

**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:

Tuesday, 28 July 2009

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

Tuesday, 28 July 2009

Charles Taylor denies eating humans

By Betty Milton

Charles Ghankay Taylor has denied allegations that Foday Sankoh and himself came together to exploit the people of Sierra Leone of their natural resources. He also denied allegations that he ate human beings. He was giving evidence in his defence at the Special Court in The Hague, The Netherlands.

The witness said: “the allegations are false, it is nonsense. Liberia is a rich country endowed with natural resources from gold, diamonds that came all over Liberia; it has bauxite, oil which is now found everywhere. For God sake everything you need is there what should I go to Sierra Leone to do?”

He maintained that he never met Sankoh in Libya and they never arranged to exploit Sierra Leone for its mineral resources and that the person he met in Libya was Alie Kabba who was the leader of the Sierra Leone Pan Movement.

The witness also denied an allegation made by a prosecution witness that he [Taylor] ate human’s beings and that as a member of the Poro society he ate human flesh. Taylor said that the whole evidence is false as the Poro society was a social structure which resisted the slave trade in Liberia and that all the presidents before him were members of the Poro society.

Charles Taylor said that “the whole evidence makes me sick at the stomach” and that the evidence is incredible, and this shows the extent to which people go to lie.

Adding that no one in his right sense will believe the evidence of Zig Zag Masaquoi as he was never a member of the society. He further told the court that there were certain groups in Liberia that practice cannibalism but he did not eat human flesh nor did he ordered his NPFL men to eat human flesh. Speaking about the spread of language between Sierra Leone and Liberia, the witness testified that the countries are one people because most of them speak the same language like mende and kissy.

He also told the court that a man will come from Sierra Leone speak any tribe like mende and decide to live in any part of the country.

The witness testified that during the invasion of Freetown, the various heads of states like Presidents Momoh. S. Momoh and Strasser hired and used mercenaries and they were part of the army to aid them in the fight and these mercenaries spoke Liberian languages.

He denied sending Liberian soldier to fight in Sierra Leone as the Liberian soldiers were never under his control.

Concord Times
Tuesday, 28 July 2009

'I'm no cannibal'

...Taylor

Liberia's former president Charles Taylor on Monday denied that he had ever eaten human flesh or ordered his fighters to do so as he answered allegations of cannibalism at his war crimes trial.

"It is sickening. You must be sick to believe it," the one-time warlord testified in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague.

"It makes you feel like throwing up." *Contd. page 1*



further excesses and dis-

'I'm no cannibal'

From page 1

Taylor, 61, said he could not dispute that there were cannibals in certain parts of Liberia, but claims that he was among them were "total nonsense".

A witness had testified at the trial that he ate human flesh with Taylor at a gathering of a secret society, Poro.

"It never happened," the ex-president retorted, adding: "I never ordered any combatant to eat anyone."

Some witnesses have told the court that combatants of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia had committed cannibalism to instill fear in civilians in the West African nation.

The former leader and warlord took the stand in his own defence on July 14, dismissing as "lies" charges of murder, rape, conscripting child soldiers, enslavement and pillaging against him.

He has been on trial since January 2008 on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity stemming from the brutal 1991-2001 civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, whose rebel Revolutionary United Front he is accused of arming in exchange for so-called "blood diamonds".

The RUF is blamed for the mutilation of thousands of civilians who had their hands and arms severed in one

of the most brutal wars in modern history, which claimed some 120,000 lives.

"It is beyond imagination that one could believe that the president of Liberia would go into Sierra Leone because he wants to terrorise the population and go for its wealth," Taylor said on Monday.

He insisted he had "absolutely nothing" to gain from destabilising Sierra Leone, adding that such actions would simply cause him to "lose foreign aid, lose assistance, lose friends".

Taylor is the first African leader to be tried before an international court.

He became president of Liberia in 1997 after rebels had unseated Samuel Doe in 1989, but was himself overthrown by a rebellion and agreed to go into exile in 2003.

Taylor was handed over to the tribunal in 2006 following his arrest in Nigeria. His trial is being held in the Netherlands for fears that his presence in Sierra Leone could destabilise the West African region.

He has told the court that he had sought to broker peace in Sierra Leone, and not fuel war.

Taylor's testimony is expected to last several weeks.

Meanwhile, Mr. Taylor has also denied that he had traded arms for diamonds in Sierra Leone, pointing to impassible roads and his country's

own mineral wealth to dismiss the key testimony.

Taylor said neither of the two roads that led to the Sierra Leone border could support vehicles laden with weapons, as alleged by a prosecution witness.

"No road existed then, and no road exists now," he told the court. The only access was by rough roads surfaced with rocks and dirt.

Varmuyan Sheriff, a former Taylor bodyguard testified last year that he escorted pickup trucks to the border loaded with automatic rifle ammunition and rocket-propelled grenades. The court was shown a picture of Sheriff with a truck allegedly photographed on the border.

"I say bluntly, it's a lie," Taylor said.

He also described as "ludicrous" Sheriff's allegation that he accepted diamonds from the Sierra Leone rebels, who sometimes sent them in mayonnaise jars.

"Liberia is a very rich country" with abundant diamonds, gold deposits and uranium, Taylor said, adding that he had been negotiating with the U.S. company, Haliburton to develop offshore oil reserves.

"It is beyond my imagination that anyone would believe that the president of Liberia would go into Sierra Leone because he wants to terrorize the people and take their wealth," he said.

Concord Times
Tuesday, 28 July 2009

From A Victor To A Victim

FEATURE

*By Alfred Sorie Kargbo,
The Netherlands*

Sierra Leone is well-known as a country that has many mineral resources: resources that can help to develop the economy of Sierra Leone and improve the lives of her citizens.

For several decades, these mineral resources have neither benefited the country nor the people. What are the reasons for that? We all know. Undisputedly, it is because of our selfish, ill-minded and stupid leaders, sorry to say that, is the principal cause for our ailing and deplorable economic situation.

How could one be living on the bank of an ocean yet washing his or her hands with spittle? We call that 'sky-high stupidity'. We have what can easily make us rich yet we are 'self-made poor'.

The Europeans and Americans came to Africa and orchestrated their clever tricks and manipulated our leaders to be greedy and piling massive wealth for themselves in western banks and invest there with the hope that when they leave power they can enjoy those undignified riches with their family in a foreign land. They also brainwashed our brothers to stage rebellions and coups all in their own selfish interests. Evidence of that are the testimonies of Charles Taylor in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, The Netherlands. Read this Extract from AllAfrica.com with the caption 'Taylor Makes Shocking Revelation - Says U.S. Unleashed Him'. (16 July 2009)

But Taylor now says that version of his embarrassing dramatic escape was not the full story. He says his escape was directed by a US prison operative acting on orders from high places in the U.S.

From a victor to a victim

government. Below is a dispatch from The Hague regarding Taylor's escape testimony:

In a dramatic day of testimony, former Liberian president Charles Taylor told of his 1985 escape from an American maximum security jail with alleged United States government help, only days before a failed US-backed coup attempt to overthrow the then Liberian government.

With his prison cell unlocked by a US prison guard late one night in November 1985, Taylor walked out of the maximum security area of the Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Massachusetts, he told the Special Court for Sierra Leone today.

Taylor said he was escorted by the same guard to the minimum security area. Tying a sheet to a window, Taylor climbed out the window and over the prison fence, where a car containing two men was waiting to whisk him to New York, he said.

Taylor told the court that he believed the guard who set him free "had to be operating with someone else."

Taylor also said he assumed that the car that took him to New York "had to be a [US] government car" because the men driving him feared he may be "picked up" if Taylor changed cars to be with his then wife, who had driven to meet the escape car with money to get Taylor out of the country.

Taylor was in US custody in 1985 pending a US government decision on an extradition request by the Liberian government on

charges of embezzlement. Taylor's escape took place only days before his friend and Liberian military leader, Thomas Quiwonkpa, staged an unsuccessful coup against the Liberian government of President Samuel Doe in November 1985.

Taylor alleged that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) was working with, and arming, Quiwonkpa to overthrow the Doe government in the months leading up to the coup attempt.

Taylor told the court that he was "one hundred percent positive" that the weapons Quiwonkpa was using "were paid for by the CIA." Taylor later went on to describe his efforts to recruit a total of 168 men and women to be part of his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) group to undertake military training in a former US military base in Libya between 1987 and 1989.

Taylor told the court that the training aimed to produce a "well-trained and disciplined force" which were "trained in the laws of war" and could "work with the local population" in Liberia. His overall aim, Taylor said, was for the NPFL to support the Liberian people in staging a revolution in Liberia and then "to submit ourselves to fair and free elections."

While we were in chaos, disarray and in trouble they wittily stole our diamonds, gold and other minerals which they have used to develop their countries. Who to blame? Them? No, their cleverness yielded them huge dividends which they in turn used to improve the lives of their people.



The Author

The question is, should we allow the clever one to fool the fool?

We have compromised to this "horror movie" for too long. Now is the end. We the masses have benefited very little from the western world and their donor aids. Our leaders siphoned those donor funds to their personal use and the west did nothing or little about that. Let us turn the other side of the coin.

We have what they wanted. We have minerals which they desperately need. They are the 'buyers' and we are the 'sellers'. Let us sell at our terms of trade. I propose that what ever Foreign Direct Investment that is to be undertaken in Sierra Leone should meet the following conditions:

1. Diamond Mining companies that are mining diamonds in Sierra Leone should be encouraged to establish offices in the country where they can carry out diamond shaping and polishing.

2. Also Iron Ore companies should be encouraged to transform the mined iron ore into the intended finish or Semi-finish form in Sierra Leone and export them from the country. Thank God we have a very suitable Queen Elizabeth Water Quay to transport bulky and heavy products by sea.

Similar method should be employed for the other minerals. By adding value in Sierra Leone to products they extracts in the country will be beneficial to our land. Application of this method can create employment for people in the country and the government will definitely realize massive returns from the country's minerals and the economy will be rejuvenated in a twinkling of an eye. It is time for our leaders to think smarter and work harder for the country.

To achieve this means that the government should in return make investment in these areas attractive and conducive to foreign investors.

International Community Consented To Taylor's Contacts With The RUF

By Alpha Sesay

Upon his appointment as head of the Committee of Five by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Charles Taylor regularly communicated and held meetings with members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), but all these contacts were done with the consent and participation of ECOWAS and the United Nations, he said in his testimony today before judges of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

“Subsequent to my appointment on the Committee of Five, I spoke with the RUF many times. I held meetings with them with the knowledge, consent and acquiescence of ECOWAS. The United Nations knew because for most of my discussions with the RUF, I spoke with Kofi Annan directly or through his Special Representative in Liberia. Everything I did in Sierra Leone was done with knowledge and consent of ECOWAS and I have documentary evidence to prove that,” Taylor said.

The Committee of Five was set up by ECOWAS with representatives from five West African countries whose mandate was to facilitate a peaceful end to the conflict in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Taylor told judges that he was appointed as Chairman of the Committee of Five because ECOWAS leaders believed he was better placed to negotiate with the RUF rebels, having been a rebel himself. He said that he was actively involved in efforts geared towards bringing Sierra Leone's conflict to a peaceful conclusion.

Mr. Taylor also told judges that, like other West African leaders, he was part of the decision that foreign governments should not recognize the junta government of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). For this reason, he said that Liberia did not recognize the AFRC junta regime in Sierra Leone. “There was a decision that the junta should not be recognized. My government did not recognize the junta,” Taylor said.

Mr. Taylor denied allegations that he supplied the AFRC/RUF with arms and ammunition from Liberia, arguing that Liberia did not even have any arms and ammunition for its own armed forces. He said that “everybody in West Africa and the United Nations knows that Liberia is disarmed and all arms are under lock and key. Security of Liberia is still handled by ECOMOG.”

Mr. Taylor described allegations that he used the RUF rebels to plunder the diamond resources of Sierra Leone as nonsense. Describing with use of a map areas in Liberia where diamonds could be mined, Taylor told the judges that his country is rich in diamonds, bauxite and uranium and would therefore have no reason to turn to Sierra Leone for its own diamond resources. “I know our potential. I know our wealth. What am I going into Sierra Leone to do? It is beyond my imagination that anyone would believe that the President of Liberia would go into Sierra Leone. He wants to “terrorize” the people and take their wealth when the vast wealth that we have I have not even touched. It doesn't make sense. It did not happen. Why do I need to do that? What do I do with the wealth of my own country?” Taylor said.

Mr. Taylor is accused of supporting the RUF rebels in Sierra Leone by collaborating with them to plunder the country's diamond resources in return for the supply of arms and ammunition. The prosecution alleges that by his acts or omissions Mr. Taylor is responsible for the crimes committed by the rebels in Sierra Leone. Mr. Taylor has denied all the allegations.

Taylor also dismissed prosecution witness Zig Marzah's testimony that Taylor dined on human intestines as nonsense and blamed the witness's illiteracy for coming up with such an allegation. “I felt like throwing up when I heard that nonsense from him, and I think even the prosecution were shocked at listening to that foolishness,” he said.

Taylor said that all these allegations against him are “statements of lies, statements of deceit and deception.”

Reuters

Monday, 27 July 2009

I'm no cannibal, Taylor tells war crimes trial

By International Justice Desk



The Hague, Netherlands

Liberia's former president Charles Taylor on Monday denied that he had ever eaten human flesh or ordered his fighters to do so as he answered allegations of cannibalism at his war crimes trial.

"It is sickening. You must be sick to believe it," the one-time warlord

testified in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague.

"It makes you feel like throwing up."

Taylor, 61, said he could not dispute that there were cannibals in certain parts of Liberia, but claims that he was among them were "total nonsense".

A witness had testified at the trial that he ate human flesh with Taylor at a gathering of a secret society, Poro.

"It never happened," the ex-president retorted, adding: "I never ordered any combatant to eat anyone."

Some witnesses have told the court that combatants of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia had committed cannibalism to instill fear in civilians in the West African nation.

The former leader and warlord took the stand in his own defence on July 14, dismissing as "lies" charges of murder, rape, conscripting child soldiers, enslavement and pillaging against him.

He has been on trial since January 2008 on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity stemming from the brutal 1991-2001 civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, whose rebel Revolutionary United Front he is accused of arming in exchange for so-called "blood diamonds".

The RUF is blamed for the mutilation of thousands of civilians who had their hands and arms severed in one of the most brutal wars in modern history, which claimed some 120,000 lives.

"It is beyond imagination that one could believe that the president of Liberia would go into Sierra Leone because he wants to terrorise the population and go for its wealth," Taylor said on Monday.

He insisted he had "absolutely nothing" to gain from destabilising Sierra Leone, adding that such actions would simply cause him to "lose foreign aid, lose assistance, lose friends".

Taylor is the first African leader to be tried before an international court.

He became president of Liberia in 1997 after rebels had unseated Samuel Doe in 1989, but was himself overthrown by a rebellion and agreed to go into exile in 2003.

Taylor was handed over to the tribunal in 2006 following his arrest in Nigeria. His trial is being held in the Netherlands for fears that his presence in Sierra Leone could destabilise the West African region.

He has told the court that he had sought to broker peace in Sierra Leone, and not fuel war.

Taylor's testimony is expected to last several weeks.

Source: Reuters

Associated Press

Monday, 27 July 2009

Charles Taylor denies cannibalism accusations

AMSTERDAM — Former Liberian President Charles Taylor said Monday he was sickened by allegations at his war crimes trial that he ate human flesh, calling testimony by a former aide the lies of an illiterate man.

"I felt like throwing up when I heard that nonsense, and I think even the prosecution were shocked at listening to that foolishness," he told the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague.

Taylor, beginning his third week on the stand, said the stories of cannibalism by a former officer in his militia were "statements of lies, statements of deceit and deception."

He also denied trading arms for diamonds with Sierra Leone rebels, a central allegation of his indictment.

Taylor is accused of arming and supplying Sierra Leone militias whose signature crime during the 1991-2002 civil war was hacking off the limbs of civilians to terrorize them into submission. He has denied all 11 counts of murder, rape and recruiting child soldiers in the neighboring country.

Taylor was responding to testimony last year from Joseph Marzah, who said Taylor ordered his men to eat the flesh of his enemies, including African peacekeepers and U.N. soldiers. Marzah said that would "set an example for the people to be afraid."

Marzah, also known as "Zigzag," described himself as a former chief of operations for Taylor and commander of a death squad.

Using maps of the border region, Taylor also testified Monday he couldn't have traded arms because neither of the two roads that led to the Sierra Leone border could support vehicles laden with weapons, as alleged by a prosecution witness.

"No road existed then, and no road exists now," he told the court. The only access was by rough roads surfaced with rocks and dirt.

Varmuyan Sherif, a former Taylor bodyguard, testified last year that he escorted pickup trucks to the border loaded with automatic rifle ammunition and rocket-propelled grenades. The court was shown a picture of Sherif with a truck allegedly photographed on the border.

"I say bluntly, it's a lie," Taylor said.

He also described as "ludicrous" Sherif's allegation that he accepted diamonds from the Sierra Leone rebels, who sometimes sent them in mayonnaise jars.

"Liberia is a very rich country" with abundant diamonds, gold deposits and uranium, Taylor said, adding that he had been negotiating with the U.S. company Halliburton to develop offshore oil reserves.

"It is beyond my imagination that anyone would believe that the president of Liberia would go into Sierra Leone because he wants to terrorize the people and take their wealth," he said.

UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries 27 July 2009

[The media summaries and press clips do not necessarily represent the views of UNMIL.]

International Clips on Liberia

Former Liberian president denies at war crimes trial sending weapons to Sierra Leone rebels

Source: Canadian Press Date: July 27, 2009 --AMSTERDAM _ Former Liberian President Charles Taylor pointed to impassible roads and his country's own mineral wealth Monday to deny key testimony at his war crimes trial that he had traded arms for diamonds in Sierra Leone. Taylor, starting his third week of testimony at the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague, said neither of the two roads that led to the Sierra Leone border could support vehicles laden with weapons, as alleged by a prosecution witness. "No road existed then, and no road exists now," he told the court. The only access was by rough roads surfaced with rocks and dirt. Taylor is accused of arming and supplying Sierra Leone militias whose signature crime during the 1991-2002 civil war was hacking off the limbs of civilians to terrorize them into submission. He has denied all 11 counts of murder, rape and recruiting child soldiers in the neighbouring country. Varmuyan Sherif, a former Taylor bodyguard. He testified last year that he escorted pickup trucks to the border loaded with automatic rifle ammunition and rocket-propelled grenades. The court was shown a picture of Sherif with a truck allegedly photographed on the border. "I say bluntly, it's a lie," Taylor said.

I'm no cannibal, Taylor tells war crimes trial

THE HAGUE, July 27, 2009 (AFP) - Liberian former president Charles Taylor on Monday denied that he had ever eaten human flesh or ordered his fighters to do so as he answered allegations of cannibalism at his war crimes trial. "It is sickening. You must be sick to believe it," the former warlord testified in the Special Court for Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague. "It makes you feel like throwing up." Taylor, 61, said he could not dispute that there were cannibals in certain parts of Liberia, but claims that he was among them were "total nonsense". A witness had testified in Taylor's trial that he ate human flesh with the ex-president at a gathering of a secret society, Poro. "It never happened," the ex-president retorted, adding: "I never ordered any combatant to eat anyone." Some witnesses have told the court that combatants of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia had committed cannibalism to instill fear in civilians.

International Clips on West Africa

Ivorian Ex-Fighters Build New Businesses Under UN Reintegration Programme

Source: All Africa Global Media Date: July 27, 2009

Jul 27, 2009 (UN News Service/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- From raising chickens and growing tomatoes to washing cars and renting out party equipment, combatants from Cote d'Ivoire's civil war are finding jobs in hundreds of new enterprises and projects under a pilot United Nations initiative that aims to reintegrate ex-fighters into their former communities. The \$4 million disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programme, which is being jointly run by the United Nations peacekeeping mission in Cote d'Ivoire and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), has helped between 3,000 and 4,000 ex-combatants since it began in August last year. Y. J. Choi, the Secretary-General's Special Representative in Cote d'Ivoire and the head of the UN peacekeeping mission in the West African country (known as UNOCI), told the UN News Centre that the initiative has been so successful that it should be introduced across all peacekeeping operations run by the world body. "We are recommending that \$1 million be given to each peacekeeping operation the extra money could come from the UN Peacebuilding Fund," he said.

Newspaper Summary

No newspaper appear on the newsstand today due to the holiday (National Independence Day)

Radio Summary

Star Radio *(News monitored today at 9:00 am)*

Liberia Celebrates Independence Day in Gbarnga, Bong County

- Ceremonies marking the celebration of Liberia's 162nd Independence anniversary are taking place across the country.
- The official celebration is taking place in Gbarnga, Bong County, in Central Liberia on the theme Reconciliation.
- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, her government officials, and foreign dignitaries including the President of Equatorial Guinea are attending the Gbarnga celebration.
- A local Chief, Flomo Bawror is this year's orator and he will deliver his address in Kpelle, one of Liberia's widely spoken languages.
- This is the first time for a traditional leader to serve as Independence Day orator and for the address to be delivered in a local language.

President Sirleaf Dedicates, Inspects Several Projects in Bong County

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has dedicated and inspected several projects in Bong County.
- The projects include the Superintendent's compound, the Liberia Produce Marketing Corporation (LPMC) and the sub-office of the Gender Ministry.
- Correspondents say the President Sirleaf also dedicated the local sports stadium, the new Cuttington University (CU) gate, radio and television stations and broke ground for the construction of the Madam Suakoko monument on the CU's campus.
- The President call on the CU administration to make the monument large and make it a research centre.
- She hoped that when constructed the centre would foster the dreams and aspirations of the late paramount Chief Suakoko.

Equatorial Guinea President say Reconstruction can be Achieved if Peace is Maintained

- Speaking shortly upon arrival in the Central Regional city of Gbarnga, the Special Guest of this year's Independence Day celebration, Equatorial Guinea President Theodore Obiang Nguema Mbasogo says the reconstruction of Liberia will only be a reality if the peace is sustained.
- President Mbasogon challenged Liberians to pursue peace and maintain it

Education Ministry Suspends Local Education Officials of Montserrado County

- The Ministry of Education has with immediate effect suspended all district Education Officers and County Education Officer of Montserrado County.
- According to a release, the officials remain suspended pending a report from the Ministry's verification team authorized to investigate ghost names on the county's payroll.
- The action is in response to a list of suspected ghost names from the General Auditing Commission (GAC).

Outgoing Police IG Says Community Participation Crucial in Fight against Crime

- Outgoing Police Inspector General Beatrice Munah Sieh-Browne has described as crucial community participation in the fight against crime.
- Mrs. Browne said no where in the world the police can succeed without help from the community residents.
- The statements were in response to honor bestowed upon the former Police IG and her deputy Isatu Bah Kenneth who was also sacked by President Sirleaf.
- Members of the Community Policing Forum honored the two outgoing Police Chiefs what they called their sacrificial services to the state.
- During the ceremony, the leadership of the policing forum called for a review of the standard of operations of the Liberia National Police (LNP).

The Analyst

Tuesday, 28 July 2009

We Won't Rest Until - Pres. Sirleaf Says of Campaign Promises - Lets the Cat of the Bag on TRC Ban

Gbarnga — When Liberians elected President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in a tightly-fought presidential race in 2005, they did so out of hope for a brighter Liberia. In the President's Special July 26 Message, she acknowledged the promises for the morrows, outlined what has been achieved and what is yet to be achieved. But what has she to say about the 30-year ban hovering overhead? The Analyst Staff Writer has been finding out from the President's "special message".

No Rest Until

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has reiterated her administration's determination to revive the Liberian nation, heal the wound of victims, and provide opportunities for the jobless and children of Liberia.

She said her administration will continue to exert every ounce of energy it has and knock on doors of opportunities until these promises were significantly achieved.

The President's renewed avowal was contained in a special July 26 message she delivered yesterday to the nation from the central highland city of Gbarnga in Bong County.

Addressing, amongst many other dignitaries, an array of government officials, the diplomatic corps, the clergy, NGO heads, and traditional leaders, President Sirleaf said her administration's seriousness in reconstructing Liberia could be seen by the gains made in a relatively short period of time in the economic and development sectors.

"When on January 16, 2006 I spoke to the nation, I recognized that the vote for me was a vote for change," she said.

She said it was not only that: "It was a vote for peace, security and stability, a vote for individual and national prosperity, a vote for healing and leadership. I expressed humility in the enormity of the challenges that lay ahead – to heal our nation's wounds, redefine and strengthen its purpose, make democracy a living and effective experiment, promote economic growth, create jobs, revitalize our health and education facilities and services, and quicken the pace of social progress and individual prosperity in our country."

She then noted that it is to make the children smile again that was driving her administration's domestic agendas and foreign policy.

Radio Netherlands Worldwide

Tuesday, 28 July 2009

Bosnian Serb Mladic won't stay at large much longer

By International Justice Desk



Sarajevo , Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnian Serb fugitive war time general Ratko Mladic will not stay at large for much longer, a top Serbian official said Monday. Serbian authorities have stepped up efforts to capture him, a top government official said on Monday.

Mladic is indicted for the 1995 Srebrenica massacre of 8,000 Muslims by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. His arrest is a key condition for Serbia's progress towards membership of the European Union.

Serbia also needs to hand over Goran Hadzic, the political leader of Serbs in Croatia.

"It is impossible that he gets away from many domestic and foreign intelligence officers," said Rasim Ljajic, Serbia's point man for cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY).

Speaking to B92 television, Ljajic said the latest hunt for Mladic was conducted last week and that Serbia was cooperating closely with intelligence services from the region, mainly to exchange information.

"The war time commander of the Bosnian Serb Republic has been hiding for 14 years," Ljajic said. "No one in Serbia expects Ratko Mladic to surrender any more."

Mladic, the commander of Bosnian Serb forces in the 1992-1995 war in Bosnia, was charged with genocide in 1995 for his role in Srebrenica and the 43-month siege of Sarajevo.

Serbia had hoped last year's arrest of Bosnian Serb political leader Radovan Karadzic would boost its application to the EU.

"It seems to me it would be easier for us to locate Mladic, than convince the EU members, and in particular the Netherlands, to change their stand," Ljajic said.

The country has intensified its efforts to arrest Mladic last year, investigating his financial support network and inspecting possible hide outs.

Earlier this month, the EU decided to grant visa-free travel to the citizens of Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, and told Belgrade to improve border controls and boost the fight against corruption and organized crime before the EU lifted visas.

Stuff.co.nz

Monday, 27 July 2009

Hamill to testify before Khmer Rouge tribunal

One day short of 31 years after his brother was abducted, tortured and killed by Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia, Rob Hamill is to testify before the Khmer Rouge Tribunal.

Kerry Hamill ended up at the S-21 or Tuol Sleng prison headed by Kaing Guek Eav, better known as Duch, when the yacht he and friends were sailing strayed into Cambodian waters on August 13, 1978.

One crewman, Canadian Stuart Glass, was shot while Mr Hamill and Briton John Dewhirst were taken for interrogation and torture for two months before being killed.

Mr Hamill, like the estimated 17,000 who entered Tuol Sleng's gates, was forced to make confessions and he claimed to be a CIA spy.

Duch is the first of Pol Pot's henchmen to face trial before the joint UN-backed Cambodian-international court, officially called the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC), on which New Zealand judge Dame Silvia Cartwright is one of the five judges.

Hamill is to testify on August 12.

"I expect to experience the widest possible range of emotions when I see Duch," Hamill said.

"A lot of nervous energy will be expended."

When the trial opened in April Duch apologised for heading the prison but said he was acting on orders.

"Duch says he is sorry and wants forgiveness, but I want to find out whether he truly understands the impact of what he did and the damage he caused," Hamill said.

"I'm not sure that he does comprehend what he and the Khmer Rouge did to the people of Cambodia, let alone to the families of Kerry, John and Stuart."

A documentary, Brother No 1, telling Hamill's story is being produced by Annie Goldson, James Bellamy and Hamill for Pan Pacific Films, funded by NZ on Air and TV3.

Duch faces charges including crimes against humanity, breaches of the Geneva Convention and violations of the Cambodian penal code including premeditated murder. Up to 2 million people died of starvation, overwork, torture or were executed during the 1975-1979 regime.

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The Way Forward in Sri Lanka

By Rohini Hensman

The way forward in Sri Lanka involves demilitarisation, restoration of the rule of law, and democratisation. These are interlinked so closely that it is impossible to separate them, and on their fulfilment depends not only the political future of Sri Lanka, but also its economic survival.

The Fate of Internally Displaced People

Perhaps the most urgent issue is the fate of internally displaced people (IDPs), especially the Vanni civilians who were displaced in the last stages of the war. Reports of conditions in the camps where they have been interned vary; but the central issue is not the conditions under which they are being detained, but the very fact of their detention. Various spurious arguments justifying it have been put forward by the government and its supporters, none of which hold water. The fact that in many cases their homes have been destroyed and the areas from which they come have been land-mined by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) would certainly suggest that the government should offer them shelter until they can return safely, but that is very different from forcibly preventing them from leaving the camps, even if they have homes or relatives elsewhere. Indeed, one family has filed a fundamental rights petition before the Supreme Court, arguing that it is unconstitutional to detain them thus. The Supreme Court has allowed the reunification of this family within one of the camps, but the larger issue of the violation of fundamental rights still remains unaddressed.

Another argument is that LTTE cadres are hiding amongst the civilians, and therefore a process of screening needs to take place before they are released. This might have been plausible if there had been a steady stream of civilians being released as they were screened and cleared, but so far, only senior citizens have been released – that, too, after a court ruled that large numbers of elderly people were dying of dehydration and malnutrition. The plea by Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) leader Anandasangaree on behalf of a one-year-old child whose release had been refused by the authorities makes nonsense of the security argument: are we really to believe that it takes more than two months to ascertain whether or not infants are LTTE cadres who pose a threat to security? A report by the International Center for Strategic Defense that inmates can secure their release by bribing the military authorities running the camps 1-3 lakh rupees makes the ‘security’ claim even more farcical, and suggests that these hapless people are being held for ransom – unless, indeed, the purpose is even more sinister.

In fact, while the last batch of displaced people has now been interned for over two months, earlier batches have been deprived of their liberty for much longer. If this situation continues, it will become a Crime against Humanity as defined by the International Criminal Court (ICC), since it involves ‘severe deprivation of physical liberty’ and ‘severe deprivation of fundamental rights’ of a civilian population. With each passing day, the government’s claim that the assault on the LTTE’s last bastion was launched in order to free the civilians held hostage there looks less plausible, and the allegation that the real purpose was to effect a transfer of population – also defined as a crime against humanity by the ICC – looks more likely. It is an irony that a government that has gone to great lengths to refute the charge of war crimes should open itself up to the more serious charge of crimes against humanity, this time requiring no investigations since they are being committed in front of the whole world! Foreign governments and aid agencies involved in providing for the Vanni IDPs are understandably getting anxious about continuing to contribute to the illegal detention of innocent civilians.

The immediate release of displaced persons who have been interned, and speedy resettlement of all displaced people, including the Muslims ethnically cleansed from the North by the LTTE in 1990, must be part of any post-war programme, and foreign governments and aid agencies should insist on these as conditions for assisting the government of Sri Lanka in relief, reconstruction and redevelopment. Access to the camps and registration by the ICRC and/or UN of all inmates, both of IDP camps and detention camps where LTTE cadres are being held, is also necessary, in view of reports that abductions and disappearances have been taking place.

Demilitarisation and Restoration of the Rule of Law

In the latter stages of the conflict, the military was doubled to around 200,000 personnel, and one would imagine that with the defeat of the LTTE and end of the war it would be halved to its original size, with the demobilised

soldiers being re-employed in civilian tasks like the reconstruction that so urgently needs to be done. Instead, there have been proposals that it be expanded by another 100,000. This proposal should cause concern not just to minorities, but also to the majority of Sinhalese citizens, because against whom would this enormous military be used, now that the LTTE is no more? And who would pay for it? Since IMF loans normally do not have political conditions, it is likely that the reason why a projected loan still has not been approved is the fear that an already heavily indebted government would not be able to pay it back if it embarks on such a huge military spending spree. If the cost of military expansion is borne by the public, which is expecting living conditions to improve with the end of the war, there is likely to be protest in the South. Perhaps that is the expectation.

The government speaks with two tongues when it talks about the LTTE. On one side, it claims that the LTTE has been completely defeated and the war is over: the huge popularity of President Rajapaksa is premised on this notion, as are the celebrations that accompanied the announcement. Yet government policies, including an increase in military spending and the continued incarceration of hundreds of thousands of displaced civilians, can only be justified on the assumption that the LTTE is still a potent threat. Again, paramilitaries kept by Tamil parties like the Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP) were earlier justified by their need to defend themselves from LTTE assassins, but this excuse no longer holds. They should be disarmed immediately.

The LTTE's war machine has been destroyed, and its leadership, including its supreme leader Prabhakaran, killed; there is no chance that it can be revived in the near future. Desperate attempts by the pro-LTTE Tamil diaspora to foster the illusion that it is still alive have more to do with their claims on LTTE financial assets than with anything going on within Sri Lanka. The proposal for increased militarisation is based on a Sinhala nationalist view of the conflict, which sees it solely as a problem of terrorism and separatism. Why this terrorism and separatism arose is left unexplained, because the Sinhala nationalist narrative conveniently leaves out all the discrimination, persecution and violence directed at Tamils prior to the outbreak of the war; if the pogroms of 1983 are reluctantly admitted to have taken place, the official death toll resulting from them is cited: 300-400 as opposed to 2000-3000, which is the unofficial death toll. Hence, they argue, the way to prevent similar problems arising in the future is to militarise society even more, and keep in place the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA) and Emergency Regulations, which allow state actors to violate human and democratic rights with impunity. The horrible paradox is that if the real precursors to the war are recognised, it becomes evident that violation of the human and democratic rights of Tamils and militarisation are precisely what led to it! In other words, what are seen as measures to avert future terrorism and separatism could become catalysts of these very problems.

Furthermore, the destruction of the rule of law wrought by decades of the PTA and Emergency Regulations affects all sections of society in all parts of the country. A bizarre example is the public boast by Labour Minister Mervyn Silva, already infamous for his assaults on mediapersons in the state TV channel Rupavahini, that he was responsible for the murder of journalist Lasantha Wickrematunga and the brutal assault on Poddala Jayantha, general secretary of the Sri Lanka Working Journalists' Association. That a minister close to the president can preside over a mafia with such impunity speaks volumes about the lawlessness prevailing in Sri Lanka. The Asian Human Rights Commission reports that other ruling party politicians too run criminal gangs that terrorise the South, while the kidnapping of little girls for ransom in the East, and their subsequent murder, is blamed on one of the state-linked Tamil paramilitaries.

A particularly disturbing development is the branding of lawyers defending the publishers of the Sunday Leader in a case filed by the Defence Secretary as 'traitors' on the Defence Ministry website, a clear instigation of physical attacks on them by state-linked stormtroopers. One is reminded of the reign of terror in the late 1980s, when anyone who criticised the state was designated a JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna) member or supporter and therefore worthy of death, while lawyers who defended them were tortured and killed. Unless civil society in Sri Lanka wakes up to the danger and takes action to avert it, there is every likelihood that there could be a repetition of that nightmare.

Democratic Rights and the Executive Presidency

This brings us to the issue of freedom of expression, a sine qua non of democracy. The International Federation of Journalists has called on the government to 'Stop the War on Journalists', and this is surely an apt expression when the numerous cases of detention, imprisonment, assault, torture and murder of journalists are considered, while several others have been forced into exile in order to escape a similar fate. According to this professional organisation, Sri Lanka has long been considered one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. This situation continues unabated even after the annihilation of the LTTE, which was also renowned for its denial of freedom of expression. The modus operandi of the state is in fact a mirror image of the LTTE's crushing of

dissent: those who disagree with the powers-that-be are in danger of being labelled 'pro-LTTE' and 'traitors', and thereafter subjected to arrest and detention, abduction and assault or murder by state-linked criminal gangs. This has been the fate even of people who have all along been vociferous in their criticisms of the LTTE!

It is worth pointing out that this is not just a denial of the right to freedom of expression of mediapersons, but also of the right to information of the public. As of now, the clampdown on freedom of expression is not yet complete, but if it progresses further, the public will be fed only the state's version of what is happening in the country, and kept ignorant of developments detrimental to their own interests. The revival in June 2009 of the draconian 1973 Press Council Act, designed to protect government privilege rather than the public's right to information, and opposed by Mahinda Rajapaksa himself while he was in the opposition, is one more step in this direction.

The use of the same criminal gangs against lawyers and opposition politicians undermines the independence of the judiciary and the right to free and fair elections. But these institutions are also undermined by the existence of the Executive Presidency. The absolute power held by this individual trumps the rights of everyone else, and makes a mockery of democracy. This is illustrated by the fate of the 17th Amendment. Passed during Chandrika Kumaratunga's presidency in a rare moment of unanimity in 2001, the 17th Amendment to the Constitution attempts to curtail the power of the Executive President by appointing a Constitutional Council with representation from all parties in parliament, which in turn would select chairpersons and members to the Election Commission, Public Service Commission, National Police Commission, Human Rights Commission, Bribery and Corruption Commission, Finance Commission and Delimitation Commission; its approval was also mandatory for appointments to the offices of the Chief Justice and Judges of the Supreme Court, the President and Judges of the Court of Appeal, members of the Judicial Service Commission other than the chairperson, the Attorney-General, Auditor-General, Inspector-General of Police, Ombudsman and Secretary-General of Parliament. The aim was to ensure the independence of these institutions.

However, as the terms of these appointees came to an end during the presidency of Mahinda Rajapaksa, he started making appointments without consulting the Constitutional Council, which itself finally became defunct as the government failed to appoint a new one. This occurred despite a determined campaign by civil society organisations, spearheaded by the Organisation of Professional Associations. The consequences were disastrous for the justice system, human rights, the fight against organised crime, free and fair elections, and attempts to curb nepotism and corruption.

This whole sequence shows that any attempts to curtail the absolute power of the Executive President which depend on the concurrence of the individual in this position are pointless; neither democracy nor good governance can be ensured unless and until the post is abolished.

Equality and Democracy versus Ethnic Nationalism

The constitutional amendment that is most often cited as being crucial to a political solution of the ethnic conflict is the 13th Amendment, enacted in 1987 in the wake of the Indo-Lanka Accord. The provisions of this can be summed up as (a) granting parity of status to Tamil as an official language alongside Sinhala, and (b) granting devolution of power to Provincial Councils. The former, of course, was promised even prior to Independence: a long-overdue measure which could, if implemented, ensure a much greater degree of equality to Tamils. But it is the latter that is normally given more prominence.

At the time of the Accord, devolution was seen as satisfying the aspirations of the Tamil minority by granting Tamils a degree of self-government in the Tamil-majority Northeastern province which was created by the merger of the Northern and Eastern Provinces (now de-merged again). The arguments in favour of it need careful scrutiny, however. Do they suggest that Tamils in the North and East would have rights that Tamils in other parts of the country would not? Or that Sinhalese would have rights in the rest of the country which they would not have in the Northeast? What about Muslims and smaller minorities: lacking any territory, would they be deprived of self-determination?

The linking of territory to ethnicity, religion or language is always dangerous, and in Sri Lanka especially so. The fundamental argument of Sinhala nationalism is that the Sinhalese, as the majority in Sri Lanka as a whole, should have rights and privileges denied to people of other communities. Does the argument for devolution or self-determination implicitly accept this reasoning? For the LTTE, clearly, it did. For example, self-determination meant butchering Muslims in the East and ethnically cleansing them from the North. In the course of my interviews with internally displaced people in 1990, displaced Muslims told me their Tamil neighbours had wept when they were

being evicted, but were unable to persuade the LTTE to allow them to stay. I came across three Tamil women in one Tamil camp whose Sinhalese husbands had been killed by the LTTE; they were petrified that their little bilingual children would say something in Sinhala and give themselves away. In a Sinhalese camp was a Sinhalese man who had managed to escape, who revealed, in hushed tones, that his wife, who was in the camp with him, was Tamil. In a country where people from different communities have lived in mixed neighbourhoods and mixed families from time immemorial, linking a particular community to a particular territory necessarily entails terrible violence, crimes against humanity, and the prohibition of genuine love and friendship, which recognise no communal barriers.

Territorialising rights suggests that rights are a zero-sum game: since the territory of Sri Lanka is finite, more of it for one community means less for another. This is why Sinhala extremists have been able to convince some moderates that recognising ‘minority rights’ means giving up part of what they legitimately see as their country. For Tamils, surely, it is the opposite: defining only the North and East as ‘traditional Tamil homelands’ entails giving up a large part of what they can legitimately claim as their country: the whole of Sri Lanka. So what is the solution?

Relentlessly insisting on equality, the bedrock of democracy, would disarm the Sinhala chauvinists, because it could be pointed out that the minorities are simply asking for equality before the law and equal protection of the law, equal rights and opportunities, and not demanding that anything be taken away from the Sinhalese. Sri Lanka does not have the same language problems as India, since there are only three national languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English. In India, children routinely learn three languages at school, and children in Sri Lanka could easily do the same; indeed, some have already begun to do so, and if the effort is continued and expanded, the next generation would not have the same linguistic problems as this one. In the meantime, it would be necessary to recruit Tamil-speaking people and interpreters to all government offices, police stations, courts, army outposts, and so on, so that parity for Tamil can be implemented properly. If all children could be educated in the medium of their choice and all citizens could communicate with the state in the national language of their choice, practice the religion of their choice in the way they choose or practice no religion if they so choose, and develop their culture individually and collectively in all parts of the island, there would be no need to make special provisions for Tamil-majority provinces.

Even the demand for devolution needs to be reframed as a demand for democratisation that brings government closer to all the people, not just minorities, apart from being made far stronger than the 13th Amendment, which has loopholes allowing the Centre to take back the devolved powers. Along with the demand for abolition of the Executive Presidency, and further devolution to smaller units, it would give all the people of Sri Lanka more control over their lives, instead of having their lives ruled by a remote power in Colombo that knows little and cares less about their needs. Admittedly, the history of Sri Lanka from Independence has been one of oppression of minorities, and while some wrongs have been righted (e.g., disenfranchisement of the plantation workers, discrimination against Tamil by law and constitution), new injustices have arisen, foremost among which is the denial of liberty to the Vanni IDPs. Therefore some mechanism to guard against such injustices would be advisable, and this can partly be achieved by giving minorities more power at the Centre through a Second Chamber.

However, the best safeguard for the equal rights of minorities would be the understanding throughout society that democracy is not a zero-sum game, but the very opposite. As Pastor Niemoller wrote in the poem quoted by Lasantha Wickrematunga in his last article, published posthumously, if we don’t stand up for others when they are under attack, then there will be no one to stand up for us when we are attacked. In other words, by defending democracy for others, one is defending democracy for oneself. All but the oppressors have an interest in maximising democracy, and solidarity between different sections of the oppressed (including women, workers and the rural poor, as well as minority communities) is essential if the struggle for it is to be won in Sri Lanka.

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