north of the country and were hit by Ivorian airplanes when an 18-month ceasefire was shattered on 4 November, are reported to be raiding villages to demand cash.

Some commentators in the Abidjan press see this as part of a drive by the rebels to strengthen their war chest in case full-scale conflict resumes.

An Ivorian woman, who asked not to be identified, told IRIN on Thursday that rebels fighters had stormed her home village of Konaklo in early November, looking for money.

All the young men in Konaklo, which lies about 50 km from the main rebel stronghold Bouake, fled into the bush as the rebel fighters arrived. The gunmen began breaking into houses to search for hidden notes and beat up many of the people they found inside, who pleaded that they had nothing left to give.

The woman said her own mother, who is aged over 70, also fled. She was smuggled over the frontline by a young nephew, who carried her on his bicycle.

Four middle-aged men were not so lucky. They were taken hostage by the rebels, who imprisoned them in containers seven kilometres down the road in the town of Sakassou, pending the payment of a 1.5 million CFA (\$3,000) ransom.

The New Forces rebel movement have used containers as makeshift prisons before in the northern city of Korhogo.

A UN human rights investigation into clashes between rival rebel factions in Korhogo in June reported that dozens of people were arrested and held in hot airless containers. A medical examination of 99 bodies discovered in mass graves on the outskirts of the city showed that many of them had suffocated to death.

Race to raise funds

With their neighbours languishing in custody, the remaining Konaklo villagers were only able to raise one million francs between them, the woman said. They therefore sent an envoy to Abidjan at the end of last week to raise the remaining 500,000 CFA (\$1,000) from people who had left the farming community to seek jobs in Cote d'Ivoire's economic capital.

The woman said the rebel fighters gave no reasons for demanding money and did not accuse the villagers, who are mostly from the Baoule ethnic group of former president Felix Houphouet Boigny, of siding with the government.

But she said the rebel gunmen threatened bluntly to kill the hostages and burn down the entire village unless the money was paid. One of her relatives, who witnessed the scene first-hand, quoted the leader of the rebel fighters as saying: "If you don't give us the money, you won't see them again. They will be dead."

It was not the first time Konaklo had been targeted.

Back in July, the woman who spoke to IRIN was actually present in Konaklo when a small group of rebel fighters came and arrested four young men whom they accused of drug trafficking. They took them away as prisoners and told village elders that if the community wanted to see them alive again they would have to quickly raise a ransom of one million CFA francs (US\$2,000).

The woman said Konaklo's village elders eventually negotiated the payment down to 800,000 CFA (\$1,600) and managed to raise this sum after a few days. The hostages were then released.

But the fate of the men captured in November remains unclear.

These events are being mirrored in other villages in the Bandama river valley, where Konaklo is situated, according to the independent Abidjan newspaper, L'Inter.

"Each village is required to pay 1 million CFA," the paper said in an article published last week.

"Why? Nobody knows. But since the payment of 'tax' takes place in a context where the New Forces have suffered air strikes on their various military sites, the keenest observers believe that the money raised can only be used to purchase new pieces of military equipment."

UN says human rights violations increasing

The UN has also said its human rights officials in Bouake have reported increasing cases of forced disappearances, arbitrary arrests and incommunicado detentions since the latest cycle of violence began in what was once West Africa's success story. But officials in Cote d'Ivoire contacted by IRIN have declined to give further details.

A statement by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said staff were beginning to return to Cote d'Ivoire after being evacuated earlier this month and hoped investigations would be possible.

"If conditions permit, rapid assessment missions will be conducted in various areas including... Bouake in the rebel-held north where cases of forced disappearances, arrests and detention of people accused of supporting President Laurent Gbagbo have been reported," OCHA said.

But even for those northern Cote d'Ivoire residents who have managed to escape the reported hostage-taking and human rights abuses, life is still tough.

In the days following the Ivorian army's abortive assault in November on the rebel territory, prices of everyday items sky-rocketed.

An IRIN correspondent in the main town Bouake, reported that a loaf of bread was now selling for 250 CFA (50 US cents), exactly double the price in October, and residents were often scuffling for stale baguettes.

"I don't understand the shopkeepers who raise the price of their goods, even when they are old stock," Stephane Brou, a Bouake resident, told IRIN, as he stood outside a bakery.

Paraffin, which many people use to cook with, has also shot up in price from 500 CFA (US \$1) to 1,000 CFA (US\$ 2).

One Bouake local told IRIN that some vendors were waiting for prices to rise before getting rid of their stocks, and there had been clashes with soldiers.

"People went to buy paraffin and the vendor said he had some, but he was going to wait for prices to spike higher before he began selling it," the local, who would only give his first name Beli, explained.

"A soldier told him to hand over the 20 litres he had, and that he would pay 20,000 CFA. When the vendor had done so, the soldier beat him and distributed the petrol for free to all those who wanted it."

Residents have also had to cope with their electricity and water being repeatedly cut off by the government in the south. Supplies were severed the day before the Ivorian army launched their offensive. Although they were restored about a week later, they were cut again on 14 November. They have since been reconnected.

People in Bouake talk about bodies rotting in the unrefrigerated morgues, water pumps being knocked out of action and having to manage by candlelight for nights on end. And of course the price of candles has now gone through the roof.

Humanitarian organisations have urged the government to maintain a constant supply of electricity to the north, so that hospitals can keep functioning and clean drinking water is available to avoid outbreaks of cholera, typhoid and other water-borne diseases.

Serbia squeezed over war crimes

By Gabriel Partos
BBC south-east Europe analyst

Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica has promised "results soon", after being criticised for failing to hand over war crimes suspects to The Hague Tribunal.

But what impact is the criticism likely to have for Serbia and the other former Yugoslav republics?

The Hague Tribunal is under pressure.

As a body established by the UN, it is bound by the UN's decisions.

This includes the Security Council's so-called completion strategy, which envisages the tribunal finishing its trials in 2008 - and appeals against the judgements two years later.

But that schedule is threatened by three obstacles.

First, the continued failure to apprehend indictees, 20 of whom remain at liberty.

Second, doubts about the readiness of some local judicial institutions in the former Yugoslav republics to take over cases from The Hague.

Finally, by the tribunal's own financial problems, due to arrears in payments from UN member states, which have led to a recruitment freeze.

Chief prosecutor Carla Del Ponte was adamant that the fugitives should be arrested; first and foremost, the Bosnian Serbs' wartime leader, Radovan Karadzic, and his military commander, General Ratko Mladic.

"2005 will... mark the 10th anniversary of three key events: the Srebrenica genocide, the Dayton agreement and the indictment against Karadzic and Mladic," she said.

"If the international community could not prevent the genocide, it should at least not allow this and other most serious crimes to be left unpunished."

'Tipped off'

Carla Del Ponte's main target was Serbia - and more specifically Mr Kostunica's government, which she said had "deliberately chosen to ignore its legal obligations".

She said at least 12 of the fugitives from justice are in Serbia, several of them living openly.

And she cited the case of the former Serb separatist leader from Croatia, Goran Hadzic, who she claimed was tipped off by the Serb authorities in July - after they had received his indictment from the tribunal - thereby allowing him to escape.

Prime Minister Kostunica has been reluctant to order any arrests.

He is concerned that the apprehension of some of the accused, who are regarded by many Serbs as national heroes, could destabilise his minority government or perhaps Serbia itself.

Mr Kostunica's current attitude is in stark contrast with his earlier strictly constitutionalist approach when he was President of Yugoslavia.

At that time he opposed the transfer of indictees to The Hague on the grounds that there was no law allowing for that.

Now, though, with the required legislation in place, he has adopted a form of realpolitik - in effect, turning his back on Serbia's legal obligations.

But what may be a pragmatic approach at home, has already produced serious drawbacks abroad.

The US froze aid for Serbia in the spring, due to Belgrade's lack of co-operation with the tribunal.

And the EU is continuing to insist that progress towards negotiating a "stabilisation and association agreement" with Belgrade - the first step towards eventual EU membership - will depend on Serbia's compliance with the tribunal's requests.

Sanctions unlikely

Awareness of this has prompted both Serbia's President, Boris Tadic, and the Foreign Minister of Serbia and Montenegro, Vuk Draskovic, to call for the arrests and transfers of war crimes suspects.

Although the UN Security Council is unlikely to impose sanctions on Belgrade - as it did during the rule of the former President, Slobodan Milosevic - the continuing US and EU restrictions on Serbia will act as a form of pressure on Mr Kostunica's government.



In the meantime, though, international pressure may be felt more directly in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina - even though both states have shown a much higher degree of co-operation with the tribunal.

In the case of Bosnia, though, one of the country's two entities - the Serb Republic - has yet to make a single arrest of individuals indicted by The Hague.

That has already contributed to delaying Bosnia's efforts to forge closer links with Nato and the EU.

And it may now prompt the international community's High Representative Paddy Ashdown to take further measures against those whom he believes to be holding back Bosnia's international integration. That could mean sacking officials and reforming institutions.

Croatia has received a virtually clean bill of health from Carla Del Ponte. But there remains one major obstacle: the continued lack of progress in locating and arresting General Ante Gotovina who was allowed to escape by Zagreb officials after they received his indictment three years ago.

The Gotovina case is highly sensitive for the Croatian government, which argues that the fugitive is not hiding in Croatia.

Lack of progress over Mr Gotovina could delay the start of accession talks with the EU which Zagreb would like to see launched early next year.

SETimes

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Del Ponte: Serbia Not Co-operating With ICTY

25/11/2004

In her report to the UN Security Council on Tuesday, chief UN war crimes prosecutor Carla del Ponte sharply criticised Serbian authorities for their lack of co-operation with The Hague-based court. The US ambassador-at-large for war crimes issues says Washington has lost confidence in Belgrade.

By Igor Jovanovic for Southeast European Times in Belgrade – 25/11/04

UN war crimes tribunal chief prosecutor Carla del Ponte, in her regular report to the UN Security Council, has sharply criticised Serbian authorities for their lack of co-operation with the tribunal. At least 12 indictees are on Serbian territory, she said, but Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica has so far refused to take action.

"Premier Kostunica openly showed that he was not willing to arrest them, but only to try to convince them to surrender voluntarily," del Ponte said Tuesday (23 November). "The Serbian government has deliberately chosen to ignore its legal obligations."

Noting that tribunal President Theodor Meron told the Security Council in May that Serbia was failing to co-operate, del Ponte said the government's "defiant attitude towards the tribunal -- which also challenges the Security Council -- has not changed".

As an example, she cited the disappearance of former Croatian Serb leader Goran Hadzic, who is wanted for his alleged role in persecution, murder, forced expulsion and other atrocities committed during the Croatian-Serb conflict. Hadzic disappeared several hours after authorities in Belgrade received the indictment against him on 13 July, raising suspicions that he was tipped off.

Following del Ponte's remarks, US Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes Issues Pierre-Richard Prosper said in an interview that Washington has lost confidence in the Serbian government because of the co-operation issue.



Washington has lost confidence in Serbia's government over its failure to co-operate with the UN tribunal, US Ambassador-at-large for War Crimes Issues Pierre-Richard Prosper said Wednesday (24 November). [AFP]

For this reason, Prosper told the Tanjug agency Wednesday, the United States does not back the processing of war crimes cases in Serbian courts.

Serbia-Montenegro Foreign Minister Vuk Draskovic, meanwhile, said war crimes suspects are holding the nation hostage.

"Hague indictees are being proclaimed national heroes in Serbia," Draskovic said Wednesday. "All of them, including serial killers, here in the country, have multiple levels of protection: political, propaganda, military, police, physical and financial. It's really unreasonable and dangerous for the whole nation not only to be held hostage by indicted war crime suspects, but also by someone who is enthusiastically defending them," he added, referring to Kostunica's stance on extraditions.

For his part, Kostunica has maintained that Serbia is ready to co-operate. "Of course it would be more satisfactory if more had been achieved in this field, but action is being taken. There are some things that cannot be achieved overnight," he said. Kostunica added that authorities are conducting extensive searches to determine whether Ratko Mladic is in Serbia.

On Thursday, del Ponte said there are indications that Kostunica may have changed his stance following the report to the Security Council. "I was informed ... that a meeting was held and that it looked as if Kostunica is now willing to carry out the arrest of indictees," she said.

"I'm expecting concrete results immediately and I'll be grateful if there are," del Ponte said.