SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE

PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

Tuesday, 28 March 2006

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
If you are aware of omissions or have any comments or suggestions please contact
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Sierra Leone Media

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Awoko
28 March 2006

Augustine Gbao to lose his lawyer

Augustine Gbao, the third accused in the trial of the three Revolutionary United Front (RUF) indictees at the Special Court, will lose his defence lawyer Professor

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Augustine Gbao to lose his lawyer

From Page 2

Andreas O'Shea. The later informed the court yesterday that he wanted to tender his resignation from Gbao's defence team.

Mr. O'Shea, who has been the led counsel for Gbao's team for the past two year, said the reason for his resignation was based on the statement made by his client last Friday that he no longer had confidence in his defence team.

Professor O'Shea went on to inform the court, presided over by justice Pierre Boutet, that after he had been informed about the intention of his client he had a meeting with him though the meeting was not positive as Gbao stated out rightly that he had no problem with Mr. Cammegh but that Professor O' Shea should no longer represent him.

The Professor, who has also represented clients in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, further informed the court that though he was aware of the correspondence between the principal defender and the judges, he later got information that two Sierra Leonean lawyers, "Shears Moses and one Mr. King have been paying visits to my client in my absence. When I later enquired, I was told that this was done with the knowledge of the defence."

Augustine Gbao on Friday became adamant in court after the judges ruled that they would not allow him to change his lawyers for the second time as this would delay the progress of the proceedings and that they would only approve of one Sierra Leonean lawyer to join his defence team.

The three: Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao are each facing an 18-count indictment for crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

For di People
28 March 2006

Special Court Judge May Abandon Augustine Gbao

SPECIAL COURT presiding judge, Benjamin Mutenga Etoe has said yesterday that Professor Andreas O'Shea's decision to withdraw representing Ruf's Augustine Gbao will not be in the interest of his client or the court.

by
SU THORONKA

This observation was made known after O'Shea filed in a motion to withdraw from the ongoing trial as legal representative for Gbao as a result of a letter written by Gbao addressed to the Court Registrar stating that he does not require the services of O'Shea any longer but rather prefer lawyer Shears-Moses as his new defence counsel.

lost

Gbao stated in no uncertain terms that he had lost confidence in O'Shea and promised not to cooperate with him either by way of communication or consultation.

In view of this, O'Shea considers such a move by his client as a big blow to his integrity, personality and career as a renowned lawyer and therefore made his intention to resign known to the bench.

best

However, Judge Etoe opined that O`Shea`s intention to resign will not be in the interest of Gbao or the court and that even if the new lawyer is the best in the world, he will definitely find it difficult if not impossible to cope with the present trial taking into consideration that 65 witnesses have already testified in Court in the absence of Shears-Moses.

The judge said the bench is not prepared to encourage any proposal at this particular moment that would unecessarily delay the proceedings. Acting in solidarity with their colleague counsel, lawyers representing Issa Sesay and Morris Kallon expressed their willingness to resign should O`Shea resign.

They said O`Shea has the legal qualification and competence to represent Gbao.

give

He is a barrister in London and programme-coordinator for the LLM in International and African Regional Law at the University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal in South Africa.

He has represented clients before the international criminal tribunal for Rwanda and has published in international law and author of Amnesty for Crime In International Law and Practice.

Meanwhile, the judges are to give a ruling on the motion soonest.

Awoko
28 March 2006

Warrant of arrest for Charles Taylor

By Betty Milton

The Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court Desmond de Silva, QC, has issued a stern warning to the Nigerian government to execute a warrant of arrest as the international community will be upon Nigeria to see that it hands over former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor, to the democratically elected government of that country.

Mr. Desmond de Silva further stated that President

Contd. Page 2

Warrant of arrest for Charles Taylor

From Front Page

Obasanjo should execute the warrant of arrest, issued on Taylor by the Special Court in November 2003.

The Chief Prosecutor further stated that as President Obasanjo had contributed to peace in the sub-regions, he was urging him to take steps for Mr. Taylor not to abscond from Nigeria.

He maintained that as the whole world was watching they would like to see Mr. Taylor held in Nigerian detention to avoid him using his wealth and associates to slip away.

The former Liberian President was on 3 March 2003 indicted on a 17- count charge of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law.

On 1 November 2003, Taylor's lawyer in Sierra Leone, the late Terrence Terry, introduced a preliminary motion before the Special Court's Appeals Chamber unsuccessfully challenging the court's jurisdiction to try him.

The late lawyer argued the motion that as the President of Liberia, Taylor enjoyed head of state immunity. He also argued that the court was not an international tribunal and thus should have no jurisdiction outside Sierra Leone. On 31 May 2003, the Appeals Chamber decided that the court was an international court and that a head of state did not enjoy immunity from an international court.

Exclusive
28 March 2006

Obasanjo, Bush Meet...

Face To Face On Taylor

By Mohamed Sesay

Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo, will not honour the invitation to participate at the on going investors conference in Freetown, an authoritative source, yesterday revealed.

According to the source, Mr Obasanjo is due to meet the United States President; George W Bush, in Washington this week, to finalise talks on the handing over for trial at the Special Court in Freetown, of the former Liberian President Charles Taylor.

It would be recalled that Mr

Contd. page 2

Obasanjo

Charles Taylor

George Bush

Face To Face On Taylor

From front page

Taylor was granted asylum in the Calabar State of Nigeria, through an AU peace deal, to allow peace to return to that war torn country once more, in the wake of rebel advances to the capital, Monrovia three years ago.

Repeated calls by the Special Court and the international community for Mr Obasanjo to turn in Mr Taylor for trial in Freetown have consistently been rejected by the Nigerian President because according to him, he would only do so on the request of a democratically elected government in Liberia.

Last week, Liberia's President Eleen Johnson Sirleaf, who was in Washington to solicit assistance for the reconstruction of Liberia, addressed a joint session of the US Congress, during which she was alleged to have tacitly okayed the extradition of Mr Taylor.

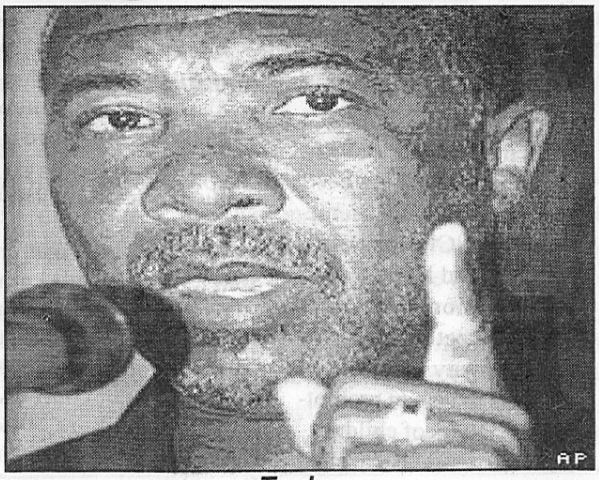
What however remains the bone of contention is whether Mr Taylor should be collected from Calabar by the Liberian government, or Nigeria sending him directly to Freetown or Monrovia, with the latter claiming to have signed no extradition treaty with Nigeria and is therefore not the competent authority to collect the former president from his Calabar State asylum.

This it seems, is what still remains to be the hiccups over when, who and where Mr Taylor would eventually be conveyed.

Our source disclosed that Mr Obasanjo's trip pending trip to Washington, will focus on finding a workable solution to Mr Taylor's extradition hiccups.

Salone Times
28 March 2006

Taylor's Trial: Security Fears



Taylor

COMMENTARY By Phileas Jusu

It is now apparent that former President of Liberia, Charles Taylor will eventually arrive in Freetown to answer to the seventeen count war crime charges against him; a thing he had always evaded since he was indicted some three years ago.

Before now, the Nigerian government that has been hosting the war crime indictee had vowed never to hand Charles Taylor over to the Special Court in Sierra Leone, and that whoever attempted to arrest Charles Taylor by force would never live to tell the story. Pressure from the International Community on that government has now changed all that, and latest developments indicate that the once

SEE PAGE 3

COMMENTARY

powerful West African war lord will be handed over to the Special Court soon.

The trial of Charles Taylor by the Special Court in Sierra Leone, if it materialises, will be a big boost for the Special Court especially at a time when the donor community as well as most citizens of Sierra Leone seem to have lost interest in the proceedings of the court. Of the key indictees initially charged by the court, only Sam Hinga Norman (who is regarded in some quarters as a war hero) is presently standing trial. Sam (Mosquito) Bockarie was reportedly killed in Liberia even before he could be extradited to Sierra Leone to stand trial; Johnny Paul Koroma's whereabouts are still not ascertained while the RUF leader Foday Sankoh died in the custody of the Special Court just as his trial proper was about to gather steam.

The arrival of Charles Taylor therefore will certainly restore both the morale of the court as well as the attention it had almost lost as a result of the aforementioned developments. It might as well be enough reason for the donor community who had become lukewarm to donate more funds to run the court to take a second look at the situation of the court.

We at SALONE TIMES welcome the moves now being made both at sub-regional level and the international community at large to bring Taylor to book, but with a note of caution. We acknowledge that Charles Taylor is a high profile indictee of the Special Court who has been a rebel warlord and eventually president for over a decade; hence he indisputably commands a lot of respect and following among ex-combatants and certain politicians in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

We also respect the high calibre of Charles Taylor's intellect and how he could use the two to create chaos and anarchy especially in a circumstance where he believes his life and personality are under threat. Hence, as a pre-requisite to Taylor's arrival in Freetown, we urge government and particularly the Special Court to reinforce and make more robust the security arrangements both in Freetown where Taylor will be tried and the border crossing points linking Sierra Leone and Liberia.

We do not want a repeat of the poor security arrangement that was in place in 1991 when the Sierra Leone government accepted the sub-regional force ECOMOG to use bases in Sierra Leone to intervene in the Liberian crisis which Taylor(then as warlord) used as an excuse for Sierra Leone to "taste the bitterness of war". As a result, rebels of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) with much aid and support from Charles Taylor and his NPFL forces invaded the country through territories in Liberia controlled by Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia.

Sierra News
28 March 2006

Amnesty International says no to Impunity

By Suliaman Bah

Amnesty International and the Coalition for Justice and Accountability have called on the Nigerian Government to hand over the former Liberian leader Charles Ghankay Taylor to the Special Court of Sierra Leone face justice

Speaking at the Amnesty International Sierra Leone Section in Freetown, the acting Managing Director, Mr. Brima Sheriff said the position for all Human Right Organizations in Sierra Leone is to hand over Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to answer to the 17 counts for his role in the armed conflict that lasted from 1991 to 2002.

Mr. Sheriff said President Johnson Sirlieaf has taken a crucial stand against impunity in Africa by requesting Taylor's surrender to the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone

He appealed to President Obasajo to demonstrate that he too care about justice on the continent by handing over Charles Taylor to the Special Court in Sierra Leone.

In his statement, Mr Smaimau Jabati, Executive Secretary of the Sierra Leone Coalition for Justice and Accountability said that this is the time for Taylor to face trial for his alleged crimes.

Mr Jabati also said that both local and International Human Right Organizations share the same position for the indictment of Charles Taylor to the Special Court of Sierra Leone.

Standard Times
28 March 2006

President Johnson-Sirleaf brings hope of Taylor's extradition

the beginning of the end.

As the Special Court prepares to receive Charles Taylor, it is essential the Outreach Section of the Special Court reaches out to the opeople of Liberia.

The Liberian people need to know that it is not Liberia but Charles Taylor that has been indicted, and that the indictment was not issued by Sierra Leone but an international war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone.

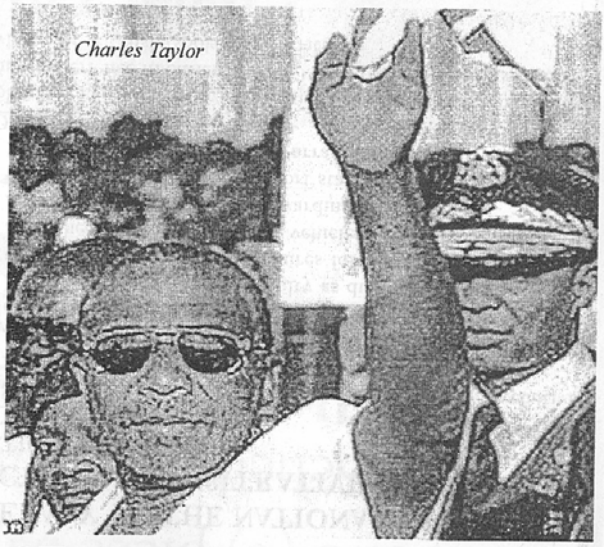
This will tremendously help to dispel the fear currently among Liberians that Charles Taylor was indicted by Sierra Leone, which some of them have interpreted to mean that more Liberians will be indicted.

This will also help to allay the fear of skeptics that the sub-region will embroil in another civil war if Charles Taylor is brought to justice.

As a court monitoring programme, we want to add our voice to the numerous calls for the extradition of Charles Taylor.

This stemmed from our belief that the greatest fertilizer of conflict is impunity and impunity is the greatest enemy of accountability.

We therefore hold the view that the longer Charles Taylor continued to be shielded away from accountability, the likely another warlord will be emerge. We will continue to bring you news and analysis from the court rooms.



Charles Taylor

Awoko
28 March 2006

UK supports Special Court on Charles Taylor extradiction

I was pleased to learn that the Nigerian Government today agreed to hand over Charles Taylor to the Liberian Government to be taken into custody. President Obasanjo deserves the gratitude of the International Community in the way that he has handled this very difficult issue. This is an important day for the international rule of law.

I understand that once the transfer has taken place, the Liberian Government, with the assistance of the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia, will be able to transfer Charles Taylor to the jurisdiction of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

The UK strongly supports the Special Court and the principle that everybody should be answerable for their actions.

We have always been committed to seeing Charles Taylor face the charges against him - relating to crimes against humanity and war crimes - in the Special Court.

His trial will be a big step forward for Sierra Leone and Liberia in addressing the atrocities of that period.

Awoko
28 March 2006

Take Charles Taylor somewhere else – says JBJ

Prominent Freetown barrister, James Blyden Jenkins-Johnston has pleaded with the government and the Special Court to ensure that they take former Liberian President Charles Taylor somewhere else for trial.

According to the legal luminary, who dubbed himself "a worried Citizen of Sierra Leone," "don't disturb our peace again."

In an article, he distributed yesterday on the issue, he said, "I have no doubt that most Sierra Leoneans were pleased to hear the news from Abuja, Nigeria, that President Obasanjo

Contd. Page 2

Legal luminary James Blyden Jenkins-Johnston

Take Charles Taylor somewhere else

From Front Page

had agreed to grant the request of the new Liberian government of Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf for Charles Taylor, (the former Warlord turned President) to be handed back to the authorities in Liberia, in keeping with his earlier promise to hand Mr. Taylor over to a democratically elected government in Monrovia."

He went on, "considering what role Mr Taylor is alleged to have played in our troubles in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002. Indeed we would all like to see him face justice, and if found guilty to be dealt with appropriately according to law."

However, the legal luminary maintained, "I was filled with great foreboding, when I heard over the BBC that the next issue to be decided was whether Mr. Charles Taylor should be taken to Monrovia, or whether he should be sent straight to Freetown for trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone, as he has already been indicted by that Court."

Lawyer Jenkins-Johnston further stressed that, "I also heard the views of some people in Monrovia that they did not want Taylor taken to Monrovia for fear that the fragile peace in Liberia might be disturbed as Mr. Taylor still has a substantial following in the country."

He then asked, "But what about Sierra Leone-do we want Mr. Charles Taylor to be brought here, particularly at this time?

Responding to his own question, he said, "I can say, speaking for myself, that the answer is a most emphatic NO!!!."

Lawyer Jenkins-Johnston gave the following reasons for his stance, which included, "we are still struggling to maintain the fragile peace obtained in the country at the moment, and those with eyes to see will confirm (if they want to be honest) that it will only take a small spark to re-ignite a fire in our country again."

"We cannot afford to take the risk," he stressed, emphasising further that, "although the guns have been silent for a few years now, it is my considered view that our government has not tackled, to any appreciable degree, the causes of the war, i.e. "poverty, social injustice, corruption at all levels; youth employment, idleness and the lack of any opportunity to make headway in life."

Lawyer Jenkins-Johnston further highlighted the continued deterioration in the basic utilities, (blackout, lack of water, lousy telephone services and a general lack of direction of the country, so in such he stated that, "we cannot afford to take the risk."

The legal luminary stressed that he did not know whether Charles Taylor had any or any substantial following in the country, but said, "I do know that there are several hundreds (maybe thousands) of idle ex-combatants right here in Freetown and all over the country, and no one can vouch for their loyalty or where their allegiance lies."

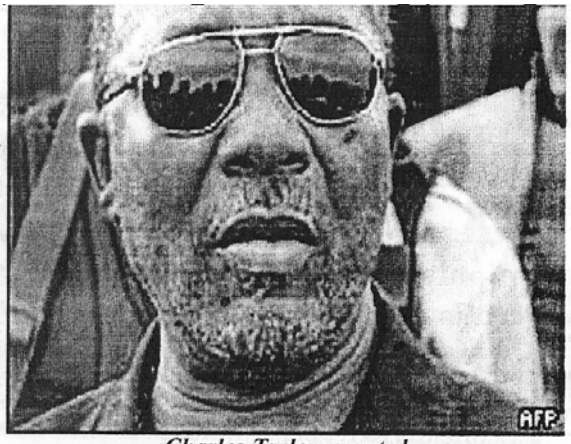
He emphasised that, "The Special Court shall have its seat in Sierra Leone.

The Court may meet away from its seat if it considers it necessary for the efficient exercise of its functions, and may be relocated outside Sierra Leone, if circumstances so requires"

To this end, he said, "maybe the Hague in Holland should be considered as a possible venue."

Spectator
28 March 2006

Take Charles Taylor elsewhere ...Jenkins Johnston



Charles Taylor: wanted

A worried legal luminary, J.B. Jenkins-Johnston Esq. has Monday 27th March appealed to Government and the Special Court for Sierra Leone not to disturb the peace of Sierra Leoneans again by bringing one time warlord and former Liberian President Charles Taylor straight to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. In a plea to Government and the SC/SL Mr. Jenkins said he would like to see Mr. Taylor face justice and if found guilty dealt with appropriately according to the law. "But what about Sierra Leoneans-Do we want Charles Taylor to be brought here, particularly at this time?

continued page 2

Take Taylor elsewhere

from front page

I can say, speaking for myself, that my answer is a most **EMPHATIC NO**," Mr. Jenkins-Johnston states because of multiple reasons. He further states that, "we are still struggling to maintain the fragile peace obtaining in the country at the moment, and those with eyes to see will confirm if they want to be honest that it will only take a small spark to reingnite a fire in our country again. We cannot afford to take the risk." Despite the silence of the guns for few years, the lawyer is of the view that "our Government has not tackled, to any approachable degree, the causes of the war, that is to say poverty, social injustice, corruption at all levels, youth unemployment" maintaining that there are thousands of ex-combatants in the country whose loyalties are uncertain. He stated that it is time to make use of Article 9 of the said Agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone which states that " The Special Court shall have its seat in Sierra Leone.

The Court may meet away from its seat if it considers it necessary for the efficient exercise of its functions, and may be relocated outside Sierra Leone in circumstances so require...may be the Hague in Holland."

Exclusive
28 March 2006
Opinion

Taylor, Taylor, Taylor Bullshit!

their minds. In their vast majority, they believe that Taylor is not on their topmost priority list or an important issue right now.

"What the average man or woman needs most right now is food to eat; jobs, health care, education and infastructural development... We need occasions like the Investors' Forum to attract investment, create jobs and improve the lives of the citizenry... Otherwise the Special Court would mean nothing to the ordinary man because, the Eighty million they 'spend' annually do not impact on the life of the common man who preferred sleeping dogs than to have the Special Court," a newspaper Editor commented.

ANOTHER WAR?

According to one Western diplomat, Sierra Leoneans have very mixed feelings about Taylor's extradition.

"Liberia with all the atrocities and destruction Taylor caused there; say he is not their priority and they had not indicted him ...They arrested top Taylor associates for fear of a military uprising... so what do you expect Sierra Leoneans to be thinking; if not the same thing," the diplomat queried.

PRISON ESCAPE

Sierra Leoneans do not seem to be fully convinced that Taylor would be securely kept under lock and key at the Special Court considering his record for jail break even in the United States.

They know the tale of Taylor's dramatic escape from one of the USA's maximum security prisons where no prisoner had escaped except the former Liberian warlord; who waged war on Liberia shortly after he escaped from his American jail

Some people say, the CIA facilitated his escape.

They know the tale of Taylor's dramatic escape from one of the USA's maximum security prisons where no prisoner had escaped except the former Liberian warlord; who waged war on Liberia shortly after he escaped from his American jail

Some people say, the CIA facilitated his escape.

BBC
28 March 2006

US pushes Nigeria on Taylor trial

The United States has urged Nigeria to ensure that former Liberia President Charles Taylor is sent to face trial on war crimes charges.

Nigeria and Liberia have publicly disagreed over how Mr Taylor should be sent from exile in Nigeria to a UN-backed court in Sierra Leone.

Nigeria says Liberia should pick him up but now the US has backed up Liberia, which says it is up to Nigeria.

Mr Taylor faces 17 charges for allegedly backing Sierra Leone rebels.

He stepped down as Liberian leader in 2003 and went into exile in Nigeria as part of a deal to end the civil war he had begun 14 years earlier.

But there is uncertainty over whether he still remains in his luxury residency in the south-eastern city of Calabar.

The BBC's Mark Doyle in Freetown says there are powerful political forces at play over Mr Taylor's fate.

Custody

Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo is due to meet US President George W Bush in Washington on Wednesday.

> Nigeria must urgently take steps to tighten security around Taylor's villa in Calabar and should immediately take him into custody
> Richard Dicker, Human Rights Watch

"It is incumbent upon the Nigerian government now to see that he [Mr Taylor] is conveyed to the international court," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said.

"Obviously, we have talked to President Obasanjo about this."

But on Monday, Mr Obasanjo's spokeswoman said Nigeria's job was done and Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had been told she "is free to come and take President Taylor into her custody".

But Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf said she wanted her predecessor to be sent directly to Sierra Leone, as he had not been indicted by a Liberian court.

'Fled'

Desmond de Silva, chief prosecutor of the war crimes court in Sierra Leone, has called for Mr Taylor's arrest in Nigeria, saying he was worried that the former Liberian leader may flee.

He also described Mr Taylor as one of the three most important wanted war crimes suspects in the world.

TAYLOR TIMELINE
1989: Launches rebellion
1991: RUF rebellion starts in Sierra Leone
1995: Peace deal signed
1997: Elected president
1999: Lurd starts rebellion to oust Taylor
June 2003: Arrest warrant issued
August 2003: Steps down, goes into exile in Nigeria

Joseph Ushigiale, spokesman for the Nigerian state where Mr Taylor is living, told the BBC's Focus on Africa programme that he was "under very good protective custody" and had taken part in the just-ended census in Nigeria.

"We can assure you Mr Taylor will not just walk away."

But one of Mr Taylor's aides, Kilari Anand Paul told the BBC that the former Liberian leader was not in Calabar.

He said Mr Taylor was either in detention, or he had fled.

A number of Mr Taylor's supporters have been detained in Liberia amid fears they may stage an armed uprising.

Tens of thousands of people died in the interlinked conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Mr Taylor is accused of selling diamonds and buying weapons for Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front rebels, who were notorious for hacking off the hands and legs of civilians during a 10-year war.

He also started the Liberian civil war in 1989, before being elected president in 1997.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4851992.stm

Reuters
27 March 2006

Liberia, Nigeria at odds over Taylor custody

By Alphonso Toweh

MONROVIA, March 27 (Reuters) - Liberia and Nigeria were at odds on Monday over who should take charge of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who is wanted by a U.N.-backed war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone.

While Nigeria had invited Liberian authorities on Saturday to take custody of the former warlord, who has lived in exile on Nigerian soil since 2003, Liberia's president said on Monday Taylor should go to Sierra Leone.

Taylor's spokesman in Nigeria, Sylvester Paasewe, said Taylor was in his villa in the southeastern city of Calabar. He denied rumours that Taylor had escaped or been taken to a secret location by Nigerian authorities.

Seen as the mastermind behind once intertwined civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, Taylor is wanted by a U.N.-backed Special Court in Freetown where he is charged on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The charges relate to the 1991-2002 civil war in Sierra Leone, where he is accused of having supported rebels notorious for their brutality in exchange for diamonds.

"Taylor was indicted by a Sierra Leone court. Taylor should rather go to Sierra Leone than come to Liberia because he was not indicted by a Liberian court," Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf told church representatives in Monrovia.

It was her first public response to Saturday's announcement by Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, which had placed the onus of collecting Taylor squarely in the hands of Liberia.

"Taylor is not a prisoner in Nigeria ... The situation is that as of March 25 she (the Liberian President) is free to come and take President Taylor into her custody," Obasanjo's spokeswoman Remi Oyo insisted in Abuja on Monday.

The prosecutor of the Sierra Leone Special Court, Desmond de Silva, said on Sunday he had asked Obasanjo to arrest Taylor to prevent him escaping, but Oyo said the Nigerian government had not yet formally received this request.

Taylor's 2003 exile was part of a peace deal to end 14 years of war in Liberia which killed 250,000 people, spawned a generation of young gunmen and spread violence to nearby states.

TAYLOR'S "DAY IN COURT"

The custody debate is further muddied by the fact Obasanjo had always said he would not hand Taylor to a third country but only to a democratically elected Liberian government.

Johnson-Sirleaf, a Harvard-trained economist, took office as Africa's first elected female president in January.

She supports the idea of Taylor having "his day in court", but says she wants to ensure this does not derail the process of reconciliation in Liberia, where memories of the brutal civil war are fresh and Taylor still has backers.

Some of Taylor's aides and supporters have warned that bringing him to trial would spark violence in Liberia.

"The Taylor issue is an inherited one. The government still stands by its position that Mr Taylor be tried in an environment that is not hostile to Liberia," Johnson-Sirleaf said.

Her government has said however it is willing to cooperate to bring Taylor's case to a conclusion.

Responding to concerns Taylor might try to flee Nigeria, Oyo said: "As far as the Nigerian authorities are concerned, he is still in Nigeria."

Obasanjo, who visits Washington this week, has been under intense pressure, notably from the United States, to send Taylor to stand trial. But he does not want to be seen as going back on his word given in 2003 granting him safe haven.

Christopher Staker, deputy prosecutor for the Special Court that indicted Taylor, said the court intended he should stand trial in Sierra Leone.

"As to how we get him here, that's being worked out," he added, but declined to elaborate.

The United States said that despite the rumors of his escape Taylor was in Nigeria and demanded the government made sure he could be handed over to the court.

"I know that he is in Nigeria at the current time. I can't tell you what his current status is, where in the country he may find himself. It is incumbent upon the Nigerian government now to see that he is conveyed to the international court," State Department spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters.

(Additional reporting by Estelle Shirbon and Felix Onuah in Abuja and Tom Ashby in Lagos)

Reuters
27 March 2006

Liberian ex-president Taylor's location unknown

CALABAR, Nigeria, March 27 (Reuters) - The location of exiled former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who is wanted for war crimes by a court in Sierra Leone, was unknown on Monday and his spokesman in Nigeria would not give any information.

Nigeria said on Saturday the government of Liberia was free to take Taylor into its custody from his asylum in the southeastern Nigerian city of Calabar, but it has not given any details on when and how this would happen.

Rumours intensified over the weekend that Taylor had left Calabar, but Reuters has not confirmed these rumours.

Taylor's spokesman Sylvester Paasewe, who late on Saturday called Reuters to say the former warlord was in his villa in Calabar, refused to answer questions about Taylor on Monday.

"I'm not going to answer that question ... I am not telling you anything about him," Paasewe said in response to question about Taylor's whereabouts.

Taylor went into exile in 2003 as part of a deal to end Liberia's 14-year civil war, which spilled over into nearby countries including Sierra Leone. Taylor stands accused of supporting brutal rebels there in exchange for diamonds.

A spokeswoman for Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said she had no information about his whereabouts.

The prosecutor of the U.N.-backed court in Sierra Leone said on Sunday he had asked Obasanjo to have Taylor arrested to prevent him escaping, but the Nigerian president's spokeswoman said the request had not been received.

"We have not received the request. He (the prosecutor) is playing games in the media. When we receive it we will respond appropriately," Remi Oyo told Reuters.

Human Rights Watch on Sunday urged Nigeria to swiftly transfer Taylor to the Sierra Leone court as there were fears he would try and escape.

An adviser to Obasanjo, who did not wish to be named, said the Nigerian government's plan was to have Taylor out of the country before Obasanjo travels to Washington on Tuesday for a meeting with President George W. Bush on Wednesday.

The adviser did not give any details on how this would work and where Taylor would be taken.

The United States has been exerting strong pressure on Nigeria to send Taylor to the Sierra Leone court.

(Additional reporting by Tom Ashby in Lagos)
((Writing by Estelle Shirbon; +234 9 413 8410; estelle.shirbon@reuters.com, editing by Fredrik Dahl))

BBC Focus on Africa
27 March 2006

LEAD-IN: Meanwhile since Nigeria announced willingness to turn over Charles Taylor, there has inevitably been a lot of speculation as to how and when it might happen. Mr. Taylor is wanted by the UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone on war crimes charges. And today President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in Liberia said she wants him transferred directly to Sierra Leone. But some like the US-based Human Rights Watch's Richard Dicker have expressed fears Mr. Taylor might try to escape from his temporary home in the Nigerian state of Calabar.

DICKER: The fear is that the security around Mr. Taylor's villa in Calabar is quite lax. from all the ports on the scene. Mr. Taylor one must recall escaped from a prison in the United States, outside Boston Massachusetts, some years ago, and a man of his determination and ruthlessness I would expect needs to be watched quite carefully if he is to be handed over for trial.

Well Joseph Ushigiale is Chief Press Secretary to the governor in Calabar. Earlier I asked him if he knew exactly where Charles Taylor was.

USHIGALE: (Laughs) You know, there's a designated place for him and he's remained there at Solomon Unoh Lodge.

That's his house?

USHIGALE: That's where the government kept him.

At the moment, is there a security presence ensuring that he is there?

USHIGALE: Definitely.

What does that consist of?

USHIGALE: What we have here are plainclothes policemen. The arrangement is highly covert. So we don't have the kind of security that you require heavy military presence like the army and all that. But I can assure you he's under very good protective custody.

It's just that since the news broke that Nigeria was prepared to let him go, to hand him over, Human Rights Watch for example, that organisation did express serious concerns that in their view it would be relatively easy for Mr. Taylor to just walk out or be spirited away somehow.

USHIGALE: I quite appreciate their concern and all that but you see America, this is Nigeria and I think we can assure you Taylor will not just walk away.

So do you know what is going to happen to Mr. Taylor now?

USHIGALE: It's not in our position to determine his fate. We await the final decision of the federal government. When, and the specific time that Mr. Taylor will be moved from here is not known to us – we are just standing by.

And do you have any indication as to when this might be?

USHIGALE: (Laughs) Well, I think it will be soon.

It has been reported that it's actually very easy for people to come to and fro – journalists and so on. Is that not in your view a possible breach of security as far as looking after him is concerned?

USHIGALE: I hope you appreciate that during the census exercises security was a bit relaxed so that the enumerators could access the place and whatever reports that came out along were gleaned from answers Taylor gave to the enumerators.

Voice of America
27 March 2006

Chief Prosecutor Rejects Attempts at Intimidation by Charles Taylor Supporters

By Joe De Capua
Washington

There's no word yet Monday about when exiled Liberian leader Charles Taylor will be turned over to Liberian authorities.

Over the weekend, Nigeria announced that Taylor would be handed over, after three years in exile. He faces war crimes charges in Sierra Leone stemming from the country's civil war.

Desmond de Silva is the chief prosecutor for the UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone. English to Africa reporter Joe De Capua asked him whether he'd been contacted by either Nigerian or Liberian officials about Charles Taylor.

"Firstly, it would be inappropriate of me to discuss what negotiations I've had either with the Liberian authorities or with the Nigerian authorities. The position at the moment is that the Nigerian authorities have made Charles Taylor available for collection by the Liberian authorities. And it's a matter for the Liberian authorities to work out with Nigeria what the modalities should be."

De Silva says as far as he knows, Taylor remains in Nigeria at this time.

De Silva rejects claims that Nigeria betrayed Taylor, saying the former Liberian president was only granted temporary asylum and that Nigeria's president, Olusegun Obasanjo, had promised to turn him over if a legitimately elected Liberian government requested it.

Some of Taylor's supporters have said there will be "chaos and bloodshed" if he is turned over for prosecution. De Silva responds, "There are even Hitler apologists still around, I expect. There are people who came out onto the streets to support (former Yugoslav Federation leader Slobodan) Milosevic." De Silva says if Taylor, through his supporters, is trying to threaten or blackmail the court with threats of violence, "he will fail."

Mail & Guardian Online
27 March 2006

Nigeria's 'betrayal' of Taylor made in the US

Katharine Houreld | Lagos

27 March 2006 02:59

Charles Taylor at a press conference in 2003 where details of the former Liberian leader's asylum were announced. (Photograph: AP)

As one of Charles Taylor's closest advisers warns of "bloodshed and chaos" if the former Liberian president is extradited, analysts say the international community must act quickly to prevent his supporters from re-arming.

Taylor, currently in exile in Nigeria, faces 17 counts of crimes against humanity brought by an internationally backed special court in Sierra Leone.

He is prevented from speaking to the media by the terms of his agreement with Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, but now, says his "spiritual adviser", evangelist Kilari Anand Paul, he feels betrayed.

"Obasanjo is doing this so the White House will close its eyes to a third term," he says darkly. The Nigerian president has refused to squash speculation that he plans to change the Constitution to extend his rule -- a move that Washington is strongly opposed to.

Analysts also link Obasanjo's olive branch to the Americans with recent refusals by Western powers to furnish Nigeria with weapons. A recent insurgency in the Niger Delta has cut the production of Africa's biggest oil producer by a quarter, but the West is alarmed about the human-rights record of the Nigerian military. Recent reports emanating from Vice-President Atiku Abubaker that Nigeria was looking elsewhere for military equipment prompted a flurry of furious denials from the president.

"As long as Taylor is in his custody, he has a better bargaining tool," says Paul, who warns of an explosion of violence if Taylor is extradited.

Mike McGovern, the West Africa head of the International Crisis Group, points out that while Taylor lacks a clear ally in neighbouring countries from which to mount an insurgency, porous borders mean that many pro-Taylor fighters are still roaming around in Sierra Leone and Western Côte d'Ivoire.

"I think that how much bloodshed potentially comes out of this extradition has a lot to do with how quickly President Obasanjo and his African colleagues come to a decision," he said. "If the decision is allowed to drag on it exposes [Liberian] President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to real danger in the sense that it gives pro-Taylor forces time to regroup and recruit."

Although many observers were surprised at the speed with which Johnson-Sirleaf asked for Taylor's extradition -- a confrontation she had repeatedly dodged during her campaign -- McGovern believes, "her hand was forced because money needed to rebuild the country was tied to this request". The Liberian president made the announcement during a special address to the United States Congress.

The White House, which has pledged millions in aid to Liberia, has frequently

denounced Taylor as one of the world's worst abusers of human rights, especially after reports that al-Qaeda laundered money through the diamond trade under his rule. A statement issued by the US ambassador to Liberia said: "We support the efforts of President Sirleaf, President Obasanjo and other African leaders to bring Charles Taylor to justice."

The current charges against Taylor do not relate to abuses committed in Liberia, where he began a war that cost up to a quarter of a million lives, but his backing for rebels in Sierra Leone, who abducted children and cut the limbs off civilians in a struggle to control the country's rich diamond fields.

Taylor fled Liberia in 2003 as rebel groups advanced on the capital and took refuge in Nigeria. Last week Johnson-Sirleaf, formally requested his extradition on behalf of the court. The Nigerian government has always said it would hand over Taylor to an elected government, but now his "spiritual adviser", Paul, is warning that to do so will lead to a renewed outbreak of the brutal civil war. "Tens of thousands of people still live and die for Charles Taylor," he said, hours after a visit to the former president.

"Extraditing him endangers the peace that has come to Liberia."

Yet it is a risk that many Liberians are willing to take to ensure their former president is locked up for good.

Katherine Kebbah was forced to flee several times and was raped by Taylor's forces. Now working as a nanny in the capital, she dismisses the complex political games being played around Taylor in the halls of government buildings and plush hotels. She just wants him to answer for his crimes. "He cannot be trusted," she said quietly. "Some I can forgive, but not him. Never him."

AFP
25 March 2006

Taylor's looming return leaves Liberia on edge

MONROVIA, March 25, 2006 (AFP) - The announcement by Nigeria that it will surrender former Liberian strongman Charles Taylor to his home country left the tiny west African nation on edge Saturday.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf moved to calm nerves justifying the extradiction request while the government assured Liberians that it was doing all in its power to ensure the security of the country.

Sirleaf's return from the United States coincided with the arrest of eight members of Taylor's National Patriotic Party (NPP) on suspicion of planning unrest over the looming arrest and handover of the warlord turned president.

Eric Kennedy of Taylor's party expressed disappointment with Nigeria, arguing that the planned extradition violated the country's 2003 peace deal.

"This is a sad day for Africa for Nigeria to succumb to this (extradition request)," Kennedy, the NPP assistant secretary for administration, told AFP.

"Nigeria should not have agreed to such. Taylor is important. I know there will be some kind of consequences if he is extradited. Mr. Taylor enjoys the support of many people," Kennedy said. But Liberia's "Iron Lady" said no one was more important than the west African country.

"We must recognize that Liberia is greater than any one person, tribe or group of people," Sirleaf said at a ceremony welcoming her back home from the United States where she had been on an official tour for more than a week.

Foreign Minister George Wallace, who stood in for Sirleaf as head of state during her absence, said that while the security situation was calm, reports of planned subversive actions by Taylor's comrades were worrying.

Wallace said although the nation was supportive of Sirleaf's decision to ask for Taylor, "equally so the nation is disturbed" about the likely consequences.

"Whatever decision taken is the will of God. We must work together with commitment to move our country forward," said Sirleaf at a ceremony broadcast live on local radio.

"The future of this country is bright and the future will be secure if we work together," she said.

Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo announced Saturday that his government would honour Liberia's request that the former president and war crimes suspect be handed over, but did not say when this would happen.

Taylor has been living in a luxury riverside villa in the southeastern Nigerian city of Calabar since August 2003, when Obasanjo persuaded him to step down as president of Liberia and allow a 14-year civil war to come to an end in the west African country.

Kennedy claimed that Nigeria had succumbed to pressure in breach of the 2003 comprehensive peace agreement reached in Accra in Ghana to end the war in Liberia and of the deal under which Taylor accepted to step down and seek asylum in Nigeria.

"I am disappointed on the grounds that such an action abrogates the CPA (comprensive peace agreement)," said Kennedy.

"This is a violation of the peace accord. Taylor was taken from here with the understanding that such (an action) would bring peace and so, it does not make sense to extradite him," he said.

Liberia's justice ministry said "the security forces are closely monitoring the activities of those who may intend to pose a threat to our national security.

"Everything is being done by the Liberian government to ensure... safety and security," it said. Taylor, 58, is accused of masterminding and bankrolling war crimes including murder, torture, pillage and rape in Liberia and its neighbour Sierra Leone.

An international war crimes tribunal in Sierra Leone has indicted Taylor on 17 counts. Obasanjo has in recent months come under pressure, notably from the United States, to send Taylor home.

Liberia is in turn expected to hand over its former strongman to the UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone.

The tribunal's chief prosecutor, Desmond da Silva of Britain welcomed Obasanjo's decision on the "fugitive" Taylor.

"This is a most significant day for those who support the cause of international justice around the world, and for the victims of so many conflicts who have suffered so grievously," the prosecutor said in a statement sent from Freetown.

Da Silva also expressed his gratitude to African leaders and the British and US governments that played a role in the process.

BBC
27 March 2006

Taylor's Nigerian gilded cage

By Elizabeth Blunt
BBC Africa analyst

Calabar was an inspired choice for Charles Taylor's home in exile.

No-one could suggest the former warlord was not being well-treated - Calabar is one of the nicest of Nigeria's state capitals, and the lush climate and seaside setting are reminiscent enough of Liberia to make Mr Taylor and his entourage feel at home.

He has been living in a large and comfortable villa on the city's prestigious Diamond Hill, in the reserved government area since he went into exile in 2003 as part of a deal to end a 14-year civil war in his country.

But it is a gilded cage.

He is in a guarded area within the city, and Calabar itself is on a peninsula, so it is easy to control the road routes out of town.

His family and associates come and go freely in Calabar but Mr Taylor himself goes out seldom, and then only with a Nigerian security escort.

And although he can freely receive visitors he has not been allowed to speak to the press.

Journalists who visited his home last week were able to see and greet the former president, but not to interview him.

It is just about possible to imagine someone making a getaway from Mr Taylor's villa by sea and slipping over the border into Cameroon, but in reality Mr Taylor is as tightly controlled as if he were already under arrest.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4849552.stm

Reuters
27 March 2006

What next for Taylor?

MONROVIA, 27 March (IRIN) - President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said on Monday that her government is not seeking her predecessor Charles Taylor's extradition to Liberia as it is the UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone that has indicted him for war crimes.

Taylor, Liberia's one-time rebel leader turned elected president, stepped down from office under intense international pressure to strike a peace deal in August 2003 and took exile in Nigeria, ending 14 years of on-off civil war.

But on Saturday the government of Nigeria said that Liberia was "free to take" Taylor, leading to speculation that he could be Africa's first former head of state to face trial for war crimes.

"I made it clear, very clear, that former president Taylor was not indicted in a Liberian court. Therefore there is no reason for him to be extradited to Liberia. He was indicted by the UN Special Court [in Sierra Leone]," Sirleaf said on Monday.

"Liberia has no means to carry out the wishes of the international community. The institution that has the responsibility to take him to court, is the institution that indicted him," she added. "Liberia was not a party to any deal to take Taylor out of here [Nigeria]."

Taylor has been indicted by the Special Court on 17 counts including war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in supporting brutal Sierra Leonean rebels known for hacking off the hands and feet of their victims.

President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria repeatedly said that he would hand over Taylor on the request of an elected Liberian government. That request came from Sirleaf earlier this month while she was on a tour of the United States, Liberia's biggest potential donor to help rebuild the war battered country and also a proponent of bringing Taylor to trial.

This week Obasanjo too is scheduled to visit the United States, where he is scheduled to meet with President George Bush on Wednesday and could face the same pressure to haul Taylor before the judges as Sirleaf did, say diplomats.

Some observers think Obasanjo should have expressly said Taylor should be sent to the Special Court. "I see the move of Obasanjo as just buying time, as a way to take some of the pressure off himself. He knows that Liberia is not in a position to take Taylor into custody," said John Caulker head of Sierra Leone's Forum of Conscience.

The affair is a sensitive one for African heads of state and would set a new precedent, removing immunity and opening a host of serving, retired and exiled leaders to the threat of prosecution. Already African leaders are facing a decision on whether to have former Chadian President Hissene Habre brought to justice, also for war crimes. But Habre's case brings all the more angst among African leaders because he would face trial not on African soil but in Europe, where Chadians filed suit against him. The AU in January sidestepped a decision on whether to extradite Habre – currently living in exile in Senegal – to Belgium, ruling that a panel of African jurists would have to consult on the matter and report back at an AU summit in July.

And as the debate continues, Desmond de Silva, the prosecutor of the Sierra Leone Special Court warned that Taylor, reckoned to be a multi-millionaire, could make good his escape. "The watching world will wish to see Taylor held in Nigerian detention to avoid the possibility of him using his wealth and associates to slip away, with grave consequences to the stability of the region," de Silva said in statement on Sunday.

It was not clear from government and local sources whether Taylor remained at his seafront mansion in the south-eastern Nigerian town of Calabar on Monday.

Unease in Monrovia and Freetown

While many Liberians broadly welcome Taylor being brought to justice, many are nervous that his arrival in neighbouring Sierra Leone could destabilise the country's new-found peace.

Since the weekend the UN, which operates a 15,000-strong peacekeeping force in Liberia, has beefed up security. Heavily armed peacekeepers patrolled the capital Monrovia's city centre in tanks and vehicles were thoroughly searched at check points.

Just 300 kilometres away in the Sierra Leonean capital Freetown, reactions to the Taylor's possible arrival were mixed.

"Let the international community offer surveillance and patrol our borders" if they want to try Taylor, said Victor Bangura, a 25-year-old student in Freetown.

"He [Taylor] is a very, very volatile man with a lot of support and when he comes here I believe his supporters will come here, too…. Bringing Taylor to stand trial now is very risky," he said, explaining that the Special Court building is in central Freetown and any trouble at the court could affect security across the capital.

But for many of Sierra Leone's war victims, there is no time to waste in putting Taylor in the dock and making an example of him to other African heads of state.

"Charles Taylor was the one who made us face war and war has left us with permanent disabilities and set back our country. Personally I would be happy to see him face trial, to show that what he did was wrong," said Alhaji Ahmed Jusu Jarka, chair of the national amputees and war wounded association.

Jusu Jarka is himself a double amputee – Sierra Leonean rebel fighters hacked off both his hands during the war.

"This would send a message to the sub-region that what he did was wrong and that leaders must set an example," Jarka added. "I want [Africa's leaders] to always have this in the back of their minds."

Daily Trust (Abuja)
27 March 2006

UN Asks Nigeria to Arrest Taylor

By Elkanah Chawai

The prosecutor of the United Nations-backed Sierra Leone court said yesterday it has asked Nigeria to arrest Taylor to prevent his escape. The court is seeking to try former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, for 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

"I have requested (Nigerian) President Obasanjo to have his authorities execute the warrant for the arrest of Charles Taylor issued by the Special Court," the prosecutor, Desmond de Silva, said in a statement.

Presidential spokesman, Remi Oyo, when contacted by Daily Trust on the receipt of the request, said that the government will maintain its position earlier stated in a statement released over the weekend which confirmed Taylor's extradition.

"The understanding among those involved in the arrangement was that the departure of Charles Taylor was a pre-requisite for the implementation of the just concluded Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement on Liberia, but that the African Union and ECOWAS could not hand over President Charles Taylor to the Sierra Leone Special Court as rather precipitately demanded by the Court's prosecutor," the statement said.

The statement said, "the request of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in her letter of 5th March, constituted her determination that the time was opportuned. President Obasanjo has informed President Sirleaf that the government of Liberia is free to take Charles Taylor into its custody."

Connected to this may be a meeting held at the instance of the Nigerian Foreign Affairs Minister, Ambassador Olu Adeniji, who held closed door meetings over the weekend with African Ambassadors serving in Nigeria, even though he said the meeting wasn't related to Charles Taylor.

He said that the meeting was convened to brief the ambassadors on peace and security situation in Africa.

In the parley which took place at 3:00pm-on the same day the FG statement was released-he said that he briefed the envoys on African Union's activities adding that even though Nigeria is no more the chair of AU, it still coordinates peace and security operations in the continent.

Meanwhile, a Stewart of Taylor's party in Liberia has expressed fears of Taylor's extradition saying that his return could spark coup, renewed violence and an assassination attempt on Liberian President, Ellen-Johnson Sirleaf.

Taylor's spiritual adviser, Kilari Anand Paul, who has been campaigning against his return on the grounds that it could spark renewed killings, said Taylor told him that his supporters would try to assassinate Johnson-Sirleaf.

He said the arrests were linked to widespread speculations in Monrovia that Taylor's supporters may try to stage a coup.

Liberian security forces arrested around a dozen Taylor's associates on Friday including former bodyguards and fighters.

"Taylor told me that Johnson will be killed. He said he has thousands of forces on the ground and if he is extradited, they cannot be controlled," Paul told Reuters from Ethiopia, where he is trying to negotiate an extended asylum for Taylor.

In other developments, a US based international rights group have called on the United Nations force to maintain security amid fears in Monrovia that Taylor's allies might use his transfer to stir up violence in Liberia.

Human Rights Watch said that the federal government, West African governments and the UN should quickly hand over former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, to his war crimes trial and prevent any violence by his allies.

The group said yesterday fears exist that Taylor might try to escape trial, saying it has credible reports that "little or no security" existed around his exile residence in the South-Eastern Nigerian town of Calabar.

Some of Taylor's aides and supporters have warned that bringing him to trial would spark violence in Liberia and even the attempted assassination of newly-elected President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who supports his handover for trial.

While human rights groups have welcomed the Nigerian announcement as a step forward for justice in West Africa, they expressed concern that the detailed arrangements of Taylor's transfer for trial have not been clearly defined.

"Nigeria must urgently take steps to tighten security around Taylor's villa in Calabar and should immediately take him into custody," Richard Dicker, director of Human Rights Watch's International Justice Programme, said in a statement.

AFP
28 March 2006

US says Nigeria must hand Taylor to international court

Washington, United States

The United States on Monday called on Nigeria's government to deliver exiled former Liberian leader Charles Taylor to a United Nations tribunal in Sierra Leone for trial on charges of crimes against humanity.

With prospects again clouded for Taylor's prosecution for atrocities in Liberia and neighbouring Sierra Leone in the 1990s, State Department spokesperson Sean McCormack said, "He needs to be brought to justice."

"It is incumbent upon the Nigerian government now to see that he is conveyed to the international court," McCormack said. "Obviously, we have talked to President [Olusegun] Obasanjo about this."

Obasanjo raised the hopes of international prosecutors that Taylor might soon be brought to court, when his government said on Saturday that Liberia was free to take the suspect "into custody".

But Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said Taylor should go to Sierra Leone rather than coming to Liberia where he was not indicted by any court.

"This is right now mainly an issue for the court, for the Liberians as well as the Nigerians to work out in terms of the modalities and all the logistics of moving him from one place to another," McCormack said.

But he added, "We have made clear both in public and private to the Nigerians that it is their responsibility to see that he [Taylor] is able to be conveyed and face justice."

The latest confusion over Taylor's status arose two days before Obasanjo was to have talks with United States President George Bush on Wednesday in Washington.

Taylor is accused of masterminding a policy of murder, torture, pillage and rape in Liberia and Sierra Leone, where prosecutors have lodged a 17-count indictment alleging crimes against humanity.

In August 2003, in a bid to bring an end to a brutal civil war, Obasanjo invited him to step down as president, leave his besieged capital Monrovia and accept political asylum in Nigeria.

Amid speculation Taylor might slip away to avoid prosecution, officials close to the one-time Liberian strongman said he has remained in his luxury villa in the southeastern Nigerian city of Calabar. - AFP

Reuters
27 March 2006

Liberia says Taylor should go to Sierra Leone

MONROVIA, March 27 (Reuters) - Liberia wants former President Charles Taylor to be sent directly to Sierra Leone for trial for war crimes, rather than to Liberian territory, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said on Monday.

Nigeria, where Taylor has lived in exile since 2003, said on Saturday Liberian authorities were free to take custody of Taylor, but Johnson-Sirleaf's statement, made to church representatives, indicated Liberia did not want to do this.

"Taylor was indicted by a Sierra Leone Court. Taylor should rather go to Sierra Leone than come to Liberia because he was not indicted by a Liberian court," the Liberian president said in response to questions.

Her comments added to growing confusion over which government or authority would take responsibility for Taylor's expected transfer to a U.N.-backed special court in Sierra Leone, where he is charged on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The charges relate to his alleged involvement in Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war. He is accused of having supported rebels notorious for their brutality in exchange for diamonds.

The whereabouts of Taylor, seen as the mastermind behind once intertwined civil wars in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, were unclear on Monday.

Nigerian authorities and a spokesman for Taylor declined to say anything about the location of the former warlord.

Taylor's 2003 exile was part of a peace deal to end 14 years of war in Liberia which killed 250,000 people, spawned a generation of young gunmen and spread violence to nearby states.

Johnson-Sirleaf's government has said it was not party to the 2003 deal but is willing to cooperate to bring Taylor's case to a conclusion for the good of Liberia.

Xinhua
27 March 2006

Liberian Gov't Expects UN Resolution to Effect Taylor's Handover

The Liberian government is expecting a UN Security Council resolution to send exiled former president Charles Taylor directly to the UN-backed special court in Sierra Leone after Nigeria agreed to terminate his asylum.

In a statement over the weekend, the Liberian government also said it will "cooperate with the original partners of the August 2003 arrangement in determining the mechanism that will bring this matter of former president Taylor to closure."

In August 2003, a west African states-brokered peace deal was reached amongst Liberian warring factions to end 14 years of civil war in the country. Taylor's temporary exile to Nigeria was part of the peace deal which put in place a two-year transitional government until 2005.

But by then, Taylor had been indicted on 17 counts by the special court in Sierra Leone, for crimes against humanity and war crimes for fueling the civil war there, when he allegedly supported rebels against the Sierra Leonean government in return for "bloody diamonds."

There had been an increased in pressure from the international community, especially from the U.S. government, for the newly democratically elected government of Liberia and Nigeria to have Taylor handed over for prosecution.

Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo had on Saturday sent a special message to his Liberian counterpart Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf that "Liberia is free to take former president Charles Taylor into its custody."

This decision, according to the message, was based on consultations with other African leaders, after Obasanjo received a formal request from Johnson-Sirleaf on March 5.

Notwithstanding, the Liberian government pointed out that "Taylor has not been indicted in any Liberian court and is therefore not subject to extradition to Liberia," implying a UN Security Council's Resolution could indicate that Taylor be taken directly to Sierra Leone from Nigeria.

Public reaction to Taylor's extradition has been mixed. Many persons want him face the war crimes court in Sierra Leone while some, mostly those considered his loyalists are opposing his handover to the court on grounds that he may not get a fair hearing.

There have also been suspicion threats that his loyalists could cause trouble in Liberia should he be handed over to the court. Some of individuals believed to be his loyalists were picked recently for questioning, but security personnel in Monrovia, capital of Liberia, have reportedly been tight-lipped on the issue.

BBC
27 March 2006

Dispute over Taylor extradition

Nigeria and Liberia are in disagreement over the extradition of exiled warlord and ex-president Charles Taylor.

Liberia's new leader says she wants her predecessor sent directly to the UN-backed war crimes court in Sierra Leone and does not want him in Liberia.

But Nigeria says that it had agreed to hand him over to Liberia, who should now come and get him.

Nigeria says Mr Taylor is free to leave his exiled home and has not received an arrest warrant from Sierra Leone.

Mr Taylor left the presidency in Liberia for exile in Nigeria in 2003 in a deal to end the civil war, but there is uncertainty over whether he still remains in his luxury residency in Calabar.

Job done

President Olusegun Obasanjo's spokesperson Remi Oyo told Reuters news agency that Liberia's President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf had been told she "is free to come and take President Taylor into her custody".

"Our job is done, and it is done - Taylor is not a prisoner here," she was quoted as saying.

> Nigeria must urgently take steps to tighten security around Taylor's villa in Calabar and should immediately take him into custody
> Richard Dicker, Human Rights Watch

But Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf said she wanted her predecessor to be sent directly to Sierra Leone from Nigeria.

"Taylor should rather go to Sierra Leone rather than coming to Liberia," she told religious leaders at her official residence in Monrovia, according to AFP news agency.

"Mr Taylor was not indicted by a Liberian court and therefore he is not needed by a Liberian court."

Desmond de Silva, chief prosecutor of the war crimes court in Sierra Leone, has called for Mr Taylor's arrest in Nigeria, saying he was worried that the former Liberian leader may flee.

He also described Mr Taylor as one of the three most important wanted war crimes suspects in the world.

'Reneging on deal'

A number of Mr Taylor's supporters have been detained in Liberia amid fears they may stage an armed uprising.

TAYLOR TIMELINE
1989: Launches rebellion
1991: RUF rebellion starts in Sierra Leone
1995: Peace deal signed
1997: Elected president
1999: Lurd starts rebellion to oust Taylor
June 2003: Arrest warrant issued
August 2003: Steps down, goes into exile in Nigeria

A warrant was issued for Mr Taylor's arrest three years ago on 17 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity during the civil war in Sierra Leone.

The 15,000 United Nations peacekeepers in Liberia are under instructions to arrest and transfer him to the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone if he ever sets foot on Liberian soil.

A spokesman for Mr Taylor said Nigeria's move was in breach of the 2003 peace deal, which ended 14 years of civil war in Liberia, of which Mr Taylor's exile was a crucial part.

Human rights activists accuse Mr Taylor of breaking the terms of the agreement by continuing to meddle in Liberian politics.

Tens of thousands of people died in the interlinked conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Mr Taylor is accused of selling diamonds and buying weapons for Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front rebels, who were notorious for hacking off the hands and legs of civilians during a 10-year war.

He also started the Liberian civil war in 1989, before being elected president in 1997.

Story from BBC NEWS:
http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/2/hi/africa/4850216.stm

Financial Times
27 March 2006

Charles Taylor on course for war crimes trial Financial Times

By DINO MAHTANI
LAGOS

Nigeria's decision to extradite Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, will almost certainly see him face trial for war crimes but could also heighten political tensions in the country he ruled for six years.

Mr Taylor was granted asylum in 2003, as part of a deal to stop further bloodshed and end 14 years of war that had killed a quarter of a million people and destabilised neighbouring countries. He stepped down during a rebel onslaught on the capital Monrovia.

The asylum deal was finalised by African leaders and western governments after Mr Taylor had already been indicted by a UN-backed court in Sierra Leone for his role in the war there. He stands accused of unlawful killings, rapes and using child soldiers when backing rebels in Sierra Leone as they fought to control lucrative diamond fields.

Nigeria's decision on Saturday to allow the extradition comes days after Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia's newly elected president, requested the "closure" of Mr Taylor's case during a visit to Washington and the UN Security Council.

The extradition will be high on the agenda when Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's president, meets President George W. Bush at the White House this week. Mr Obasanjo, who has been under pressure from the US Congress to give up Mr Taylor, could use the extradition to bolster his credibility in talks that are also likely to focus on instability in Nigeria and the security crisis in the oil-rich delta region.

The UN-backed court in Sierra Leone and rights activists have welcomed Nigeria's decision. Human rights groups see Mr Taylor as one of the world's worst violators of human rights and are eager to see him face trial.

"In Africa there is a belief that the rich and powerful always escape accountability, so this is an important moment to show that those who do commit horrendous crimes will be brought to account," said Desmond de Silva, chief prosecutor at the special court in Sierra Leone.

But the extradition could cause unwelcome ripples through Liberia's fragile political system. Mrs Johnson-Sirleaf has forged political alliances with a number of former associates of Mr Taylor, in a bid to stabilise the country and open the door to foreign aid and investment, but has also ordered the arrest of some of Mr Taylor's former allies. Some Taylor aides have warned that his trial could spark bloodshed and chaos.

UN officials say Mr Taylor will be moved to custody in Sierra Leone after he reaches Liberia.

Liberia has 15,000 UN peacekeepers, but analysts have raised questions about security arrangements in Sierra Leone, which saw its 17,000-strong UN peacekeeping force withdrawn at the end of last year. Analysts say the potential problem lies in the thousands of unemployed and disillusioned youth in Liberia and Sierra Leone, many of whom were fighters loyal to Mr Taylor.

"The former fighters probably understand that fighting for Taylor is not even going to be in their short term interests," said Mike McGovern, West Africa director of the International Crisis Group. "Those more likely to cause trouble are the high level commanders who could be going down with Taylor."

United Nations Press Briefing (excerpt)
27 March 2006

DAILY PRESS BRIEFING BY THE OFFICES OF THE SPOKESMAN FOR THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

AND THE SPOKESPERSON FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY PRESIDENT

The following is a near-verbatim transcript of today's noon briefing by Farhan Haq, Associate Spokesman for the Secretary-General, and Pragati Pascale, Spokesperson for the General Assembly President.

-SNIP-

Question: According to reports, Nigeria has agreed to extradite Charles Taylor back to Liberia. But there is the [Special] Court which is demanding that Mr. Taylor be handed over to it in Sierra Leone. How does the United Nations see that that particular issue be resolved now? Will he go to Liberia, or would he be handed over to the [Special] Court?

Associate Spokesman: Well at this stage, obviously, this is still an issue in which the Governments of Liberia and Nigeria are dealing. The Prosecutor for the Special Court, Desmond de Silva, did come out with a statement yesterday, in which he did welcome the comments from Nigeria agreeing to transfer Charles Taylor. Obviously, the Secretary-General, in the past, has repeatedly made it clear that he would expect justice to be done, and he wants it to be, in the case of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, as with other courts, that indicted suspects are, in fact, transferred so that they can be tried.

In terms of the particulars, that's still up to the Governments who are seized of this matter to deal with.

-SNIP-

United Nations Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 27 March 2006

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

International Clips on Liberia

BBC Last Updated: Monday, 27 March 2006, 15:21 GMT 16:21 UK

Deadlock over Taylor extradition

A row is brewing over the extradition of Liberia's ex-leader, as progress at the weekend appears to stall. Nigeria says Charles Taylor is free to leave his exiled home and it has not received an arrest warrant from Sierra Leone's UN-backed war crimes court.

Liberia's newly elected leader says Mr Taylor should be sent directly to the court in Sierra Leone. But Nigeria says it will not hand him over to the court and says Liberia should come and get him.

Liberia says Taylor should go to Sierra Leone

MONROVIA, March 27 (Reuters) - Liberia wants former President Charles Taylor to be sent directly to Sierra Leone for trial for war crimes, rather than to Liberian territory, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said on Monday.

By VOA News, *27 March 2006*

Prosecutor Implores Nigeria to Arrest Taylor Quickly

The prosecutor of the Sierra Leone war crimes tribunal has urged Nigerian authorities to quickly arrest former Liberian warlord Charles Taylor before he slips away.Desmond De Silva on Sunday urged Nigeria to take all necessary steps to make sure Taylor is unable to flee.

Nigeria rebuffs call to detain Taylor, says: 'Our job is done'

ABUJA, March 27, 2006 (AFP) - Nigeria on Monday dismissed calls from war crimes prosecutors for it to detain the exiled former Liberian warlord Charles Taylor, saying he was free to leave if he wished. President Olusegun Obasanjo's spokeswoman Remi Oyo told reporters that Nigeria had cancelled Taylor's political asylum and that if Liberia wanted to send officials to pick him up it could do so.

Location of ex-Liberian warlord Taylor kept secret

By Ani Akpan

CALABAR, Nigeria, March 27 (Reuters) - The whereabouts of exiled former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who is wanted for war crimes by a court in Sierra Leone, were being kept secret on Monday as rumours intensified he had left his house.

Source: AP WorldStream Date: March 27, 2006

Nigerian leader heads to U.S. on high note

By MICHELLE FAUL

ABUJA, Nigeria_Nigeria's president was heading to Washington on a high note after the resolution of two issues of concern to his U.S. allies, the release Monday of foreign oil workers, including two Americans, held by militants and his reluctant agreement to hand over the continent's most infamous warlord.

International Clips on West Africa

Sierra Leone athletes found at Commonwealth Games

Source: AP DataStream Date: March 27, 2006

SYDNEY, Australia_The six athletes missing from Sierra Leone's Commonwealth Games team were found by police Monday at a house in a beachside suburb, hours after their permission to stay in Australia had expired.

Local Media – Newspapers

Nigeria Says Liberia Can Pick Taylor Up
(Daily Observer, The News, The Inquirer, New Democrat, Heritage and National Chronicle)

- Nigeria announced in a statement over the weekend that President Olusegun Obasanjo had informed President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf that Liberia was free to take into custody former President Charles Taylor, who has been living in exile in Nigeria since 2003.*Heritage,* quoting *The Guardian* of Nigeria, reported that scores of Mr. Taylor's relatives and aides had already left his exile home in Calabar for unknown destinations.

Special Court Praises Nigerian and Liberian Presidents for Decision on Taylor
(New Democrat and The Informer)

- Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone Desmond de Silva recently described the pending extradition of former leader Taylor to Freetown as a "most important day" for those who support international justice. He congratulated Presidents Johnson-Sirleaf and Obasanjo for their decision to release Taylor.

Taylor Loyalists Arrested
(*Daily Observer, The News, The Inquirer, The Informer, National Chronicle and Liberian Express*)

- The National Security Agency (NSA) over the weekend, arrested several loyalists of former President Charles Taylor amid reports of a plan to destabilize the country following the government of Liberia's official request for the handover of Mr. Taylor to face war crimes charges in Sierra Leone. Among those arrested were former militia generals Andy Quemie, Christopher Vambo and Bob Taylor.

Nimba Residents Panic as Taylor Loyalists Cross Over to Côte d'Ivoire
(The Informer)

- Loyalists of former President Taylor, including ex-combatants in Nimba County, have been fleeing into neighboring Côte d'Ivoire due to the heavy presence of security, including the UNMIL Quick Reaction Force, the head of a local pro-democracy group Frederick Baye confirmed over the weekend.
- Mr. Baye said the situation had left many residents of Nimba panic-stricken.

UNDP Reaffirms Support to Liberia

(Liberian Express)

- UNDP Country Representative Steve Ursino said in Monrovia recently that the UNDP remained committed to helping the government achieve its development agenda, which goes beyond the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) program.
- He spoke at reception in honor of principals and participating institutions in the formal education component of the DDRR.

Local Media – Radio Veritas *(News monitored yesterday at 18:45 pm)*

President Urges Liberians to Remain Calm on Taylor's Transfer

- Speaking at a welcoming program to mark her return from a State visit abroad on Saturday, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf called on Liberians to remain calm in view of government's decision to have former President Charles Taylor surrendered to the Special Court for Sierra Leone. She said that the decision was the will of God which was in the interest of the Country.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Nigeria Gives Unclear Signals about Releasing Taylor

- In an interview with the BBC during the weekend, Nigerian Information Minister Frank Nweke said that it was unthinkable that former President Charles Taylor would be handed over because he has never been arrested, asserting that the former Liberian leader went to Nigeria a free man and he could not be turned over as if he had been arrested. Mr. Nweke added that Mr. Taylor is an adult and so the Liberian government should come and fetch him.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Sierra Leoneans Welcome Nigeria's Decision to Surrender Taylor

- A Sierra Leonean Presidential Spokesman told journalists during the weekend that the Government of Sierra Leone has welcomed Nigeria's move to hand over former President Charles Taylor to let the Special Court for Sierra Leone determine his guilt or innocence.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

ELBS RADIO *(News monitored yesterday at 19:00 pm)*

President Receives Diplomatic Note from President Obasanjo

- According to an Executive Mansion source, the Liberian government has received a special message from the Federal Republic of Nigeria declaring its readiness to handover former President Charles Taylor to the custody of the Government of Liberia. The message was delivered by Under Secretary for African Affairs at the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs F.A. Urkungar.

STAR RADIO *(News culled from website today 09:00 am)*

Rivercess County Senator Opposes New Superintendent

- In an interview with Star Radio yesterday, Rivercess County Senator George Moore said that he was unhappy about the appointment of Francis Paye as Superintendent of the county because his colleagues on the selection committee did not consult him before submitting the name of Mr. Paye to the Executive Mansion.

The Liberian Times
26 March 2006
http://www.theliberiantimes.com/article_2006_03_26_5318.html

Liberia: Taylor Prepares His Defense---Contemplates New Gamble in Monrovia
by Hassan Bility / Contributing Writer

With international pressure mounting on Nigeria to hand Taylor over to the Freetown Court, the stage now appears set for a Taylor trial that is dubbed by legal minds as one of Africa's most anticipated trials. And former president Taylor has already begun preparing his defense, according to a Taylor friend, Chuck Bradley who also said Taylor is getting what he sowed. He said Taylor and his supporters were bent on one thing: That "Taylor will not go down easily," whatever that may mean. He is determined, Bradley said, to do everything to undermine his soon-to-be trial by questioning the legitimacy of the Court, making bizarre accusations to embarrass both the Court and those advocating for his trial and, at the same time, using proxy groups and some Liberian legislators to simultaneously call for a reversal of his handover decision and cause sustained unrest and chaos in Monrovia. This comes on the heels of recent news reports that President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has officially requested that Taylor be handed over to the UN-backed Court in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The trial itself, according to legal observers, is expected to be characterized by unprecedented media grandstanding, outrageous claims, long and irritating political speeches, bold denials and toxic statements.

According to diplomatic sources in Washington and West Africa, as well as friends and aides, Taylor has already contacted some of his friends and lawyers in the United States, Europe and Africa. On his defense team, Taylor wants former United States attorney general Ramsey Clarke, a one time Taylor attorney in the early 1980's when the Liberian Government, under Samuel Doe, sought his extradition from the US on a charge that he embezzled almost one million US Dollars when he served as director general of Liberia's General Services Agency. Also expected on the team are a French lawyer, a Nigerian lawyer, a South African lawyer named Paul N'Gozie, and an unnamed Liberia lawyer. It is not known, however, how Ramsey Clarke, who defended Taylor before, will manage to form part of the team since he has taken on a new assignment as an advisor to Saddam Hussein's defense team in Iraq. But with the state of the art technology of today, such thing is a possibility.

Commenting on a possible Clarke's role on Taylor's defense team, an aide to congressman Ed Royce said "we don't really care about who will defend him; the United States is a free country and citizens are free to do what they like as long as their actions remain within the confines of the law. At the end of the day someone has to defend him."

Another source closed to the former US attorney general Clarke, Randall Burke, also said if the services of Ramsey Clarke were requested, "chances are that Clarke might give it a thought".

One Taylor friend and advocate, television evangelist Pat Robertson, who enjoyed gold mining rights in Liberia, when Liberians did not have food to eat, is expected to call for "a fairer trial", citing Taylor's concerns that a United States funded and UN backed war crimes Court in Freetown may be prejudiced against him. Robertson is digging in his heels and probably remaining convinced that Taylor may not get a fair trial. Robertson, noted for making bizarre comments, recently said it would be better if the United States Central Intelligence Agency assassinated Venezuela's Marxist president, Hugo Chavez. His comments were later disowned by the US State Department.

A TRICKY DEFENSE
Defending Taylor, a man who created and presided over one of Africa's most notorious criminal enterprises is a tricky one, as he might be wanted for other alleged crimes in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, USA. A mad man consumed by a murderous demon, Taylor lived in Boston for many years during the peak days of the "Boston Mafia", then led by William Whitey Bulger, one of the FBI's most wanted men. Taylor's wrap sheet appears to be longer than what people see. There are now talks in Boston of a "Taylor-Bulger contacts" during those years, which, if proven to be true, could open a new

dimension to the case, aside from the fact that Taylor remains a wanted man by the Boston Police for his alleged prison break and escape. It is not yet clear whether authorities in Boston will request an extradition for a Taylor trial on those charges, once he is in custody. The Boston Police would not comment on this specific aspect. But back in September, 1997, a Boston Sheriff Deputy spokesperson told the BBC Taylor remained a wanted man since he violated federal law, irrespective of his position then, as president. "We don't care if he's a president, American laws were violated, and that's the most important thing here," the spokesperson had told BBC's Robin White.

On September 15, 1985, after spending about year in prison, Taylor, along with several fellow prisoners, cut through his cell bars with a hacksaw blade, and, with a rope of knotted bed sheets, climbed down a three storey building to freedom. But Taylor would later say at a press conference in Monrovia that one day he was in jail and he saw the prison door and gates open wide and with nobody around, he added, "I just walked out with ease. Nobody asked me anything." A man who killed children and raped women would also tell the Liberian people at the same press conference, "It was God who opened the prison doors for me."

Mike Seeley, spokesman for the Plymouth County Sheriff's Department, in Massachusetts says this particular escape is noteworthy. " The other inmates were quickly recaptured in the following days." He explained that Taylor was not recaptured and "he remains the only person who has ever escaped from the Plymouth County jail without being recaptured."

GENERAL DEFENSE STRATEGY

Taylor has planned two approaches to his defense, according to sources closed to him. One approach is the legal aspect, once he his in custody and the other is a planned chaotic approach inside, Monrovia, Liberia. The legal approach has a gradation of strategies. Legal analysts say this approach, if argued effectively in court with convincing pieces of evidence, could dig potholes in the road to his conviction. That is, if the prosecution cannot produce a smoking gun. Sensing all of these, Taylor executed Sam Bockarie in his effort to destroy evidence, especially, the kind of smoking gun prosecutors would have loved to have.

Refugee Defense

As part of his defense, the Taylor team is expected to employ a familiar strategy: He will categorically deny any involvement in the Sierra Leonean civil war. He will deny influencing leaders of the Revolutionary United Front in any form or shape. He is expected to argue that there were Sierra Leonean refugees, not the rebel Revolutionary United Front, RUF, in Liberia. Taylor will explain that Liberia was under "treaty obligation" not to reject Sierra Leonean refugees who had sought refuge in Liberia because their country was at war. Additionally, he will say as West Africans, the "free movement" clause in the Economic Community of West African States, ECOWAS, Charter obliged him to open the doors of Liberia to these refugees. He will contend that those who came to Liberia were peaceful people and that his government lacked the capacity, due to the lack of international support for it, including a United Nations imposed sanction on his country, to monitor the activity of every Sierra Leone in Liberia. He will also claim there was no way he could tell an RUF fighter from an ordinary Sierra Leonean refugee because no RUF fighter carried arms in Liberia.

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RUF Statements

On the question of RUF commanders, such as Sam Buckarie(alias Mosquito) and Issa Sesay, making official statements inside Liberia on international news wires like the BBC and VOA and the Government of Liberia making statements in behalf of the RUF, as being proofs of RUF presence in Liberia and Taylor's support for and influence on them, his defense is expected to argue that Taylor only got involved with the RUF when ECOWAS set up the "Committee of Five", of which Liberia was a part, to help find a lasting solution to the conflict in Sierra Leone, in 1997. He will say what he did was in line with ECOWAS request at the time.

But back in 1997 when the Committee of Five was scheduled to meet in Abuja, Nigeria, Taylor neither sent a representative nor asked the Liberian Embassy to attend, in protest over what the Liberian Government termed as " …being too tough on the RUF." The move was viewed and interpreted in West

Africa at the time as "undermining the peaceful resolution of the conflict," according to the mediation committee itself.

Gun for Diamond Defense

On the question of "trading guns for diamonds" being a motivation for his support to the RUF, Taylor defense will argue that Liberia has large deposits of diamonds and as such, Taylor didn't need Sierra Leonean diamonds since Liberian diamond mines still existed and had not been exhausted or depleted. He will name Lofa Bridge, Weasua, Balla and Bassa Camps and many other mining towns in Liberia as been rich in diamonds. The defense will argue that therefore it did not make sense for Taylor to have left those mines and eyed diamonds across the border in conflict zones, a claim Taylor repeatedly made when he was still president.

However, what he may not be able to effectively explain is where he got his new arms from since there was a UN imposed arms embargo on Liberia. His own statements could also come back to hunt him. He had always argued that since the UN had imposed arms embargo on Liberia, he would "seek to get arms from anywhere I can".

But claims that some RUF members Eddie Kanneh, Kennedy, a Lebanese diamond dealer named Mohammed and others taking diamond to Taylor in Monrovia may be harder to refute by Taylor's defense team. Kanneh, Mohammed and Kennedy were seen by many people on many occasions in Monrovia. Their regular presence in Monrovia's bars and wide-mouthed comments, after taking one or two glasses of beer may be an embarrassment for Taylor. At one point, the three men lived on VP Road, just behind Pastor Isaac Winker's house, on the Old Road. In this case, people who lived in such area might have seen and known them and could be possible "smoking guns." The house, a two storey four apartment building, was a major base for transferring smuggled arms into Sierra Leone.

Soldiers of Fortune Defense

On the question of Taylor sending former NPFL combatants to fight in Sierra Leone, Taylor will argue that those who went to Sierra Leone were "soldiers of fortune." He will say he did not send any body to Sierra Leone to fight. His defense will attempt to boost this argument by adding that those who fought in Sierra Leone did not only consist of former NPFL soldiers. They also included former ULIMO and LPC fighters. To suggest that Taylor sent the NPFL components of those armed outlaws to fight, the defense team will argue, will logically mean those from ULIMO and LPC were also sent there by their former bosses. He will blame the United Nations for reneging on its promise to help reintegrate former combatants in civil society and retrain them once they were disarmed. This refusal by the UN to honor its commitments, he will say, turned these fighters into soldiers of fortune. But he may entrap himself if he decides to go down this road. How does he explain that there were NPFL fighters in Sierra Leone as far back as 1992, when Taylor was still a guerilla leader headquartered in Gbarnga, central Liberia.

Incriminating Statements

The Taylor team will also be making some bizarre accusations at the trial .The team is expected to declare that as part of the grand plan of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia during its formative stage, the organizers realized there was a large pool of dissenters from Sierra Leone in exile and had wanted to tap into this pool. To do this, Taylor will allege, the organizers agreed to entice these Sierra Leonean dissidents to join the NPFL's ranks and file by promising them a reciprocal help to oust the government of the late President Joseph Seydou Momo of Sierra Leone. He will then name high profile Liberians, who were in exile when the when NPFL invaded Liberia as on December 24th 1989, in the hope of ousting the Doe Regime. According his aides, Taylor will name President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Dr. Amos Sawyer among others. His defense will then proceed to claim that Taylor rejected the idea of invading Sierra Leone later, thus setting the basis for a bitter disagreement between him and the "organizers and financiers," who had allegedly wanted to honor their promise to Sierra Leoneans who joined them in their times of need.

A wide-mouthed man who spoke loudly on the BBC, he will then have to explain his earlier threats of invasion of Sierra Leone for "harboring ECOMOG," the West African Peacekeeping Force set up to stop the fighting and restore sanity to Liberia.

But these accusations are not strange to Taylor's lip. Over the years, Taylor, in his effort make his future trial difficult, has always said "every Liberian is guilty of war crimes." Oh, well, the difference this time is that he is not charged for any crimes he might have committed in Liberia. Instead, he is charged with alleged war crimes in Sierra Leone and the charges only take into account Taylor's alleged involvement with the RUF after he became president, not earlier.

Security in Prison

Faced with the inevitability of his trial, Taylor has begun to shape how his security in prison should look like as well as the frequency of visitation rights for his family. He is contemplating politicizing his security by asking the court to include among his prison guards, two Burkinabe soldiers, one Nigerian soldier and two of his former body guards, one of whom has been identified as Momo Jibba, his former aide camp. All are expected to be armed during the trial. But calls to the Freetown war Crimes Court about whether the Court would allow him to determine who would be on his prison security team were not returned, even though the person answering the calls said the "proper authorities will get back to you. This is a serious matter."

THE "GAMBLE" STRATEGY

The second approach to his defense is more of Gamble reflecting a true NPFL style-cocktail, in this case, violence. This strategy will be far from the scene of the trial. It will be in Monrovia. And those execute it will range from lawmakers to proxy organizations and outlaws, mostly former combatants. This is probably the dangerous phase.

Recently, Taylor began making contacts with some former combatants and associates. Daniel Chea, Edwin Snowe, Emmanuel Shaw, Roland Duo and a high-profile person from the Congress for Democratic Change- Liberian a political- have been contacted. It is not known if these people have agreed to participate in the plan. The CDC as a political entity is not aware of this and has got nothing to do with it.

According one of Taylor's aides who is closed to the plan, his name withheld for his personal security reason because he continues to release more information, the proxy groups will mobilize support amongst former fighters to join a series of protests and demonstrations in Monrovia to call for a complete reversal of the "handover" decision. At some point, these protests are expected to turn violent as occasional irritants for the security forces. They will attempt to draw the security forces into attacking demonstrators and create a sense of instability and confusion in Monrovia.

In the ensuing chaos, they hope to achieve two objectives: One is to draw criticisms from international pro-democracy and human rights organizations and western governments by portraying the new government as intolerant and disrespectful of the basic human rights of its citizens, freedom of speech, movement and opinion.

The second objective is to cause a tensed situation, create a state of lawlessness, make Monrovia ungovernable and turn the population against the Government's decision to hand over Taylor to the War Crimes Court in Freetown. Aware of the fact that Liberians do not want to entertain any form of chaos, Taylor and his associate plotters hope there will be, at some point, a massive show of disagreement and protest by the people of Liberia and as such, the people will call for a reversal of the decision.

From all indications, it appears the cult of one man is still looming large over Liberia. If Liberians are wondering how this can be possible, they may want to look at the new legislature, the House Representatives. The election of a FRAUD as speaker of the House was purely Taylor's handiworks. In the months leading to the election of a speaker, Taylor made frantic efforts to see one of his stooges elected to the position. He channeled money to Edwin Snowe, personally placed calls some candidates who were in the contest asking them drop out of the race for the post of speaker and contacted some other

members for their support with promises of money. Such calls and contacts were a clear violation of the back room deal he cut with Obassanjo to provide him sanctuary in Nigeria.

Taylor had wanted to get control of the highest position in the House of Representatives and the third position in line to the presidency. And now he has got that. A troubling scenario is, in the event the president and vice president are both incapacitated and unable to run the affairs of the state, the speaker of the House of Representatives, in this case Edwin Snowe, will become the President of Liberia. And by the way, what is the difference between a President Edwin Snowe and a President Charles Taylor?

While this may be a dangerous venture for Taylor himself, the real catastrophe will come if Liberians call for a reversal of the decision to hand Taylor over to the Court. With such calls, Liberia's opportunity to shed its brutal past will be lost. And all that is needed for evil to happen is that good men do nothing.

Post Trial Period

When future Liberian and African historians look back at the rise and fall of Charles McArthur Gankay Taylor, they may see some similarities between him and Maximilien Robespierre, a French revolutionary leader in the 1700's, who got rid of those who disagreed with him by beheading them at the GUILLOTINE- a machine employing a heavy blade that falls freely between upright guides to behead a condemned prisoner. The rise of both men to the helm of power was made possible when they seized advantage of the decaying political and social systems of their respective times and played on and exploited the fears of, their people. They both ruthlessly killed their opponents in rather crude ways- Robespierre by use of the guillotine and Taylor by execution style using the AK-47. And by the time they fell from grace to grass, they had killed so many people, spilled so much blood that the people had no more tears to shed.

About the Author:

Hassan Bility is the Director of Communications and Public Affairs at the International Institute for Justice and Development in Boston, Massachusetts. He is the former editor-in-chief of The Analyst Newspaper in Monrovia, Liberia and former press officer of European Union Mission in Monrovia, Liberia. As a journalist, he was arrested several times by the Liberian Government for his writings and views. In June 2002, he was arrested and accused of plotting to assassinate Taylor with the alleged help of the American Government. He was held incommunicado detention for six months without trial. He served prison terms in many places including Foya, in upper Lofa County and in an underground cell in Klay, Bomi County. Among other things, Taylor had wanted him to confess the names of Bishop Michael Francis, Sheikh Kafumba konneh, Abraham Mitchell and President Ellen John-Sirleaf, then an opposition leader, in a non-existent coup plot. In December 2003, the Liberian Government succumbed to international and local pressure from human rights and pro-democracy groups as well as the United States and the European Union. As a result, he was released to the custody of American Ambassador, John Blaney, on condition that he is immediately flown out of the country and officially exiled. He was driven in a convoy of fifteen cars, including that of Defense Minister Chea and US Ambassador Blaney and Tom White, directly to the Robert International Airport, put on a plane and flown out of Liberia. The Americans facilitated his travel and took him to Boston, the United States. He is the recipient of several local and international awards, including the Amnesty International Human Rights Journalism under Threat Award, 2003, London. Currently, he is an advocate for the Global Wellness Fund Treaty, New York, and he sits on the Advisory Council of the International Rescue Committee, IRC, in Boston, Massachusetts. He is also a regular campaigner on human rights and democracy issues. As a public speaker, he has served as guest speaker at more than 40 American colleges and universities, including Harvard, Boston College, Boston University, Brown University in Providence, George town Law School, university of Indianapolis, Seaton Hall and the University of Cincinnati in Ohio, among others. He has also served as guest speaker at many amnesty international organized events and conferences. He has done promotional videos and speeches for the International Rescue Committee, IRC in Boston.

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The Daily Star (Lebanon)
28 March 2006

UN Security Council 'will OK' international court

By Rym Ghazal
Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: The UN Security Council "will OK" the establishment of an international tribunal to try those accused for the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, according to Justice Minister Charles Rizk in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star.

"We are in a hurry to begin, as international tribunals have a bad reputation for taking far too long to establish, and so I want to surprise the world and have Lebanon set up its tribunal in record time," Rizk told The Daily Star.

Once the UN Security Council votes Tuesday on a French draft tribunal, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan will be in direct contact with Rizk and the Lebanese authorities on the formation of the tribunal, expected to resemble the Sierra Leone Special Court, which has been widely held up as a model, but with a Lebanese base.

"The draft that will be adopted by the UN has been drafted right here in the ministry in Lebanon," said Rizk, "We have done our homework."

Rizk said the tribunal will be founded on the Lebanese legal framework, "but with the death penalty removed."

The minister highlighted a critical point in the draft, and read out that the exact wording submitted said that "Lebanon will secure the financing of the tribunal."

"The Lebanese government wastes a lot of money, so the least it can do is save some of that money toward financing the tribunal as a sort of redemption for the great crime committed on its grounds," said Rizk.

If the Hariri tribunal follows a similar model to that of the Sierra Leone tribunal, then the annual budget may range between $20 million and $30 million.

"I personally pushed for the tribunal to be financed by us, and will fight for this if others in government disagree with me," he vowed.

Once Lebanon gets the green light, the tribunal will be staffed with both local and international judges and prosecutors.

"It is too early to say if the UN chief investigator Serge Brammertz will accept the position of general prosecutor of the tribunal, as we still have wait for the UN investigation into Hariri's assassinations to be completed," said Rizk. Brammertz has four months left to his term, unless his commission is further extended by the UN.

Rizk also clarified that the reasons for asking for an international tribunal, was not due to "a lack of legal expertise in Lebanon."

"The crime committed is of a terrorist scale, and hence falls within the competence of an international judiciary. Secondly, the suspects may belong to more than one nationality, and

hence to avoid plurality of the tribune, we opted for an international one," he said.

"Then there are security reasons, where the safety of the judges and witnesses are at risk, especially when the judging is occurring in the same country as the crime," said Rizk, dismissing any possibility of the tribunal being set up in Lebanon.

As for the "fate" of the four Lebanese generals arrested by the UN investigation, "they are assumed innocent unless proven guilty by the tribunal," said Rizk, refusing to elaborate further on their case.

When asked about his views on the presidency, the most highly debated issue at the national dialogue and among the Lebanese people, Rizk, whose name has been circulated by the media as a potential candidate for the post, said: "To my knowledge, the presidency is not vacant, and the problem is far more serious and challenging than to be fixed by replacing Mr. Y with Mr. X."

As for the ongoing national dialogue and whether the constant delay could be interpreted as a sign of disagreement, Rizk merely said: "It is not a signal that they are agreeing."

"The impact of agreements made at the dialogue is mainly psychological," he added.

"The remaining issues, such as the disarmament of Hizbullah and the presidency, I believe will be tougher to agree upon, and so I am not sure what will happen there," he said.