

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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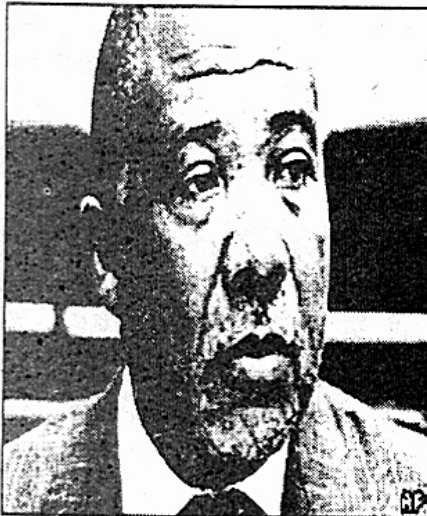
Liberia's Taylor Trial Adjourned

The war crimes trial of Liberia's ex-President Charles Taylor has been adjourned until 3 July.

The delay is to appoint a defence team after Mr Taylor sacked his lawyer. Mr Taylor is boycotting The Hague trial, saying he will not get a fair hearing.

He is accused of backing rebels in Sierra Leone in an 11-year campaign that killed thousand of civilians. He denies all the charges.

It is the first case of its kind against an African former leader.



TAYLOR:butcher

Before Monday's session, court official Vincent Nmehielle said Mr Taylor had called him to say he would not attend the court. "He [Taylor] said the chamber knows why he will not be in court," said Mr Nmehielle, responsible for the rights of the accused.

But presiding judge Julia Sebutinde said: "For the record, the chamber does not know. We have not officially been informed why Mr Taylor is not in court." When the trial opened on 4 June, Mr Taylor also refused to attend court, saying in a letter to judges that he did not believe he would get a fair hearing. He also said he was sacking his lawyer, Karim Khan. Mr Taylor has been indicted

on 11 charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law over his alleged role in the brutal civil war in Sierra Leone. The charges include terrorising the civilian population, murder, sexual violence, physical violence, using child soldiers, enslavement and looting.

Mr Taylor pleaded not guilty to all the charges when he appeared in court in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in March 2006. The trial was moved to The Hague because of fears it could lead to renewed tensions within Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Awoko

Tuesday, 26 June 2007

Taylor's trial comes up June 3

The trial of former Liberia's President, Charles Taylor, was yesterday adjourned by the trial judges of the Special Court to July 3.

Prosecution will continue with their seating until July 11, during this time the duty counsel, Charles Jalloh, will be seating until August 20th.

Meanwhile, the court has ordered the principal defender, Vincent

Nmehielle, to assemble lead counsel, two counsels and one senior investigator.

During the start of the trial on 4 June, Mr Taylor sacked his lawyer, Karim Khan, and said he was boycotting The Hague trial, alleging that he would not get a fair hearing.

The former president is accused of backing rebels in Sierra Leone in an eleven-year campaign that killed thousands of civilians.

He denies all the charges against him.

Before yesterday's session, Vincent Nmehielle said Mr Taylor called him to say he would not attend the court. "He [Taylor] said the chamber knows why he will not be in court," said Mr Nmehielle, responsible for the rights of the accused.

But presiding judge Julia Sebutinde said: "For the record, the chamber does not know. We have not officially been informed why Mr Taylor is not in court."

“Paramount Helicopter Was Not Air Worthy”

– *Technical Report States*

In the wake of the crash of the MI/8 helicopter, leading to the death of twenty two people, facts about the non-air worthiness of the killer helicopter have started to unfold. A source in Canada said yesterday that the Chief Technical Advisor of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), Sam Owiredu, had carried out a four day audit mis-

sion to Sierra Leone at the request of the Department of Civil Aviation in Freetown to determine the

air worthiness of five potential helicopter operators, all of them request-

Contd back page

PARAMOUNT HELICOPTER WAS NOT AIR WORTHY

From page 1
ing permission to com-

mence operations in Sierra Leone, but only two were audited by the ICAO Chief Technical Advisor because these were the two that had helicopters in Sierra Leone.

The two companies with helicopters at the time of the audit were the then existing operator, Paramount Airlines and a newly registered operator, UTAir, which had arrived from South Africa.

The other three companies did not have helicopters in Sierra Leone and therefore, their machines were not audited.

The air worthiness survey on Paramount Airlines shows the following:

1. Paramount Airlines had operated in Sierra Leone for over ten years, but during those ten years had gained a bad reputation with the traveling public.

2. There were a number of serious near-fatal incidents reported to ICAO by local residents who saw Paramount Airlines as operating unreliable equipments.

3. The bad image of Paramount Airlines was carried both in the local press and overseas newspapers even though the management of Paramount Airlines denied the allegations proffered by the media.

4. ICAO further stated

that subsequent to the investigation by the Chief Technical Advisor, there were already indications that there were some truths in the allegation of a bad reputation already earned by Paramount, but that it was not possible to fully confirm the details.

The ICAO report which has been edited and circulated raised the following concerns:

a. The aircraft operated by Paramount Airlines when audited were found to consist of 32 weaknesses or findings which demonstrated that Paramount Airlines did not meet acceptable standards for an air operator holder.

Furthermore, all the areas audited revealed a frightening non-conformance findings which demonstrated

a. Failure to fully comply with applicable regulation requirements

b. Ineffective management control of the organization

c. Ineffective system control through the company manuals

d. Lack of effective quality control to ensure satisfactory standards.

The findings on the weaknesses of Paramount Airlines were further emphasized by the fact that the aircraft were operated with:

1. Crews that had not been checked and trained in accordance with requirements

2. Safety and emer-

gency equipment standards were not met

3. Substandard maintenance being carried out

4. Required manuals and procedures not available.

According to the source, ICAO had complained that by virtue of not complying with mandatory requirements, Paramount Airlines operated aircraft in commercial service with the certificate of air worthiness NOT IN FORCE.

UTAir, which had still not commenced operation at the time of the audit, was also audited and the audit report discovered ten findings and most of these findings had to do with the removal or addition of certain equipment for the comfort of the passengers.

The government of Sierra Leone has set up a committee, comprising representatives of Sierra Leone, Togo, Gabon and France, the home countries of the victims who perished during the crash, to investigate the cause that led to the explosion of the Paramount Airlines helicopter and to also find out the weaknesses and non-air worthiness that could have caused the crash of the helicopter.

An authoritative source said in Freetown yesterday, "taking into consideration the concerns raised by the ICAO Chief Technical Advisor, Paramount Airlines had no business to fly an aircraft in Sierra Leone under the circumstances in which they did."

The Trial of Charles Taylor website

Monday, 25 June 2007

<http://charlestaylortrial.org>

Trial Chamber Finds Taylor's No-Show Tantamount to Boycott of Trial and Nullifies Self-Representation

The Hague

Following opening statements a few weeks ago, the trial of Charles Taylor was expected to resume today in the Hague with the Prosecution presenting its first witness. But after Taylor himself failed to appear, the trial took a different turn as the Court wrestled with the question of who would represent Taylor in the proceedings. The Court ultimately ruled that Taylor's failure to appear was tantamount to a boycott of the proceedings and that Taylor, therefore, could not be permitted to represent himself. The Principal Defender, Vincent O. Nmehielle, suggested to Taylor that he be assigned counsel and indicated that Taylor was open to this idea, but the Principal Defender disagreed with the Registry and the Prosecution about the composition of the defense team and the implications the new assignment should have on the timing of the trial.

The Court ruled that the Principal Defender is to immediately appoint new counsel to assume control of Taylor's defense while the Registry is to ensure that by July 31, 2007, a defense team acceptable to the Court is in place.

The proceedings will resume on Tuesday, July 3 and continue through July 11. The case will then be adjourned again until August 20, 2007.

Taylor's Attempt to Represent Himself

Before the trial commenced on June 4, 2007, Taylor wrote a letter [posted here [taylor_1.pdf](#)] to the Presiding Judge complaining that he was being denied his rights to a fair trial and advising the Court that he no longer wanted to be represented by his assigned counsel, Karim Khan, and his co-counsel. When the trial opened on June 4, Khan explained that Taylor wanted to represent himself.

At that hearing, the Court directed the Registry to (i) facilitate a meeting between Taylor and the Principal Defender, and (ii) ensure that Taylor had adequate facilities to prepare his defense. Those consultations took place between the Principal Defender and Taylor, and written submissions were separately filed by the Principal Defender, Registry and Prosecution concerning the Court's order.

The Principal Defender's submission, filed on June 12, stated that "[n]ew counsel should not be appointed; rather, Mr Khan should continue as [Mr Taylor's] counsel to avoid the loss of more time than necessary." Two days later, though, the Principal Defender granted Mr Khan's request for withdrawal and, on June 20, submitted an extensive report with its recommendations for representing Taylor and providing him with adequate facilities to conduct his defense. The Principal Defender recommended the assignment of one new lead counsel at the rank of a Queen's Counsel or its equivalent, one experienced senior counsel, two co-counsel, and two legal assistants. The Acting Registrar objected to this proposal arguing that it goes far beyond the number and standards provided by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

The applicable rules that govern the proceedings (Article 24(d) and Article 25 of the Directive on the Assignment of Counsel) require that, in the event counsel withdraws, "the Principal Defender shall immediately assign a new Counsel to the Suspect or Accused." And, "where the assignment of Counsel is withdrawn by the Principal Defender or where the services of assigned counsel are discontinued, duty counsel of the defense office, including the Principal Defender, shall give the Suspect or Accused legal assistance until a new counsel is assigned." Rule 45(c) also lists the following requirements for counsel: "(i) speak fluent English; (ii) be admitted to practice law in any State; (iii) have at least 7 years' relevant experience; and (iv) have indicated their willingness and full-time availability to be assigned by the Special Court to suspects or accused."

The Court's Ruling on the Assignment of Counsel

The Court agreed with the Prosecution that Taylor's absence, in conjunction with his stated intention to represent himself, amounts to a boycott of the trial. According to the Trial Chamber, Taylor accepted that he must be assigned and be represented by counsel. There was disagreement between the Principal Defender on the one hand and the Prosecution and the Registry on the other as to how this could be best accomplished. The Registry expressed concern that the funds requested to facilitate the new defense team were excessive and proposed to appoint interim counsel drawing on the former defense team. However, both lead counsel and co-counsel from the former defense team have severed all ties with the Court. For the Prosecution, Brenda Hollis argued that the accused most certainly has a right to be represented by competent counsel. The accused does not have a right to simultaneously represent himself and be absent from the proceedings. Certainly, the Prosecutor urged, the accused should not have the right to come and go as he pleases.

After adjourning for an hour and a half, the Court issued its ruling, directing the Registrar and the Principal Defender to make both short and long-term arrangements for Taylor's defense.

First, however, the Presiding Judge emphasized that since early March 2007 both the Acting Registrar and the Principal Defender had been aware of the issue of inadequate representation. Presiding Judge Julia Sebutinde was displeased that the Registrar had primarily been occupied with budgetary constraints and had not focused on issues of fair trial. If the Court is to respect the fair trial rights of the accused, she said, then resources must be provided. The Presiding Judge also recalled that the Trial Chamber had been warned previously about this concern and that "today, the Chamber's worst fears were realized." The Court emphasized the importance of avoiding additional delays and was dismayed that the delays were caused by the Court's own institutions. In this respect, the Prosecution noted that it was in fact Taylor's manipulative tactics that caused the delays of the proceedings, and that Taylor should not be allowed to profit from a situation of his own making.

The Presiding Judge stressed that the Statute, the Rules and the Directives do not envisage a "vacuum" in legal representation. In this light, she ordered the following short-term measures. The Principal Defender is directed to comply immediately with the rules and requirements on the assignment of counsel and to assign new counsel either from the list or from the office of the Principal Defender. In this respect, if possible, former members of the Taylor defense team are to be retained (we note again, however, that both the lead counsel and the co-counsel have severed ties with the Court, leaving only legal assistants). Meanwhile, if there is no assigned counsel by then, duty counsel is directed to appear in court to represent Taylor when the trial recommences on July 3.

By July 31, the Acting Registrar is ordered to ensure that the Principal Defender assemble a defense team consisting of one lead counsel and two co-counsel in conformity with the qualifications set out in the rules, and one senior investigator. These are to supplement the residual members of the defense team.

The Principal Defender stated that he did not envisage to be able to respond to all outstanding motions in time. The Presiding Judge noted that they were welcome to file motions for more time.

Schedule

The court will next sit from July 3 through 11. It will resume again August 21, 2007.

The Monitor (Kampala)

Tuesday, 26 June 2007

Sebutinde Warns Taylor On Boycott

By Rodney Muhumuza & Agencies

FORMER Liberian President Charles Taylor skipped his war crimes trial for a second time yesterday, prompting Justice Julia Sebutinde to issue a terse warning against "undue delay".

The trial was delayed until Tuesday next week after Mr Taylor failed to show up, saying he could not afford an able defence team. Mr Taylor, who is charged with instigating murder, rape and mutilation during Sierra Leone's civil war in quest for the country's diamonds, boycotted the start of his trial on June 4.

"Judge Julia Sebutinde expressed frustration, not only with Taylor but with officials with the U.N.-backed special tribunal for Sierra Leone," Reuters reported. "He sacked his lawyer and declared the trial would not be fair, adding in a letter he intended to defend himself."

Justice Sebutinde was quoted during the proceedings as saying: "The accused does not have the option to appear before this court as and when he chooses to."

Justice Sebutinde, a Ugandan-born lawyer, is chairing the panel of four judges in the trial conducted in The Hague in the Netherlands.

Justice Sebutinde reportedly said adequate resources must be provided in the interests of a fair trial, ordering the court to ensure Taylor had another four people boosting his defence team, including a lead counsel, by July 31.

Justice Sebutinde is renowned for her characteristic straight-talk, made prominent during a series of inquiries she conducted on behalf of the government between 1999 and 2001.

"We have frowned upon undue delay in this court. That it would come from an institution within this court is really regrettable," Reuters quoted her as saying.

Mr Vincent Nmehielle, the court's principal defender, said Mr Taylor also wanted to avoid undue delay and had been persuaded to accept a lawyer rather than defend himself, although there were not enough funds from the court to hire a capable lawyer.

Earlier this month the president of the court and its prosecutor told the U.N. Security Council available funds would be exhausted by November and another \$60 million was needed from voluntary contributions. The prosecution will be allowed to begin presenting its case on July 3.

Mr Taylor has pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, related to the 1991-2002 civil war during which an estimated 50,000 people were killed. The fighting in Sierra Leone was noted for its exceptional brutality and for the conscription of child soldiers as young as 8.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was set up jointly by the country's government and the United Nations in 2002 to try those deemed most responsible for human rights violations during the later stages of the civil war.

At the time, prosecutors said they would produce strong and compelling evidence to back claims that Mr Taylor directed Revolutionary United Front rebels as they carried out a campaign of terror against Sierra Leone's civilians. Human rights activists and pro-democracy campaigners hope the trial can send a signal that nobody can escape punishment for atrocities, including heads of state.

"Prosecutors hope the trial will end impunity for African strongmen as well as send a signal that international justice can operate efficiently and fairly," Reuters reported. "However, some observers fear Taylor is intent on disrupting proceedings

Uganda Sunday Monitor

Wednesday, 27 June 2007

Lessons from Taylor's trial

Inside Politics | June 27 - July 3, 2007

If fate had decided otherwise, August 2, 2007 would have been celebrated as Liberia's "Liberation Day" with the "revolutionary liberator" Charles Ghankay Taylor as main celebrant. By that date Mr Taylor would have been marking the end of his 2nd elective term in office and a total ten years in power which he had gained in 1997.

But that day, which is hardly two months away, will find Mr Taylor not on the podium of the equivalent of our own Kololo Independence grounds, Bible in hand promising to protect and defend the constitution of his country but incarcerated in a jail, at the Hague in the Netherlands, where he is facing trial before a special UN tribunal. No body, including Taylor, would have imagined or even dreamt of the turn of events.

With a Ugandan judge, Lady Justice Julia Sebutinde taking charge over Taylor's trial, the Ugandan population and especially the media is following the developments, at the Hague, with unprecedented keenness. The meaning is that Ugandans should take lessons from Taylor's trial.

Born January 28, 1948 Taylor waged a brutal guerrilla war against the government of Liberia that saw him attain power in 1997. Amazingly, unlike many so called African liberators or revolutionaries, Taylor ascended to power a year after the end of hostilities meaning that he did not shoot his way until State House but emerged through an election in which he scored an amazing landslide at 75 percent of the vote which some observers judged free and fair.

It was indeed free and fair but also filled Liberians with a lot of fear for they were afraid that should Taylor lose then he would return to the bush. As the drama surrounding Taylor's trial resumed at the Hague I reflected back and tried to draw parallels with Uganda.

In this fair country's first democratic election 10 years after the 1986 liberation, skulls from Luwero Triangle were used as a key campaign tool complete with messages warning voters to vote wisely or risk a return to the Luwero situation!

In the election that followed in 2001, a fear that should certain people fail to win would spell doom was still high, and in 2006 it was the threat of increased rebel activity, particularly by of PRA, that dictated the results in some areas.

Taylor's experience is an important lesson for Uganda and the rest of Africa.

First it is a bad idea to use all means possible to attain power but even worse to assume you have 'arrived' once you gain your coveted trophy-State Power.

At the time Mr Taylor's trial resumed, a court in Iraq sentenced some more men from the former allies of the late Iraq dictator Saddam Hussein.

The men, including the acclaimed "Chemical Ali", while still in power executed their duties with unimaginable zeal. They carried chanted claiming to be working in the interest of the people of Iraq but actually ended up destroying the country, forgot to think of the consequences, did not advise their leader and definitely never planned for what is happening today.

In the end they have destroyed all the three reasons that kept them in power, their leader, themselves and their country. No wonder, they are now facing the music.

Taylor will not represent himself in trial



By Muntu Lukhozi

Since Charles Taylor, the former Liberian president, declared himself indigent, he has been receiving legal assistance from the Special Court.

Julia Sebutinde, the presiding judge over the trial, before the beginning of the proceedings yesterday, demanded to know why Taylor had not attended his trial. "Could you explain first of all why Taylor is not in court" the judge asked Vincent Nmehille, Taylor's principal defender.

It did not come as a surprise that Taylor's seat remained vacant at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague. When his trial resumed, many hoped he would grace the proceedings with his presence. However, his concerns had not been addressed. Ready to call its first witness, the prosecution instead had to watch the exchanges between the judges and the principal defender.

The UN says Taylor's trial is a sign that no one is above the law

"Taylor's needs had already been spelt out - nothing less than top counsels, who will compliment the unique nature of this trial. It boils down to finances. The court survives on donations, therefore cannot afford high legal costs for Taylor," the judge said.

Annoyed judge

Clearly annoyed over delays, the judge announced the postponement of the trial. Taylor will no longer defend himself. His legal defence team will be put together. The Special Court for Sierra Leone has charged him with 11 counts of crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of international law.

Last week the court delivered guilty verdicts on three defendants who participated in the civil war in Sierra Leone under the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. Another verdict is expected soon on Civil Defence Force members.

The Analyst (Monrovia)

Tuesday, 26 June 2007

Defiant Taylor's Request Granted

The Acting Registrar of the Special Court for Sierra Leone currently sitting at The Hague has instructed the Principal Defender to find a new Lead Counsel for former President Charles Taylor's request for a new defense team.

Taylor, 59, had said in a letter to judges that he was firing his attorney, British lawyer Karim Khan. "I cannot participate in a charade that does injustice to the people of Sierra Leone," Taylor wrote. He now wants to defend himself.

There were no defense attorneys for Taylor in court Monday, meaning that prosecution plans to take testimony from their first witness almost certainly will not go ahead.

The Acting Registrar, Herman von Hebel Vincent says he is willing to increase the lump sum for monthly contractual fees previously agreed from \$45,000 to \$50,000 for the trial stage.

However, on June 21, the Acting Registrar submitted that Mr. Taylor's request for self-representation cannot be accepted because it would not be in the interest of justice. Mr. Taylor who is not qualified as a counsel, had stated that he was seeking a new defense team.

On conditions of Detention and Visitation, the Registrar says he has contacted the ICRC to conduct an independent assessment of the ICC Detention Centre and interview the accused with regards to his food and communication issues.

On June 20, the President of the Special Court ruled that the Acting Registrar has reasonable grounds for imposing restrictions and conditions of communication of the Accused.

The Registrar notes that Mr. Taylor fails to acknowledge that he is under strict regime of communication restriction. On visa requests, the Registrar, out of 10 family members of Mr. Taylor who have so far applied for visa for visiting the detainee, five were US citizens.

Family members from the United States are entitled to remain in the territory of the Netherlands up to three months. Applications from five family members requiring visa have been approved.

When his trial opened June 4, Taylor also refused to leave his cell in a special wing of a Dutch seaside jail, saying he did not believe he would get a fair hearing and complaining that he had insufficient funds to pay for his defense.

At the resumption of his war crimes trial yesterday, Mr. Taylor, again blocking efforts to try him on charges of arming Sierra Leone rebels and orchestrating a murderous terror campaign during that country's 10-year civil war, boycotted the trial.

I got a call this morning that Mr. Taylor said he will not be in court," said Vincent Nmehielle, the court's principal defender who is responsible for ensuring Taylor can mount an adequate defense to the charges.

"He said the chamber knows why he will not be in court." Presiding judge Julia Sebutinde angrily responded: "For the record, the chamber does not know. We have not been officially informed why Mr. Taylor is not in court."

Mr. Taylor has pleaded not guilty to 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity for allegedly arming Sierra Leone rebels and orchestrating a murderous terror campaign they waged during their country's 10-year civil war that ended in 2002.

His trial is being held in the Netherlands for fear it could spark more unrest if staged in Sierra Leone.

Without even appearing in court, Taylor has managed to turn officials against one another. Nmehielle has accepted Taylor's decision to drop Khan; however prosecutors and the court's registrar have not and say that only judges have the power to take Khan off the case.

In a response to the Principal Defender, Vincent O.Nmehielle's Public Pleading submission, senior prosecution trial attorney Brenda Hollis suggested Taylor was trying to stall the case and urged judges not to let that happen.

"Neither protection of the rights of the accused nor the interests of justice require a postponement of the resumption of the prosecution case," Hollis wrote. In his opening statement on June 4, the court's chief prosecutor Stephen Rapp said witnesses will directly link Taylor to crimes committed by rebels.

The Liberian leader shipped rebels arms, ammunition and supplies such as alcohol and drugs used to desensitize children forced to fight, Rapp said. In return he got diamonds, often mined by slave laborers.

Last week the Sierra Leone court issued its first verdicts, convicting three former Sierra Leonean military leaders on multiple counts of war crimes, including the first-ever conviction for using child soldiers by an international court.

The men - Alex Tamba Brima, Brima Bazzy Kamara and Santigie Borbor Kanu - were indicted in 2003 as the alleged leaders of the junta, called the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council.

The group of former military officers toppled Sierra Leone's government in 1997 and then teamed up with rebels to control the country until 1998, according to the indictment. Prosecutors say the rebels were among those supported by Taylor.

BBC

Monday, 25 June 2007

Liberia's Taylor trial adjourned

The war crimes trial of Liberia's ex-President Charles Taylor has been adjourned until 3 July.

The delay is to appoint a defence team after Mr Taylor sacked his lawyer. Mr Taylor is boycotting The Hague trial, saying he will not get a fair hearing.

He is accused of backing rebels in Sierra Leone in an 11-year campaign that killed thousand of civilians. He denies all the charges.

It is the first case of its kind against an African former leader.

Before Monday's session, court official Vincent Nmehielle said Mr Taylor had called him to say he would not attend the court until he was provided with enough resources to match those available to the prosecution.

The court heard that meant the appointment of higher-calibre lawyers, and what was referred to as a Scotland Yard - or CIA-type investigator to help the defence team.

The prosecution objected, saying Mr Taylor had tried to delay proceedings by waiting until the start of the trial before sacking his first lawyer; he should not be allowed to benefit from a situation of his own making.

But presiding judge Julia Sebutinde ruled that adequate resources had to be provided to the defence and said the court's registry had not moved quickly enough to ensure those were in place.

'Not guilty'

When the trial opened on 4 June, Mr Taylor also refused to attend court, saying in a letter to judges that he did not believe he would get a fair hearing. He also said he was sacking his lawyer, Karim Khan

Mr Taylor has been indicted on 11 charges of war crimes, crimes against humanity and violations of international humanitarian law over his alleged role in the brutal civil war in Sierra Leone.

The charges include terrorising the civilian population, murder, sexual violence, physical violence, using child soldiers, enslavement and looting.

Mr Taylor pleaded not guilty to all the charges when he appeared in court in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in March 2006.

The trial was moved to The Hague because of fears it could lead to renewed tensions within Sierra Leone and Liberia.



Charles Taylor has said the court is not 'fit for purpose'

CHARLES TAYLOR CHARGES

- Acts of terrorism (WC)
- Murder (CAH)
- Violence to life, in particular murder (WC)
- Rape (CAH)
- Sexual slavery and violence (CAH)
- Outrages upon personal dignity (WC)
- Violence to life, in particular cruel treatment (WC)
- Other inhumane acts (CAH)
- Use of child soldiers (VHL)
- Enslavement (CAH)
- Pillage (WC)

CAH: Crime against humanity

WC: War crime

VHL: Violation of international humanitarian law

The Special Court for Sierra Leone has been approved by both the UN and the government of Sierra Leone.

'Blood diamonds'

Mr Taylor started Liberia's civil war in 1989 and became one of a number of warlords competing for control in the West African country.

He later emerged as Liberia's most powerful politician and won the 1997 presidential election.

Meanwhile in 1991, one of Mr Taylor's comrades-in-arms, Foday Sankoh, started his own rebellion in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The prosecution claims Mr Taylor provided the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) leader with training, money, fighters, arms and ammunition to start the rebellion.

The RUF became notorious for hacking off the hands and legs of civilians during their decade-long war.

It is alleged that Mr Taylor shared a common plan with the RUF's commanders to gain power and control over Sierra Leone, so he could gain access to its diamonds and have a government in Freetown that would support his aims.

Mr Taylor lost power in 2003 after rival militias rose up and forced him into exile in Nigeria.

He was deported by Nigeria last year in controversial circumstances and flown to The Hague to await his trial.



Toronto Globe and Mail

Tuesday, 26 June 2007

Taylor war crimes trial unhinged by false start

Liberia's former president refused to appear in court in The Hague yesterday. His trial has made it more difficult to act against other African dictators and war criminals, critics say

STEPHANIE NOLEN

From Tuesday's Globe and Mail

JOHANNESBURG — Borrowing a page from the playbook of late Serbian leader Slobodan Milosevic, former Liberian president Charles Taylor has succeeded in further stalling his trial in The Hague on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The first witnesses were to take the stand yesterday, testifying to savage rapes, murders and mutilations carried out in neighbouring Sierra Leone by militias allegedly led by Mr. Taylor in the 1990s.

But Mr. Taylor refused to appear in court, sending a message from the seaside Dutch prison where he has been held for the past year that he had fired his lawyer and - despite having amassed a vast personal fortune from illegal diamond and timber sales while in office - that he had inadequate resources to defend himself.

The proceedings at a special session of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (a hybrid national and United Nations body) are being watched intently in Africa. Mr. Taylor is the first sitting African head of state to be indicted for abuses committed on his watch. And, outside Africa, his trial is being hailed as a crucial step toward ending impunity and fortifying the concept of international justice. "Having a former African head of state on trial - even if imperfectly - is in itself incredibly significant," said Caitlin Reiger, who is monitoring the trial for the International Center for Transitional Justice.

"It gives some solace to the victims of the crimes; people that they thought were completely untouchable are not necessarily so." But in Africa, many human-rights advocates and conflict mediators are far less enthused. "All that euphoria that greeted the idea of African ownership, African solutions for African problems - all that is a thing of the past after Taylor's trial," said Peter Kagwanja, president of the Africa Policy Institute in Nairobi. "This is a blow for African governance, and all because some were too hawkish in their need to string up Taylor."

Mr. Kagwanja and other critics are disturbed by several things: First, which the trial is taking place outside Africa. Mr. Taylor won Liberia's presidency in a suspect election in 1997 but was forced out of office in 2003 and agreed to go into exile in a lavish villa in Nigeria in exchange for immunity. But he continued to meddle in Liberian politics, and shortly after Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected Liberia's new president, she asked that he be extradited. Nigeria, under pressure from the United States (which wanted to support Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf), complied.

She then agreed that he should be tried in Europe, for fear that a local trial would disrupt the fragile peace that holds in the region. (Yet it is questionable how much distance the trial provides in this digital age - a live blog from the trial, <http://www.charlestaylortrial.org>, which is maintained by international justice groups, receives most of its comments and feedback from people in West Africa who are following the proceedings in real time.) The second criticism is that Mr. Taylor's trial has made it more difficult to act against other African dictators and war

criminals, who no longer trust any offer of immunity that might have got them out of office. "Since Taylor was put on trial, all African dictators are sitting tight," Mr. Kagwanja said, calling it a return to the politics of the 1970s and '80s, when strongmen stayed in office until they died or were toppled, but never agreed to brokered retirements, a form of transition that had been becoming increasingly common in recent years.

"[South African President Thabo] Mbeki cannot go [to a leader] and say, 'Get out of power, I'll give you immunity' - there is no trust, that is gone." While it would be ideal to see an end to impunity and to see all of those who cause civil wars behind bars, he said, the blunt reality is that the threat of international prosecution undermines the possibility of brokered agreements to end conflicts such as Uganda's civil war or the fighting in Darfur, and thus the chance to save lives.

The most prominent example is Zimbabwe: Despotic President Robert Mugabe is reported to have specifically rejected offers of "retirement" in Namibia or Malawi, brokered by South Africa in recent weeks, because he no longer trusts that he, too, will not end up in The Hague.

If Mr. Taylor had been tried by the new African human-rights court in Mauritius, that would have been an immense boon to African institutions, Mr. Kagwanja said. The former dictator of Chad, Hissène Habré, for example, is facing prosecution through the African Union, a move which has had enthusiastic support from African human-rights advocates.

Locally within Liberia, there is also ambivalence about the trial. Mr. Taylor still has many supporters, while others believe he is being tried as a scapegoat for the misdeeds of a host of people, some of whom have prominent positions in the new government. Many of his victims wanted to see him tried at home, while some of those engaged in rebuilding the shattered nation feel that this is not the appropriate time to be trying civil-war crimes.

Tracey Gurd, a lawyer monitoring the trial for the Open Society Justice Initiative, said she sympathized with fears that the trial will undermine efforts to broker peace in other African conflicts, but that it was not worth sacrificing impunity for an end to fighting.

"Historically, if you look at places where they have forsaken justice for peace, it's not long before it's disrupted again because you run into the same impunity again."

Yesterday's session in The Hague was supposed to hear from the first of 130 witnesses who would describe how militias allegedly controlled by Mr. Taylor abducted and terrorized children, trained them into Small Boys Units and Small Girls Units, and sent them to mutilate and kill, sometimes their own families. Chief prosecutor Stephen Rapp described the war in his opening argument as one of the "ugliest in living memory - the very worst of what human beings are capable of doing to one another." Mr. Taylor does not deny the events in the charge, but says he did not order them carried out and is not responsible for them; he has pled not guilty to all the charges.

Instead of hearing from those first witnesses, yesterday's session was hijacked into arguments among judges and court officials about whether Mr. Taylor had the right to fire his lawyer or defend himself, or even to refuse to appear.

Mr. Taylor is insisting he is in a state of "partial indigence," and thus unable to pay for his own defence team, although he was arrested trying to flee Nigeria with hundreds of thousands of dollars and is believed to have amassed a personal fortune of nearly half a billion dollars. A UN investigations panel recently found that he had considerable wealth, not all of it frozen, and ongoing links to Liberia's largest cellphone consortium.

The court, sensitive to the perception that Mr. Taylor's trial must appear scrupulously fair, has ordered an interim defence counsel to appear for Mr. Taylor when another attempt is made to get witnesses on the stand next week - and a new defence team of four attorneys to be in place by Aug. 20. Mr. Taylor's legal bills have already cost the court, which is funded by donations from Western governments, more than \$700,000.

President's fall

Jan. 28, 1948: Charles Taylor is born in Arthington, Liberia, into a family descended from freed U.S. slaves.

1970s: Mr. Taylor lives in the Boston area, earning an economics degree from Bentley College in Waltham, Mass., but eventually returns to Liberia.

1983: He flees Liberia after being accused of embezzling nearly \$1-million, and is later detained in the United States on a Liberian arrest warrant.

1985: He escapes from a Massachusetts jail.

December, 1989: Mr. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia rebel group launches armed uprising in Liberia, sparking a conflict that leaves 200,000 dead.

1991-2002: Sierra Leone civil war.

Aug. 2, 1997: Mr. Taylor is elected Liberia's president.

March 3, 2003: The Special Court for Sierra Leone indicts Mr. Taylor on 17 charges including murder, rape, sexual slavery, conscripting child soldiers and terrorizing civilians.

Aug. 11, 2003: Mr. Taylor resigns and flees into exile in Nigeria.

March, 2006: He disappears after Nigeria agrees, under international pressure, that he should stand trial.

March 29, 2006: Mr. Taylor is taken into custody as he tries to cross border from Nigeria to Cameroon. He is transferred to the Special Court in Sierra Leone and later sent to UN detention block in The Hague.

June 4, 2007: His trial begins.

The Associated Press

For Taylor.Net

Tuesday, 26 June 2007

<http://www.fortaylor.net>

Here They Come with Cascades of Lies on Taylor Again

By Sylvester Vaanii Paasewe II

In about two weeks, heads of states and governments of Africa will meet in Accra Ghana for the Seventh Ordinary Summit of the African Union. To a large extent this will be a homecoming of the pan-African movement. The one-item agenda focusing on planning a united continental government underscores this overwhelming concordance in time, place and event. Where else could be more suitable to hold this momentous summit than in the birthplace of the representative thinker of a strong and free Africa, Osagefor Kwame Nkrumah.

The stakes are high. Africa cannot fail. As the leaders get down to business at this summit, they would not only reckon the highest good they seek for a people once benighted, but also encounter huge challenges of resistance. The irresistible demand the mix would produce is likely to test the best of Africa. The African leaders must be prepared to invest their hearts, heads, minds, and wills if they are to streak through and persevere against the perennial odds, the disintegrating impact of foreign manipulations often cast in stale arguments against unity and promoting gradualism.

Africa's detractors are not in want of justifications. Predictably, they will taunt Africa with instability in Dafur, Somalia, Chad, and Cote d'Ivoire and brand Africa as a woeful failure at self-governance. The biggest doubts will be cast on the continent's incapability to prevent the recurrence of endemic internal conflicts characterized by "civil wars" and cross-border violence. In the process, Africa cannot avoid discussing lethal trajectory of foreign intrusions into the affairs of other states and their entrenched dominance of the international system,

Outside the big picture, vexing cases that have opened African eyes on neocolonialism will rent the air too. Already the family of former Liberian President Charles Ghankay Taylor has prayed the Summit in Ghana to discuss the trial in The Hague.

In a letter laying the passionate plea to AU Chairman John Kufuor, the Taylor family urged continent's leaders to ensure that justice prevails, warning that the trial is not about Taylor alone, but the future of the African people.

Taylor's defense committee in Monrovia also joined in the request to the AU to assist in raising a private defense team for him, so as to upset existing imbalances between the prosecution and defense as was also observed by the Principal Defender when the trial commenced on June 4, 2007. President Taylor is represented at the trial by Court assigned lawyers on the basis that the defendant is a partial indigent.

When Taylor was arraigned at the Special Court in Freetown on April 3, 2006, he declared his inability to employ private lawyers.. The declaration confounded Taylor's detractors, who had mounted a virulent campaign of misinformation and disinformation about his role in the Sierra Leone and other West African conflicts. Above all, it served as an antithesis to what the enemies had all along parroted.

The contrivers had raised two theories to spread their evil delusions about Taylor. First, he bears the greatest responsibility for the atrocities allegedly committed by dissidents during the course of the war in Sierra Leone. Second, Taylor's interests in Sierra Leone were based on trade in guns in

exchange for blood diamonds peddled by the RUF dissidents. The 11-count indictment laid on Taylor is woven around these theories. However, in the absence of substantive proofs of gunrunning and the diamond trade, the prosecutors have taken to the gallery of concocting and fashioning new accusations which are off tangent to the case.

Essentially the same old reflexes have been employed since 2003 to deceive the public. While the prosecutors and their spin machines continue to exhort the trial of a sitting African president as a war on impunity, for crimes he allegedly committed in Sierra Leone, their vassalages are raising another mantra saying Taylor amassed wealth from monies he earned in trading in Sierra Leone and the sales of Liberia's natural resources.

Sadly, the once respected western media with pretension of champions of truth and justice have assumed the ignoble role of "voices for hire" and spokespersons for the forces of injustice. Commentators of the Fourth Estate or may I say joiners are traducing the noble profession by replicating falsehood and bogus theories in the guise of shedding light on the truth of the matter. Take for example the June 14 and 15, 2007 trashy article by Lydia Polgreen and Marlise Simons in the New York Times and Edith Lederer of the Associated Press, respectively. It flaunts the arrogant pretension of consummate accomplices of evil policies sporting as journalists. Acting on the nagging fact that the political indictment has no basis in law, the writers sucked into the morgue and excavated festering lies, slurs and hate messages about Taylor in a vain attempt to give the bandied indictment a flavor of response suitable to their benefactors.

The upshots are the lies are inconsistent and the story grudging. The writers were clearly concerned with the failure of the so-called international community to prove the anti-Taylor western propaganda that Taylor amassed wealth from gunrunning and trade in blood diamonds. This theory runs contrary to the fact that Taylor could not even afford to employ a private legal defense team. Polgreen, Simons and Lederer quoted diplomatic sources at UN Security Council as saying that the UN has evidence showing that Taylor's wealth has not vanished. By implication, they were wondering what might have happened to the billions Taylor claimed to have amassed.

As was predicted by detached analysts, the anti-Taylor propagandists have shifted the logic by alleging that Taylor made fortunes not only from gunrunning and blood diamonds but by kickbacks on taxes from Liberia's natural resources and investments in Liberia and Nigeria. The total amount accrued from these transactions varies sharply. The New York Times and the Associated Press say Taylor made half a billion dollars, but the UN panel of experts whom they quoted so generously claimed in 2001 that Taylor earned 3 billion dollars from shady deals and the monies were stashed in foreign banks.

The writers deliberately omitted the fact that when the UN sanction regime announcing the seizure of Taylor's assets were adopted, Taylor threw a challenge to the UN that wherever these monies and assets were found, they should be frozen and he should be impeached. Five years after, neither a single penny nor a hut has been traced.

Now, they have turned the lies on Nigeria. Having twisted its arms to handover Taylor for prosecution at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in breach of an internationally endorsed asylum, western formations are accusing Nigeria of shielding Taylor's investment. The New York Times and the Associated Press reporters reiterated in many lines the UN's disappointment with Nigeria for not freezing Taylor's alleged investments salted into the Nigerian economy. Had the two media houses avoided mindless conformity with the conspiracy, they would have investigated and

found out while Taylor was in Calabar, the Nigerian government virtually sponsored him. Cross River State also accorded Taylor's staff honorable hospitality including the provision of living allowances for his staff.

Contrary to the UN panel of expert claims that he owns estates, Taylor does not have any investment in Nigeria. Evidently, rumor mills have mistaken Arikpo Estate, 35 Barracks Road, Calabar, where Taylor's staff live as on a two-year lease agreement, as one of the purchases referred to in popular Nigerian music.

All these trumped up charges are intended to arouse a dramatic repudiation for Taylor not only by sworn detractors but also African leaders meeting at the AU conference. Polgreen, Simons and Lederer are mere stalking horses. Theirs is to lay the most horrendous accusation any one could possible level on someone targeted for extermination. No surprise, they dredged up the old accusation spawned by The Washington Post reporter Douglas Farrah. That is, Taylor hosted and did business with Al Qaeda. Certainly, this allegation was plotted to agitate US public opinion against Taylor and scare other African leaders into isolation. As the Chinese say, kill he chicken and scare the monkey. However, what the writers forgot was, when Farrah raised the same absurd infective in 2002, he was rebutted by the State Department for lack of proof.. No doubt, the replication of lies can bring nothing more than a rueful regret as the reportage is laughed off in conviviality.

UNMIL Public Information Office
Press Clips 26 June 2007

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International Clips on Liberia

Liberia: Sebutinde Warns Taylor on Boycott

The Monitor (Kampala) 26 June 2007—Former Liberian President Charles Taylor skipped his war crimes trial for a second time yesterday, prompting Justice Julia Sebutinde to issue a terse warning against "undue delay".

The trial was delayed until Tuesday next week after Mr Taylor failed to show up, saying he could not afford an able defence team. Mr Taylor, who is charged with instigating murder, rape and mutilation during Sierra Leone's civil war in quest for the country's diamonds, boycotted the start of his trial on June 4.

Judge Julia Sebutinde expressed frustration, not only with Taylor but with officials with the U.N.-backed special tribunal for Sierra Leone," Reuters reported. "He sacked his lawyer and declared the trial would not be fair, adding in a letter he intended to defend himself."

Justice Sebutinde was quoted during the proceedings as saying: "The accused does not have the option to appear before this court as and when he chooses to."

Justice Sebutinde, a Ugandan-born lawyer, is chairing the panel of four judges in the trial conducted in The Hague in the Netherlands.

Justice Sebutinde reportedly said adequate resources must be provided in the interests of a fair trial, ordering the court to ensure Taylor had another four people boosting his defence team, including a lead counsel, by July 31.

Justice Sebutinde is renowned for her characteristic straight-talk, made prominent during a series of inquiries she conducted on behalf of the government between 1999 and 2001.

"We have frowned upon undue delay in this court. That it would come from an institution within this court is really regrettable," Reuters quoted her as saying.

Mr Vincent Nmehielle, the court's principal defender, said Mr Taylor also wanted to avoid undue delay and had been persuaded to accept a lawyer rather than defend himself, although there were not enough funds from the court to hire a capable lawyer.

Earlier this month the president of the court and its prosecutor told the U.N. Security Council available funds would be exhausted by November and another \$60 million was needed from voluntary contributions. The prosecution will be allowed to begin presenting its case on July 3.

Mr Taylor has pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, related to the 1991-2002 civil war during which an estimated 50,000 people were killed. The fighting in Sierra Leone was noted for its exceptional brutality and for the conscription of child soldiers as young as 8.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was set up jointly by the country's government and the United Nations in 2002 to try those deemed most responsible for human rights violations during the later stages of the civil war.

At the time, prosecutors said they would produce strong and compelling evidence to back claims that Mr Taylor directed Revolutionary United Front rebels as they carried out a campaign of terror against Sierra Leone's civilians. Human rights activists and pro-democracy campaigners hope the trial can send a signal that nobody can escape punishment for atrocities, including heads of state.

"Prosecutors hope the trial will end impunity for African strongmen as well as send a signal that international justice can operate efficiently and fairly," Reuters reported. "However, some observers fear Taylor is intent on disrupting proceedings."

Kennedy wants to see Liberia as Africom host

The Hill June 26, 2007 --As the Pentagon hashes out the details of a new Africa Command amid reluctance from several African countries to host the U.S. military, Rep. Patrick Kennedy (D-R.I.) is pressing to convince government officials that Liberia should have a stake in the deliberations.

Kennedy, whose state has the largest concentration of Liberians in the United States, has started laying groundwork to ensure the West African country will host part of the U.S. footprint when the new command stands up in the fall of next year. Kennedy may face an uphill battle in his quest to convince the Pentagon to pick Liberia, a country still reeling from years of civil war. Liberia, however, has a key advantage — political will — that so far appears lacking in some strategically positioned countries, particularly in North Africa.

Infrastructure can be built, and a welcoming political environment is hard to come by, Kennedy argued.

"That is something you can't build out of nothing," he said. "It is either there or not."

Algeria and Libya declined to host the new command and oppose their neighbors' doing so. Morocco is backtracking from previous statements offering to house the command, known as Africom. Apart from Liberia, Botswana has offered to host the U.S. command.

The Pentagon is not yet disclosing how it will organize and base the command, and is tight-lipped about its discussions with African countries.

President Bush in February directed the Department of Defense to create a so-called unified combatant command for Africa. A four-star general will be in charge of Africom, which in the near term will be based in Stuttgart, Germany.

Ryan Henry, the principal deputy undersecretary of defense for policy, who led the latest interagency delegation to Africa, stressed in a Friday press conference that Africom will not be "optimized for war-fighting."

The new command's main mission will be to stabilize weak or poor countries by training the local security forces and providing humanitarian aid. Henry said Africom's mission will encompass a blend of diplomacy, humanitarian aid and counter-terrorism operations. It will be unlike any other command around the world, according to Henry.

It's no secret that Africa has been providing more of the U.S. share of oil and natural gas and that China is starting to expand its presence on the continent.

The Pentagon currently divides Africa between three combatant commands: Central Command, which has responsibility for Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Somalia and Kenya; European Command, responsible for the rest of the countries in the African mainland; and Pacific Command, with responsibility for Madagascar, the Seychelles and the Indian Ocean area.

The three commands do not focus solely on Africa, but the new command would change that. The four-star general, who has yet to be chosen by Bush, will focus solely on African issues, according to Henry.

He stressed that the long-term security issues on the continent should come under the leadership of the African Union (AU), the continent's common security architecture. Several African countries advised that Africom be established in harmony with AU's regional security structure.

The creation of Africom will not result in any new troops or permanent bases, Henry said. Units that will be engaged in activities on the African continent will rotate from the United States. America's only long-term base in Africa is Camp Lemonier in Djibouti.

While there will be no other U.S. bases in Africa, the new command will have a staff headquarters of up to 1,000 people on the continent. Henry said the Pentagon is looking at different models for the headquarters, one of them being a command distributed in a number of nodes across the continent.

If Kennedy gets his way, one of these nodes could be in Liberia. The country, founded by freed American slaves, has a historic bond to the United States, he said.

"You would think that there would not be such an affinity for America, but the bond is stronger than you can imagine," Kennedy, whose state is home to about 15,000 Liberians, said.

The United States remained Liberia's closest ally until its 1989-96 civil war, which left 200,000 Liberians dead and 1 million displaced, according to State Department data.

Kennedy acknowledged that Liberia's lack of infrastructure and war devastation could be an impediment to a U.S. footprint in the country. But attracting the U.S. military to Liberia could serve as an impetus to stabilize, he said. Liberia could become an even stronger ally in the region, Kennedy explained.

Kennedy said he is planning a trip to Liberia for late fall with freshman Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse (D-R.I.). Kennedy said that Rhode Island's other senator, Jack Reed (D-R.I.), has been "an absolute partner of mine with respect to strengthening our efforts to rebuild Liberia."

Henry said the Pentagon has had informal bilateral talks with Liberia about Africom, but that the country has not yet been part of formal talks.

Congress has been pouring considerable funds into Liberia. For this year alone, \$139 million was allocated for foreign operations, including economic development, and \$43 million was included in the 2007 supplemental for security assistance.

DynCorp International, a privately owned security company, is under a U.S. government contract to train a 4,000-man Liberian army.

"Liberia is pushing hard to be considered as a West African footprint," Riva Levinson, managing director of KRL International, said. Levinson represents Liberia in Washington.

"Liberia is not going to meet the infrastructure criteria, but there needs to be a huge political will and Liberia hopes to win on that," she added.

Mark Malan, a peace-building program officer for Refugees International with extensive experience in Africa, said Liberia would not "necessarily be the most rational choice. It would raise eyebrows."

A move to bring Liberia into the Africom effort would be more "symbolic," he added. Instead, one of the most rational choices for a headquarters would be Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, where

the African Union is based together with a strong network of African embassies.

"That [rationale] could cut the rivalry among the other states," he said.

As part of the larger picture, Levinson said Congress will play an important role in coordinating and planning for additional and preferably long-term resources in Africa. More resources dedicated to security and stability operations could create a thriving environment for non-governmental organizations and businesses, she said.

EU lifts its embargo on Liberian diamonds

TurkishPress.com June 26, 2007--The European Union on Monday lifted its embargo on Liberian diamonds, following a decision by the UN Security Council in April that the trade in "blood diamonds" from the country has been stemmed.

The decision, allowing the import of Liberian diamonds for the first time since 2004, was made retroactive to April 27, when the Security Council made its decision to lift the ban, the EU said in a statement.

Last month Liberia was admitted to the international diamond exporting scheme known as the Kimberley process after satisfying experts it had taken measures to prevent the trade in "conflict diamonds."

The government in Monrovia has pledged to honour conditions set by the UN to ensure the gems, blamed for fuelling a barbaric 14-year civil war in the country, do not slip out of the tight international diamond control system.

Endowed with abundant timber, rubber and mineral wealth, Liberia lay in ruins after its civil war. Its former leader and warlord Charles Taylor is on trial at The Hague for war crimes committed in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The trial was adjourned for a week on Monday as the former Liberian president again boycotted the hearings over problems with his defence lawyers.

During back-to-back internal conflicts that lasted from 1989 to 2003, in Liberia and Sierra Leone, rivals plundered the country's wood and diamond resources to purchase the arms they used to wage war in a conflict that claimed more than 400,000 lives.

An expert mission, headed by the European Union and Botswana, visited Liberia in March and concluded that it had met the conditions for admission and the country will now be able to export its uncut diamonds legally to the 70-plus Kimberley Process member states.

The European Union is the current chair of the Kimberley process and EU Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid Louis Michel called Liberia's admission "a very important step" for its development, "marking the very end of any potential future financing of the war by blood diamonds."

Liberia had been subject to UN diamond sanctions for six years as a result of its civil war.

The labour-intensive diamond industry is expected to help reduce the rate of unemployment in Liberia, which stands at around 85 percent in what was once one of Africa's most prosperous nations.

International Clips on West Africa

Protests over proposed toxic waste payout

ABIDJAN, June 26, 2007 (AFP) - Police on Tuesday used tear gas to disperse protesters demonstrating against a proposed government pay-out to victims of toxic waste poisoning by a Dutch company.

Around 50 people briefly blocked one of the main roads in the capital Abidjan as well as the entrance to a site in the capital's Akouedo district where some of the toxic waste was dumped.

According to details released last week by President Laurent Gbagbo's office, the families of the 16 victims who died will each receive 152,000 euros in compensation out of the 152 million euros (200 million dollars) compensation package.

But the bulk of the funds paid out by the multinational Trafigura in settlement for the August 2006 pollution outbreak will be retained by the state for development projects.

"Akouedo is one of the areas most affected by the toxic waste, but the government, instead of siding with us, has carved up the damages for itself," a spokeswoman for the residents, Rachel Gougoua, told AFP.

"We tried to talk to the presidency yesterday, to no avail. And today, while demonstrating for our rights, we have been chased out of our district. Instead of investigating the consequences of the pollution, the police have come just to beat us," she said.

The proposed share-out of the compensation funds were rejected Monday by several victims' associations

Trafigura had chartered a ship, which unloaded nearly 600 tonnes of caustic soda and petroleum residues which were then dumped by a local firm at 16 open air public waste sites across the economic capital of the West African country.

As the fumes from the waste spread across the city, more than 100,000 people sought medical attention, 16 died and 69 were hospitalized.

Excessive force used in deadly Guinea protests, says Amnesty

Conakry/Nairobi_(dpa) _ June 26, 2007---Guinean security personnel used excessive force in trying to contain mass protests against the government earlier this year, killing demonstrators, torturing people in custody and raping women, Amnesty International said Wednesday.

The demonstrations last January and February saw some 130 people killed and 1,500 injured by Guinean security forces and ushered in a new government, which Amnesty said has failed to hold anyone responsible for the crimes committed during the protests.

"The Guinean security forces are a permanent threat to the people of Guinea," said Veronique Aubert, deputy director of the international rights group's Africa programme.

"They have repeatedly used force against the population when the government feels threatened. The fact that no one has been held to account clearly shows how state authorities - up to the highest level - have covered up these acts and even encouraged them."

Widespread discontent with President Lansana Conte's increasingly erratic regime led to mass protests this year that were met with harsh reaction from the aging leader's security forces to crush the unrest, a similar reaction to 2006 strikes.

Scores were killed in the demonstrations which eventually brought down Conte's government, making way for an international diplomat, Lansana Kouyate, to take over as prime minister of the West African country.

In a report assessing the protests, Amnesty said that forces deliberately used firearms against children as young as three-years-old in the conflict and once fired at a group of schoolchildren.

The report cites the experience of one man who was held in police custody and allegedly tortured.

"They walked on me, kicked me in the chest and beat me with batons, saying 'You want change? You'll get change,'" said the man, who was not named because of the sensitivity of the subject.

Amnesty called for the new government to provide reparations to the families of the people killed and bring those responsible to justice.

Kadhafi gets a red carpet welcome in SLeone

FREETOWN, June 25, 2007 (AFP) - Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi arrived Monday to a red carpet welcome in Sierra Leone, a country where he was once accused of backing rebels during a brutal civil war that claimed 120,000 lives.

Kadhafi's convoy of several hundred cars drove into the poverty-stricken west African nation through the border town of Kambia, 240 kilometres (150 miles) north of the capital, from neighbouring Guinea.

He was welcomed by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, and hundreds of school children and Muslim followers sporting T-shirts bearing his portrait.

The Libyan leader then arrived in the seaside capital Freetown where thousands turned up along the route to welcome him.

Kadhafi is due to hold talks with Kabbah Tuesday on the African Union and a slew of other issues.

Kadhafi, an avid backer of the concept of a "United States of Africa" which is to be discussed at the African Union (AU) summit to be held in July in the Ghanaian capital Accra, has slammed the continental body's structures as being ineffective.

The Libyan leader who is travelling by road, has been to Mali and Guinea. He is due to leave Freetown this week, for neighbouring Ivory Coast, from where he will proceed to Ghana for the AU summit due at the weekend.

Both Kadhafi and former Liberian president Charles Taylor have been accused of backing rebels in the Sierra Leone war that raged from 1991 to 2001 and was marked by mass killings, mutilations and amputations and rape.
