

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

Friday, 27 March 2009

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Awoko

Friday, 27 March 2009

Taylor is Being Tried for Killings and Abduction of Civilians

By Betty Milton

In an exclusive interview with Awoko yesterday, the Prosecutor of the Special Court Stephen Rapp countered the accusations made by the defence counsel for Charles Taylor, Courtenay Griffiths who claimed that the trial of Taylor was about politics not about law.

Mr Rapp said "he is wrong. His trial is about law; it is about the indictment, confirmed by judges and now supported by 91 witnesses almost all of them from Sierra Leone and Liberia. It is about facts and law. Its alleged to be the responsibility of Charles Taylor for the murder of tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans, the amputation, rape and abduction of hundreds of thousands."

Prosecutor Rapp stated Griffiths is trying to divide attention from the suffering victims by claiming that Taylor is the victim and that he is not the individual accused of having been responsible for those crimes. He maintained that Griffiths "can't evade that responsibility by saying that somehow he is being unfairly charged. The judges are giving him his day in court he has been able to cross examine each of these witnesses. He has an able well compensated defence team. He now has time and facilities to present his defence to testify on his behalf and to present witnesses from any region of the world if that is what he wants to testify, at the end of the day the judges will decide his case based upon the facts and the law."

During the prosecution case 91 witnesses were presented, half of which were linkage witness and the rest were crime based witnesses.

According to the Rules of the Special Court written testimony of certain witnesses who have testified in a particular case, will be tendered in court which does not allow the people to physically be present in court, in order to save time and money.

Speaking about these witnesses the Prosecutor said "Mr Griffiths insisted on them coming to The Hague and this is the most bizarre argument I have had on his part. When he said he never asked for these witnesses to be present in court."

Rapp noted "We had offered to present the testimony of almost 50 witnesses in writing and statements which did not directly implicate Charles Taylor. But Mr Griffiths and his client did not want that evidence and they say that they will have to come to The Hague, in any case, he insisted that the witness come physically to testify and to subject them to cross examination."

He recalled that Taylor's defence counsel (Griffiths) subjected these witnesses to cross examination, among which were a double amputee and he was questioned by Mr Griffiths whether he can read or write and the man said "sorry I don't have any hands now to write anymore." Another, he went on was a rape victim whom Griffiths claimed her story was not true as there was a problem of interpretation. "He is the one who insisted on these people" Rapp disclosed, adding "so it is nonsense to suggest that we were the ones that required their presence in court. It was his demand that he be able to cross examine the witnesses."

Mr Griffiths also alleged during his press conference that the international community influenced the decision of the court, to this Prosecutor Rapp again disagreed saying "We as prosecutors have sworn to exercise independent judgment and expressly prosecutors are not supposed to take instructions from any government and we have not."

Citing the case of the Civil Defence Force (CDF) he maintained "this case is an interesting one but we should not forget that former British High Commissioner appeared as a witness for the defence in favour of Chief Norman, it was a courageous decision by my predecessors certainly something which was not approved of by the former Ambassador of the United Kingdom to indict the leaders of the CDF not for rightly upholding democracy but for intentionally killing civilians during the course of that combat and carnage and the use of child soldiers. Those were allegations made based upon the law" he said "and if the prosecution had been following the direction of the government of the United Kingdom that prosecution would never have been brought."

Most people including the Taylor Counsel believed that Former President Kabbah should have been indicted rather than Chief

Norman as he [Kabbah] is believed to bear the greatest responsibility for the crimes committed by the CDF.

Prosecutor Rapp however argued that “the Special Court is not prosecuting people because they are arming rebels or CDF or engaged in civil war or combat. The Special Court is involved in prosecuting people who engage in attacks on civilians and atrocities against civilians. Our jurisdictions are war crimes and crimes against humanity and other violations of humanitarian law and there is no question that former President Kabbah was responsible for the establishment of the CDF and for assisting in the arming of the CDF for the purpose of (driving out) the AFRC/RUF junta that was in control of Sierra Leone from May 1997 to February 1998.” He stressed “what was wrong was for instance the evidence which was presented in the CDF case which Chief Norman accompanied by Kondewa and Fofanah gave a speech to CDF troops saying go into Koribondu and kill every single person every man woman and child leaving no building standing that was the crime it was not the

CDF fighting the war.”

Warming up to his clarification Prosecutor Rapp went on “Now if Kabbah had been responsible for giving that order, if he had known about that order and had approved of it by continuing to aid and assist the CDF in carrying out those crimes and outrages then he would have been responsible under our law but we did not have (the evidence) to prove that he was responsible.”

In contrast with Taylor, Mr Rapp explained “he was holding power in Liberia and in Sierra Leone, for his allies in the RUF (have) been waging a campaign of terror against the civilian population and invariably it was a campaign to scare, frighten and terrorize the civilians into submission. That is what we are alleging him (being) responsible for.

“Here he assisted the RUF from the beginning right to the end and was encouraging them to fight a campaign of terror against the civilians. In 1998 after the junta was overthrown he provided key assistance, key arms in training when he knew they were conducting operations with names. Like spare no

Continued on Page 7

“Taylor is being tried for the killings and abduction of civilians”

From Page 2

soul.

That is why his case is prosecutable and the case against Kabbah is not prosecutable.”

Stephen Rapp disclosed that “this case is all about the victims in Sierra Leone, it’s about those thousands of people who were killed, the hundreds of women who were raped and sexually enslaved and the millions of people displaced in this conflict.

What we are doing is trying to prevent that from happening again here and also prevent that from happening elsewhere by sending a clear message that those who are responsible no matter how big they are will be held to account and obviously people who are being held to account don’t want that to happen they want to divert the attention to others and say that they have been victimized.”

Cotton Tree News
Thursday, 26 March 2009

Charles Taylor's lawyer takes a swipe at International Justice

Written by Ndeamoh Mansaray



Lead Counsel for former Liberian President Charles Taylor has questioned why former President of Sierra Leone, Ahmad Tejan-Kabbah was not indicted by the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, for war crimes committed by the Civil Defense Forces if Charles Taylor stands indicted for atrocities committed by the Revolutionary United Front.

Courtney Griffiths spoke at a press conference in Freetown, as part of his visit to Sierra Leone. He said he was in Sierra Leone, in the hope that Sierra Leoneans could see beyond the pain of the brutal civil conflict. The lead Counsel for the former Liberian President, said there was more at stake in the trial of Mr. Charles Taylor than the fate of one man. Mr. Courtney Griffiths said the Taylor trial and that of other Africans are in The Hague, because it was easier to destroy the rights of people when they were kept in the dark.

Mr. Griffiths said the Taylor trial was all about Sierra Leone, so Sierra Leoneans must be able to decide if justice was truly being done fairly and equally to all men and women irrespective of where they come from in the world.

Standard Times
Friday, 27 March 2009

Defence Minister suspends talks with Guinea

...as Yenga stalls

BY EDWARD MARAH

Many Sierra Leoneans especially residents of Yenga yesterday wept bitterly when they heard the news that the Minister of Defence retired Major Alfred Paolo Conteh has suspended all negotiations on Yenga with the current Guinea leadership until a democratic elections are held in that Country. The disclosure was made yesterday by the Minister at a press conference held at conference room Ministry of Defence Tower Hill in Freetown. The Minister's pronouncement came in response to a question posed by this reporter that as to whether he will continue negotiations with Guinea for the handing over of Yenga which has been occupied by the Guineans for all most ten years to Sierra Leone now that there is a change of regime.

According to the Minister, he will not continue negotiations with the military Junta government in Guinea on Yenga until a democratic government is elected in that country adding that since the Junta Government took over he has never contacted them on the issue of Yenga and he will never contact them. "We understand that the Junta leaders in

Guinea have a six-month mandate after which they are to hold elections and handover power to a democratically elected government and until that is done we will not negotiate with them on Yenga" he said, adding that if they negotiate with the Junta now it is likely that when the democratic government is elected they have to start it all over again. 'We know a new government will come and we are waiting for that to happen' he added.

The issue of Yenga has and continues to be of great concern to many Sierra Leoneans who have been calling on the Government to do every thing within their power for Yenga to be handed over to Sierra Leone as the disputed land belongs to the country. Yenga was occupied by the Guinean troops during the Sierra Leonean civil war as their military base but they have since refused to vacate the land even when the war which brought them has ended almost eight years ago. The Minister of Defence Mr. Alfred Paolo Conteh when he took over as Minister of Defence over two years ago promised Sierra Leonean that Yenga will surly be handed over to Sierra Leone

through diplomatic means as it belongs to Sierra Leone, but this promise is yet to be realized by Sierra Leoneans especially the directly affected residents of Yenga that are being deprived the use and ownership of their land.

In another related development the Minister yesterday revealed that the Republic of Sierra Leone (RSLAF) Air Wing Department is currently non-functional due to the fact that they lack the necessary equipment to keep the unit running. He added that they have trained the personnel and is therefore calling on their partners to help them in providing RSLAF equipment that will enhance the effective operations of the Air Wing. He said that presently the government hasn't money to buy helicopters and other equipments to make it operational and as such hopes that help will be given till such time when Government has resources to equip the wing.

The Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Brigadier Robert Yirah Koroma while giving an over view of the security situation in the Country revealed that despite the recent political violence, the Country remains stable as they continue their joint border patrol. He assured all that they will continue providing the needed security in the country. He however called on the public to support them as they are changing the face of the Army into an army that will be accountable to the people of Sierra Leone.

Concord Times

Thursday, 26 March 2009

Sierra Leone: Taylor Supported RUF, Says Defence Lawyer

Freetown — Lead defense counsel for former Liberia president Charles Taylor has revealed in Freetown that his client indeed supported Foday Sankoh and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in their rebellion in Sierra Leone but only for 18 months.

Courtenay Griffiths told journalists at the Sierra Leone News Agency (SLENA) yesterday that the Special Court indictee assisted the RUF with arms and ammunition and manpower at the start of the rebellion.

"We accept the fact that he was involved with the RUF at the start of the war but his support only lasted for 18 months," Griffiths said.

He said according to the statutes of the Special Court, the tribunal was empowered to try offences committed in Sierra Leone between 1996 to 2002, noting that his client's indictment covers the Economic Community of West Africa Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) intervention and the Freetown invasion of January 6, 1999.

Griffiths said the prosecution's evidence against the former warlord was based "on lies and lies based on money" adding, "The prosecution has never suggested that Taylor was in Sierra Leone during the 11-year war."

"The trial of Charles Taylor is not about law but politics. There is lot of pressure on the court to hand down verdicts that will please its financiers. We are not given up the fight because we are confident that we are on the right path," he maintained.

The defence counsel said the millions of dollars spent on witnesses to testify against his client should have been spent on improving the roads in the country.

"I urge Sierra Leoneans to watch carefully as we begin our defence case. We will be prepared to call on Taylor as our first witness in July," he said.

Sierra Leone court asks UAE for money

Charles Taylor still on trial in The Hague

Representative visits Dubai to appeal for another contribution as UN secretary general renews plea to governments around the world

Zoi Constantine

DUBAI // The Special Court for Sierra Leone has again asked the UAE to help pay for the trials of those accused of committing atrocities during the country's civil war.

The court, which relies on voluntary contributions, was established in 2002 through an agreement between the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations.

Herman von Hebel, the court's registrar, has warned that more money is urgently needed, describing the current financial situation as "dire".

The Special Court differs from other international tribunals, such as those for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, in that it is funded by voluntary contributions.



The most salient kind of crime was the amputations of hundreds of thousands of people

Herman von Hebel
registrar of Special Court for Sierra Leone

Some money is expected soon from Canada, but the court now has only US\$1 million (Dh3.67m), for a programme with a monthly operating cost of \$2.5m. The 2009-10 budget is \$40m, of which \$31m still must be raised.

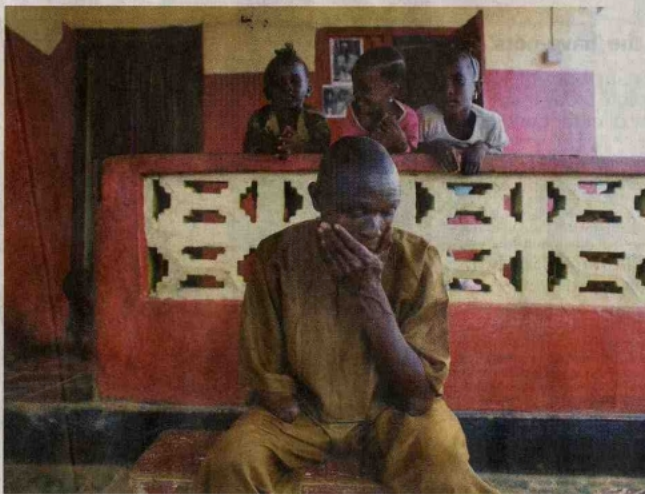
In 2007, Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, appealed to member nations to step in during a similar money shortage. The UAE gave \$100,000.

Last week, the secretary general again asked for donations.

According to Mr von Hebel, Mr Ban said "the court has made a lot of progress, but we still need to get it to the end of next year, so governments please go and look into your own wallet and see whether there is money for the court in order to allow it to finalise its work".

By the end of 2010, the court is due to complete its final trial, that of Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, who is accused of controlling the Revolutionary United Front rebel group. The prosecution's case concluded in January, and his defence is expected to start next month. For security reasons, he is being tried in The Hague.

The registrar has been in the UAE this week meeting with government officials, including Dr Hadeef al Dhaheri, the Minister of Justice, and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and Princess Haya bint Al Hussein, wife of Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai.



Herman von Hebel, above, registrar of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, visited Dubai this week looking for money to keep the court running. Ana Bianca Marin for The National

Alpha Kanu, left, of Hastings, Sierra Leone lost a hand in the country's civil war. Andrew Parsons / The National

Money is not the court's only problem. Mr von Hebel and his staff are also dealing with the question of where those convicted will end up serving their sentences.

All eight defendants whose trials are complete were found guilty on charges including war crimes and crimes against humanity and sentenced to between 15 and 50 years each. They are now being held in Sierra Leone.

Last week, Mr von Hebel was in Rwanda to discuss the possibility of those convicted serving their sen-

tences in facilities set up for those found guilty of the genocide in that country.

If Mr Taylor is convicted, he will serve his sentence in the UK.

Lack of money might result in the court's staff not being paid, Mr von Hebel said, but he denied rumours that it could lead to Mr Taylor's release.

"Any decision about whether Mr Taylor is released is a decision to be taken by judges, based on whether they think he is guilty or innocent for the crimes he has been charged

with," he said. "It's not a matter of me saying that I can't pay my bills this month so let him out."

"Everyone is convinced that the Taylor trial has to come to an end. He needs a fair trial and it is for the judges to determine his guilt or innocence."

During the civil war, hundreds of thousands of civilians were the victims of what Mr von Hebel described as "very serious crimes".

"The most salient kind of crime was the amputations of hundreds of thousands of people, and if you

walk around in Freetown there is no way you can do so without seeing amputees," he said.

The use of children as soldiers by rebel groups was also widespread during the conflict, as were forced marriages and rape of young girls.

The Special Court was the first international tribunal to rule on the recruitment and use of child soldiers and the first to sit in the country where the crimes under its jurisdiction took place.

► zconstantine@thenational.ae

الأميرة هيا تلتقي أمين المحكمة الخاصة في سيراليون وقرينة رئيس سنغافورة



تصوير - محمد هشام

الأميرة هيا خلال لقائها ممثل المحكمة الخاصة بسيراليون



الأميرة هيا والسيدة الأولى في سنغافورة وعدد من السيدات

الدولتين وتطرقنا أيضا إلى عدد من الشؤون الأخرى بما في ذلك الدور الذي تلعبه المرأة في الدولة ومساهماتها الفاعلة في مختلف المجالات. كما التقت سمو الأميرة هيا بنت الحسين أمس أمين سجل المحكمة الخاصة بسيراليون هيرمان فون هيبيل الذي يزور المنطقة حاليا لحشد الدعم للمحكمة الدولية التي تسعى لبسط يد العدالة وسيادة القانون في البلد الأفرريقي الذي خرج قبل بضع سنوات فقط من حرب أهلية مدمرة. وأطلع فون هيبيل سمو الأميرة هيا على النموذج المميز للعدالة الدولية الذي تجسده المحكمة وعلى المساهمة الإنسانية الفاعلة للمحكمة تجاه إحلال السلام والمصالحة في سيراليون عقب الحرب الأهلية المدمرة التي استمرت 11 عاما خلال الفترة الواقعة بين عامي 1991 و2002. ويعمل ممثل المحكمة الخاصة بسيراليون على اطلاع المسؤولين في الحكومات والشخصيات المهمة على التقدم الذي حققته المحكمة الدولية في سياق الدور المتطور بها لإحقيق الحق وفرض سيادة القانون في سيراليون حيث تطارد القارين من العقاب وتدير برنامجا خاصا لتطوير القانون وبناء ارث من العدالة للأجيال القادمة. وكانت المحكمة الخاصة بسيراليون تأسست عام 2002 بموجب اتفاقية بين الحكومة السيراليونية والأمم المتحدة وذلك بناء على طلب من الحكومة السيراليونية جراء الجرائم الوحشية المرتكبة ضد الإنسانية وذلك على أمل تطوير المجتمع وجعله أكثر أمنا كما تشكل هذه المحكمة قاعدة أساسية لعمل المحاكم الدولية الأخرى.

(وام)

سموها تطلع على
المساهمة الإنسانية
الفاعلة للمحكمة تجاه
إحلال السلام والمصالحة
في سيراليون

أقامت حرم صاحب السمو الشيخ محمد بن راشد آل مكتوم نائب رئيس الدولة رئيس مجلس الوزراء حاكم دبي - سمو الأميرة هيا بنت الحسين مائدة غداء أمس على شرف السيدة الأولى لسنغافورة اورميلا راماناثان وذلك في قصر البحر. حضر المائدة الوفد المرافق للسيدة نثان إلى جانب رجا القرق رئيسة لجنة سيدات الأعمال في اتحاد غرف صناعة وتجارة الإمارات وأمينة الرستمانى المدير التنفيذي لقطاع الإعلام بمؤسسة تيكوم للاستثمار وسناء سهيل مساعدة الأمين العام للمجلس التنفيذي لحكومة دبي ونجلاء العور الأمين العام لمجلس الوزراء، وتبادلت سمو الأميرة هيا مع نثان الحديث عن مجموعة من القضايا تناولت التعليم والثقافة والرياضة والصحة في كلتا

Alkhaleej (UAE) (website)

Tuesday, 24 March 2009

http://www.alkhaleej.ae

الأميرة هيا تلتقي أمين المحكمة الخاصة في

سيراليون

آخر تحديث: الأربعاء, 25/03/2009

التقت حرم صاحب السمو
الشيخ محمد بن راشد آل
مكتوم نائب رئيس الدولة
رئيس مجلس الوزراء حاكم
دبي سمو الأميرة هيا بنت
الحسين أمس، أمين سجل
المحكمة الخاصة في
سيراليون هيرمان فون
هيبيل الذي يزور المنطقة
حاليا لحشد الدعم للمحكمة
الدولية التي تسعى لبسط يد
العدالة وسيادة القانون في
البلد الأفريقي الذي خرج قبل



1/1

بضع سنوات فقط من حرب أهلية دامية.

وأطلع فون هيبيل سمو الأميرة هيا على النموذج المميز للعدالة الدولية الذي تجسده المحكمة، وعلى
المساهمة الإنسانية الفاعلة للمحكمة تجاه احلال السلام والمصالحة في سيراليون عقب الحرب الاهلية
المدمرة التي استمرت 11 عاما خلال الفترة الواقعة بين عامي 1991 و2002. (وام)

The Registrar with Princess Haya.

Model United Nations
 Tuesday, 24 March 2009

MARCH 24, 2009

Students to tour Hague UN Bodies

By Allison Roy Since Monday afternoon, delegates will have the opportunity to attend tours and workshops in various organs of the United Nations throughout the week. The in-conference visits are an annual event of WorldMUN that allow attendees the chance to explore highlighted features of the host city.

This week, the doors of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, the Court of Audit, the Special Court for Sierra Leone, the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court for the Former Yugoslavia will open for WorldMUN delegates.

In the OPCW, delegates will be offered a tour and presentation of the organization. At the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the ICJ, delegates will hear a briefing on court proceedings and, depending on the progress of the Charles Taylor trial, may be given the opportunity to attend a hearing there or at the International Criminal Court.

"I am looking forward to visiting the ICJ as a student studying international law," said University François student, Ramayana Syroziniki. Although many are similar to Syroziniki in their excitement for these visits, registration for these activities was only available for a brief time; however,

delegates not attending the in-conference visits will still have plenty to do around the Hague.

"I wasn't able to register for the in-conference visits, but I still plan on going to see the city," said Joseph Callaway, a sophomore at the United States Military Academy at West Point. "It's my first time at WorldMUN, but it seems that there is lots to do."

In-conference visits dates and times

Tuesday, March 24

12.30pm - 05.30pm

- International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia
- The Special Court for Sierra Leone
- The International Court of Justice

Wednesday, March 25

12.30pm - 05.30pm

- International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia
- The Special Court for Sierra Leone
- The International Court of Justice
- Court of Audit

Friday, March 27

01.00pm - 03.30pm

- Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Model United Nations

Wednesday, 25 March 2009

Today's Afternoon Program

By Joep Geurts There are really interesting activities today during lunch break. While taking a bite, visit the Main Hall for the International Opportunity's Fair (IOF). You will have to chance to talk to representatives from the following organizations:

Amnesty International
 OPCW
 Equal in rights
 Niños de Guatemala
 Special Court for Sierra Leone
 Europol
 European Patent Office
 Nuffic
 United Nations Association of the Netherlands
 Radboud University Nijmegen
 International Affaires Bureau Municipality the Hague
 United Netherlands

If you are interested in visiting the Nuffic presentation, please sign in at the stand which you can find at the IOF. The best ideas of the Social Venture Challenge will be judged in the Radboud University Hall. Each attending delegation gets the chance to present their concept to win a funding to realize these ideas.

Having trouble understanding these strange Dutch people? Do you want to know more about the inhabitants of this flat country? Attend the workshop by Jacob Vossestein. He wrote a book which is already sold for more than 30.000 times, entitled 'Dealing with the Dutch'. Do not miss it if you ever want to know how to handle someone from The Netherlands.

There will also be an In-Conference visit to the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia, starting at 13.00 and 14.15.

- 12.30 – 15.30 Main Hall
International Opportunity's Fair
- 12.00 – 15.00 Radboud University Hall
Social Venture Challenge final round
- 13.00 – 13.45 / 14.15 – 15.00
In-Conference visits: ICTY
- 13.00 – 14.30 Mississippi
Workshop: Dealing with the Dutch by Jacob Vossestein
- 13.30 – 14.30 Amazone
NUFFIC presentation

FinalCall.Com

Thursday, 26 March 2009

http://www.finalcall.com

Hands off Sudan' protestors blast Int'l Court

By Askia Muhammad
Senior Correspondent

WASHINGTON (FinalCall.com) - Chanting: "Hands off Sudan!" "The ICC is a racist court!" and "Down with the ICC!" more than 100 activists protested March 11 at the Sudan embassy here to show opposition to the recent decision by the International Criminal Court to issue an arrest warrant for Sudan's President Omar Al-Bashir.

"This is the first time that a sitting head of state has been issued an arrest warrant," Abdul Akbar Muhammad, of the Nation of Islam, told the rally. "The hypocrisy of it is that many of the countries of the world, where their leaders should be tried, do not belong to the ICC. They refuse to sign on.

"We are saying to the International Criminal Court, if you want to do your duty, then your first duty should be to arrest George Bush for the destruction of Iraq, for the genocide in Iraq, for the killing of nearly four million civilians in Iraq and destroying a whole society," Mr. Muhammad said.

The International Criminal Court is a "racist tool of Western imperialists" members of the "Hands Off Sudan" coalition of Black Americans, Muslims and other activist groups including the International ANSWER Coalition and followers of Lyndon LaRouche said in a statement. The indictment against President Al-Bashir is "totally unwarranted" and "a new racist genocide against Africa," the statement continued.

The ICC has received more than 1,700 complaints from at least 103 different countries, to investigate charges of "the most serious crimes" of global concern, inclusive of crimes against humanity, genocide, war crimes, and the crimes of aggression, said Hodari Abdul Ali, a member of the Give Peace a Chance Coalition. "Yet, *the only investigations which the court has initiated have been in African countries.*"

Sudan has the largest land area of any country in Africa. It borders at least nine other countries, and is a gateway from the Middle East to Central Africa, and it is a country that is very rich, not only with the oil, but with water under the desert floor in Darfur, as well as untapped deposits of uranium, gold and copper, rally organizers said.

The African Union, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement all stand in solidarity with the Sudanese government against what Mr. Muhammad called an attempt at regime change.

But some members of the Congressional Black Caucus support the ICC action. "Today's action by the ICC sends a clear message to the genocidal regime in Khartoum that crimes against humanity will not go unpunished," Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.) said in a statement. "General Bashir should step down and turn himself in to the ICC so that we can finally begin the process of ending the violence and bringing peace to Darfur.

"Together with the release of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) recommendations on Sudan, it is timelier than ever for the Administration to appoint a Special Envoy to the



(L) Akbar Muhammad speaks, at "Hands Off Sudan" rally. (R) Dr. Kaukab Siddique, a professor of English and Journalism, who is affiliated with Baltimore based Jamaat Al-Muslimeen speaks, at "Hands Off Sudan" rally, while organizer Hodari Abdul Ali listens. *Photos: Askia Muhammad*

The African Union, the Arab League, the Organization of Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement all stand in solidarity with the Sudanese government against what Mr. Muhammad called an attempt at regime change.

region,” the statement by Rep. Lee, who is chair of the CBC, continued. “The people of Darfur are counting on us for help. The longer we wait to act, the longer we are stymied in our efforts the worse the situation will get. My colleagues and I stand ready to work with the Obama Administration to address this issue and bring about swift resolution.”

The USCIRF recommendations on U.S. Sudan policy focuses on “improving religious freedom conditions in Northern Sudan and promoting peace in the Western region of Darfur,” according to Rep. Lee.

But members of the Give Peace a Chance Coalition strongly disagree. “You have to know the history of what the Sudan has been challenged with since 1989 when an Islamic government took over,” said Mr. Muhammad. “There have been attempts by certain elements of the international community, in particular the Zionist state, to break up the Sudan and cause the Sudan to become a failed state.

“They want a repeat performance of what has taken place in Somalia. That is a failed state. And on the African continent, you had Sierra Leone, it became a failed state. Liberia became a failed state. Somalia is a failed state. The DRC—Democratic Republic of the Congo—is a failed state. The best way you can engineer a failed state is what took place in Somalia in 1991, when the president was overthrown and they have not been able to form a government since that time.”

If Sudan becomes a failed state he said, a civil war will break out, allowing Western countries to control the country’s assets, said Mr. Muhammad. “Who supported the rebels in Darfur?” he asked rhetorically. “Where are they getting their money and their passports, and their weapons and munitions?” That support he said comes from Israel, which does not want to see a strong Islamic government emerge in Africa.

The indictment of President Al-Bashir will destroy any hopes of peace in the war-ravaged region of Darfur, said Mr. Abdul Ali and likely lead to the break-up of Sudan, destroying a hard-fought comprehensive peace agreement.

“A collapse of the fragile peace talks over Darfur might result in renewed danger for hundreds of thousands; the biggest danger is the collapse of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between North and South, which could lead to the death of millions,” said Mr. Abdul Ali. “We call for the abolition of the International Criminal Court. Its existence itself is a crime against humanity—because it disregards the principle of the sovereignty of nation states. It is now clear that the ICC, in the tradition of the racists of the past, targets some nation states and peoples more than others—specifically, dark-skinned African people.”

“A judge should be impartial. The law should apply to everyone and not only the weak,” he said, questioning why the denunciations of African leaders by the international community, are so frequent, while other countries, such as those involved in the conflicts in Gaza, Iraq, or Sri Lanka are not condemned.

African Union Commission Chief Jean Ping has also accused the court of concentrating only on Africans, “We think there is a problem with ICC targeting only Africans, as if Africa has been a place to experiment with their ideas. The African Union has formally called on the United Nations Security Council to defer an indictment for 12 months, to give a greater chance to the peace process now ongoing between the Sudanese government and rebel factions,” Mr. Ping said according to the coalition.

Other rally participants included Dr. Kaukab Siddique of Baltimore based Jamaat Al-Muslimeen; and Lawrence Freeman of the Executive Intelligence Review magazine’s Africa desk.

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Voice of America
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By Margaret Besheer

Darfur Envoy Says ICC Indictment has Compromised Political Solution



Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir (file photo)

The chief African Union-United Nations mediator for Darfur says the indictment of Sudan's president for atrocities committed in Darfur has likely "significantly slowed and even compromised" efforts to find a political solution to the conflict.

Mediator Djibril Bassolé said efforts to bring the government of Sudan and rebel groups together at the negotiation table is blocked, following the International Criminal Court's decision to issue an arrest warrant for President Omar al-Bashir earlier this month.

Bassolé briefed the Security Council in a private session Thursday. In a copy of his remarks obtained by VOA, the former Burkina Faso foreign minister said the court's decision has "had a significant impact on the various actors in the crisis."

He cited the announcement by the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), the main rebel group, that it would capture the president and turn him over to the court, and its recent decision to suspend its participation in peace talks in Qatar.

French Ambassador Jean-Maurice Ripert said Bassolé asked the Security Council to take into consideration the position of the African Union on the court's indictment. "We took the message and we said to him we would take it duly into account, the position of the African Union," he said.

The African Union, along with some other regional organizations, has asked the Security Council to use its authority to defer the charges against President Bashir for one year. The council is split on this issue and no action has been taken. Ambassador Ripert's remarks highlight the division in the council over this issue.

"We respect the position of the African Union, of course, and we listen to the African Union, and we understand what they mean, it does not mean we have to share the same position. Obviously there is some disagreement on this question of the ICC," he said.

During the closed meeting, the council was also updated on the humanitarian situation in Darfur in a briefing by U.N. humanitarian chief John Holmes.

In a statement following the meeting, the 15-member Security Council reaffirmed its support for the mediation process and stressed the importance of continuing the peace process, urging the parties to engage actively in negotiations. The council also expressed its support to the Qatari government for its efforts to bring together the government of Sudan and the rebels.

Hirondelle News Agency (Lausanne)

Thursday, 26 March 2009

Rwanda: UN, Govt to Discuss Post-ICTR Period On March 27

Arusha — The United Nations Under Secretary General for Legal Affairs and UN Counsel, Patricia O' Brien, begins next week an African tour and is scheduled for Rwanda on 27 March where the discussions are expected to be devoted on creation of a "residual mechanism" of the Arusha-based International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), reports Hirondelle Agency.

The residual mechanism is a structure which will have the role of managing issues which will not have been settled at the closing of all first instance trials at the Tribunal by end of this year as directed by the UN Security Council.

The appeal cases are expected to be closed by end of 2010.

The Special Representative of Rwandan Government to ICTR, Alloys Mutabingwa, welcomed the visit, adding that the issue of residual mechanism and retention of tribunal archives would be discussed exhaustively.

Some observers consider Rwanda, where the genocide took place in 1994, to be the country best positioned to host of the archives. According to UN estimates, about 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus were killed in the April-July slaughter, worst humanitarian tragedy on 21st century.

The relocation of convicts would also be on the menu, according to the Rwandan diplomat. The issue has now gained weight following this week's signing of an agreement between the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and Rwanda whereby Kigali will host some convicts of the Tribunal.

"We hope that UN will accord all its importance to this agreement. The SCSL has appreciated management and prison facilities of Mpanga. This prison is spacious and offers more than is required by the ICTR standards", Mutabingwa stressed.

Article 26 of Statute of the Tribunal stipulates that Imprisonment shall be served in Rwanda or any of the States on a list of States which have indicated to the Security Council their willingness to accept convicted persons.

Kigali has maintained all along that, according to this text, the first destination of the ICTR prisoners was Rwanda. For Rwandan authorities, any transfer of a convict elsewhere than to Rwanda was a violation of the Statute of the Tribunal.

Fifteen prisoners of the ICTR, including the former Prime Minister Jean Kambanda during the genocide, are currently serving their sentences in Mali.

The former Italian-Belgian presenter of the RTL, Georges Ruggiu, the only non-Rwandan to be convicted by the ICTR, was serving his sentence in Italy.

The other signatory countries, but which still have not received any convicts, are: Benin, Swaziland, France, Sweden and Rwanda.

Associated Press

Wednesday, 25 March 2009

Judges sworn in at tribunal over Hariri's killing

By MIKE CORDER

The U.N.-backed tribunal to prosecute the alleged killers of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri said Tuesday it has sworn in its judges, but kept the identities of all but two of them secret for their own security.

The court has yet to issue any indictments over the Feb. 14, 2005, killing of Hariri and 22 others in a suicide bombing on a seaside street in Beirut.

The court named Italian Antonio Cassese as the tribunal president, and Belgian Daniel Franssen as the pretrial judge. Four of the other judges are Lebanese, and the nationalities of the other three judges were not disclosed. The court also has two alternate judges, one Lebanese and another of undisclosed nationality.

"Their names will be announced once all security measures are in place," said a court statement.

Cassese is a former president of the U.N.'s Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, which also sits in The Hague.

In a key step along the path to prosecutions, the judges formally adopted rules governing investigations and trials, rules for detaining suspects and guidelines on assigning defense lawyers for suspects.

Prosecutor Daniel Bellemare of Canada is expected to soon ask for four pro-Syrian generals being held in Beirut on suspicion of involvement in the assassination to be sent to The Hague.

The generals led Lebanon's police, intelligence service and an elite army unit at the time of the bombing. They are the only suspects in custody, though they have not been formally charged.

The new court has a wing ready to detain suspects in a Hague jail that already holds Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic and former Liberian President Charles Taylor, among other international war crimes suspects.

As prime minister, Hariri, a billionaire businessman, was credited with rebuilding downtown Beirut after the 1975-90 civil war, and with trying to limit Syria's influence.

Many in Lebanon believe Syria was behind the assassination. Damascus denies any involvement.

The court was set up by the U.N. Security Council in 2007 and is funded by Lebanon and U.N. member states.

It is based in the Netherlands to ensure the safety of staff and an impartial trial.

It will use Lebanese law, but unlike Lebanese courts cannot impose the death penalty.

The National

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<http://www.thenational.ae>

Gaza war crimes accusations start to haunt Israel

James Reinl, United Nations Correspondent

Last Updated: March 26. 2009 11:39PM UAE / March 26. 2009 7:39PM GMT NEW YORK // Accused of firing white phosphorous shells over densely packed communities and using a child as a human shield, Israeli troops are increasingly fielding allegations of war crimes committed during the Gaza onslaught.

While the Jewish state was accused of violations even during its three-week invasion that caused the deaths of more than 1,400, allegations of military misconduct have mounted since the unilateral Jan 18 ceasefire. Investigations into alleged atrocities launched by both Israel and the United Nations are due to report back within weeks, opening up the possibility of any war criminals being tried by a global tribunal.

This week saw Israel face allegations from many quarters, with Human Rights Watch accusing the military of a war crime by indiscriminately firing white phosphorous shells over densely packed Gaza districts. The New York-based advocacy group said Israel fired shells that burst across a wide area into more than 100 flaming wedges, burning and killing civilians while setting homes ablaze.

Fred Abrahams, the group's researcher, said Israeli forces "knew perfectly well what danger white phosphorous poses to civilians ... yet they fired it not once, not twice, but repeatedly into densely populated areas".

The campaign group's condemnation follows a series of allegations made in newspapers and at the UN's Human Rights Council that suggest Israeli violators should face justice for meting out atrocities on Palestinians.

Radhika Coomaraswamy, a UN human rights expert, accused Israeli soldiers of "violations ... too numerous to list" including shooting Palestinian children, bulldozing a home with a woman and child inside and shelling a building they had ordered civilians into a day earlier.

Soldiers used a Palestinian boy as a human shield while being fired on in the Gaza neighbourhood of Tel al-Hawa on Jan 15, forcing the 11-year-old to enter buildings before them during their war against Hamas, the expert claimed.

Another report presented to the UN's Geneva-based council this week came from Robert Falk, an American academic and the body's special rapporteur on human rights in the territories.

Mr Falk, whom Israel barred from entry last year after accusing him of bias and prejudice, said Israel had subjected civilians in Gaza to "an inhuman form of warfare that kills, maims and inflicts mental harm".

He called for an independent experts' group to investigate possible war crimes by Israel and Hamas and also suggested that the UN Security Council set up an ad hoc criminal tribunal.

The experts echo concerns raised this month by 16 of the world's leading war crimes investigators and judges, who demanded a full inquiry into violations of the laws of war committed by both sides to the conflict. Signed by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the UN's former high commissioner for human rights,

Mary Robinson, the open letter to Ban Ki-moon, the UN secretary general, called for a “comprehensive international investigation” into alleged atrocities.

Meanwhile, newspapers have published testimonies from Israeli soldiers about atrocities and a pervasive attitude among commanding officers that devalued the lives of Palestinians. In one published account, an Israeli sniper killed a Palestinian woman and her two children after they misunderstood another soldier’s order and turned the wrong way. In another account, an elderly woman was shot dead while walking on a road, even though she was close enough for the soldiers to see whether she posed a threat.

“The climate in general, from what I understood from most of my men whom I talked to, was ... the lives of Palestinians, let’s say, are far less important than the lives of our soldier,” an infantry squad leader was quoted as saying.

The fractious debate reached Security Council members on Wednesday, with Qatar’s envoy, Abdulaziz al Nasser, calling for a “comprehensive and fair investigation” of all allegations and prosecutions against “perpetrators of such violations”.

But Israel defends itself, describing the use of white phosphorous as “legal” and its army as the world’s “most moral”, while pressing ahead with its own investigations and prosecutions of soldiers who broke the rules.

“The true targets of Israeli actions were Hamas terrorists, not the citizens of Gaza,” Israel’s UN envoy, Gabriela Shalev, told the 15-nation body in Manhattan. Ordinary Gazans were used as human shields by these terrorists, who deliberately staged attacks from, and hid, in heavily populated civilian areas.”

Nevertheless, Arab League diplomats have sought to have Gaza war crimes investigated by either the International Criminal Court (ICC) or a bespoke tribunal like those that handled atrocities in Rwanda, Sierra Leone and the former Yugoslavia.

The ICC prosecutor, Luis Moreno Ocampo, said he was willing to investigate Gaza war crimes but cannot initiate an investigation at the Netherlands-based court without an order from the Security Council.

Establishing a separate Gaza war crimes tribunal would likewise require a Security Council mandate, and analysts predict the veto-wielding United States would quash either option.

“Either way, you have to problem of Israel’s allies’ reluctance to subject Israel to an international judicial process which, in the eyes of Israel’s supporters – especially the US – would be biased and unfair,” said Jeffrey Laurenti.

Israel could also sidestep proceedings from any global judiciary by launching their own “rigorous and internationally credible” court cases against soldiers, added the director of foreign policy programmes at The Century Foundation.

Other analysts, such as Hussein Ibish, senior fellow at the American Task Force on Palestine, question whether the current system of international justice is powerful enough to prosecute defendants from robust states such as Israel.

“It doesn’t look like even Sudan’s president, Omar al Bashir, will be landing in the dock at any time in the foreseeable future,” said Mr Ibish. “It’s even less likely that the Israeli military, with stronger connections to various western governments, would find themselves exposed in an analogous way.”