

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:

Tuesday, July 27, 2004

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
If you are aware of omissions or have any comments or suggestions please contact
Ibrahim Tommy
Ext 7248
MOBILE: 232 76 645 914

Issa Sesay Is Ill

By Joseph Turay

Former battlefield commander and Interim leader of the Revolutionary United Front, Issa Hassan Sesay, was yesterday reported ill by one of his lawyers at the Special Court.

The Special Court indictee, who is facing 18 count charges of war crimes and



Issa Sesay: sick

other violations of international laws, was conspicuous absent in court and the trial

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Issa Sesay Is Ill

From front page

chamber presided by Justice George Benjamine Itoe announced the absence, say that the accused was "slightly indisposed" and therefore could not attend court sittings.

The learned judge therefore asked the

accused lawyer, British born lawyer Wayne Jordash, to confirm his client's illness and explain to the court what was the state of the Issa's health.

Explaining to the court lawyer Jordash confirmed his client's illness and explained that the accused has been complain-

ing of his heart, adding that he was not sure whether it was malaria but it has to be proven by a medical doctor.

Meanwhile, the trial chamber has said it will have to give some time to the medical authorities at the Special Court to diagnose Sesay's illness.

The Exclusive

Tuesday July 27, 2004

DEFENCE COUNSEL TELLS SPECIAL COURT

ISSA SESAY SUFFERING 'CHEST PAIN'

By Mohamed Mansaray

Defence Counsel for the first RUF Special Court indictee, Issa Sesay reported in court yesterday that his client has been diagnosed with "Heart Pain". Wayne Jordash informed the court that his client also complained of fever and other complications including too much perspiration. He also informed the court that Mr. Sesay was being given medical attention.

Consequently, the counsel informed the court that his client would not be able to attend yesterday's court

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Issa Sick At Special Court

sessions, an application granted by the Chamber.

However, court sources described to SALONE TIMES the complications suffered by the first accused as "minor".

Issa Sesay and two others Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao are facing 18-count indictment for war crimes and crimes committed against civilians by RUF rebels in Sierra Leone between 1996 and 2000.

However, the third accused Augustine Gbao has consistently boycotted court sittings on the grounds that he does not recognise the legitimacy of a court he had described as "political in nature".

In another development, the court upheld an application made by Andreas O'shea defence counsel for the 3rd accused to cross-examine again Prosecution witness TF1-199, in respect of his testimony on July 19, relating to the abduction of UNAMSIL personnel by rebels in Makeni sometime in 1998.

The case is before the Trial Chamber comprising Justice Pierre Boutet, Justice Bankole Thompson and Justice Benjamin Itoe as the Presiding Judge.

The trial continues today.

Salone Times

Tuesday July 27,

2004

Court says Halloway can defend Special Court

The controversy surrounding the right of Eke to represent the Special Court for War Crimes in Sierra Leone has ended at the Supreme Court where lawyer Serry Kamal submitted that Halloway as minister of justice and Attorney General cannot represent the Special Court.

The Coram comprised Hon. Dr. Justice Abdulai Timbo, the Chief Justice, Hon. Justice M.E.T. Thompson

Hon. Mrs. Justice V.A.D. Wright and Hon. Justice Sir John Muria, an expatriate Judge.

In his ruling Dr. Justice Abdulai Timbo pointed out that an act of parliament is presumed valid until the contrary is proved.

He stressed, "... When the court declares unconstitutional a legislative enactment, it is in effect thwarting the collective

will of the elected majority."

The contention has to do with whether Eke Halloway as minister of justice and Attorney General can represent the interest of the Special Court in a case in court. The Special Court are presently in a legal battle at the Supreme Court in matter taken to court by Issa Sesay, Allieu Kondewa, Monina Fofana on their legality in

Sierra Leone. Lawyer Serry Kamal represents Issa and others. The Special Court president, Registrar and prosecutor David Crane are now defending themselves in the matter. They were represented by Eke Halloway, which prompted Lawyer Serry Kamal to file a submission.

But Eke Halloway submitted in court that section 15 (1) of Act NO. 7

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From Front page

of 2002 gives a clear mandate to the Special Court to request or solicit "assistance" from the Attorney-General and minister of justice whenever it deems it necessary.

Lawyer Serry Kamal representing Issa Sesay, Allieu Kondewai and Monina Fofana (in the matter which the Special Court are defending themselves) argued that Eke has no such power. In the ruling, Dr. Justice Abdulai Timbo, the chief justice pointed out that apart from the clause that

mandates Special Court to seek assistance from the Attorney-General and minister of justice, section 15(13) "thereof had also put the question the kind of assistance the Special Court can seek from the Attorney-General and minister of justice beyond a doubt by specifically providing in section 3 that states, "Nothing in this Act shall limit the type of assistance the Special Court can request from the Attorney General and minister of justice under the Agreement."

"This, in my opinion,

clearly not exclude assistance for legal representation in court," the CJ Declared.

He concluded! "I see no reason why the Attorney General and minister of Justice cannot appear on behalf of 1st, 2nd and 3rd defendants in the proceeding before us as long as he has been so requested under section 15 (1) of the Act.

The ruling now gives Eke Halloway the mandate to represent the Special Court at the Supreme Court in the matter between they on the one hand, Issa Sesay and others on the other.

The Independent

Tuesday July 27, 2004

Continued Times
Tuesday July 27, 2004

SPECIAL COMMENTARY

By Tatafway Tumoe

The Special Court and International Humanitarian Law

A lot of people mistake a short memory for a clear conscience.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone is here to stay. For those who think otherwise, there is really nothing they can do apart from shedding tears for those who might find their relatives, friends or mentors trapped within the cogwheels of justice and truth.

Following the establishment of the Special Court, a lot of press articles, radio phone-in programs and seminars have seen a whole lot of ideas being brought up as to why the Special Court should operate, or why it should not operate etc etc. The end in this case will certainly justify the means. What however some sections of the Sierra Leonean community fail to realize is that the crimes for which Hinga Norman and others are alleged to have committed are not only against Sierra Leonean law but international laws. They might have committed them in Sierra Leone but the crimes transcend borders. That explains why Charles Taylor is also found wanting. The Special Court for Sierra Leone is therefore a very important component in our search for a civilized world where people will not be allowed to take any action with impunity without thinking of the consequences. David Crane is really doing a grand job not only for Sierra Leone but the world.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone is guided along the premise of International Humanitarian Law, which in essence was brought about through the great effort of the International Committee of the Red Cross founded by five Swiss citizens in 1863 (Henry Duncant, Guilloume-Henri Dufour, Gustavu Moynier, Louis Appia and Theodove Maunoir). According to the ICRC, International Humanitarian Law forms a major part of Public International Law. These are laws which in times of war are there to protect the people who are no

longer taking part in the conflict and "to restrict the methods and means of warfare." International Humanitarian Law also known as the Law of Armed Conflict or Law of War has two branches:

The Law of Geneva

As the name implies, this law was codified in the city of Geneva and is "designed to safeguard military personnel who are no longer taking part in the fighting and people who are not actively involved in hostilities, e.g. civilians. The Geneva Convention of 1864 is the starting point of International Humanitarian Law as we know it today. Indeed, since there is no society without its own set of rules, so there has never been a war that did not have rules covering the outbreak or the end of hostilities.

The Law of The Hague

The Law of The Hague on the other hand establishes the rights and obligations of the opposing forces in the conduct of military operations and also limits the means of harming the enemy.

Prior to the establishment of the International Humanitarian Law, philosophers had taken up the challenge of regulating wars. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the 18th century French philosopher had formulated principles about war. According to Rousseau, "war is in no way a relationship of man with man, but a relationship between states in which individuals are enemies only by accident, not as men, nor even as citizens but as soldiers," he went on further to say that "since the object of war is to destroy the enemy, it is legitimate to kill the latter's defenders as long as they are carrying arms, but as soon as they lay them down and surrender they cease to be enemies or agents of the enemy, and again become mere men and it is no longer legitimate to take their lives.

TO BE CONTINUED



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Nigeria Sets Date for Taylor Asylum Challenge

Mon Jul 26, 2004 09:36 AM ET

By Dino Mahtani

LAGOS (Reuters) - A Nigerian court set a Sept. 15 date for the start of a challenge to former Liberian president Charles Taylor's asylum in Nigeria by two men tortured by rebels he controlled, prosecution lawyers said on Monday.

Taylor, granted asylum in Nigeria last year in return for giving up power in Liberia, was indicted on 17 counts of crimes against humanity by a U.N.-backed court in Sierra Leone for his involvement in a decade-long war which killed 50,000 people.

Nigerian businessmen David Anyaele and Emmanuel Egbuna say they were attacked by rebels backed by Taylor in the Sierra Leone capital of Freetown in 1999. They hacked off Anyaele's arms and set him on fire, and mutilated Egbuna's wrists.

"The judge will start hearing the preliminary proceedings on the 15th of September, after Taylor was formally served his court papers last week," Mutiu Ganiyu, one of the plaintiffs' lawyers, told Reuters by phone from the capital Abuja.

A Nigerian high court ruled earlier this month that Taylor could be served notice of the challenge through advertisements in the Nigerian press following failed attempts by the prosecution to gain access to Taylor, who lives in a heavily defended villa in the southeastern port town of Calabar.

Any further court proceedings, including a possible court summons for Taylor, would not have been possible without the action.

The Nigerian government has refused to hand Taylor to the U.N.-backed court in Sierra Leone, saying his asylum was agreed as part of a cease-fire with rebels surrounding the Liberian capital Monrovia to prevent another bloodbath.

Nigeria's president Olusegun Obasanjo said last week it was a "matter of honor" that he would only hand back Taylor to an elected government in Liberia, if the government requested it.

The United States has pressured Nigeria to hand over the former warlord before the U.N. tribunal's mandate expires at the end of 2005.

In an executive order, President Bush last week froze the assets of Taylor and 28 people close to him, including his wife, ex-wives and children. It followed a similar move by the United Nations in March.

The Sierra Leone court dismissed an appeal by Taylor who said he should be entitled to immunity as he was head of state at the time of his indictment last year.

The Nigerian plaintiffs argue that Nigeria should not have granted Taylor asylum under African Union and Geneva Convention guidelines, which prohibit asylum to war criminals.

Sierra Leone's rebels became notorious for hacking off the limbs of their victims, mass rape and recruiting child soldiers in their bid to dominate the country's diamond-rich areas.

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Liberia's Taylor snubs court

By Ola Awoniyi

Abuja - Former Liberian leader Charles Taylor failed to attend a court hearing on Monday to defend himself against a bid by two Nigerian amputees to force their government to hand him over for international justice.

Emmanuel Egbuna and David Anyaele, who were mutilated by Sierra Leonean rebels in 1999, allege that Taylor had a role in their ordeal and have asked for a judicial review of Nigeria's decision to grant him political asylum.

Taylor has not been summoned to face the court but, along with Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, he is a respondent in a suit designed to force Nigeria to hand him over to a United Nations-backed war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone.

'I am surprised that he did not come to court today'

"We are saying, on the basis of applicable law that Taylor ought not to have been granted asylum," the plaintiffs' lawyer, Mutiu Ganiyu, told the Federal High Court in the Nigerian capital Abuja.

"I am surprised that he did not come to court today but the case will still go ahead if he fails to be represented at the next sitting," he added.

Taylor fled to Nigeria in August last year as rebel fighters closed in on the Liberian capital Monrovia. He was granted asylum by Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo in exchange for not interfering in Liberia's peace process.

Taylor, Obasanjo, Nigeria's justice minister and three government agencies have been named as respondents in the suit. All but Taylor were represented.

In 1999 Egbuna and Anyaele were businessmen working in wartorn Sierra Leone. They were caught by rebel fighters and, like thousands of local civilians, they were tortured and maimed.

Anyaele's arms were severed above the elbow, while Egbuna's hands were partially cut off and left permanently useless.

Judge Stephen Adah adjourned the case to September 15 to consider preliminary objections raised by other parties in the case who would challenge the plaintiffs' right to bring the action and defend the government's policy.

The court adjourned the case earlier this month after the plaintiffs' lawyers complained they could not locate Taylor to serve court papers on him.

Taylor has been living under Obasanjo's protection at a luxury villa in the south-eastern Nigerian city of Calabar.

The two amputees were later given the go-ahead to serve court papers on the former Liberian president through the daily press.

Following the court order, the papers published in two national dailies and copies made available to senior court registrar of the Federal High Court in Abuja and Calabar.

"If you are served with the hearing notice of a matter, it is an indication to you that a case is pending against you and you should come and answer those charges, but he has refused to come," Ganiyu told reporters.

A Libyan-trained guerrilla, Taylor fought his way to power at the head of a brutal rebel army, then fought the latest in his country's long line of civil wars before seeing himself confirmed as Liberia's elected president in 1997.

Soon afterwards Liberia was plunged back into anarchy by a new rebellion.

Taylor, meanwhile, stands accused of backing Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels between 1991 and 2001 in exchange for a share in Sierra Leone's trade in so-called "blood diamonds".

He was forced out of power by a combination of international pressure and the advance of a rebel army on his capital in August last year, and has since been living in comfortable but increasingly isolated exile in Nigeria.

Obasanjo last week defended his decision to protect Taylor, saying his decision to grant him political asylum had helped end Liberia's latest civil war and allowed a new generation of leaders to embark on a peace process.



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Nigerian Court Hearing Case On Charles Taylor Asylum

Carrie Giardino

26 Jul 2004, 16:17 UTC



A Nigerian high court has resumed preliminary hearings in a case brought against former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who has been living in exile in southeastern Nigeria since last year.

The case was brought by two Nigerians, Emmanuel Egbuna and David Anyaele, who accuse Mr. Taylor of supporting the rebel Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone during the war, in exchange for money from Sierra Leone's diamond trade.

A representative from one of the organizations supporting the plaintiffs, Maxwell Kadiri, says the men were horribly maimed by rebel forces.

"The two plaintiffs in this application were otherwise healthy looking, straightforward, frank Nigerian businessmen doing business within their sub-region. They suffered gross violations on their rights in Sierra Leone. They had their limbs cut off by forces loyal to R.U.F., and in fact those who meted out the inhuman treatment to them during the Sierra Leone war said they were acting on instructions of Mr. Taylor, the man in the white mansion in Liberia," he says.

Mr. Taylor was granted asylum in Nigeria after bending to international pressure to relinquish power in Liberia, which had suffered from nearly two decades of civil war.

A U-N-backed special court for war crimes, sitting in Sierra Leone, has indicted Mr. Taylor on 17 counts of human rights violations. But Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo has refused to extradite Mr. Taylor, saying it is a matter of national honor to maintain the commitment of asylum.

Mr. Kadiri says President Obasanjo should be more concerned with granting justice to citizens who have suffered.

He says, "And the question we want to ask is, in what context are we talking of honor here? What happens to those who had their guardians, their families killed, had their limbs cut off, were maimed and suffered fundamental abuses of their rights? How do we place that in the context of honor? What should be the primary responsibility of the government? Is it to its citizens? Is it to the protection of life and property and preservation of law and order? Or is it to uphold certain questionable honor obligations?"

According to Mr. Kadiri, the high court adjourned and the case is due to resume on September 15th.

Last Friday, the U.S. administration froze the assets of Mr. Taylor and 28 people close to him, accusing him of "undermining Liberia's transition to democracy."



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As he appears in Court...

TAYLOR'S ASYLUM ENDS IN NIGERIA

A court in Nigeria's capital is set to resume preliminary hearings in a case against the former Liberian president.

Charles Taylor has been in exile in south-east Nigeria since last August, after its government gave him asylum. The prosecution want Mr Taylor's asylum to be lifted so that he can face charges of war crimes against humanity in the UN-backed Sierra Leone tribunal. The tribunal accuses him of supporting the RUF rebel movement in return for a share of Sierra Leone's diamond wealth. The case in Abuja is

brought by two Nigerian businessmen who travelled to Sierra Leone in 1999, and say that while they were there they were mutilated by rebels of the Revolutionary United Front. Emmanuel Egbuna had both his hands severed at the wrist, while David Anyaele lost his arms and



Charles Taylor, war crimes indictee No. 1



Obasango, custodian of indictee

was then set alight. The men claim the rebels were acting on the orders of then Liberian president Mr Taylor. Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo granted Mr Taylor asylum last year on the condition that he does not involve himself in the peace process in Liberia, but the lawyers for the two men are challenging the legitimacy of the move.

Mr Taylor has been
Continued page 3

living in exile with family and friends in the quiet Nigerian town of Calabar since last year, and the Nigerian government has so far resisted local and international pressure to hand him over to the war crimes tribunal.

In a public address last week, Mr Obasanjo said it was a matter of honour and that he would only hand over Mr Taylor to an elected Liberian government

New Vision

Tuesday July 27, 2004

Trial of Charles Taylor commences

A court in Nigeria's capital has resumed preliminary hearings in a case against the former Liberian president Charles Taylor. Charles Taylor has been in exile in Calabar State, south-east Nigeria since last August, after his government gave him asylum.

The prosecution wants Taylor's asylum to be lifted so that he can face charges of war crimes against humanity at the Special Court for war crimes in Sierra Leone. The tribunal accuses him of supporting the RUF rebel movement in return for a share of Sierra

Leone's diamond wealth. Two Nigerian businessmen who travelled to Sierra Leone in 1999, and were mutilated by rebels of the Revolutionary United Front took their case to court in Abuja. Emmanuel Egbuna had both his hands severed at the wrist, while David

Anyaele lost his arms and was then set alight. The men claim the rebels were acting on the orders of then Liberian president Charles Taylor. President Obasanjo is reported to have said in a public address that he would only hand over Taylor to an elected Liberian government.



Taylor: last days

The Independent

Tuesday July 27, 2004



For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
July 23, 2004

Executive Order Blocking Property of Certain Persons and Prohibiting the Importation of Certain Goods From Liberia

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, including the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) (IEEPA), the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1601 et seq.) (NEA), section 5 of the United Nations Participation Act, as amended (22 U.S.C. 287c) (UNPA), and section 301 of title 3, United States Code, and in view of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1521 of December 22, 2003, and 1532 of March 12, 2004,

I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, note that the actions and policies of former Liberian President Charles Taylor and other persons, in particular their unlawful depletion of Liberian resources and their removal from Liberia and secreting of Liberian funds and property, have undermined Liberia's transition to democracy and the orderly development of its political, administrative, and economic institutions and resources. I further note that the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed on August 18, 2003, and the related ceasefire have not yet been universally implemented throughout Liberia, and that the illicit trade in round logs and timber products is linked to the proliferation of and trafficking in illegal arms, which perpetuate the Liberian conflict and fuel and exacerbate other conflicts throughout West Africa. I find that the actions, policies, and circumstances described above constitute an unusual and extraordinary threat to the foreign policy of the United States and hereby declare a national emergency to deal with that threat. To address that threat, I hereby order:

Section 1. (a) Except to the extent provided in section 203(b)(1), (3), and (4) of IEEPA (50 U.S.C. 1702(b)(1), (3), and (4)), or regulations, orders, directives, or licenses that may be issued pursuant to this order, and notwithstanding any contract entered into or any license or permit granted prior to the effective date of this order, all property and interests in property of the following persons, that are in the United States, that hereafter come within the United States, or that are or hereafter come within the possession or control of United States persons, are blocked and may not be transferred, paid, exported, withdrawn, or otherwise dealt in:

- (i) the persons listed in the Annex to this order; and
- (ii) any person determined by the Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State:
 - (A) to be or have been an immediate family member of Charles Taylor;
 - (B) to have been a senior official of the former Liberian regime headed by Charles Taylor or otherwise to have been or be a close ally or associate of Charles Taylor or the former Liberian regime;
 - (C) to have materially assisted, sponsored, or provided financial, material, or technological support for, or goods or services in support of, the unlawful depletion of Liberian resources, the removal of Liberian resources from that country, and the secreting of Liberian funds and property by any person

whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant

to this order; or

(D) to be owned or controlled by, or acting or purporting to

act for or on behalf of, directly or indirectly, any person

whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant

to this order.

(b) I hereby determine that the making of donations of the type of articles specified in section 203(b)(2) of IEEPA (50 U.S.C. 1702(b)(2)) by, to, or for the benefit of, any person whose property or interests in property are blocked pursuant to paragraph (a) of this section would seriously impair my ability to deal with the national emergency declared in this order, and I hereby prohibit such donations as provided by paragraph (a) of this section.

(c) The prohibitions in paragraph (a) of this section include, but are not limited to,

(i) the making of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services by, to, or for the benefit of, any person whose property or interests in property are blocked pursuant to this order, and

(ii) the receipt of any contribution or provision of funds, goods, or services from any such person.

Sec. 2. Except to the extent provided in regulations, orders, directives, or licenses that may be issued pursuant to this order, and notwithstanding any contract entered into or any license or permit granted prior to the effective date of this order, the direct or indirect importation into the United States of any round log or timber product originating in Liberia is prohibited.

Sec. 3. (a) Any transaction by a United States person or within the United States that evades or avoids, has the purpose of evading or avoiding, or attempts to violate any of the prohibitions set forth in this order is prohibited.

(b) Any conspiracy formed to violate any of the prohibitions set forth in this order is prohibited.

Sec. 4. For purposes of this order: (a) the term "person" means an individual or entity;

(b) the term "entity" means a partnership, association, trust, joint venture, corporation, group, subgroup, or other organization;

(c) the term "United States person" means any United States citizen, permanent resident alien, entity organized under the laws of the United States or any jurisdiction within the United States (including foreign branches), or any person in the United States; and

(d) the term "round log or timber product" means any product classifiable in Chapter 44 of the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States.

Sec. 5. For those persons whose property and interests in property are blocked pursuant to section 1 of this order who might have a constitutional presence in the United States, I find that because of the ability to transfer funds or other assets instantaneously, prior notice to such persons of measures to be taken pursuant to this order would render these measures ineffectual. I therefore determine that for these measures to be effective in addressing the national emergency declared in this order, there need be no prior notice of a listing or determination made pursuant to section 1 of this order.

Sec. 6. The Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, is hereby authorized to take such actions, including the promulgation of rules and regulations, and to employ all powers granted to the President by IEEPA and UNPA as may be necessary to carry out the purposes of this order. The Secretary of the Treasury may redelegate any of these functions to other officers and agencies of the United States Government, consistent with applicable law. All agencies of the United States Government are hereby directed to take all appropriate measures within their authority to carry out the provisions of this order and, where appropriate, to advise the Secretary of the Treasury in a timely manner of the measures taken.

Sec. 7. The Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, is hereby authorized to submit the recurring and final reports to the Congress on the national emergency declared in this order, consistent with section 401(c) of NEA, 50 U.S.C. 1641(c), and section 204(c) of IEEPA, 50 U.S.C. 1703(c).

Sec. 8. The Secretary of the Treasury, in consultation with the Secretary of State, is hereby authorized to determine, subsequent to the issuance of this order, that circumstances no longer warrant the inclusion of a person in the Annex to this order and that the property and interests in property of that person are therefore no longer blocked pursuant to section 1 of this order.

Sec. 9. This order is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, instrumentalities, or entities, its officers or employees, or any other person.

Sec. 10. This order is effective at 12:01 a.m. eastern daylight time on July 23, 2004.

Sec. 11. This order shall be transmitted to the Congress and published in the Federal Register.

GEORGE W. BUSH

THE WHITE HOUSE,

July 22, 2004.

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Darfur crisis catches worldwide attention

www.chinaview.cn 2004-07-27 16:07:18

KHARTOUM, July 26 (Xinhuanet) -- The crisis in western Sudan's Darfur region has been on the agenda of several major meetings and caught massive attention from the international community over the past month.

The conflict in the region led to discussions among leaders of various countries at the EU-US summit, the G-8 summit and the summit of the African Union in June.

Earlier this month, both UN Secretary General Kofi Annan and US Secretary of State Colin Powell flew to the African country to exchange views with Sudanese leaders on the issue.

Like other African nations, Sudan's borders were demarcated in the colonial era. Tangled ethnic and religious conflicts have resulted in surging violence in the country.

The region of Darfur was plunged into a conflict in February 2003, when two rebel forces took up arms against the Sudanese government. They accused the authorities of not protecting them from the attacks of Arab militias and asked for regional autonomy.

Under intensive international peace-making efforts, the government reached a cease-fire agreement with the armed opposition in April. But the accord has not been seriously carried out, with civilians still being killed.

Preliminary estimates put the death toll at some 30,000. More than a million people have fled their homes in the turmoil.

The pressure on the Sudanese government to solve the conflict mounted while diplomatic talks went on.

US Secretary of State Powell presented a revised draft resolution to the UN Security Council last Thursday, threatening to impose UN sanctions on the Sudanese government if it fails to arrest leaders of Arab militias operating in the Darfur region.

The European Union also joined the choir for sanctions on Monday after a meeting of foreign ministers of its member states.

On its part, the Sudanese authorities blamed the violence in Darfur on the rebels and turned down their request for autonomy while bluntly denying having any links with the Arab militias.

The Sudanese government also voiced strong opposition to international military intervention, arguing that the Darfur conflict is Sudan's internal affair.

The country also rejected resolutions passed last Thursday by the US Congress which declared that Arab militias' attacks in the Darfur region amounted to a "genocide."

External Relations Minister Mustafa Othman Ismail said the Bush administration was aiming to vie for ballots from black voters by making such irresponsible remarks on the Darfur issue.

His remarks were echoed by Sudanese media which believed that the United States attached great importance to Darfur because of its upcoming presidential election.

In Detroit, the United States, Bush told African Americans on Friday he wanted vote from American blacks and acknowledged his Republican Party had "a lot of work to do" to win the support of blacks.
Enditem