

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



Members of the public viewing the Taylor judgment

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Monday, 30 April 2012

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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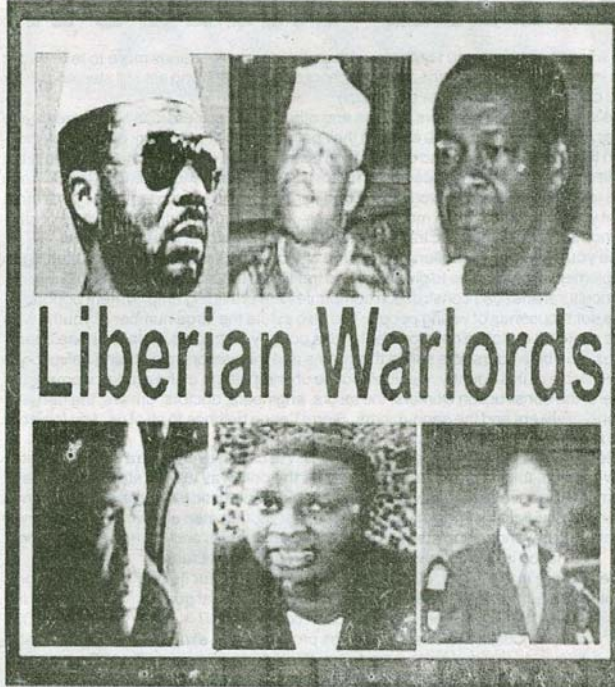
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TAYLOR IS GUILTY; ACCOMPLICES ARE UNTOUCHABLE – A summary case study of the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone

By Thomas Kai Toteh :



*U.S., Libya, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, France, and
Liberian opposition political leaders*

An age-old internal strife in Liberia provided the opportunity to many persons, including states and organizations to promote their political and economic interests, agendas, controls, and powers. These motivating factors underlined the cause(s) for the war in Liberia, which spread to neighboring Sierra Leone by Charles Taylor, a key player, rebel leader turned president. Indicted by Special Hybrid Tribunal on charges of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, Charles Taylor's armed struggle procedures were principally simplified by

This is an organizational crime based on various theories. This war was organized and supported by governments, individuals and firms for the purpose of "advancing the goals of illegal business entities whose members are bound together because of their group interests and desire to profit from illegal activity," (cad.sagepub.com). According to Kramer, Michalowski, and Kauzlarich, state-corporate crime is defined as criminal acts that occur when one or more institutions of political governance pursue a goal in direct cooperation with one or more institutions of economic production and distribution.

Charles Taylor was supported by governments, organizations, and corporations to wage the war in Liberia. Charles Taylor then started a rebellion in Sierra Leone with support came from corporations and organizations. Therefore, the case in point is a state-corporate crime since organizational crime, according to Kramer, is a state crime (Kramer, 1982). Although only two major players were indicted, Charles Taylor and Foday Sankoh, the war directly benefited not only executives but corporations, governments and organizations that participated in the war.

The principal character and convicted war criminal, former President Charles Taylor served in the Liberian government as a director general of Civil Service Agency soon after the coup de tat in Liberia. He later escaped the country in 1980 with the amount of US\$900,000 to the U.S. The military government sought his extradition for prosecution in Liberia, but the U.S. government through its attorney general, refused to extradite him reasoning that his security would be compromised and endangered. As a result, the U.S. government promised to detain Charles Taylor until at such time, according to U.S. attorney general, proper arrangements including his safety and other human rights protection in Liberia were ensured. Thereafter, Charles Taylor was jailed at the Plymouth County Correctional facility in Massachusetts in 1980 and broke jail in 1985 (boston.com).

The relationship between the United States and Liberia began to take a U-turn, according to PBS "When William R. Tolbert welcomed the Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban ambassadors to Liberia and pitted Egypt and Syria against Israel." "He spoke out for recognition for national rights of the Palestinian people. "He also renegotiated a better deal with Firestone and encouraged political and economic freedom. "In 1978, U.S. president Jimmy Carter visited Liberia after initially planning to fly over to Liberia on his way to Nigeria. "The fact that this was the first official visit by an American president to Liberia (FDR had made his stop simply to visit U.S. troops) may have

been a sign that the U.S.-Liberia relationship was not quite as tight as the Liberians had thought" (pbs.org).

Ideological struggle or cold war between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union affected Liberia and U.S. long standing traditional and historical relationship when in 1970s, Liberia loosened its close ties with the United States. In 1974 it accepted economic aid from the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and in 1978 it joined with other developing countries in a trade agreement with the European Community (global security).

Libya and the U.S. on the other hand were involved in rivalry of varied natures. Liberia soon was caught in the middle. Liberia was used by the U.S. to spy on Libya. Kenneth Noble notes, "What brought the simmering rivalry between these two foreign powers to violence was a confluence of events." "U.S. pressured Liberia to sever its ties with Libya, and Libya's response, which was to give arms and money to Liberian dissident groups, and the decision of Charles Taylor, the biggest recipient of Col. Qaddafi's largesse, to invade Liberia in December 1989."

Opportunity/International Relations

U.S. exerted the new military regime to follow instructions from Washington or risk its security and economic aid. "He would close Libya's embassy in Monrovia — the "People's Bureau" as the Libyans called it — and expel its diplomats if the U.S. put on a military air show" (Noble 1998). Washington accepted the deal. Doe failed his promise. Shortly Samuel Doe established diplomatic relation with Libya and Libyan presence in Liberia with its People's Bureau and economic interests in Liberia did not go well with the U.S. (Noble 1998). But political pressures and threats of economic sanction from Washington forced Doe to drive the Libyans away.

"I suspect that they had at least three reasons for wanting to get involved in Liberia," said James K. Bishop, a former U.S. Ambassador to Liberia during the Doe regime. "One was to get even with Doe. "One was just to ferment mayhem and support revolutionaries, and the third was to poke an eye out on the Americans because we of course had a very substantial stake in Liberia and they could take psychological satisfaction from having done us dirt" (aliciapatterson.org).

Charles Taylor who is now convicted on war crimes in The Hague has alleged U.S. and Libya's connection in the civil war in Liberia and the Sierra Leone. During his testimony, "Former Liberian president Charles Taylor told of his 1985 escape from an American maximum security jail with alleged United States government help, only days before a failed US-backed coup attempt to overthrow the then Liberian government" (charlestaylortrial.org).

"With his prison cell unlocked by a U.S. prison guard late one night in November 1985, Taylor walked out of the maximum security area of the Plymouth County Correctional Facility in Massachusetts, he told the Special Court for Sierra Leone today" (charlestaylortrial.org). "Taylor said he was escorted by the same guard to the minimum security area. "Tying a sheet to a window, Taylor climbed out the window and over the prison fence, where a car containing two men was waiting to whisk him to New York, he said (charlestaylortrial.org). "Taylor later went on to describe his efforts to recruit a total of 168 men and women to be part of his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) group to undertake military training in a former U.S. military base in Libya between 1987 and 1989" (charlestaylortrial.org).

Controls and Deterrence:

However, besides those charged with bearing the greatest responsibility of atrocities (warlords), there are a number of other people who are the facilitators, including nations, corporations, governments, and organizations. Without them this crime could not be committed. For this reason, the law must take a due course to deal with all those who are accomplices, including arms and diamonds smugglers, and all benefactors of exploitation of natural resources of conflict countries, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Any thing short of the above, ICC and all other international war crimes courts will not be taken seriously.



ATROCITIES COMMITTED BY LIBERIA'S WARLORDS

The Exclusive
Monday, 30 April 2012

Taylor found Guilty

The guilty verdict against former Liberian President Charles Taylor, who was convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes in Sierra Leone, is sinking in across West Africa. The historic judgment of the first African president to be prosecuted in an international court leaves Taylor facing a lengthy sentence in a British prison. More than 50,000 people were killed during the 11-year conflict, and thousands more were left with brutal amputations - the macabre signature of the Revolutionary United Front rebel group. There were scenes of jubilation in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone, but the reaction was very different in neighboring Liberia.

Before the verdict was announced, crowds bustle and debate on the streets in downtown Monrovia, Liberia's capital. There was a strong - maybe somewhat naïve - expectation Taylor would be coming back to his homeland. People cheered and clapped as they saw him appear on television. The man who was president from 1997 to 2003 still commands a lot of support and even adoration here. But as the verdict finally came down, the mood shifted.

The judge declared Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting the war in Sierra Leone on all 11 counts. They include arming rebel groups with guns and ammunition in exchange for diamonds, the use of child soldiers, rape, sexual slavery and acts of torture. He will not be coming back to Liberia. "It makes me crazy because Charles Taylor had no problem with Freetown people," says 23-year-old student Amara Sanoë. Sanoë spent his entire childhood in Liberia during the country's own 14 years of civil conflict. Yet he's one of the many who believe Taylor had nothing to do with

Sierra Leone's war.

"Charles Taylor never carried any war in Freetown. Their own politicians carried war on them to destroy their own people," he says. Among the minority and also less vocal in the crowd, there was also a feeling of relief - and a sense that justice has taken its course. The overwhelming view, though, is that Taylor has been used as a scapegoat for another country's war. After the verdict, a debate began in a hatai shop - places where people go to drink tea, play scrabble and chat politics. People patiently waited until the head of the discussion used the gavel, signaling another man's turn to speak.

"It kind of saddens me as a person to know that my ex-president who should be living here happily and freely with us," one man says, "just as others who perpetrated mayhem and heinous crimes are living with us here today on the basis of reconciliation.

That is my sadness." No one was convicted of any crimes associated with Liberia's own civil war. The government chose to have a Truth and Reconciliation Commission instead. So former warlords walk freely on the streets - many even hold top government positions. Taylor's defense team will have 14 days from the verdict to appeal. His sentencing is then due on May 30. Human rights groups have hailed the verdict as a victory against the impunity of so-called "big men" who pillage countries resources and commit atrocities against their people.

However, the verdict is viewed very differently here. Shortly after it was rendered, a rainbow appeared around the sun, causing commotion on the street. Liberians believe this phenomenon marks when "a great man has fallen."

Taylor's ex-wife:

*'He's not responsible for
Sierra Leone war crimes'*



After a five-year prosecution, the international criminal court reaches a verdict this week in the trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who is accused of war crimes in neighbouring Sierra Leone. Here Jewel Taylor, his former wife, now a Liberian state senator, says the peoples of Sierra Leone and Liberia need to move on from their pasts.

In Sierra Leone, the Charles Taylor War Shattered the lives of my Generation

OPINION

A United Nations backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague has found former Liberian leader Charles Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes during the Sierra Leone civil war. He was accused of backing rebels who killed tens of thousands including children during 10 years civil war.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone has again taken a major step which will help restore justice for children affected by the war in Sierra Leone. Another page has been turned in the history of justice for children. It is a historic moment for the children of Sierra Leone and across the world.

Children will live with the long-lasting impact of the war for the rest of their lives. The recruitment and use of children to fight wars is criminal. It is a war crime and a crime against humanity. In Sierra Leone, the war shattered the lives of my generation. It is not possible to replace ten years of a lost childhood but what children lost in the war – education, health, protection – must be restored to the extent possible.

When I was 11 years old, I was separated from my parents. I spent months hiding in the bush and moving from village to village to escape the rebels. I lost everything in a war I did not cause to happen, but I suffered the most. During the 10-year conflict, children had no rights. Children could not go to school, children had no access to doctors, children were victims of abuses and violations, and children had no access to justice. Children were used and abused by those who should have been protecting them.

There is no justice without children. When children are abused, justice brings hope and security for the present and future generations. In a conflict where children had no rights, justice is sometimes a child's last hope.

The physical, social and economic costs of conflicts have impacted negatively on the lives of children and their communities limiting their access to services and their ability to realise their full potential. Many children in Sierra Leone are orphaned and left with deep emotional scars and trauma from direct exposure to violence, rape, displacement, poverty and the loss of loved ones. These coupled with the difficulty in accessing health and education services and a weak social structure to protect children have had a terrible impact on the lives of children.



Radhika Coomaraswamy (left), Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, and Messeh Kamara (right), advocating for children affected by war in a side event of the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

So after the war, long term rehabilitation must be given priority in all programmes, from psychosocial and trauma services to the provision of health, education and skills training. A child-sensitive approach to peace-building and reconciliation, and to transitional justice, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Sierra Leone, has helped uphold the rights of children. But it's also necessary to implement programmes that address children needs and protect their rights.

There is an urgent need to design and implement reparations programmes that effectively target all children who have been affected by the war. International justice mechanisms must not only seek to hold perpetrators accountable, but must also seek to provide long-term support to victims who will otherwise continued to suffer if support is not provided. In order to ensure that children benefit from reparations programmes, the Court should also consider reparations awards for children that fit into existing programmes currently being implemented by NGOs and child-led organizations like the Children's Forum Network in Sierra Leone.

The Court must therefore work closely with the Government of

Sierra Leone to ensure that they continue to support and facilitate the work of such organisations to help and support children affected by the war with an emphasis on girls and women, so that the Government will faithfully execute the awards made by the Court.

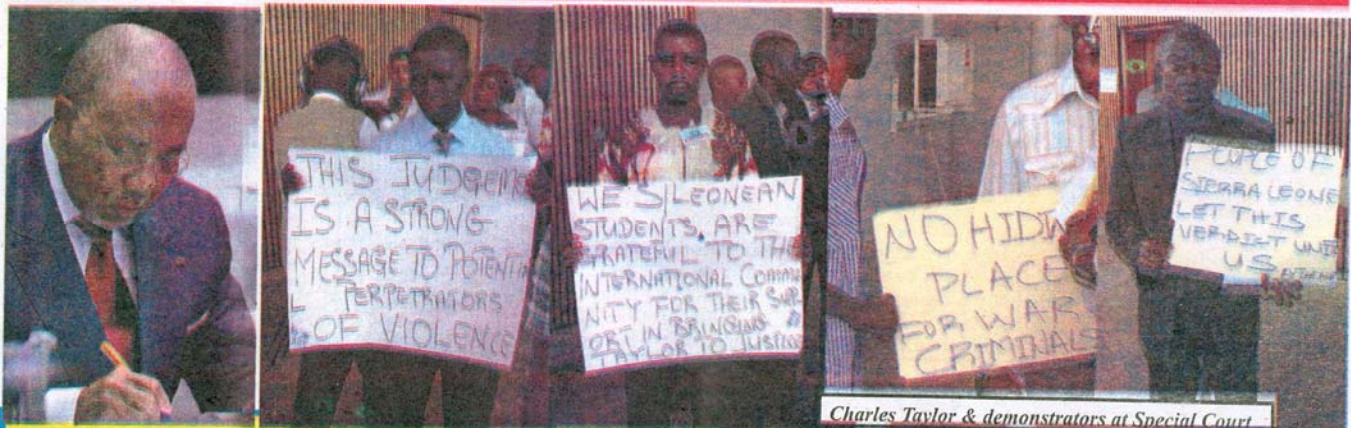
There is a great responsibility now to make sure that Sierra Leone's future is not defined by the negative impact of the war and that the questions of child rights, democracy, justice and ending impunity are addressed fairly and fully. That rule of law is a significant contributor to that agenda. If perpetrators are not prosecuted it is harder to rebuild our country and restore respect for the rule of law.

The war is not over – there is still a war against girls and women who are suffering from sexual violence. Justice can provide a window of opportunity to address atrocities against girls and women. Ending impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence would do a great deal to rebuild women's sense of community and belonging and to encourage their public engagement.

Yet this is still work in progress, we need more action to end impunity and prevent wars. We want a society without war, a society based on justice --- justice that is fairly and fully implemented for children.

About the Author:

At age 14, Messeh Kamara helped establish a democratic child-led organization, and was elected national president of the Children's Forum Network, which chaired the children's inputs to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission. He was the leading campaigner who presented the child rights agenda to the President of Sierra Leone and advocated tirelessly for the enactment of the Child Rights Act, adopted in 2007. Messeh, now 24, is currently studying law in the United Kingdom, with the end objective of becoming an international human rights lawyer.



Charles Taylor & demonstrators at Special Court

No convictions for command responsibility but...

Taylor guilty on 11 counts

No convictions for command responsibility but...

Taylor guilty on 11 counts

By Betty Milton

The Trial Chamber of the Special for Sierra Leone sitting in The Hague on Thursday 26th April 2012 handed over judgment on former President of Liberia Charles Ghankay Taylor, finding him guilty on all 11 counts for war crimes, and crimes against humanity. However the trial chamber found that the prosecution did not provide sufficient evidence for a conviction for command responsibility.

Dressed in a dark blue European suit and sporting a stained wine coloured tie Mr Taylor was very quiet during the proceedings although at some point he

was busy taking down notes and alternatively tapping the table with his fingers. Delivering the judgment Presiding Judge Richard Lussick ordered Mr Taylor to stand and while standing Taylor took his time to arrange his coat and make himself comfortable after which the Judge said "the Trial Chamber has found you guilty for aiding and abetting in the commissioning of crimes by the AFRC and RUF rebels."

The Presiding Judge disclosed that the Trial Chamber convicted Mr. Taylor on Count 1 for acts of terrorism, Count 2 for murder, on Count 3 for murder, on Count 4 for rape, on Count 5 for

sexual slavery, on Count 6 for outrages upon personal dignity, on Count 7 for cruel treatment, on Count 8 for inhumane acts, including mutilations and amputations, on Count 9 for the recruitment, enlistment and use of child soldiers, on Count 10 for enslavement, and on Count 11 for pillage.

The lead defence counsel Courtney Griffith of Charles Taylor in a press briefing in the Hague said that the history of the international court particularly the Special Court suggest today's outcome is one that was inevitable.

Stating that they have said from the

onset that "the trial was dictated by certain political imperatives...the embarrassing events of today's happening speak volume for what this court is about."

The lawyer said that the convictions were obtained by "untainted, uncorrupted evidence effectively bought by the prosecution. The payment of witnesses particularly those witnesses upon whose evidence, the prosecution plays a particular story is a matter which should not be forgotten."

Courtney Griffith explained that the concept of the judgment has three parts and these are the whole concept

Contd. Page 6

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Taylor guilty on 11 counts

of the Joint Criminal Enterprises which has been rejected and which is the central foundational cause of the prosecution that has been rejected by the chamber. Adding that "the ideas that from Monrovia Taylor never set foot in Sierra Leone but was micromanaging what was happening in the war. That too was rejected by the judges."

About the supply of arms and ammunition into Sierra Leone and diamonds going into Monrovia he said that the judges did not find anything even through prosecution witnesses like Naomi Campbell and Mia Farrow.

About a dissenting view from Justice Malik Sall the alternate judge, whose view was not heard, Courtney Griffith read from a document in which the Judge is alleged to have stated that he "disagreed with the findings and conclusion of the other judges" adding that the "Standard of proof for the guilt of the accused from the evidence provided in this trial is not proved beyond reasonable

doubt by the prosecution."

He went on to read that "the whole system is not consistence with all the values of international criminal justice and I'm afraid that the whole system is in grave danger of just losing all credibility and ... this whole thing is heading for failure."

This view Griffith said is "a condemnation by a judge, so how can the outcome of this procedure be treated with any measure of seriousness given such comment by one of the four judges who has diligently followed the evidence right from the outset."

The Prosecutor of the Court Brenda Hollis said of the judgment that "this conviction is one more victory in the very important fight against impunity. Today is for the people of Sierra Leone who suffered horribly in the hands of Charles Taylor and his forces."

She went on "today's historic judgment re-enforces the new realities that Heads of States cannot hide behind their positions that they will be held

accountable for war crimes and crimes against humanity. The judgment confirms that leadership comes not only with power and authority (but) with responsibility and accountability."

Taylor was found guilty for aiding and abetting the war that happened in the country the Prosecutor said, adding that the Chamber's findings made it clear about the central role Taylor played during the war.

On the convictions for murder Brenda Hollis maintained that she acknowledges the thousands who were brutally killed each men women and children, who were violently taken and many were killed in remote locations. On the convictions of enlisting children into armed conflict she said "Mr. Taylor robbed the children from their childhood."

The Chamber has scheduled a sentencing hearing for Wednesday, 16 May 2012, and the sentencing judgment will be delivered on Wednesday, 30 May 2012.

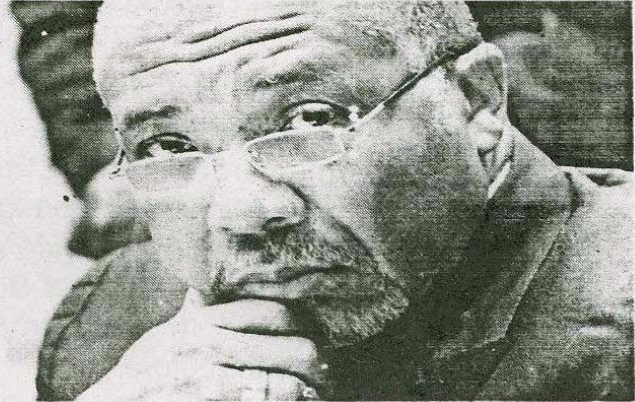
We Yone

Monday, 30 April 2012

Taylor's Verdict Closes Painful Chapter in Sierra Leone's History

The marathon trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor (in photo) has finally come to an end, after he was found guilty of aiding and abetting crimes committed during the 11-year civil war in Sierra Leone. Taylor, who has been on trial since April 3 2006, was charged with 11 counts including rape, murder, enslavement and other crimes against humanity. Reacting shortly after the judgment, Sierra Leone's Ambassador to

Germany, HE Jongopie S. Stevens described the trial as "...a process in helping Sierra Leoneans to deal with the legacy of the civil conflict. I therefore, welcome the decision of the trial chamber of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, in ensuring that perpetrators of the civil war in the country are brought to justice." The Special Court for Sierra Leone has, prior to Taylor's verdict, indicted thirteen people



from various factions that took part in the Sierra Leone civil conflict. While key figures from these factions died during the course of their indictments, others

who were prosecuted and found guilty are now serving jail sentences in Rwanda. Charles Taylor is expected to serve his jail term in Britain after sentences have been passed in May 30 2012.

Standard Times
Monday, 30 April 2012

Justice for Sierra Leoneans as Charles Taylor found Guilty of War Crimes and Crimes against Humanity

Taylor's trial highlighted the way in which he systematically used natural resources to fund his campaign of regional destabilisation. Under Taylor's sponsorship, the RUF seized control of Sierra Leone's diamond fields, funnelling diamond exports through Liberia to international markets. This trade generated massive revenues for the RUF and provided Taylor personally with millions of dollars. Taylor also used Liberia's logging industry to fund and provide logistics for armed forces in both Sierra Leone and Liberia. "Blood diamonds and conflict timber were the fuel for Taylor's war machine in both Sierra Leone and Liberia," said Alley. "This verdict sends a clear signal - that those who steal a country's natural resource wealth and use the proceeds to terrorise its people - can be held to account. It is essential that those international companies and individuals that helped finance Taylor's activities, by trading in the resources that he stole, are now brought to justice." The Taylor verdict comes as both West African countries struggle to restructure their natural resource industries. Sierra Leone is again exporting diamonds and has recently found oil off of its coast. Liberia - which emerged from conflict in 2003 - has adopted new forestry laws and is starting to establish its own oil sector. But reforms in

The verdict by the Special Court for Sierra Leone that Charles Taylor is guilty of 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity has delivered justice for the people of Sierra Leone and marks a momentous step in international efforts to end impunity. It also highlights the crucial role natural resources played in fuelling the country's conflict, said Global Witness today. The Special Court of Sierra Leone, sitting for this case in The Hague, found Taylor criminally responsible for aiding and abetting in crimes including pillage, murder and rape committed during Sierra Leone's bloody civil war. Taylor was a warlord and later President of Liberia, which shares a border with Sierra Leone. During Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 war, Taylor trained and armed the Sierra Leonean rebel group the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The RUF became notorious for horrific abuses, including sexual violence, cutting off limbs and forcibly recruiting child soldiers. "One of the key architects of Sierra Leone's brutal war, which killed tens of thousands and displaced many more, has finally been brought to justice," said Global Witness Director Patrick Alley. "Heads of state, who commit grave human rights abuses, whether at home or abroad, are no longer beyond the reach of the law."

Justice for Sierra Leone as Charles Taylor found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity

both countries have met considerable difficulties. In Liberia, massive new logging and plantation concessions have been awarded, several in violation of the country's laws, which risk mass displacement of local people. Sierra Leone has also attracted big investments in plantations, as well as mining. These could help the country escape its dependence on foreign aid, but may also entrench corruption and cause environmental damage. "Both Sierra Leone and Liberia have taken steps to reform their natural resource sectors but serious threats persist," said Patrick Alley. "Illegal contracts, badly outdated laws and the persistent failure to prosecute corrupt officials must all be addressed if either country is to

make a genuine break with Taylor's legacy of resource mismanagement." The Special Court has now succeeded in delivering justice for many of Taylor's victims. However, its jurisdiction does not extend beyond Sierra Leone and Taylor has not yet been held to account for crimes he committed against the people of Liberia, whom he terrorized from 1989 to 2003.

"Unlike in Sierra Leone, no tribunal has been established in Liberia to hold accountable those who committed war crimes or crimes against humanity during the civil war," said Alley. "The people of Liberia should not have to continue to wait for justice to be brought to those, like Taylor, who committed horrific abuses in their country."



BBC

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Why will Charles Taylor be jailed in Britain?

By Chris Summers BBC News



Charles Taylor surrounded by his troops in Liberia Charles Taylor, seen here in his heyday in 1997, is heading for a British prison

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor - convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes during the Sierra Leone civil war - will serve his sentence in a British jail. Why is this and where might he be housed?

In the spring of 2006, Charles Taylor's luck finally ran out.

The one-time president of Liberia was arrested and handed over to Irish soldiers representing the United Nations, and found himself in custody for the first time.

Because of fears his trial could renew instability in West Africa, Taylor, 64, was put on trial at a special UN-backed court in The Hague.

The Netherlands only agreed to host his trial as long as he was imprisoned in another country if he was convicted.

In June that year, the UK government offered to house Taylor in a British jail if he was convicted.

A special Act of Parliament, the International Tribunals (Sierra Leone) Act 2007, had to be passed - a demonstration of what the government said was its "commitment to international justice".

It was not the first time the UK had made such an offer - if he had been convicted, the former President of Yugoslavia, Slobodan Milosevic, would have been housed in a British jail.

However, Milosevic died in 2006 while on trial in The Hague on charges of war crimes and genocide. At home or abroad?

Taylor was president of Liberia, but faced 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in connection with the brutal civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, which ended in 2001. HMP Belmarsh in SE London Charles Taylor could initially be housed in Belmarsh Prison

He was accused of funding Sierra Leone's former rebels, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), by selling diamonds on their behalf and buying weapons for them.

RUF fighters were notorious for hacking off the arms and legs of the civilian population with machetes, as well as killing, raping and robbing them.



PA On Thursday, Taylor was found guilty of aiding and abetting rebels in committing the 11 crimes but was cleared of ordering them.

Jon Silverman, a professor of media and criminal justice at the University of Bedfordshire, says imprisoning those convicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone abroad has been controversial.

Eight people found guilty by the court are currently serving their sentences in Rwanda. Some of them have complained about harassment and brutality by the guards at Mpanga prison.

"By contrast, many in Sierra Leone believe the prisoners are being held in the lap of luxury and would like to see them transferred to Freetown's notorious Pademba Road jail," Prof Silverman says.

One of the inmates at Mpanga, Issa Sesay - a leading figure in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) - is serving a sentence of 52 years.

Continue reading the main story

“Start Quote

He would be considered high risk as he presumably still has access to funds, and has followers who might be willing to help him escape”

Eric Allison Prisons correspondent, The Guardian

Prof Silverman says that while Taylor's sentence is unlikely to be as long, his term will not be subject to review by the UK's Parole Board.

The Prison Service says any decision on his release from prison would be determined by the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Which prison?

The Guardian newspaper's prisons correspondent, Eric Allison, says Taylor will end up in a high-security prison.

"He would no doubt initially go to Belmarsh [in south-east London], which has a special high-security unit for terrorists and such like.

"Then he would probably be sent to one of the high-security prisons - Frankland [in County Durham], Full Sutton [near York] or Whitemoor [in Cambridgeshire].

"He would be considered high-risk as he presumably still has access to funds and has followers who might be willing to help him escape."

However, Mr Allison says he is unlikely to be at risk of attack from other prisoners, and would not be held in isolation.

He says Taylor might well end up in Norwich prison, which has special facilities to cope with elderly patients.

British gangster Reggie Kray spent time there before his death in 2000, and Great Train Robber Ronnie Biggs was freed from Norwich jail on compassionate grounds in 2009.

BBC

Friday, 27 April 2012

African press hails Taylor verdict



Many newspapers in Africa have welcomed the guilty verdict against former Liberian leader Charles Taylor, who was convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes committed during the Sierra Leone civil war.

Commentators say the verdict, handed down by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, marks an end to impunity and should serve as a warning to all rights abusers in Africa - past, present and future.

"The days of impunity are gone," says an editorial in Sierra Leone's Cocorioko.

Continue reading the main story

“Start Quote

For too long, people in positions of power all over the world have been getting away with similar crimes. That will be no more. The era of impunity for is over”



The US-based news website, observed to run articles supporting Sierra Leonean President Ernest Bai Koroma, hopes the verdict will prevent efforts to disrupt the forthcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in November.

"If you are among these people who have a deviant agenda for our country, meet you at the International Criminal Court," the paper says.

An editorial in Liberia's New Dawn private daily also welcomes the verdict, saying that "justice has finally prevailed in the interest of hundreds of Sierra Leoneans maimed and victimized one way or the other".

"Let there be no wheeling and dealing about this. Let war criminals or suspected war criminals of the wars fought in Liberia face justice, too; let them be prosecuted as Taylor has been," the paper says.

Kenya's Daily Nation, a top-selling private daily, points out that the trial took almost five years, but says that international justice works in the end.

Victim of Sierra Leone rebels The court was satisfied that Mr Taylor had aided atrocities during Sierra Leone's brutal civil war



Four prominent Kenyans are due to stand trial at the International Criminal Court (ICC) over crimes against humanity following post-election violence in 2007.

"If there was ever any doubt that international courts can deliver judgment, however long it takes, then such misapprehensions have been corrected," says the paper in an editorial.

"For too long, people in positions of power all over the world have been getting away with similar crimes. That will be no more. The era of impunity for is over," it says.

'Message to Mugabe'

In Ivory Coast, several newspapers see the verdict as a warning to ex-President Laurent Gbagbo, who is at The Hague awaiting trial at the ICC on charges of crimes against humanity.

Continue reading the main story

“Start Quote

It's a shame that we need international justice to remind some what they are supposed to know”

Le Jour Plus, a privately owned newspaper supportive of Ivorian President Alassane Ouattara, comments that Mr Gbagbo is particularly worried by how long he might remain under ICC custody, considering how long Taylor spent there.

Le Patriote, another pro-Ouattara newspaper, says that Mr Gbagbo is likely to meet a "similar fate".

He could have avoided this, Le Patriote says, by admitting defeat in the 2010 elections instead of provoking a stand-off with Ouattara's supporters, which claimed innocent lives and left scores injured.

L'Expression, a privately owned daily, echoes the sentiment - drawing parallels between Taylor and Mr Gbagbo and saying that the verdict has set the former Ivorian president and his backers "panicking".

The Zimbabwe Independent says Taylor's conviction should send an "important message" to President Robert Mugabe.

Pro-Taylor supporters in Monrovia, 26 April 2012 There were angry scenes in Monrovia on Thursday from supporters of Charles Taylor

"Perpetrators of horrendous crimes continue to walk the streets freely and in some cases even enjoy comfy lifestyles after being rewarded with top jobs and perks for work well-done in the killing fields," the privately owned weekly paper says.

"Zimbabwean leaders must take notice, especially those who have been spearheading human rights abuses against innocent people. Time will come - hopefully soon - when you will be held to account."

Writing in Burkina Faso's privately owned, pro-opposition Le Pays newspaper, Seni Dabo regrets that Charles Taylor could not be brought to justice in Africa.

"It's a shame that we need international justice to remind some what they are supposed to know," the article says. "Nothing can justify the rage of a ruler against his own people, from whom, paradoxically, comes his power."

"If these bloodthirsty leaders want to avoid disgrace, they should review their governance while there is still time," Le Pays warns.

BBC Monitoring selects and translates news from radio, television, press, news agencies and the internet from 150 countries in more than 70 languages. It is based in Caversham, UK, and has several bureaux abroad.

BBC

Friday, 27 April 2012

Human rights groups have welcomed the guilty verdict against former Liberian leader Charles Taylor.

The UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague said he aided and abetted war crimes during the Sierra Leone civil war.

Taylor, 64, has been on trial for almost five years.

"This is an incredibly significant decision," Elise Keppler from the campaign group Human Rights Watch told the BBC.

"Charles Taylor has been called to account for the crimes in Sierra Leone. It is an incredible day for international justice but most of all for victims in Sierra Leone and everywhere," she added.

Taylor was accused of backing rebels who killed tens of thousands of people in Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war. He was convicted on 11 counts including terror, murder and rape - but cleared of ordering the crimes.

David Crane was the first prosecutor for the Special court for Sierra Leone. In 2003 he signed the indictment against Charles Taylor. He told the BBC's Newshour programme that it was irrelevant that he was not convicted on all charges.

"When I drafted that indictment and signed it there were three [charges] and you only had to [find him guilty on] one, so therefore at the end of the day it's what they did with the charges that matters, and they found him guilty as charged... of the horror story in Sierra Leone," he said.

Taylor is the first former head of state convicted by an international court since the Nuremburg military tribunal of Nazis after World War II.

Another group, Amnesty International, said the verdict sent an important message to all high-ranking state officials.

The indictment of Charles Taylor took war crimes jurisprudence to a new level, establishing the principle that a serving head of state was not immune from prosecution.

The later indictments by the International Criminal Court of Sudan's President Omar al-Bashir and former Ivory Coast leader Laurent Gbagbo of Ivory Coast are a testament to the significance of the Taylor precedent.

Mr Gbagbo, who shares a prison compound in The Hague with Taylor, will undoubtedly feel less sanguine about the outcome of his trial as a result. The same is true of Jean-Pierre Bemba, former vice-president of DR Congo, also on trial at the ICC.

The sight of a convicted defendant facing justice in a courtroom as a contrast to the squalid ends suffered by Saddam Hussein and Muammar Gaddafi is a relief to those who argue the case for the integrity of international war crimes law.

"While today's conviction brings some measure of justice to the people of Sierra Leone, Taylor and the others sentenced by the Special Court are just the tip of the iceberg," the group's Brima Abdulai Sheriff said in a statement.

The US State Department said the ruling sent "a strong message to all perpetrators of atrocities, including those in the highest positions of power, that they will be held accountable".

Chief prosecutor Brenda Hollis said it was "confirmation of what the people in Sierra Leone told us from the beginning of our investigations, and that is that Mr Taylor was one of those who bore greatest responsibility for the crimes against them".

Defence lawyer Courtenay Griffiths told the BBC that the trial had not been fair, but rather "prompted by political imperatives".

However he added that he had been surprised at the extent to which the judges were "prepared to reject the initial theories put forward by the prosecution" - notably the contention that Taylor was micro-managing events in Sierra Leone.

Reading out the verdict in The Hague, Judge Richard Lussick said Taylor had been found guilty beyond reasonable doubt in connection with 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Those included terror, murder, rape, and conscripting child soldiers, he added.

Judge Richard Lussick said the court was satisfied Taylor had aided war crimes

Judge Lussick said that as Liberian leader, Taylor had extended "sustained and significant" support to the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The judge said the accused had sold diamonds and bought weapons on behalf of the RUF - and knew the rebels were committing atrocities.

But Judge Lussick added that this support fell short of effective command and control over the rebels.

"The trial chamber finds the accused cannot be held responsible for ordering the crimes," he said.

Continue reading the main story

Taylor timeline

Sierra Leone-Liberia map

- 1989: Launches rebellion in Liberia
- 1991: RUF rebellion starts in Sierra Leone
- 1997: Elected president after a 1995 peace deal
- 1999: Liberia's Lurd rebels start an insurrection to oust Mr Taylor
- June 2003: Arrest warrant issued; two months later he steps down and goes into exile to Nigeria
- March 2006: Arrested after a failed escape bid and sent to Sierra Leone
- June 2007: His trial opens - hosted in The Hague for security reasons
- April 2012: Convicted of aiding and abetting the commission of war crimes

He also said the prosecution had failed to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Taylor was part of a joint criminal enterprise.

A sentence hearing will be held on 16 May, with the sentence to be handed down on 30 May, he added.

Taylor has a right to appeal against the conviction.

If he loses the appeal he is expected to serve his sentence in a British prison, as the Dutch government only agreed to host the trial if any ensuing jail term was served in another country.

The BBC's Mark Doyle in the capital of Sierra Leone, Freetown, says traditional chiefs and victims of the war watching the proceedings by video link breathed a sigh of relief when the verdict was read out.

Victim Jusu Jarkar said: "This is a happy day. I have not been able to do many things because my arms were cut off, but today I am happy."

In the Liberian capital, Monrovia, newspaper publisher Tom Kamara hailed the verdict, saying "justice has been done" and it was "an end to impunity".

However, young supporters of Charles Taylor took to the streets brandishing placards reading: "We love you Taylor, God willing you will come back."

Taylor, a rebel leader in the 1980s and early 1990s, was elected president of Liberia in 1997 following a peace deal which ended a brutal civil war.

He governed for six years before being forced into exile in Nigeria following a second conflict.

In 2006 he was arrested, repatriated to Liberia and eventually sent to The Hague to be tried.

AfricaNews.com

Monday, 30 April 2012

http://www.africanews.com/site/Set_Charles_Taylor_free/list_messages/41619

Set Charles Taylor free?

Article by James N. Kariuki and E. Githinji



The most historic news of this century is easily the verdict against Liberia's Charles Taylor by the Special Court for Sierra Leone at The Hague. Taylor has been found guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes in Sierra Leone.

Taylor

Sentencing is still pending but we know for sure that Taylor will be called upon to serve time. In that event, the question that faces friends of Africa is whether serving prison time is the appropriate option for a former state president.

This question is relevant especially because in Africa, the 'intentions' of the International Criminal Court (ICC) have been questioned. Detractors lament that the court targets Africans leaders disproportionately. And sure enough, its pending cases include the Sudan's president, Omar Al-Bashir, four prominent Kenyan personalities who have been indicted for the 2007-2008 post-election violence, and the son of late Muammar Gaddafi. Does the ICC discriminate or are Africans bigger sinners?

It is fitting that Charles Taylor has endured a grueling trial. First, Taylor committed harrowing crimes in Liberia and Sierra Leone. No worldly punishment can ever come close to paying back the price for the anguish that this one man has perpetrated upon the people of Liberia and Sierra Leone. Even if he accepted guilt, which he doesn't, there is nothing he can do to compensate the troubled region.

Second, Taylor believes in retribution. When he deposed Samuel Doe in 1990, he relished making a worldwide spectacle of his vanquished victim. Indeed he made an international television show of Doe's vile torture, humiliation and, ultimately, execution. We do not suggest that Taylor should be killed and paraded through town nude or have his ears cut off on videotape. But he should remember that he did that to someone else.

Finally and most compellingly, it is imperative that Africa entrenches the principle that nobody is above the law; not even the head of state. This point is critical in a continent where, despite rampant human rights violations, no sitting or former head of state has ever been called upon to be account for his human rights violations against his own people. That was before Charles Taylor.

In sum, if there was probable cause that Taylor broke the law; it was critical that he was held accountable. The old feudal idea that 'The King can do no wrong,' is alive and well in Africa. Indeed, the impulse among many African heads of state is to apply it to themselves. Like Louis XIV of France, they proclaim, 'I am the state.' That kind of impunity is now a thing of the past.

While making room for the legal route, it is equally compelling that we balance between Taylor's culpability and the interest of peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia. In this context, a trial of a sitting or deposed head of state can be tricky.

Post-apartheid SA learned this lesson the hard way. In the late 1990s, the bid to establish Jacob Zuma's guilt or innocence in the court of law strained the fabric of the SA society to the limit. And yet, Zuma was not head of state then; he was merely head of state-in-the-making.

Putting a national leader on trial risks endangering national cohesion. Could a Taylor trial have triggered further regional instability in Liberia and Sierra Leone where he still commanded considerable support? The UN seemed to think so; hence the decision to transfer the legal proceedings against the Liberian leader to the Netherlands at substantial costs. Stability of the region was a relevant consideration.

On the other hand, there is demonstration-effect to take into account. When he accepted the offer of safe exile in Nigeria in 2003, Taylor expected exemption from prosecution in return, a *pid pro quo*. Was he a victim of a broken promise when Nigeria's Olusegun Obasanjo handed him over to Liberia three years later?

If there was such a betrayal of trust by Nigeria, what kind of example did Taylor's experience set for other African political wrongdoers? Would Robert Mugabe, for example, subsequently consider an offer to loosen his grip on Zimbabweans in exchange for exemption from prosecution and an asylum in, say, Namibia or SA? In all likelihood, he would say no, thanks.

A case can thus be made that by breaking the promise of safe haven to Taylor, Nigeria has unwittingly prolonged human suffering in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in Africa. Why would any other African tyrant surrender his positions of power if he is likely to be hunted down later when he no longer has trappings of power?

By all accounts, Taylor did commit awesome acts of savagery in and around Liberia. But, wasn't banishing him out of Liberia's political life (with his own consent) punishment enough? Was putting him on an agonizing trial tantamount to going to excesses?

Fortunately, Liberia and Sierra Leone did not explode in fury over the trial of Charles Taylor? But what about sentencing him to a lengthy jail term? Can we cross a line of sound reasoning by engaging such in overkill? Could a long sense for Taylor trigger violent riots and hurt the chances of national reconciliation in Liberia and Sierra Leone?

Prompting the pendulum of revenge in Sierra Leone and Liberia is a real danger. The grudge cycle of 'you hurt our man today, we shall hurt your man tomorrow,' should not be entertained. There is wisdom to the thought of limiting ourselves to de-thronement without decapitation. This is not to praise the perpetrator of evil; it is to shield the already victimized from further savagery.

Africa longs for a peaceful Liberia and its neighbors. If so, we should entertain the option of shaming Charles Taylor by smothering him with ubuntu, what he denied his antagonists. Set Taylor free but bar him from ever setting foot on any part of West Africa. After all, the ultimate measure of a healthy black family is how it treats its most difficult member.

National Public Radio (US)

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Hague Tribunal Issues Verdict Against Charles Taylor

Steve Inskeep and Eric Westervelt

A special tribunal in The Hague has found former Liberian President Charles Taylor guilty of aiding war crimes. Taylor armed fighters in neighboring Sierra Leone in return for "blood diamonds."

We now know the judgment against former Liberian President Charles Taylor. He was on trial before an international war crimes tribunal at the Hague, Netherlands. He faced almost a dozen charges of various war crimes, all stemming from his support of rebel fighters in neighboring Sierra Leone. Taylor was prosecuted trading weapons, ammunition and other assistance in exchange for so-called blood diamonds mined by slaves. NPR's Eric Westervelt has been following this story. He's on the line, once again.

Eric, what are the findings, at this point?

ERIC WESTERVELT, BYLINE: Well, Steve, today the judge has found Charles Taylor guilty on the bulk of the war crimes against him. The presiding judge said that diamonds mined from Sierra Leone were delivered to Taylor in exchange for arms and ammunition. He said at another point, Taylor was found by the court to have received blood and conflict diamonds from the rebels, the RUF. He was found guilty, Steve, of aiding and abetting war crimes, including rape, murder, sexual slavery and other charges. The judge called Taylor's support for the Sierra Leone rebels sustained and significant.

INSKEEP: So he was effectively selling them arms. He was being paid in blood diamonds as he sold those arms. Did he play a larger role, according to the court, in sustaining this Sierra Leone rebellion, in which tens of thousands of civilians were killed?

WESTERVELT: The court found that he did play a large role. But on some of the other charges, Steve, they found that there wasn't sufficient evidence that he was ordering and masterminding specific attacks and atrocities. But on the larger overall charges, he was found criminally responsible.

INSKEEP: And I want to understand a little bit better this rebellion that Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, supported, according to the court, in this neighboring nation. In the end, did this rebellion turn out to be more about business than anything else? There were diamonds to sell. There were arms to sell. There was a cut of everything to be taken.

WESTERVELT: I think that's true. I mean, this group, the Revolutionary United Front, did not have a clear plan to try to help Sierra Leone. They didn't really have a coherent ideology, Steve. They really ended up being about vicious brutality and terror. They were about power and diamonds. They chopped off limbs of civilians and enemy fighters. They tortured and killed and raped. They recruited child soldiers. I mean, Steve, the names of their operations sort of say it all. There was Operation No Living Thing and Operation Spare No Soul. They disemboweled people. It was a brutal, sort of, reign of terror that I think, in the end, yeah, was all about power and diamonds, importantly, in West Africa.

INSKEEP: So, a landmark case, here, Charles Taylor found guilty on the bulk of the charges against him at The Hague in the Netherlands. And Eric, what has the scene been like in the courtroom there?

WESTERVELT: Well, it was mostly quiet. The judge read the verdict for over two hours. Charles Taylor sat passively throughout most of it. He'll have a chance to speak at his sentencing next month. There are victims in the courtroom, we were able to see. And they sat listening to, really, every word, Steve. And I

think for them, it's an important moment, certainly bittersweet, because it took so long. But I think they're happy that, finally, Charles Taylor has been held to account for some serious war crimes.

INSKEEP: And we should mention that in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, the city was virtually shut down in anticipation of this verdict, fear of some kind of reaction. But it sounds like there in the courtroom, anyway, things were very dignified and very, very quiet as justice was handed down.

WESTERVELT: That's correct.

INSKEEP: Eric, thanks very much.

WESTERVELT: You're welcome, Steve.

INSKEEP: That's NPR's Eric Westervelt. He's at The Hague in the Netherlands, where Charles Taylor has now been convicted of war crimes.

The Telegraph
Saturday, 28 April 2012
Opinion

People may suffer less if a tyrant sees an easy way out

Calls by the international community for 'justice' may make dictators determined to hang on to power at all costs.



By Alasdair Palmer

The cheers at the conviction of Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, by a court specially convened by the United Nations to try him in the Hague, are understandable. Taylor seems to be an unusually unpleasant individual, who presided over a reign of unspeakable terror in Sierra Leone, as his troops murdered, raped and mutilated their way across that country in their effort to obtain diamonds which ultimately ended up in his hands.

But if no one (except perhaps his lawyer) mourns Taylor's conviction, still it has not achieved all that has been claimed for it. The court's supporters insist that "justice has been done to Taylor". This is debatable. He was acquitted of ordering his troops to chop off the arms of women and children, to murder and to rape – as they did. He was convicted only of making money out of the troops responsible for those atrocities. He shows no signs of remorse.

Supposing he gets a lengthy prison sentence, he will serve his time in a British jail, where he will be well fed and clothed, and have access to books, television and the internet. Many of his victims, meanwhile, languish on the verge of starvation, unable, because of what his troops did to them, to make a living except by begging. Looking at the relative luxury of his life and the impoverishment of their own, they are understandably perplexed by the claim that his treatment counts as "justice".

But the reasons for profound concern about international criminal courts go beyond the particular case of Charles Taylor. The most fundamental is that they could have the opposite effect to the one intended. They may prolong vicious dictatorships, rather than help to curtail them.

Every transition from dictatorship to democracy, when it is not the result of civil war or palace coup, involves negotiating with the dictator and his cronies to persuade them to relinquish power. That happened in Argentina, in Uruguay and in South Africa.

It's a distasteful process, because it requires offering the bad guys some incentives to step aside. No dictator is going to be attracted by the prospect of a criminal trial and life imprisonment at the end of it. But when the international community calls for "justice", that may be all that is on offer. It makes dictators uninterested in stepping down and determined to hang on to power at all costs. So the end result of the international community's insistence that a tyrant should stand trial is to hold up the transition from tyranny to democracy.

Robert Mugabe, the tyrant grinding Zimbabwe into the dust, exemplifies this. In 2008, he might have been persuaded to follow the example of Idi Amin, the thug who ruled Uganda in the Seventies, and go into exile to somewhere such as Saudi Arabia. But it was made clear to him that the "peaceful retirement" option was not available. Although the International Criminal Court (ICC) has not indicted him, he can see what has happened to his friend Charles Taylor. Mugabe has insisted that he will only leave Zimbabwe in a coffin. Millions of Zimbabweans suffer under his continued rule as a consequence.

The ICC issued a warrant more than three years ago for the arrest of Omar Hassan al-Bashir, who has viciously tyrannised Sudan since 1989. The only effect has been to harden his commitment to staying in power. It has done nothing whatever to weaken his grip on the country, or to ensure that Sudan moves to a less barbaric form of government. It has made the international community feel as if it is "doing something" about Bashir – when in fact it is not.

We should pause before concluding from the conviction of Charles Taylor that international trials "work" to advance peace and democracy, and to increase the sum of human happiness. The price of a single-minded determination to achieve justice may in fact be to prolong the misery of people who suffer under tyrants.

The Telegraph

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Charles Taylor: former child soldiers 'delight' in conviction

Listening to the live radio broadcast of Charles Taylor's verdict was "so painful" for Kabbah Williams, a former child soldier in Sierra Leone, that he said "not one minute passed without tears in my eyes".

By Mike Pflanz, West Africa Correspondent

The BBC World Service reporters talked of the ruling being an "historic moment in international justice", but for Mr Williams and friends gathered to listen with him, it was of far more personal importance.

"That man is the one who helped to bring so much misery to my country, and to me," he told The Daily Telegraph.

"To hear that he was found guilty, I felt extremely delighted, it is true that justice has prevailed, even after all this time.

"But also I felt so sad – even as I talk to you I am crying again – because in my mind was the nightmare that began when I was forcibly conscripted into the rebel army in 1991." Then, he was six years old. He had left his mother at home to walk to a nearby village to sell rice grown on the family's smallholding in eastern Sierra Leone.



While he was away, the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the army that Charles Taylor "aided and abetted" with guns-for-diamonds deals, swept through his village.

When Mr Williams returned, dead bodies littered the paths, his mother had disappeared and the fighters still patrolling the area abducted him into their ranks.

"I have never, to this day, seen my mother again," he said.

"They took us and gave us war training, even though we were only children, and then soon after we were fighting, or we were being made to carry heavy loads through the bush. It was so, so bad." Over the next three years, Mr Williams escaped from the rebels, was forced to fight for the government army, joined a Unicef rehabilitation programme, returned to the bush to fight again, and eventually laid down his AK-47 for good in 1994. He was nine years old.

He is now a 27-year-old studying Literature and Linguistics at Sierra Leone's Njala University, and he wants to be a teacher.

"I have spent so much of the last few years working with the community that was traumatised by us child soldiers, as a way for me to show my true remorse," he said.

"We are stigmatised, but people should understand that I did not do those terrible things because I wanted to. We were brainwashed, some were drugged, we were forced to do it." The stigma that Mr Williams talks about means that many former child soldiers are now unemployed and increasingly restive, he said.

Charles Taylor's conviction must not mean that international focus on the legacy of Sierra Leone's war should fade, said Henry Sheku of the country's Human Rights Commission.

"Of course it is important to see that justice has won, but for many of the civil war's victims, there continues to be a grave daily struggle," he said.

Promised compensation schemes to boost ex-fighters and amputees into work have so far failed to pay out.

At the same time, there is a perception that the millions of pounds spent on the Special Court for Sierra Leone could have been better used on aid to the country, said Ibrahim Bangura, a civil rights activist who helped coax child soldiers out of the jungle after the war ended in 2002.

"Many Sierra Leoneans I speak to look at the current challenges they face in terms of lack of access to the means of production and not to the war period," he said.

Sunday Times
Sunday, 29 April 2012

Charles Taylor's cash likely to stay stashed



THERE were celebrations in the slums of Sierra Leone and gasps of joy in The Hague when Charles Taylor was found guilty of war crimes by an international court last week.

But as the warlord who led Liberia from 1997 to 2003 was convicted of crimes against humanity for his role in arming Sierra Leone's rebels in exchange for "blood diamonds", one crucial question remained unanswered.

What has happened to the enormous personal fortune he garnered from the years of terror in west Africa?

As Taylor, 64, whose army of child soldiers gained notoriety for hacking off the limbs of their victims, prepared to spend the rest of his life in a British prison at taxpayers' expense, it emerged that only \$US7 million (\$6.6m) of his total assets - estimated at \$US400m - has been recovered.

The Sunday Times has learned that the hunt for his money, hidden in private bank accounts in Lagos, New York, Bermuda and Hong Kong, has ground to a halt, leaving his tens of thousands of victims with little or no chance of compensation.

Rec Coverage 28 Day pass

The failure is made all the more remarkable by the fact that the bills for Taylor's defence and the cost of the trial, thought to exceed \$US50m, have been met largely by the US after he was declared insolvent by the court.

According to a forensic accountant involved in the search, it did not begin in earnest until 2007, by which time much of the money had been lost or hidden. "We came to the game too late," he said. "By that time, Taylor had worked with cronies in Nigeria to hide a great deal of his assets behind shell companies."

Frustrated by the inability of the court in The Hague to seize the funds, the Liberian government began its own investigation., but it could not afford the teams of lawyers and accountants needed for the job.

"We believe the money remains hidden in banks, mainly in Asia, and in property assets in the Middle East and US," the accountant said.

David Crane, the chief prosecutor of the special court for Sierra Leone until 2005, now believes there is little hope of tracking down the money.

Last week's verdict related to Taylor's role in supporting the Revolutionary United Front rebels in Sierra Leone, where about 50,000 people died.

Taylor stepped down as Liberian president in 2003 in a deal to avoid prosecution, and moved to a mansion in Nigeria after being indicted by the special court set up to deal with crimes committed in the Sierra Leone conflict.

Under international pressure in 2006, the then Nigerian president, Olusegun Obasanjo, allowed him to be arrested as he tried to leave the country. By then, legal experts claim, Taylor had been able to conceal much of the stolen cash.

His lawyer has hinted that he will appeal once the written judgment has been handed down on May 30. That could take more than a year. If the appeal is rejected, Taylor will be sent to prison in Britain next year.

CBC (Canada)

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Liberia's Charles Taylor convicted in war crimes case

Conviction 'a historic moment in the development of international justice,' UN commissioner



Former Liberian president Charles Taylor was convicted Thursday by an international tribunal for aiding and abetting rebels who committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

Judge Richard Lussick said the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague had unanimously found Taylor guilty of aiding and abetting the commission of a range of crimes.

Taylor was convicted on all 11 charges in the indictment, including terror, murder, rape and conscripting child soldiers.

'This ruling will hopefully be of some solace for those still grieving and still healing.'
—John Baird, Canada's foreign affairs minister

He had pleaded not guilty to all counts, claiming — in seven months of testimony in his own defence — that he was a statesman and peacemaker in West Africa.

Lussick said Taylor gave weapons, ammunition, communications equipment and planning to rebels who committed atrocities during the 1991-2002 civil war that left more than 50,000 dead and countless survivors with emotional and physical scars.

However, Lussick also ruled that while Taylor had been a major influence over one of the rebel groups, prosecutors had failed to prove that Taylor was individually responsible for some of the crimes. He also said the prosecution failed to show that Taylor was part of a joint criminal enterprise. Charles Taylor is the highest-ranking leader ever brought to court accused of recruiting child soldiers, like these two seen in 2000 during the conflict in Sierra Leone. Charles Taylor is the highest-ranking leader ever brought to court accused of recruiting child soldiers, like these two seen in 2000 during the conflict in Sierra Leone. (Jean-Philippe Ksiazek/AFP/Getty Images)

Taylor could face a maximum sentence of life in prison, to be served in Great Britain. He has a May 16 hearing, and will learn his sentence on May 30.

The case unfolded over nearly four years, wrapping up after 420 trial days in March 2011. According to the court, more than 1,500 exhibits were admitted into evidence and a total of 115 witnesses testified, including Taylor.

He is the first African head of state convicted by an international court. Karl Doenitz, a naval officer who briefly led Germany after Adolf Hitler committed suicide, was tried at Nuremberg and convicted in 1946. He spent 10 years in prison.

Operation No Living Thing

Speaking to CBC's Chris Hall on Power & Politics with Evan Solomon, Canadian Jeremy Waiser, former special assistant to the prosecutor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, called the landmark ruling "a very big day" for thousands of Taylor's war crimes victims.

"The mood was very serious," Waiser said, speaking from The Hague.

"In the judge's words, Taylor was the instigating force in one of the operations called No Living Thing, and the name alone tells you all you probably need to know."

The bloody attack on the capital of Freetown in 1999 involved Taylor's forces disembowling civilians in the streets, raping women in public and burning families alive inside their homes.

"The purpose, in the words of the judges, was to terrorize the civilian population into total submission. If you were watching this from Sierra Leone today, as many were, I think this [judgment] gave at least some small measure of justice," Waiser said.



Taylor can appeal ruling

Both the prosecution and the defence are expected to review the special court's ruling to determine if they should launch an appeal.

Taylor's attorney, Courtenay Griffiths, slammed the conviction as based on "tainted and corrupt evidence." He claimed prosecutors paid for some of the evidence.

Griffiths said Taylor took the verdicts in stride. "Mr. Taylor has always been a stoic individual and he continued to display that stoicism," Griffiths told reporters.

Navi Pillay, the UN high commissioner for human rights, welcomed the judgment against Taylor, but noted that the ex-president can still appeal the ruling, saying his guilt "is not fully established until the end of the judicial process."

"Nevertheless, whatever the final outcome, this is undoubtedly a historic moment in the development of international justice," Pillay said in a statement.

"A former president, who once wielded immense influence in a neighbouring country where tens of thousands of people were killed, mutilated, raped, robbed and repeatedly displaced for years on end, has been arrested, tried in a fair and thorough international procedure, and has now been convicted of very serious crimes," she said.

Pillay also noted that other leaders, including Laurent Gbagbo, the former president of Ivory Coast, and former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, have also been charged with international crimes and are either already on trial or will be soon.

Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird said Canada welcomes the unanimous judgment.

"Nothing can undo what was done. This ruling will hopefully be of some solace for those still grieving and still healing," Baird said in a statement released after the ruling.

Baird said Taylor abused his office, and "violated the basic dignity of the men, women and children who were terrorized, oppressed and assaulted."

A spokesperson for Amnesty International praised the ruling, as did Elise Keppler, senior international counsel at Human Rights Watch, who said leaders like Charles Taylor have "for too long lived comfortably above the law."

"Taylor's conviction sends a message to those in power that they can be held to account for grave crimes," Keppler said in a statement.

'Shame on you Charles Taylor'

In Sierra Leone, thousands of people celebrate the conviction, The Associated Press reported. Sierra Leonian amputee association chairman Alhaji Jusu Jarka walks outside the Special Court in Freetown on Thursday as Liberian ex-leader Charles Taylor's trial taking place in the Hague was broadcasted inside. Sierra Leonian amputee association chairman Alhaji Jusu Jarka walks outside the Special Court in Freetown on Thursday as Liberian ex-leader Charles Taylor's trial taking place in the Hague was broadcasted inside. (Issouf Sanogo/AFP Photo/Getty Images)

Jusu Jarka, a former Sierra Leone businessman who is now chair of the victims' rights organization the Amputees and War Wounded Association, had his arms amputated in 1999 during the war after he refused to give his daughter to the troops.

He said Thursday he is happy that the court in Holland had found Taylor was "fully and solely responsible for the crimes committed against the people of Sierra Leone."

One sign on display Thursday read: "Shame on you Charles Taylor. Give us your diamonds before going to prison."

Documentary filmmaker Ngardy Conteh, who was born in Sierra Leone, told CBC News she was pleased to hear about the ruling.

"I think there are many people who are happy to see that justice has been served," she said.

Conteh, who is currently working on a film about an amputee soccer league in the country, said some in Sierra Leone were uninterested in the trial.

"The focus should be on the victims of the war, the amputated and the ones most affected," she said, adding that more resources are needed so people can "move on and healing can happen."

Montreal Gazette
Saturday, 28 April 2012

In the Charles Taylor conviction, a warning to other national leaders

By RENÉ PROVOST, The Gazette

The Sierra Leone Special Court sitting in The Hague has convicted the former president of Liberia, Charles Taylor, of terrorism, murder, rape, sexual slavery, using child soldiers, enslavement and pillage, amounting to war crimes and crimes against humanity. While these abhorrent events took place in a small country that few Canadians could place on a map, this is a decision that will reverberate far and wide for many years to come.

The first striking aspect of the decision is whom it relates to: a man who, at all material times, was the president of a recognized, sovereign country. In convicting him, the court has broken a taboo against sending to jail the leaders of countries despite the magnitude of the crimes they may have committed.

The International Military Tribunal created at Nuremberg after the Second World War rejected as baseless for any trial before an international tribunal any claim of immunity attaching to an official position in government, including as head of state. However, a challenge to this principle was the refusal by states to create any international criminal tribunal for nearly 50 years after the end of the war, despite the fact that there was no shortage of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocides. This fed a certain sense that the Nuremberg principles were wishful thinking, and that political leaders were beyond the reach of international criminal law.

The creation of international tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda by the United Nations Security Council in the early 1990s, followed by the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court in 1998, finally opened the door to possible prosecutions of presidents and prime ministers. This proved nearly impossible to do in practice, however, because heads of state are very adept at escaping arrest by hiding among their followers, by hunkering behind their borders, or by manipulating other governments to deter co-operation with international tribunals. Yugoslav president Slobodan Milosevic was eventually arrested in the former Yugoslavia, only to die in prison in The Hague while his trial was ongoing, thus preventing his eventual conviction.

Taylor is thus the first head of state to be truly brought to justice, and this make less illusory the possibility that others will follow. The next on the list may well be Omar Al-Bashir, the president of Sudan indicted by the International Criminal Court for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide in Darfur. He is not likely to be the last.

The second striking aspect of the judgment is what it relates to: a policy of indirect involvement in, and support for, an insurgency in another country.

The prosecutor of the Sierra Leone Special Court had alleged that Charles Taylor was in command of some of the militias found to have committed barbaric atrocities on a massive scale in that country. The indictment also charged that Taylor had been a participant in a joint criminal enterprise, along with commanders of these militias, leading to the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone. In its judgment issued Thursday, the Special Court found that it had not been proven beyond reasonable doubt that Taylor was in command of or had joined a criminal enterprise. On the other hand, the court did conclude that Taylor had participated in planning some operations in the war in Sierra Leone during which crimes were committed. Likewise, the court found that Taylor's continued participation in illegal diamond trading to finance the militias, providing logistical support in the form of satellite phones, transport and housing in Liberia, amounted to aiding and abetting the commission of the crimes by the militias.

Remarkably, Taylor is being convicted for a type of remote involvement in a war in another country that is actually much more common than the type of direct control for which the court found him not guilty. Many governments in many parts of the world discreetly become involved in civil wars in the indirect manner for which Taylor will certainly be jailed for many years - giving money, providing support, but never actually taking over the fighting. The Taylor judgment is an invitation to all governments, whether authoritarian or democratic, to carefully consider whether they wish to become legally linked to crimes committed by armed groups that they discreetly support.

Will this one legal stroke bring about a sudden turn to law and order in the world? Probably not. Many of the reasons that made it so difficult to arrive at a first conviction of a head of state remain valid today. Nevertheless, this is a new and important weapon in the arsenal of those fighting to prevent atrocities in places like Syria, Afghanistan and Sudan.

René Provost is a professor of law at McGill University. He was the founding director of the McGill Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism, and of the McGill Clinic for the Sierra Leone Special Court.

Cocorioko (website)

Sunday, 29 April 2012

Opinion

The Charles Taylor saga: My view

By Dr. Augustine Kamara :

This is a turning point of our country, and a moment of reflection. A turning point that marks a memory of a bitter past in our country's history. The injustice perpetrated to our beloved land and innocent people was finally rewarded by the international community by a fair judgement to one of the catalysts in that wicked exercise in the name of a rebel war. The so called warlord of Liberia, Charles Taylor was handed a verdict of "GUILTY" for his role in aiding and perpetrating rebels, that cause mayhem to the peoples of Sierra Leone.

The man clad in a nice blue suit, appeared in court with confidence as if he was ready to celebrate with a toast of champagne, perhaps with a thought that the international court of justice in the Hague would exonerate him from the atrocities he helped perpetrated into our land .The moment of truth has finally come. The victims and relatives and the world at large listened attentively to the several charges of crimes against humanity of rape torture, murder read out to his ears. The arm of the law displaying its firm grip over criminality. Where are the Gaddafi's to sponsor him and his other partners in crime to bail him from jail? I am sure all of those are now burning in the hottest part of hell, others are waiting to follow soon?? Where are the blood diamonds that He was so much in love with and had enough to lavishly entice ladies? Were they left for safe keeping in Nigeria for safe keeping the last place he sought refuge after a failed attempt of an escape to Cameroon? He forgot that, there was a God he disemboweled pregnant women, and hacked limbs of innocent men and women including babies.

The rest of his gangsters who are still out there are now shaking in fear, not knowing whose turn is next. Don't worry "bad boy bad boy what you gonna do? when they come for you" your time is already ripe, there is no hiding place as the evidences against you are very clear .If the Hague cannot get you, the ghosts of those murdered will haunt you.Time for reflection ,again it will be more fair if crimes against humanity are not further pursued within Sierra Leone as the saying goes", charity begins at home", it is now clear that the tentacles of the war were extrapolated to Liberia! What about the players within Sierra Leone ? What are we hiding?Yes we are praying for peace but, we want equal rights and justice, Down in Zimbabwe -Equal rights and Justice. down in up gun equal rights and justice, This is no joke, we have to bring our former rulers to justice same as we have done to Charles Taylor "Africa shall judge and see who is right " "This was a phrase by Patrice Lumumba the murdered Congolese leader when he was arrested in parliament. when Joseph Mobutu came to arrest him let us reflect to what he said again "Thou puppets. thou enemies of Africa ,thou men with women souls stay where you are Africa shall judge and see who is right,I am the prime minister and have legally dismissed Kassavubu from office and I know you all have vowed to treat me shamefully as did the Jews to our saviour but,t his must I have to say to you all as long as Patrice Lumumba lives the union must be maintained should I die tomorrow because I love my country beyond personal gains and your children nay the future sons and daughters of Africa shall ask father why was Patrice Lumumba when as a matter of fact he fought for the independence of our country and I am sure your own answers to this innocent question must be the words of Oliver Wendel Holmes.....

.Again on reflections Congo now Zaire has not known peace because justice was never done to the killing of Lumumba god alone knows how many hands were involved. Today as we reflect on Charles Taylor's verdict a man from a neighboring country let us don't forget other players at a higher level from a far distance that also played a more dubious role. This broils down to the fact "If hose nor sell you treet nor go buy you" if you are not betrayed by your house your neighbors wont buy you. Like Patrice Lumumba he was betrayed by his own people to Belgium and western powers. In Sierra Leone also we were sold to the rebels by our leaders who for the sake of power did not care how much Sierra Leone would

burn. Today also is time for reflections as we move on from the ruins of war we see our victims everyday in the street of Freetown and around the country, do we really care to stop and offer any act of sympathy or compassion to this group of unfortunate victims?

Does their presence in our midst send a message to denounce violence for good? are we really getting the message that we have to be patriotic and desist from corruption? Time for reflection oh yes can we accept the fact that it was because of greed corruption and bad heartism that culminated the war. Now it is time for praying, as we pray do we pray earnestly and honestly pray to god? Do we bow down in fear of a witch gun or forgiveness of our sins? As I walk down the streets of Freetown many unbelievable happenings could be seen today.

Overcrowding throngs the street of Freetown and mining areas, people with 3G or 4G i phones ready to send messages across the world to relatives and friends. Business partners NGO'S JCS okada Chinese Russians Ogaman Dollar man squeezing ones way in the city centers. Music and car horns blasting to high pitch of melodious music or noise. This looks chaotic, but guess what it is all peaceful. We pray mama salone continues to be peaceful and that citizens learn to peacefully co-exist. Do not allow any evil foreign forces to corrupt our minds and that we pledges more loyalty to mama salone help, love one another to build and protect our country from ruin. AMEN

The Star

Sunday, 29 April 2012

Opinion

Charles Taylor's historic conviction for war crimes is a victory for international justice

When Charles Taylor was at the height of his power fanning Sierra Leone's gruesome "blood diamond" civil war in which 50,000 died, the former Liberian president never dreamed he might one day be hauled before a United Nations-mandated court for his crimes.

But today Taylor awaits sentencing on May 30 for terrorism, murder, rape, sexual slavery, pillage and other crimes. He's the first head of state to be indicted, tried and judged guilty by an international tribunal since the Nuremberg trials after World War II. While he has yet to be tried for crimes in Liberia itself on his watch, his conviction this past week before the Special Court for Sierra Leone is a victory for international justice that sounds the death-knell for impunity.

Taylor was convicted of providing moral support, weapons and operational help to Liberian-backed, drug-crazed rebels in Sierra Leone from 1996 to 2002, in exchange for blood diamonds. They burned people alive, carved their initials in peoples' bodies, hacked off limbs and made Taylor rich. Whatever his sentence for "aiding and abetting" the rebels, Taylor will be luckier than many of his victims. There is no death penalty in international law.

Even so, there is a new reality dawning in Africa, the Middle East and other regions where despots, warlords and gangsters hold cruel sway. As the court's chief prosecutor Brenda Hollis put it, "With leadership comes not just power and authority, but also responsibility and accountability. No person, no matter how powerful, is above the law." It will be harder, in future, for those who oppress their own people, or who export violence, to evade the consequences.

Indeed the International Criminal Court at The Hague has issued an arrest warrant for Sudan President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, and has launched proceedings against former Ivory Coast President Laurent Gbagbo. Former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic died before his trial ended. And former Rwandan Prime Minister Jean Kambanda was tried and convicted by a special court.

Granted, these courts are slow, arbitrarily selective, costly vehicles of justice. But each judgment they render serves welcome notice on presidents and foot soldiers alike who commit butchery that they can no longer feel confident that the world will look the other way.

Voice of America

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Zimbabweans Reflect on Charles Taylor's Conviction for War Crimes

An international tribunal sitting in The Hague has convicted former warlord and Liberian president Charles Taylor of aiding and abetting horrific war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during Sierra Leone's civil war.

Taylor had pleaded innocent to the charges, pressed by the U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, formed in 2002. He reserves the right to appeal.

The conviction is the first by an international tribunal against a head of state since the Nazi trials at Nuremberg. It is also the first against a former African leader.

The tribunal was moved from Sierra Leone to the International Criminal Court in Netherlands due to security concerns.

Looking somber in a dark blue suit, Taylor stood silently as judge Richard Lussick read out the verdict. Charges against him included murder, sexual enslavement, rape, use of child soldiers and other war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Prosecutors argued that Taylor provided arms to the Revolutionary United Front rebels in Sierra Leone in exchange for so-called "blood diamonds." The arms were used in a civil war that killed more than 500, 000 people.

African leaders, led by long-ruling Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe have regularly criticized such international tribunals and the ICC for allegedly targeting leaders from third world nations, especially in Africa.

Mr. Mugabe has himself been accused by critics of committing crimes against humanity during a military campaign in Matabeleland during the 1980s, in an operation code-named Gukurahundi, meaning the early rains that wash away the chaff.

At last years U.N General Assembly, Mr. Mugabe accused the court of turning a "blind eye" to crimes against humanity committed by Western leaders.

But lead ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo has rejected the charges saying his office has a mandate to go after anyone accused of wrongdoing and deliver justice.

Some of the high-profile individuals on the ICC radar include Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir, who faces 10 counts of crimes against humanity and war crimes. He remains free and in power, enjoying the full support of the African Union.

Notorious commander of the Lord's Resistance Army, Joseph Kony faces 33 counts. He is on the run. Former Ivory Coast leader Laurent Gbagbo is in the ICC custody awaiting trial.

Executive Director, Irene Petras, of the Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights told VOA the Taylor verdict is a victory for justice. "It's a positive step for those who have been fighting against impunity for international crimes."

Her sentiments were echoed by political analyst Effie Dlela Ncube who added that the Sierra Leone tribunal has sent a clear message to leaders violating human rights.

Associated Press
Sunday, 29 April 2012

Sierra Leone victims cheer Charles Taylor verdict



TOMBODU, Sierra Leone (AP) — Rebels captured Samuel Komba, tied him up with more than a dozen other villagers and set them on fire. Badly burned, he broke free, only to be caught by fighters who tried to chop off his right hand.

The 58-year-old farmer, one of only two survivors of that attack more than a decade ago, says he takes solace from ex-Liberian President Charles Taylor's conviction

by an international court Thursday for his role in Sierra Leone's brutal war.

"The whole world will know today what Charles Taylor did, and we are happy," Komba said from this rural village, where many who survived the fighting were enslaved as diamond miners.

On Thursday, officials set up an area for several hundred residents of Tombodu to listen to the verdict live from the Netherlands, but they couldn't get a radio signal. Some villagers carrying transistor radios wandered hillsides trying to pick up a signal from the capital, Freetown.

There was some subdued clapping and a few smiles as news of Taylor's conviction spread. One woman called out, asking why those who committed atrocities locally for years during the war were not charged. But the crowd quickly dispersed and people went back to their daily lives.

Wounds are still raw in this community. A tiled pit full of human bones and skulls marks the spot where rebels once burned 55 people alive.

"Let them chop off Charles Taylor's hand. He should go to jail forever," Komba said, his own maimed hand hanging limp and unusable, his back scarred from the burns he suffered.

"They brought diamonds to Charles Taylor. He gave them guns that they brought here and gave to small children," said Komba, who testified for the prosecution in 2006 at Taylor's trial in Leidschendam, Netherlands.

In Freetown, the capital, crowds who had gathered to watch the verdict on television sighed with relief when the conviction was announced. Simmering anger was evident on placards carried by some, including one that read: "Give us your diamonds before going to prison."

Among those closely following the court proceedings from afar was Alhaji Jusu Jarka, whose arms were hacked off by rebels in 1999 and who is the current chairman of the Amputees Association.

"I am happy that the truth has come out ... that Charles Taylor is fully and solely responsible for the crimes committed against the people of Sierra Leone," he said.

Sierra Leone's government said it "salutes the dignity, patience and resilience showed by particularly the victims of the war throughout the process of the administration of international justice until today's historic verdict."

Taylor, though, still garners strong support from his followers in Liberia. On Thursday, youths in the capital, Monrovia, carried signs, including one that read: "We love you Taylor, God willing you will come back." "Leave Taylor; let him come back home, he's not guilty," declared another.

One man, Jura Sanoë, appeared with a tiny anti-Taylor flier that read: "Taylor is guilty." He was booed and jeered, and had to be escorted away by police amid shouted threats.

"The Sierra Leonean Embassy will be burnt down for the second time," screamed a young man in a crowd gathered to listen to the verdict on the radio.

In a statement, the Liberian government urged calm. "The government calls on all Liberians, irrespective of our social and political differences, to respect the verdict of the Special Court and continue to pray for enduring peace and unity in the nation," it said.

Newspaper publisher Tom Kamara, who was forced into exile during Taylor's regime, only returned to Liberia after he was pushed out of power in 2003. On Thursday, he hailed the verdict as "an end to impunity" before becoming overwhelmed by emotion — weeping as he cut short a radio appearance.

Taylor, 64, insists he is an innocent victim of neocolonialism and a political process aimed at preventing him from returning to power in Liberia. In seven months of testimony in his own defense, he cast himself as a peacemaker and statesman in West Africa.

While judges convicted Taylor of aiding and abetting atrocities by rebels, they cleared him of direct command responsibility, saying he had no direct control over the rebels he supported.

Residents of Tombodu believe otherwise. Out of 500 homes, only seven were spared from arson during the war.

Bondu Koiko, 87, who didn't join her neighbors in hearing Thursday's verdict, says she can't bear to even hear Taylor's name.

"I don't want to see the picture of Charles Taylor. I don't want to hear that name, because he directed people to burn down houses and kill people. He tied people and threw them in the pit," she said, of the rebels' practice of tying up victims and throwing them to their deaths to save bullets.

Koiko fled the village in 1998 and later made her way to neighboring Guinea with a single bag containing her belongings. Her home was looted and burned, and most of her relatives killed.

These days she makes her living from a garden that she tends on the burned out foundations of a house.

Roy-Macaulay reported from Freetown. Associated Press writer Jonathan Paye-Layleh in Monrovia, Liberia, contributed to this report.



The Daily Beast

Friday, 27 April 2012

War Criminal Charles Taylor's Daughter Defends Her Dad

This week, former Liberian President Charles Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes in Sierra Leone. His daughter watched the U.N. tribunal in The Hague and spoke to Robtel Neajai Pailey.

Charles Taylor only smiled once during the court hearing in the Hague, before he was found guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes, during the bloody civil war in Sierra Leone.

Looking up, the warlord, who became Liberia's president before he was finally convicted on Thursday for helping bring about years of terror in neighboring Sierra Leone, beamed when he caught the eye of his daughter.

Sharon, or "Lady Ghankay" as she is also called, had followed the proceedings from the public gallery, sitting at the edge of her seat. Separated from her father by a wall of transparent glass, she watched as her father faced justice, somber and pale, his head slightly bowed, burgundy tie limply hanging from his neck, and three deep horizontal lines crossing his forehead.

At the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Justice Richard Lussick read the verdict to about 80 spellbound listeners. During a four-year trial prosecutors at the United Nations-backed tribunal in The Hague have documented the terror committed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which Taylor supported.

Between 1996 and 2002, RUF rebels rampaged Sierra Leone, killing, maiming, and raping civilians. The horror stories are well known: limbs were amputated, lips were cut off, pregnant women were cut open, their fetuses torn from their wombs. Children were kidnapped and drugged, employed as child soldiers or mine guards, and forced to commit atrocities themselves.

Brenda Hollis, the chief prosecutor, called the judgment against Taylor "historic," saying it reinforced "a new reality: that heads of state will be held to account for war crimes and other international crimes."

Taylor's lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, meanwhile argued that by finding against the leader of a "small, weak, poor country" in Africa, the international criminal justice system had "set an unwelcome precedent." Charles Taylor, Griffiths said, had not been a warmonger but a peacemaker, who had attempted to protect the integrity of Liberia's borders.

The judges, though, found that while Taylor had publicly promoted peace as a standing head of state of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), he had undermined that same peace process by providing arms and ammunition to the RUF and fuelling hostilities in Sierra Leone.

When asked about her father's involvement in Sierra Leone's civil war, Sharon Taylor defended her dad. "Being the leader of a nation... that comes with huge responsibility, and of course we never have control over our subordinates," she said. "When you're in such a position, it's quite vulnerable."

The special tribunal found Taylor guilty on 11 counts, saying he provided sustained support for the rebels as they committed atrocities in the neighboring country. The court also found that Taylor participated in the planning of attacks, including one on the Sierra Leone capital, Freetown.

"I'm obviously saddened," said Sharon Taylor in response to the verdict. But, she added, "our family's faith in the Almighty is strong." She also described Charles Taylor as dedicated to his family and an "amazing father." "My dad is awesome. He's fun. He's vibrant."

To illustrate his involvement with his children, Sharon recalled a trip she took with Taylor to Ethiopia when she was a gawky teenager. Her father, she said, listened to the music she liked, including her favorite song by slain rapper Tupac Shakur, “The Rose that Grew from Concrete.”

When Sharon graduated from a high school in Geneva, Switzerland, he reveled in her success, she recalled. “My dad is my best friend. There’s nothing that I can hide from him. There’s nothing that I do hide from him. Every single one of us, he’s involved in our lives in every way, shape and form.”

During the trial, she visited her father and tried to take his mind off the proceedings. “We would just talk about things that were fun,” she said. “I would never want to focus on the trial with him because it was depressing.”

To the many who had waited so long for justice, the verdict was anything but.

A. Fasu Kanneh, a Liberian who now lives in The Hague, remembered his own encounters with Taylor during the 1980s, when Taylor held the job as head of the General Services Agency (GSA), Liberia’s chief procurement agency. “Taylor became something like a president,” driving around Monrovia with a motorcade and attendant bodyguard, Fasu recalled.

“There are two things that Taylor loves: power and money,” said Fasu. But “if you don’t know how to exercise that particular power, you might misuse it, and I think that’s what happened to Taylor... Working at GSA showed Taylor that he could be president of Liberia one day.”

Investigators believe Taylor siphoned hundreds of millions of dollars out of Liberia —and engaged in the blood diamond trade.

When asked about Taylor today, Fasu responded: “I personally feel that Taylor should remain in prison for the rest of his life because I saw the destruction of a city [Monrovia] that was vibrant...and the kids, these little kids didn’t have any future...that is painful.”

The Guardian

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Charles Taylor aided and abetted Sierra Leone war crimes, Hague court finds

Former president of Liberia is found to have supported rebels during reign of terror in neighbouring Sierra Leone

By Owen Bowcott in The Hague

UN-backed tribunal in The Hague finds former Liberian president guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes [Link to this video](#)

Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia, has been found to have "aided and abetted" war crimes by a United Nations-backed tribunal in The Hague.

After four years of hearings at the special court for Sierra Leone, the disgraced one-time guerrilla leader was found to have provided sustained support for rebels during their reign of terror in the neighbouring west African state.

He was also said to have participated in the planning of certain attacks, including the assault on Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone.

The judge said Taylor would be sentenced on 30 May after a hearing on 16 May.

Taylor, 64, the first African head of state to be brought before an international tribunal, had pleaded not guilty to all 11 charges.

He stood at the back of the court while the judge formally found him "criminally responsible" of aiding and abetting in the commission of 11 crimes.

Hands clasped in front of him, Taylor blinked as the long list of his criminal responsibility was read out. His eyes shifted not knowing where to focus.

Between 1996 and 2002, the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which Taylor supported, was found by the court to have committed crimes involving terrorising civilian populations, murder, rape, sexual slavery and enforced amputations in Sierra Leone.

Judge Richard Lussick of Samoa said more than 1,000 children had the letters "RUF" carved into their backs to prevent them escaping. Children were used to amputate limbs, guard diamond mines and hunt for food. Some were involved in fighting.

The judge said Taylor told RUF commanders to seize and hold the diamond-producing areas of Sierra Leone so that he could continue trading gems for arms and ammunition. One diamond was said to have weighed as much as 36 carats.

The court found that despite Taylor's denials, he knew from August 1997 about the campaign of terror being waged against the civilian population in Sierra Leone, including murder, rape and amputations.

Taylor continued privately fuelling the conflict by providing arms and ammunition to the RUF in Sierra Leone, the judge said. His clandestine dealing helped undermine the peace process even when there was a regional arms embargo in force.

Taylor's conviction will be widely welcomed in Sierra Leone but the response in Liberia, where he was once seen as a freedom fighter and retains support, may be more critical.

Human Rights Watch pointed out that he was the first former head of state to face judgment in an international court on war crimes charges since judges in Nuremberg convicted Karl Dönitz, an admiral who led Nazi Germany for a brief period following Adolf Hitler's suicide.

Slobodan Milosevic, the former Yugoslav president, faced trial by an international criminal tribunal, but he died before a judgment was issued. Another head of state, the one-time president of Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo, is also detained in The Hague. He will appear at the international criminal court on charges of crimes against humanity.

Human Rights Watch said the trial of Taylor signalled an end to an era of impunity. "Taylor's trial has immense significance for people in the west African sub-region who suffered as a consequence of the violence and instability he allegedly fomented in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire," the organisation said.

"For decades, so-called "big men – people who either led armed groups or wielded significant political power – have been allowed to carry out abuses, seemingly with no fear of being investigated or held accountable by a credible judicial body.

"In this trial, for the first time, such a 'big man' was taken into custody and forced to answer for his alleged crimes."

The judges also had to consider how the 11 charges against Taylor fitted into three legal levels of proof: whether he aided or abetted in the execution of the crimes; whether he was involved in the offences as a joint enterprise with paramilitary groups in Sierra Leone or, most damningly, whether he exercised control and command over the other rebel groups that perpetrated atrocities. In the end they decided his role amounted to the lesser of the three categories.

Taylor has 14 days from the receipt of the full judgment to file a written notice of appeal with the registrar against his convictions.

Despite previous suggestions that he would not be able to attend, his lead counsel, Courtenay Griffiths QC, was in court to hear the final verdict.

Charles Taylor: a life in brief

1948: Born in Arthington, Liberia

1972: Enrols as a student at Bentley College, Massachusetts

1980: Returns to Liberia in time for military coup against president

1983: Flees on embezzlement charges

1989: Launches rebellion to oust dictator Samuel Doe

1991: Taylor's forces back rebellion in neighbouring Sierra Leone

1997: Elected president of Liberia

1999: Rebellion starts to remove Taylor

2002: Sierra Leone civil war ends

2003: Arrest warrant issued for Taylor, who goes into exile in Nigeria

2006: Arrested, sent to Sierra Leone then to the Netherlands

2007: War crimes trial begins

2012: Found guilty of aiding and abetting war crimes

The Guardian

Friday, 27 April 2012

The \$250m dollar conviction

Welcome to Guardian Law's weekly roundup of the best of the site and the rest of the legal web



Charles Taylor verdict broadcast watched by street vendor in Freetown

Street vendor in Freetown, Sierra Leone, watches live broadcast of the Charles Taylor verdict being delivered by the special court for Sierra Leone in The Hague Photograph: FINBARR O'REILLY/REUTERS

"For the victims of this – now proven – collaboration from hell, today's verdict is a kind of justice," wrote Afua Hirsch as Charles Taylor was found guilty at The Hague of aiding and abetting war crimes in Sierra Leone.

"The double amputee, who asked for another of his hands to be cut off rather than see the machete taken to his son's arm, or the woman who was made to carry a heavy bag with her children's severed body parts inside on her head – the blood trickling down – know now that their courage in travelling to the Hague and giving evidence against Taylor has played its part in history."

Not everyone wanted it to happen this way - not just because of the \$250m cost of prosecuting and trying Taylor, but because the trial took place in Europe and not Africa, where his crimes were committed.

"Africans must focus on building strong institutions to deal with human rights violations ourselves, else we should not claim to be independent and instead should let others define and enforce the rules,"

said Mwangi Kimenyi and John Kibaki.

Taylor is due to be sentenced on May 30 and could end up in a UK jail, where the regime is likely to be harsher than in Scheveningen prison. Taylor is said to have fathered at least one child since his incarceration.

The Independent
Thursday, 26 April 2012

William Hague welcomes Charles Taylor ruling

Foreign Secretary William Hague today welcomed the conviction of former Liberian President Charles Taylor for crimes against humanity.

Mr Hague said the verdict should serve as a warning to Syria's president Bashar al-Assad, who has been accused of human rights abuses against his own people.

The successful trial of the former Liberian leader was also hailed by former PM Tony Blair, whose decision to send UK troops into neighbouring Sierra Leone in 2000 is credited with hastening Taylor's fall from power.

The Royal Marine detachment was initially tasked with evacuating foreign nationals, but the extension of their mandate to support a UN force helped tip the military balance against the Taylor-backed RUF rebels and bring about a ceasefire to end a bloody civil war in the west African state.

Taylor himself fell from power in 2003 and was today found guilty at the UN-sponsored Special Court for Sierra Leone at The Hague of aiding and abetting war crimes and crimes against humanity by supporting the brutal rebels in return for blood diamonds.

Mr Blair told ITV News: "I think Britain as a whole can be immensely proud of what it has done for Sierra Leone and what it is doing.

"It is not often you get a situation in which the clarity is so obvious. Either you intervened or this country's democracy was given over to a murderous group of thugs and gangsters. The intervention was successful. The country has been struggling, it is still struggling but it is on its feet and is able to move forward which is a great thing."

Mr Blair added: "It is really important for Sierra Leone to have had the trial process because what people have got to understand is they engaged in this attempt to damage democracy and kill and harm people. In the course of that then, there is going to be a comeback, there's going to be a moment of accountability. So I think it is very important for people in Sierra Leone, even though primarily they are focused on their future and all the challenges, they have to draw a line under their past."

In a message on Twitter following the verdict, Mr Hague said: "Charles Taylor: justice has been done. Remember his victims, and remind Assad: there is no expiry date for crimes against the innocent."

And in a statement released later by the Foreign Office, he added: "This landmark verdict demonstrates that those who have committed the most serious of crimes can and will be held to account for their actions; it demonstrates that the reach of international law is long and not time limited and it demonstrates that heads of state cannot hide behind immunity.

"The verdict can only be a small comfort for the victims and relatives of those killed. But the Court's authoritative view of what occurred will play an important role in helping the people of Sierra Leone come to terms with the past and consolidate national reconciliation."

Taylor, who was president of Liberia from 1997-2003, pleaded not guilty to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including murder, rape, terror and conscripting child soldiers.

But presiding judge Richard Lussick said prosecutors in a trial which ended a year ago had proved beyond reasonable doubt that he was "criminally responsible" for aiding and abetting crimes by rebels in Sierra Leone.

Lussick said Taylor provided arms, ammunition, communications equipment and planning on a "sustained and significant" basis to rebels responsible for countless atrocities in the 1991-2002 civil war.

A sentence will be imposed later. Taylor faces a maximum term of life in jail, to be served in Britain. He is the first African head of state convicted by an international court.

The Wall Street Journal

Sunday, 29 April 2012

Opinion

The Taylor Principle

An African butcher gets his due.

Former Liberian president Charles Taylor on Thursday became the first head of state convicted by an international court in over six decades. The distinction is deserved, but the lessons of this case are more than legal.

In avarice and cruelty, the warlord had few rivals in Africa. A special court at The Hague found him responsible for crimes committed during the civil war in Sierra Leone, which abuts Liberia. Child soldiers who killed, raped and maimed with easy abandon were armed and supported by Taylor, who demanded "blood diamonds" as payment. He was directly implicated in outrages in Liberia, but that's beyond the scope of this trial.

The special tribunal is an ad hoc, temporary and hybrid court, run together by Sierra Leone and the U.N., with a clear and narrow focus on the 12-year civil war. Taylor's was the last case before the panel, and the court will now be wound down, as will eventually the U.N. tribunal on the former Yugoslavia. Both differ from the permanent International Criminal Court at The Hague, or ICC, which embraces "universal jurisdiction" that could allow an anti-American prosecutor to go after NATO or U.S. officials. Temporary international courts are a better idea.

How the Charles Taylor case even got to the court is instructive about the limits of international law without nation states to enforce it. Sierra Leone's civil war ended only after Britain intervened militarily in 2000. Taylor fled Liberia in 2003 for Nigeria, but the U.S., among others, pressed for his arrest three years later.

Other butchers like Syria's Bashar Assad and Sudan's Omar al-Bashar, who has been indicted by the ICC, have little to worry about as long the outside world lacks the will to stop the atrocities that they are ordering today.

National Public Radio (US)

Friday, 27 April 2012

Charles Taylor Verdict Spurs Anger From Liberians

In an historic judgment, the UN-backed court at The Hague found Liberia's former president, Charles Taylor, guilty of war crimes. He was convicted of abetting murder, rape, and the forced enlistment of child soldiers during Sierra Leone's civil war. Host Michel Martin talks about reactions in Liberia and Sierra Leone with journalist Tamasin Ford.

MICHEL MARTIN, HOST:

Now we turn to the West African nation of Liberia, where residents are reacting to the guilty verdict in the war crimes trial of their former president, Charles Taylor. Taylor had been on trial at the UN-backed court in The Hague for almost five years. He was accused of backing rebels in neighboring Sierra Leone during that country's civil war by selling them weapons in exchange for diamonds.

It was a dramatic trial. There was graphic testimony about gruesome atrocities, mass rapes, amputations, cannibalism and information about the tens of thousands of people killed during the decade-long war.

Internationally known model Naomi Campbell even reluctantly took the stand at one point, describing an encounter with Charles Taylor, after which he allegedly gifted her with a diamond in the rough.

Judges say Taylor knew about the crimes rebel troops were committing, but prosecutors could not prove that Taylor was actually commanding those troops. Still, the judgment is the first of its kind against a world leader at The Hague.

We wanted to hear more reaction from Liberia, so we called Tamasin Ford. She's a freelance reporter who's based in Liberia's capital, Monrovia.

Tamasin, thanks so much for joining us.

TAMASIN FORD: Thank you.

MARTIN: Can you tell us: What's the mood there after the news broke about the verdict?

FORD: Well, it's one of anger, really - maybe naively. But before the verdict was being delivered, there was a huge sense of excitement, people with posters saying, our Papi is coming home. That's the name that people fondly refer to Charles Taylor as. And then, as the verdict came down and, of course, he was found guilty, the mood changed to anger.

The idea that their former president has been found guilty of crimes in another country's war - there are other people - meanwhile, Liberia was going through its own devastating civil war. And so there are also those people who feel that justice hasn't been done in Liberia.

MARTIN: That sounds very complicated. Are these - do these disputes fall along certain lines? For example, are there certain parts of the country that are more pro-Taylor than others, or is this really kind of house-by-house and very individual?

FORD: Well, it's quite across the board. In Bong County, which is in central Liberia, Taylor had his headquarters. So there is a very positive vibe for Taylor there. But generally, it's quite widespread, the support.

MARTIN: Tamasin, as you just told us, remembering that Mr. Taylor was accused of committing atrocities or directing atrocities across the border in Sierra Leone during that country's civil war, you visited Sierra Leone recently. How do people feel about him there?

FORD: It's very different in Sierra Leone, especially Freetown. There is the feeling that Charles Taylor, former president of Liberia, was the cause of their war. Thousands of people had their limbs amputated by the rebel group, RUF, Revolutionary United Front, which Taylor backed. And, in particular, these people, many of whom survived, feel that Taylor should face justice for what happened to them in Sierra Leone.

I spoke to Edward Conteh, the president of the Amputee and War Wounded Association in Sierra Leone, and this was just a few weeks ago, and these were his words.

EDWARD CONTEH: I want to see that fellow being locked up for the rest of his life and never breathe the free air that we do.

MARTIN: Tamasin, what accounts for such a very large difference of opinion about this man?

FORD: Well, in Liberia, you must remember, Charles Taylor was the former president. And at the time, he commanded a lot of respect and even adoration. He was very charismatic. He would go around the country. He was extravagant, handing out wads of money wherever he went. He also made sure rice, the staple food in Liberia, was cheap. So, war aside, there are many who feel that life was easier with Charles Taylor in power.

MARTIN: The trial happened at The Hague because Taylor was seen to be a destabilizing presence in the region, as - for reasons - all the reasons that you just told us. Are there any signs that this verdict will divide the country, that there will be some unrest in the wake of this?

FORD: Well, the government of Sierra Leone chose to do a lot of outreach in terms of the process of the court all across the country, keeping people up-to-date through video, through radio. In Liberia, the decision was not to do that. So Liberians generally haven't been following the trial and, really, the only time the trial surfaced here in the last two years since I've been here is when Naomi Campbell, the British supermodel, was testifying.

But I'm not sure there's an understanding of really what these charges meant in relation to Sierra Leone. For Liberians, it's simply that their president has been found guilty of another country's war.

MARTIN: Even though this verdict was not a complete victory for Taylor's accusers, will he ever walk freely again?

FORD: It's really unclear. It's difficult to say what sort of sentence they're going to decide on. I mean, I've heard legal minds talking about 40 or so years. This is a man who destabilized an entire region - Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Liberia, even Guinea. And the idea of Charles Taylor coming back to this region in West Africa is not one that people in the international community would consider, considering that peace is ensued in Sierra Leone and Liberia now for almost 10 years.

MARTIN: Tamasin Ford is a freelance reporter based in Monrovia. That's the capital of Liberia. And she's been following the trial of the former president of Liberia, recently convicted of war crimes trials at The Hague.

Tamasin, thank you so much for speaking with us.

FORD: You're welcome. Thank you.

The New Dawn (Liberia)

Monday, 30 April 2012

Bong Mourns Taylor Verdict

Jefferson Massah, Bong County



Bongesese are reported to be mourning the guilty verdict of former President Charles G. Taylor handed down last Thursday, April 26, by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone sitting in The Hague.

Many residents in the central Liberian town of Gbarnga and its surroundings broke down in tears for former President Taylor after Judge Richard Lussick of the Republic of Samoa read the ruling.

Gbarnga, Bong County once served as the headquarters of the defunct National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the military wing of the United States-based

Association for Constitutional Democracy in Liberia or ACDL.

According to Correspondent Jefferson Massah, many Bongese were glued to their radio sets, while others crowded cinemas and video clubs to watch the process live from The Hague.

“Papay, you told us that ‘God willing, you will be back’. Is this the way you’re leaving us? Anyway, it’s man’s own judgment; God knows the truth. We shall meet face-to-face one day,” a dejected former general in one video club said in tears as others sadly looked on.

Some had already camped at these video clubs after it was announced by the BBC the day before that the ruling would be broadcast radio and television worldwide beginning at 9am (GMT) which was 11am Dutch time.

Minutes following the guilty verdict, Gbarnga residents experienced a strange phenomenon as the early morning sunny weather became very mal with the sun completely in the middle of a rainbow just as it was in Monrovia and other parts of the country for several minutes during and following the broadcast.

Some claimed that the nation was mourning the decision of the International Court against their former president; other said that justice was being aborted, and that it was only God’s intervention that could have set Taylor free.

Prophet James Gbanequelleh told The New Dawn correspondent in Gbarnga that he would stage a one week ‘dry fast’ to save the nation from the pending danger in the aftermath of the verdict.

Expressing their concern about the timing of the ruling by the Special Court, many harbored the belief that it was actually a “gift for the Sierra Leoneans” because the announcement was made on the eve of their Independence Day which was last Friday, April 27.

The New Dawn (Liberia)

Monday, 30 April 2012

At Taylor's Verdict: Dissenting Judge Microphone Switch-off

There are particles of dust in the air amidst unanswered questions as to how a surprise drama during the Charles Taylor April 26 verdict received no attention from the media despite the wide international coverage that marred the event.

It all happened when one of the four judges, an alternate judge, Senegalese judge Malick Sow opposed the decision of the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague to convict Taylor for aiding and abetting all the 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In an unexpected turn of events, as Justice Sow gave his dissenting opinion on the verdict, Justice Lussick (Presiding), Justice Doherty and Justice Sebutinde rose to leave the courtroom as his microphone was switched-off and curtains drawn.

Justice Sow addressed the Court: "The only moment where a Judge can express his opinion is during the deliberations or in the courtroom, and, pursuant to the Rules, when there are no serious deliberations; the only place left for me is the courtroom."

"I won't get — because I think we have been sitting for too long but for me I have my dissenting opinion and I disagree with the findings and conclusions of the other Judges, because for me under any mode of liability, under any accepted standard of proof, the guilt of the accused from the evidence provided in this trial is not proved beyond reasonable doubt by the Prosecution. "

"And my only worry is that the whole system is not consistent with all the principles we know and love, and the system is not consistent with all the values of international criminal justice, and I'm afraid the whole system is under grave danger of just losing all credibility, and I'm afraid this whole thing is headed for failure."

"Hearing the voice of their counterpart did not deter Justices Lussick, Doherty and Sebutinde from walking out. Justice Sow's microphone immediately cut out and a curtain was drawn across the public gallery. Nonetheless, he persisted to air his views to those present, unaided by a microphone" reports say.

The West African Democracy Radio WADR reported that although Justice Sow microphone was switched off, he spoke in detail through a statement released after judgment was closed. He was not one of the three judges that had the voting power but legally he had the right to make a statement either in favor or against the judgment, the WADR quoted legal experts as saying.

There are provision for both the prosecution and defense to appeal. Charles Taylor will be sentenced on May 30.

The New Dawn (Liberia)

Monday, 30 April 2012

Opinion

Giving Sierra Leoneans Justice and Forgetting About Liberians

By Paul Y. Harry

Glaring Double Standards in the Dispensation of Justice

The Issues Desk wishes to look at the prosecution of former President Charles Taylor by the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone and the guilty verdict handed down vis-à-vis the deaf ear paid to and the we-don't-care-about-justice-for-Liberian attitude shown toward the consistent and genuine calls for the international community to initiate a similar trial for those bearing greater responsibilities in the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Liberian Civil War.

Let no one misinterpret or misrepresent my point. I am not against the trial of former President Charles Taylor. I am not against the guilty verdict announced. I am not against the victims of the Sierra Leonean Civil War receiving justice. Since 1995, I have both written and debated in person about the need to prosecute those engaging or suspected of engaging gross human rights violations. In fact, Chapter Five (titled "On the Issue of War Crimes Trial") of my second book, *Pinpointing the Points*, published in 2009, focuses on the importance of establishing a war crimes tribunal for war criminals, especially those connected with the Liberian Civil War.

That said, it confounds many of us that the international community is interested (or seems to be interested) in making sure that Sierra Leoneans that are victims of war crimes and crimes against humanity receive justice, while showing no serious interest in doing the same for Liberians. We see double standards in it all. There is no wheeling and dealing about this – that the international community is biased in its desire to dispense justice. In short, the international community institutes selective justice.

When one hears or reads the grounds on which Taylor was found guilty, it is hard not to be irritated that men of Taylor's likes are sitting in Liberia, wielding much political and economic power than they did before committing the crimes that have brought them to prominence.

Judge Richard Lussick, the UN judge reading the verdict, said: "The trial chamber finds, therefore, beyond reasonable doubt that the accused knew that his support would provide practical assistance, encouragement and moral support to them in the commission of crimes during the course of their military operations in Sierra Leone. The trial chamber finds beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is criminally responsible for aiding and abetting the commission of crimes."

So Taylor was found guilty not for directly committing war crimes and crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone or for having any direct control over the criminal acts committed, but for "aiding and abetting" the rebels who committed the crimes?

This is interesting, isn't it? But if this is the point on which Mr. Taylor is found guilty, why has President Blaise Campaore of Burkina Faso not been indicted and prosecuted? There are reports that some of those who brought war to Liberia got direct support – moral and logistical – from the government of Burkina Faso. It is well-known that some of the rebels trained in that country. In fact, there were trained Burkinabes fighting for Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Why has Campaore not been criminally held responsible for the crimes NPFL rebels committed against the people of Liberia and foreigners?

Also, if it is about “aiding and abetting” those who committed the crimes, why was Muammar Gaddafi not indicted and prosecuted on the same point? Many of the leaders and leading fighters of the NPFL were trained in Libya. They got weapons from Gaddafi. They got other resources from Gaddafi and his government.

When the effort to indict Taylor and prosecute him was being galvanized, nothing was said about Gaddafi and Campaore. When the effort to commence Taylor’s trial in The Hague was being exerted, world leaders, including Tony Blair, occupied themselves with reconnecting with Gaddafi, organizing elaborate please-visit-us invitations and programs for him and promoting him here and there, including inviting him to address the United Nations’ General Assembly.

Did the world not know that Gaddafi had aided and abetted the rebels that committed atrocities in Liberia? Or, still, did the international community not know that Gaddafi’s actions or role helped the commission of war crimes and crimes against humanity?

Why is only Taylor held criminally accountable for supporting the Sierra Leonean rebels, while others falling in a similar category are allowed to go scot-free? It confuses us. It resembles double standards. It is the institution of selective justice, which is inimical to the effort to have such a process serve as a deterrent to would-be criminals.

Why is the world interested in justice for the victims of the Sierra Leonean war, but not the victims of the Liberian war? Why is the international community remembering Sierra Leoneans and forgetting about Liberians? Why is the justice-loving international community that we believe in so much dispensing justice selectively?

Another area in which the international community’s dispensation of selective justice is seen is in the list of crimes for which Mr. Taylor is found guilty. The eleven-count charges against Taylor included rape, murder, sexual slavery, recruitment and use of child soldiers, and so forth.

But all of these crimes were also committed in Liberia and committed by Liberian rebel groups, many of whose leaders are still around. If they are serious crimes that warrant the indictment, prosecution and conviction of Mr. Taylor, why aren’t the former warlords of Liberia treated in like manner? Glaring example of selective justice? Double standards in international justice?

Also, according to reports, Brenda Hollis, chief prosecutor in the Taylor trial, said: “Today is for the people of Sierra Leone who suffered horribly at the hands of Charles Taylor and his proxy forces. This judgment brings some measure of justice to the many thousands of victims who paid a terrible price for Mr. Taylor’s crimes.”

So, is the international community telling us Liberians that it is only the people of Sierra Leone who suffered horribly at the hands of Charles Taylor?

Did we also not suffer horribly under Taylor and his rebels? Why be concerned only about bringing some measure of justice to the many victims of the Sierra Leonean war, and not also to the many victims of the Liberian war?

Also, if Mr. Taylor is punished for indirectly helping the rebels, why is the international community not anxious about prosecuting former Liberian warlords who directly oversaw the activities of Liberian rebels that committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in our country?

The NPFL of Charles Taylor was a rebel faction. The atrocities committed by the NPFL are well documented. The leaders of the NPFL are still around. The INPFL of Prince Johnson was a rebel group. INPFL rebels committed heinous crimes. The leaders of that group are still around. The ULIMO-K of

Alhaji Kromah was a rebel group. The fighters committed war crimes and crimes against humanity. The leaders of ULIMO-K are still around.

The LPC of George Boley was another warring group. Its fighters committed atrocities that are well document by both Liberians and leading human rights organizations, including Human Rights Watch. The leaders of LPC are still around. MODEL, LURD and other rebel factions involved in the wars in Liberia committed atrocious acts. The leaders of those groups are still around, or at least some of them.

This million-dollar question is this. If Mr. Taylor is tried for aiding and abetting rebels that committed war crimes and crimes against humanity against the people of Sierra Leone, why haven't those who directly commanded Liberian belligerent forces that violated the rules of law or humanitarian law been indicted and prosecuted?

Liberia's war was on for about fourteen years. Atrocious acts were committed. Why is the international community treating Liberia and its people like this?

Why is the world behaving to Liberians as if they (the Liberian people) were not justice-loving and justice-deserving people? Why is the West behaving as if no war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed in Liberia? Why is the international community behaving as if our Sierra Leonean brothers and sisters were better than us, in terms of the right to receive justice? Why are those having the power to bring about the prosecution of Liberian war criminals and human rights violators behaving as if we gloried in the culture of impunity? We will continue to shake our heads in disbelief and bemusement.

The world is confusing us. War crimes and crimes against humanity were committed in Rwanda. The perpetrators were prosecuted, even against the will of the Rwandan government. Atrocities were committed in the DRC. The culprits – or at least some of them – have been prosecuted. Heinous crimes were committed in Sierra Leone. The perpetrators, including Taylor, have been prosecuted. War crimes and crimes against humanity were committed in Libya.

The late Gaddafi and others were indicted. War crimes and crimes against humanity were committed in the Ivory Coast. President Laurent Gbagbo was indicted, arrested and sent to The Hague for prosecution. There are reports that others will follow. Elections violence that saw the commission of crimes against humanity occurred in Kenya. Those bearing greater responsibility, including Deputy Prime Minister Uhuru Kenyatta, were indicted and their prosecution announced.

Even in South Africa, a country that did not experience a war as we did, had a TRC that recommended the prosecution of certain perpetrators of crimes against humanity.

So we do not understand why the international is not interested in prosecuting known war criminals of the Liberian scenario. Does justice hate us, or is the international community determined to deny us that opportunity for reasons best known to them? We are beginning to doubt the international community's ability to impartially and non-selectively institute justice where it is due. Are we right, or wrong?

Anyway, as our people would say in Liberia, "We leave our own with God." Believe me, my people. We will never stop following the issues.

The New Dawn (Liberia)

Friday, 27 April 2012

Taylor To Be Sentenced on May 30

Othello B. Garblah



Ex-President Charles Taylor convicted for aiding and abetting on all 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity Thursday is to be sentenced on May 30, the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone has announced.

Taylor is the first head of state to be indicted, tried and convicted by an international tribunal.

The Chamber has scheduled a sentencing hearing for Wednesday, 16 May 2012, and the sentencing judgment will be delivered on Wednesday, 30 May 2012.

Under the Special Court Rules, sentences must be given in a specified term of years.

The Special Court may not impose a life sentence or the death penalty.

Mr. Taylor was ordered remanded in custody until the 16 May hearing. The Special court's statement said both Prosecution and Defence may appeal. A notice of appeal must be filed within 14 days of the full judgment and sentence.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone is the first "hybrid" tribunal, created by an agreement between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone, and is the first modern court to have its seat in the country where the crimes took place.

It is the first court to convict former rebel and militia leaders for the use of child soldiers, for forced marriage as a crime against humanity, and for attacks directed at United Nations peacekeepers.

Mr. Taylor was convicted on Count 1 for acts of terrorism (a war crime), on Count 2 for murder (a crime against humanity), on Count 3 for murder (a war crime), on Count 4 for rape (a crime against humanity), on Count 5 for sexual slavery (a crime against humanity), on Count 6 for outrages upon personal dignity (a war crime), on Count 7 for cruel treatment (a war crime), on Count 8 for inhumane acts, including mutilations and amputations, (a crime against humanity), on Count 9 for the recruitment, enlistment and use of child soldiers, on Count 10 for enslavement (a crime against humanity), and on Count 11 for pillage (a war crime).

The Prosecution had not alleged that Mr. Taylor had committed these crimes in person, but that he participated from Liberia in the commission of crimes by AFRC and RUF rebels and, under Articles 6.1 and 6.3 of the Special Court Statute, was individually responsible for them. The Chamber found that he had aided and abetted the rebels by providing them with arms and ammunition, military personnel, operational support and moral support, making him individually responsible for their crimes.

With Thursday's judgment, the Special Court said it has reached a major milestone, and is on course towards being the first modern international criminal tribunal to complete its mandate.

The New Dawn (Liberia)

Friday, 27 April 2012

Ex-warlords Mute On Verdict

E. J. Nathaniel Daygbor

Former Liberian warlords in Monrovia are largely hesitant to give their reactions to Thursday's April 26,



2012 guilty verdict pronounced by the Special Court of Sierra Leone against ex-President Charles Taylor in The Hague.

Taylor was adjudged guilty on all 11 counts for criminally aiding and abetting rebels in Sierra Leone, who waged a 10-year vicious civil war that left thousands of civilians killed, and others most of them women and children, legs and arms brutally amputated.

He was indicted in 2003 for war crimes and crimes against humanity while attending peace conference in Accra, Ghana but returned to Liberia and subsequently resigned and went in exile to Nigeria.

However, the former Liberian President was extradited to Liberia few months after the inauguration of a democratically-elected government and immediately airlifted to Sierra Leone where he pleaded not guilty to the charges and subsequently transferred to The Hague, Netherlands. Attempts by this paper Thursday following the verdict to get reactions from several warlords about the final fate of the man they all bitterly fought was not very receptive.

When contacted via mobile phone, the leader of the disbanded rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) Sekou Damante Conneh, initially welcomed the interview, but when he was questioned on the verdict, he said, "I am not prepared to comment now, because I am in the midst of many people and secondly, this is a critical stuff that needs serious concentration before making any comment." Conneh however promised to comment later.

For his part, Taylor's main archrival Prince Johnson, who parted with him from the onset of the rebel invasion in early 1990 and commended his Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia, said the verdict is about Sierra Leone and not Liberia.

"But my son, we can talk about the Taylor trial and verdict tomorrow; find me at my office and maybe I will be there to address the matter. Let me also say this to you. You the media guys should stop bothering people about Taylor this and Taylor that; we have many things to address than that", said Johnson, now a Senator.

University of Liberia lecturer Professor Alhaji G.V. Kromah, who led a factional rebel group United Liberation Movement (ULIMO-K) against Taylor from 1992 to 97, said he was in a meeting and promised to call back within two minutes, but up to press time, he neither called nor responded to calls from this paper.

Taylor's successor former Vice President Moses Z. Blah, who testified against him during the trial in The Hague could not be reached because his phone numbers were off.

However, speaking to the New Dawn on the verdict, defunct rebel Movement for Democracy in Liberia leader Thomas Yaya Nimely, said the prosecution and verdict of Taylor is a clear indication that the rebellion waged against the Taylor regime in 2003 was justified in the eyes of the international community.

"We brought war against his administration because of failed agenda and divisive politics", he said.

According to him, the international community should redefine its role in dealing with African leaders or revolutionaries, who he noted, are often used to accomplish its political interest and then at the end of the day, they are hunted or prosecuted.

"The problem is not about Charles Taylor, but the West, who supports the wrong people at a time to achieve their dreams and at the same time knowing well the motive of that person", Thomas, who currently resides in his home county, Grand Gedeh, added.

Most ordinary Liberians have received the verdict with mixed reactions with some feeling sad, while others believe justice has taken its course.

The New Dawn (Liberia)

Thursday, 26 April 2012

Opinion

Is This The Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia?

Paul Yeenie Harr

Columnist's Note: This article was first published on the LiberianForum.Com website in March of 2006 when former President Charles Ghankay Taylor was arrested in Nigeria and turned over to the UN Special Court on Sierra Leone. The historic nature of the closure of his trial has prompted the republication of the piece, with a few changes.

I was born in Liberia. I was living in Liberia when the civil war started on December 24, 1989, a war that later culminated into a series of other meaningless wars, killings, sufferings, etc. Not only that, I lived in Liberia during the years of the different wars, except the last Monrovia War that took Taylor to Nigeria.

During all those war years, we saw the surfacing of various warlords – Charles Taylor, Prince Johnson, Roosevelt Johnson, George Boley, Francis Massaquoi, Alhaji Kromah, Sekou Conneh, and so forth.

I strongly believe that the strongest of all these warlords was Charles Ghankay Taylor. Not only that. He was believed to be the most respected, the most cunning, the most mischievous, the most established, the most connected, the richest, the most flamboyant, the most obstinate, the most defiant, the most demanding, the most ruthless, the most deceitful, the most vindictive, the most notorious, etc., warlord that Liberia and, yea, Africa, had ever had.

What is shocking to me, to many other Liberians and, perhaps, to many non-Liberians, is the fact that the Charles Ghankay Taylor, the man who possessed all of the qualities above has been arrested and is awaiting trial.

I have read a number of articles and news reports about the arrest of Charles Taylor. I have seen a number of pictures showing his person in the mist of UN police, disembarking planes, etc. But I saw another picture showing a handcuffed Charles Taylor. It is this one that has prompted this article.

I may sound insane, buffoonery, childish, uneducated, histrionic, bemused, moronic, and all the other adjectives you may have in the best-unabridged dictionary of the English language. But the fact of the matter is that I can't believe what I have seen: a handcuffed Charles Taylor.

This picture might be the result of an artistic ingenuity, aided by computer technology.

This handcuffed Charles Taylor cannot be the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, I mean the Charles Ghankay Taylor that headed the NPFL, the Charles Ghankay Taylor that was once the President of the Republic of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor that ...

But wait a minute! Do you, both Liberians and UN Court officials, really want me to believe that this handcuffed Taylor is the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia? Stop that expensive joke, my people.

Just look at the picture. Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia? I can't believe it.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose convoy had about fifty cars in Monrovia, and, according to many people, every time he was going to work or coming from work, all other cars, including ambulance carrying emergency patients, had to stop and wait for minutes until his convoy had passed? It is inconceivable that this Charles Ghankay Taylor is the one that is handcuffed.

Just look at the picture once more. Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia? I can't believe it.

The Charles Ghankay Taylor that I know is that invincible figure that told his challengers, "Even if you run under your mom's bed, I will still grab you." He proved this by going to the James Spring Airfield himself to search an

airplane in which was George Boley. Reports say he had gone there to check for Roosevelt Johnson with the intention to arrest him. It is inconceivable that this Charles Ghankay Taylor is the one that is handcuffed.

Just look at the picture again. Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose security forces, it is said, almost killed Dr. Amos Sawyer, Commany Wesseh, destroyed the offices of the Center for Democratic Empowerment and caused these men to run into exile? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor who, according to sources, sent his security forces on the campus of the University of Liberia and beat students, instructors, professors, administrators, etc? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose intimidation caused some of my comrades at the University of Liberia to flee Liberia and go into exile in Ghana? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? I can't believe it.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor who, after recapturing the city of Kakata from Ulimo-J in either late 1995 or earlier 1996 in less than twenty-four hours, registered his pre-eminence by using the Creole expression: "Trousee pass trousee, na so man pass man?" Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor who, in 2000, closed down the Star Radio Station and said, "The Star Radio Station will never be allowed to operate in Liberia as long as I am the President?" Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? You want me to believe this?

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose arrogance and stubbornness and self-aggrandizement, many believe, caused thousands of our countrymen to be killed and Liberia destroyed? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? No way!

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor on whose order, according to reports, many journalists, like Hassan Bility, and human rights activists, like counselor Tiawon Gongloe, were arrested, tortured and imprisoned incommunicado? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Taylor whose greed, many maintain, caused hundreds of thousands of our compatriots to be internally displaced, as well as become refugees in other countries? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Taylor whose activities caused thousands of our countrymen to go into self-imposed exiles? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose security forces were so brutal towards the Liberian people? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that expensive joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose dictatorial tactics and threats, a lot of people believe, caused many of us to flee Liberia? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose activities reduced Liberia to so an unbearable condition that a Liberia police officer remarked, "It is better for me to be a prisoner in America than to live freely in Liberia?" Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Taylor who launched the 15 October 1992 war, a war that was infamously termed "Octopus," on Monrovia, killing scores of our brothers and sisters and destroying properties worth millions of dollars? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor on whose orders, some say, his opponents or potential opponents were killed? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whose quest for power and inclination to aggression started the infamous April Six War in Monrovia, a war that made some Liberians believe that hell was better than Monrovia, a war that sent some of us in hiding for three months because we were being witch-hunted for articles we had published in the New Democrat newspaper? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor whom other rebel leaders, coup plotters, nation destabilizers, etc. came to for consultation? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor who once boasted his mischievousness at a press conference when he said, "If you think you are mischievous, I am more mischievous than any other Liberian?" Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor who felt that he was the biggest rock in West Africa, the hardest substance in nature, the most invincible figure in Liberia, the Zeus of Greece, the Apollo of Rome, the center of the solar system? Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor that is handcuffed? Stop that joke.

Is this the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia, the Charles Ghankay Taylor who ...

To cut long matter short, as Liberians usually say, I will stop here, but I will stress my point once more. I can't believe that the handcuffed Taylor is the Charles Ghankay Taylor of Liberia.

Maybe I am just blind to the reality. Maybe I am so used to the unreal picture of the real situation that when I see the real picture I am not able to associate it with the real situation. Don't blame me for this, please. The Liberian wars were fought for fourteen years. Fourteen years is a long time, not so?

Once, my maternal grandfather and I went to a little creek to fish. We sat on a nearby log and dropped our hooks in the creek. We were there for more than an hour without any fish jerking his line or mine. I became impatient and wanted to go back home or find another spot to fish.

"Grandpa, there is no fish in this creek," I said.

"Why do you say that, my little boy?" he questioned.

"We've been here for more than an hour, and there has not been a single jerk of your line," I defended myself.

"Be patient, my little boy. Everything has time. Besides, no condition is permanent," he advised.

I understood the "Be patient," but not the other two expressions, yet I did not bother to ask him to explain, as I was tired and wanted to leave. After awhile, he took out a sheet of paper and a pencil from the left-side pocket of his African gown and wrote this sentence and handed it to me:

"It's sad that leaders usually fail to learn anything from history, and that's why they will always be hunted by the reality of history."

Believe me, my people. We will never stop following the issues?

The New Dawn (Liberia)

Friday, 27 April 2012

Opinion

Editorial: Following the Sierra Leonean Example

While many Liberians, as well as friends and family members of ex-President Charles Taylor long anticipated that the 26 April 2012 verdict in his case would be in his favor, based on some divine intervention, it was the opposite, instead, which prevailed.

On all 11 counts, the international judges of the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, sitting in The Hague, found the 64-year-old former President guilty of “aiding and abetting” war crimes and crimes against humanity in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Former President Taylor’s 11-count conviction included murder, terror, rape, as well as recruitment of child soldiers, among others, by the Revolutionary United Front or RUF which he reportedly backed in its war in Sierra Leone from 1991-2002.

In less than seven working days, beginning from the announcement of his April 26 guilty verdict, Taylor is expected to be sentenced on May 30 and imprisoned in Britain in consonance with a Special Act passed by the British Parliament in 2007, demonstrating what the government referred to as its commitment to “international justice.”

The description by international human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, of the April 26 judgment (the first of its kind for a former head of state since the Nuremburg military tribunal of Nazis after World War II, according to reports) as “historic, incredibly significant decision, as well as a landmark moment,” is something that many in Liberia and elsewhere may want to agree with.

And truly enough, justice has finally prevailed in the ‘interest’ of hundreds of Sierra Leoneans maimed and victimized one way or the other by the brutal actions of the RUF, even though they continue to live under abandoned, miserable and unbearable conditions. That the verdict would now bring relief to their plight is another issue to be discussed.

However, the judgment in the Taylor Trial is, no doubt, a fine model for international justice, especially in Africa and the Middle East where war crimes and crimes against humanity occur unabated based on the economic interests of the “big powers” of the world. But is international justice actually prevailing in the political and security situations in Uganda, Rwanda, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Syria, etc., etc.?

Back in our own country, Liberia, the issue of ensuring international justice as it relates to our civil war has completely been swept under the rug, despite the millions of dollars spent by the international community to promote peace and reconciliation through the TRC process.

It is, indeed, a known fact that the Liberian Civil War between 1989 and 2003 was characterized by war crimes and crimes against humanity. Devoid of all of the un-necessary politics and PR’s, Liberia can now follow the example of neighboring Sierra Leone.

It’s high time Liberians began the advocacy for international justice (the setting up of a special war crimes court) too, based on the recommendations of the TRC so that those who bear greater responsibilities for the heinous atrocities and destructions our people and our nation experienced – including the sponsors,

architects and others who helped establish the National Patriotic Front of Liberia or NPFL and other rebel forces – can be brought to justice. Let this be done.

Such process must also include facilitators, including leaders and other officials of such countries as Libya, Bourkina Faso, Sierra Leone and the Ivory Coast, leaders and officials who, one way or the other, backed the NPFL and other factions in pillaging our resources and destroying precious and innocent lives.

Liberians must now wake up and follow the example of Sierra Leoneans who now celebrate justice as an Independence Day gift today, April 27, 2012.

Let there be no wheeling and dealing about this. Let war criminals or suspected war criminals of the wars fought in Liberia face justice, too; let them be prosecuted as Taylor has been.

Washington Post
Thursday, 26 April 2012

Charles Taylor, former Liberian leader, found guilty of war crimes



By Edward Cody,

THE HAGUE — Charles Taylor, the U.S.-educated guerrilla leader who fought his way to the presidency of Liberia, was convicted Thursday of war crimes and crimes against humanity — including murder, rape and slavery — for his role in assisting a bloody rebel movement in neighboring Sierra Leone.

The conviction, in the U.N. Special Court for Sierra Leone, was hailed by chief prosecutor Brenda J. Hollis as a triumph for the idea that political leaders should be held accountable for their deeds in “the new reality” of an international justice system composed of a half-dozen U.N. courts headquartered in this verdant Dutch city.

“This judgment confirms that with leadership comes not only power, but also responsibility,” the U.S. jurist declared at a news conference after the verdict was read out over two hours by the presiding judge, Richard Lussick of Samoa.

Elise Keppler, senior counsel in Human Rights Watch’s international justice program, said the verdict marked the first such judgment against a former head of state.

“This is a victory for Sierra Leonean victims and all those seeking justice when the worst abuses are committed,” she said.

But chief defense lawyer Courtenay Griffiths, a silver-tongued London barrister, challenged the court’s decision as a political gesture that he qualified as “inevitable,” implying that it was not based on the evidence. At a news conference, Griffiths said the verdict grew out of “tainted and corrupt” testimony

because witnesses were paid to come from Sierra Leone, in West Africa, to appear before the three-judge panel with evidence of what happened in their country's atrocity-ridden civil war from 1991 to 2002.

Griffiths depicted Taylor, 64, as the legitimate president of a sovereign nation who assisted a rebel movement in a neighboring country but who should not be held accountable for crimes that the rebels might have committed. If that were the standard, he suggested, U.S. leaders should be tried for abuses committed when they assisted rebels in Nicaragua and Afghanistan and financed a brutal military in El Salvador in the 1980s.

"If such behavior is being deemed illegal, then I'd like to see it deemed illegal across the board," Griffiths said.

Griffiths expressed outrage at the court's treatment of alternate judge Malick Sow of Senegal when he tried to voice a dissenting opinion after the verdict was read. Sow, who as an alternate did not have a vote, rose to complain that the evidence against Taylor was too flimsy for a conviction. But the other three judges turned their backs on him and walked away, while court technicians immediately cut off an in-house video feed to reporters.

"My worry is that the whole [international justice] system is not consistent with the values we know and love," Griffiths quoted Sow as saying, reading from a prepared statement. "I am afraid the whole thing is headed for failure."

Taylor, who has been held by the court since his arrest in 2006, appeared in a blue pinstriped suit with a maroon tie and a white handkerchief in his breast pocket. During the reading, he sat expressionless, occasionally taking notes with a yellow ballpoint pen.

Griffiths said Taylor remained "stoic" as he was led back to his cell after the proceedings. The defense will decide whether to appeal only after sentencing, which is scheduled for May 30, he added. Under court rules, the three judges may not condemn him to death but can send him to prison for a term they consider commensurate with his crimes, according to a court spokesman, Solomon Moriba.

The court dismissed prosecution allegations that Taylor became involved in the Sierra Leone war after hatching a plan with rebel leaders when they were all being trained in Libya in the 1980s. It also dismissed charges that Taylor was in effect the senior commander of the rebel forces, using his prestige as president and his connections with arms merchants to exercise command-and-control functions and arrange arms-for-diamonds deals.

But it upheld the prosecution's contention that, by supplying advice, arms, ammunition, communications and transport to the rebels, he bore criminal responsibility for atrocities they committed in Sierra Leone. The judges ruled that the assistance was "sustained and significant" during the war and that Taylor knew full well of the bloodletting through reports from newspapers, U.N. agencies and his own staff.

In particular, the judges singled out attacks in the late 1990s on Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, and on diamond-producing regions as the occasions for particularly abhorrent rebel abuses. These, they said, included using pubescent girls as sex slaves, forcing young boys to go into battle under the influence of drugs and killing or maiming civilians to terrorize people living in areas under their control.

Crisis Group

Wednesday, 26 April 2012

Taylor Verdict a Warning to War Crimes Perpetrators

Dakar/Nairobi/Brussels

The landmark guilty verdict today against former Liberian President Charles Ghankay Taylor is a warning to those most responsible for atrocity crimes that they can be held accountable.

A decade after the war in Sierra Leone, the Special Court's ruling marks the first time that a former head of state has been found guilty of war-time atrocities by an internationally-backed court since the Nuremberg trials. The verdict is a fresh lesson to all those in power that they do not enjoy impunity and a sign of hope in Sierra Leone that those most responsible for the heinous crimes of the eleven-year civil war (1991-2002) are being brought to book. Nevertheless, Liberians are still waiting for Taylor and others to be tried for atrocities committed in the civil war in their country.

“The guilty verdict against Charles Taylor by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) is a watershed moment in the fight to hold high-level perpetrators accountable”, says Gilles Yabi, Crisis Group's West Africa Project Director. “It is also a momentous day for the victims' families, who have waited patiently for this ruling since the court began its work”.

The verdict has been a long time coming. Taylor was indicted in March 2003 on multiple counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international law. He was accused of helping to plan, order and encourage acts including murder, terrorising civilians, mutilation, rape, sexual slavery and recruiting child soldiers. The charges stemmed from his support for Sierra Leone rebel groups as commander of the National Patriotic Front for Liberia from 1989 and after becoming president in 1997. Under the peace agreement that ended Liberia's civil war in 2003, Taylor resigned as president. He was granted exile in Nigeria but extradited in March 2006 to Freetown, at the request of Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and after he violated the terms of his exile by meddling in Liberian politics. Owing to regional security concerns, his trial before the SCSL – a court set up jointly by the government of Sierra Leone and the United Nations – was held in The Hague.

This verdict ends the work of the court, which also convicted eight other individuals. Its mandate was to prosecute only those most responsible for the crimes within its jurisdiction. That brief was heavily criticised because it meant that many lesser perpetrators would go free, particularly given the weaknesses in Sierra Leone's justice system. While the judgment sends a strong message that heads of state can be prosecuted, many Liberians may feel short-changed. Despite the long and costly work of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which recommended prosecutions for the main perpetrators of atrocities during the Liberian civil war, impunity still prevails and remains an obstacle to national reconciliation. “While this is a significant day for Sierra Leone, many in Liberia will have mixed feelings”, says Comfort Ero, Crisis Group's Africa Program Director. “Taylor and other Liberians have yet to be held to account for crimes committed in Liberia's civil war. Several suspects continue to serve in public office”.

Official Statement from the German Government

Saturday, 28 April 2012

German Government welcomes guilty verdict against Charles Taylor

Minister of State Cornelia Pieper: German Government welcomes guilty verdict against Charles Taylor

Minister of State Cornelia Pieper issued the following statement in Berlin on the verdict announced today (26 April) by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the case against Charles Taylor:

“With its guilty verdict against Charles Taylor today, the Special Court for Sierra Leone is sending an important signal: not even former heads of state can escape their responsibility under criminal law for war crimes.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone has already made legal history with its judgement on the forced recruitment of child soldiers. Now, having completed proceedings against Charles Taylor, it is the first of the special courts to have fulfilled its mandate.”

Charles Taylor, the former President of Liberia, was indicted of war crimes and crimes against humanity by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in 2003; today the court of first instance reached a verdict of guilty. Taylor is accused of being one of those who bore the greatest responsibility for the civil war in Sierra Leone. Sentence will be passed in separate proceedings.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone was established by an agreement between Sierra Leone and the United Nations dated 16 January 2002. It is mandated “to prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996”.

Since 2002 Germany has contributed just under eight million dollars to the Court’s budget.

Voice of America

Monday, 30 April 2012

Charles Taylor Convicted of War Crimes, Crimes Against Humanity

Former Liberian president Charles Taylor has been found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity by a special tribunal in The Hague.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone ruled Thursday that Taylor aided and abetted severe human rights abuses carried out by rebels during Sierra Leone's civil war.

Presiding Judge Richard Lussick said Taylor was guilty on all 11 counts of an indictment that included charges of murder, rape, sexual slavery, recruitment of child soldiers, and enslavement.

“The trial chamber unanimously finds you guilty of aiding and abetting the commission of the following crimes, pursuant to article 6/1 of the statute during the indictment period and planning the commission of the following crimes, in the attacks on Kono and Makeni in December 1998, and in the invasion of and retreat from Freetown between December 1998 and February 1999.”

Taylor, wearing a dark blue suit, was calm as he stood and listened to the verdict.

Taylor is the first head of state to be convicted by an international court since the Nuremberg trial in 1946 of Karl Doenitz, who briefly ruled Nazi Germany after the death of Adolf Hitler.

Lussick said Taylor will be sentenced on May 30. Taylor had pleaded not guilty to the charges and has the right to appeal the verdict.

The United States and international rights groups welcomed the verdict, saying it will serve as an example to others who would commit similar crimes.

The White House issued a statement Thursday, saying the conviction of the former Liberian leader sends a powerful message about accountability. The statement says that with Taylor behind bars, the people of Liberia and Sierra Leone are building the strong institutions and the bright future to which they so deservedly aspire.

Prosecutors had said Taylor masterminded Sierra Leone's civil war in the 1990s, arming and assisting Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front rebels in exchange for “blood diamonds,” mined in eastern Sierra Leone.

The court found Taylor did not have command and control of the rebels but was aware of their activities and provided them with weapons and other supplies.

Taylor was arrested and handed over to the court in 2006, three years after his indictment and subsequent resignation as president. The trial, which opened in 2007, was transferred from Freetown to The Hague amid regional security concerns.

During the trial, the court heard testimony from 94 prosecution witnesses and 21 defense witnesses, including Taylor.

The tribunal was established to try the most serious cases of war crimes rising from the Sierra Leone conflict. The Taylor case is expected to be the court's last major trial.

Coventry Telegraph
Saturday, 28 April 2012

Former Bablake boy Courtenay Griffiths defends war criminal Charles Taylor



A FORMER Coventry schoolboy pupil was lead defence lawyer in a trial which saw a former African president convicted of war crimes.

Courtenay Griffiths defended former Liberian president Charles Taylor on charges of war crimes in neighbouring Sierra Leone during that country's civil war.

At a UN-backed special court in The Hague, Taylor was convicted of aiding and abetting war crimes, but cleared of charges of ordering the war crimes.

Mr Griffiths was a pupil at All Saints Church of England Primary School, in Strathmore Avenue, Stoke, Coventry, before moving on to Bablake.

From time to time he visits the school to talk to pupils about careers in the law.

In 2005, he was made an honorary doctor of law by Coventry University.

Allegations made at the trial were that Taylor used diamonds mined in Sierra Leone to fund weapons for the country's Revolutionary United Front, notorious for hacking off people's arms and legs.

The court found that Taylor knew the group was carrying out the amputations and attacks against civilians but carried on arming them anyway.

As part of the defence of Taylor, Mr Griffiths questioned supermodel Naomi Campbell. She told the court Taylor had given her some 'dirty-looking' stones during a star studded charity dinner in South Africa.

Mr Griffiths was born in Jamaica before moving to Coventry with his seven brothers and sister as a child.

The QC has represented members of the IRA after bombing attacks and one of the youths accused of murdering 10-year-old Damilola in London. In an interview, he said the morality of Taylor was none of his business and the important thing was to make sure Taylor had a fair hearing.

Bablake School's head of religious studies and law extension co-ordinator Chris Mellers said: "Courtenay grew up in the era of changes in the Coventry music scene, and was very involved with The Specials—several of whom are still close friends – but Courtenay went into law, studying at the London School of Economics and is now joint head of Garden Court Chambers, one of the biggest groups of barristers in the country.

"He is an excellent and much-valued mentor to several of our students, helping them to understand that operating within the law is paramount but that even the seemingly unworthy should have an open and fair trial."

Head John Watson said: "Our pupils have been both impressed and positively provoked whenever they have heard him speak."

New Era (Namibia)

Friday, 27 April 2012

Taylor's conviction stirs international justice debate

Story by Toivo Ndjebela

WINDHOEK – Yesterday's conviction of former Liberian President Charles Taylor at The Hague has revived debate of whether it marks an end to impunity for the perpetrators of atrocities, or it simply confirms victory of power politics over international justice.

The 64-year-old former strongman was convicted by the Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) for a role he allegedly played during a deadly civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone, where he backed rebels between 1991 and 2002.

Taylor, who has all along denied responsibility for the Sierra Leone strife, will be sentenced on May 30, according to the verdict delivered in The Netherlands yesterday.

News of his conviction has set tongues of Namibian political and law commentators wagging, on especially the perceived selective application of international law.

Both Executive Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) Graham Hopwood and University of Namibia law professor, Dr Nico Horn, agree that Taylor's conviction sets good precedence against human rights violations in Africa.

The two pundits are also on the same page with regard to the dwindling impunity that many sitting heads of state enjoyed while committing atrocities against their own people.

"It (the conviction) sends a message to national leaders that they can be held to account for widespread human rights abuses," remarked Hopwood.

"However, if Taylor's conviction is to signal an end to impunity for heads of state who commission human rights abuses, then the system of international justice has to apply globally and not just to certain areas of the world," the IPPR boss said.

Horn cited the arbitrary executions of former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, his Iraqi counterpart Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda head Osama bin Laden, saying the perpetrators of these crimes were never brought to book.

"In international law, the killings of Gaddafi, bin Laden and Saddam Hussein were illegal but nobody was arrested in connection with them," the law professor said.

"And the Americans, who have played a key role in indictment of people by the ICC, never attempted to stop the killing of the three leaders," he argued.

Since its establishment, the ICC has indicted 11 people for war crimes and crimes against humanity and all these suspects are from Africa.

The ICC's persistent appetite for Africans and its failure to indict anyone from outside the continent do not sit well with many Africans.

"While it is right that rogue leaders from Africa are held to account, such courts and their investigators should also give attention to other parts of the world - for example Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and Chechnya among others - where horrific, widespread and systematic human rights abuses have been committed," Hopwood commented.

Horn said the international justice arena is structured in a way that would make it difficult for leaders such as former US President George W. Bush to be indicted for war crimes committed in Iraq.

Under Bush's leadership, the USA waged a war in Iraq, under the pretext of stopping Hussein's purported dealings in weapons of mass destruction (WMD), leading to the killing of Hussein and about 200 000 other Iraqi citizens.

"The USA is not a signatory to the Rome Statute and therefore you can only bring Bush to the ICC if he is charged with genocide," Horn explained.

Fatou Bensouda of The Gambia is expected to take over as chief prosecutor of the ICC this year, when Luis Moreno-Ocampo of Argentina steps down.

"Many human rights violations are committed in Africa so it's only fair that an African is leading the ICC," Horn said.

"Right now the ICC is dominated by prosecutors and lawyers from the USA and Canada, countries that are not signatories to the Rome Statute."

New York Times
Thursday, 26 April 2012

Ex-President of Liberia Aided War Crimes, Court Rules



THE HAGUE — Charles G. Taylor, the former president of Liberia and once a powerful warlord, was convicted by an international tribunal on Thursday of arming, supporting and guiding a brutal rebel movement that committed mass atrocities in Sierra Leone during its civil war in the 1990s. He is the first head of state to be convicted by an international court since the Nuremberg trials after World War II.

After 13 months of deliberation, a panel of three judges from Ireland, Samoa and Uganda found Mr. Taylor guilty of crimes against humanity and war crimes, including murder, rape, slavery and the use of child soldiers. They said he had helped plan the capture of diamond mines and the invasion of Freetown, the capital. But the prosecution failed to prove that Mr. Taylor had directly commanded the rebels responsible for the atrocities, the judges said.

The conflict in Sierra Leone became notorious for its gruesome tactics, including the calculated mutilation of thousands of civilians, the widespread use of drugged children and the mining of diamonds to pay for guns and ammunition. A sinister rebel vocabulary pointed to the horrors: applying “a smile” meant cutting off the upper and lower lips of a victim, giving “long sleeves” meant hacking off the hands, and giving “short sleeves” meant cutting the arm above the elbow.

Ten years after the war ended, Sierra Leone is still struggling to rebuild. An estimated 50,000 people died, while countless others fled the country or took refuge in camps. A large portion of the nation’s young missed their educations. Unemployment, particularly among the young men who emerged from the war with few skills, is crushing. Electricity is scant, even in the capital. The country has returned to democracy, but many educated Sierra Leoneans remain abroad, literacy is low and some industries, like mining iron ore, are just starting up again.

“He is the one who started this,” Osman Turay, one of several amputees playing soccer on crutches in the concrete shell of an unfinished building in Freetown, said of Mr. Taylor after the verdict.

Prosecutors said Mr. Taylor’s part in the devastation was motivated not by ideology, but by a quest for power and money — “pure avarice,” in the words of David M. Crane, the American prosecutor who

indicted him in 2003. Rebels provided Mr. Taylor with “a continuous supply” of diamonds, often in exchange for arms and ammunition, the court found. The war, and the money siphoned off from his own government, allowed him to send millions of dollars to offshore companies, prosecutors said.

Yet investigators never unraveled the web hiding this presumed fortune, and Mr. Taylor pleaded penury, leaving the court to foot the bill for his defense, which cost \$100,000 per month in lawyers, staff and rent.

Still, the trial has brought “a sense of relief,” said Ibrahim Tommy, who leads the Center for Accountability and Rule of Law, a human rights group in Freetown. “I’m not sure it will bring closure to the victims,” Mr. Tommy said, but the trial was “a genuine effort to ensure accountability for the crimes in Sierra Leone.”

The tribunal, called the Special Court for Sierra Leone, has already sentenced eight other leading members of different forces and rebel groups. Mr. Taylor, who has maintained his innocence, is scheduled to be sentenced on May 30. There is no death penalty in international criminal law, and any prison term would be served behind British bars.

The fighting for control over one of the world’s poorest regions also involved Liberia, where many more died, and threatened to spill over into neighboring Guinea and Ivory Coast. But only crimes in Sierra Leone between 1996 and 2002 are within the court’s mandate, and Mr. Taylor is the special court’s last defendant. His trial was moved to the Netherlands for fear of causing unrest in West Africa, where he still has followers.

Not since Karl Dönitz, the German admiral who briefly succeeded Hitler upon his death, was tried and sentenced by the International Military Tribunal has a head of state been convicted by an international court.

Slobodan Milosevic, the former president of Serbia, died in his cell in 2006 before his war crimes trial ended. Jean Kambanda, the first person sentenced for the crime of genocide, received a life sentence for his role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, but he was a former prime minister, not the head of state. The former president of Ivory Coast, Laurent Gbagbo, has been charged with crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court, but his trial has not yet begun. Similarly, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of Sudan is wanted by the court on genocide charges for atrocities in Darfur, but he has long evaded arrest.

During Mr. Taylor’s lengthy trial, which began in 2006, the judges heard testimony from 115 witnesses. Before the formally robed court officers, they spoke of slave labor in captured diamond mines, rape, severed heads displayed on stakes to terrorize people, and lines of captured villagers, waiting to have their limbs hacked off.

There were many chilling moments, as witnesses described the barbarism of the rebels.

Mustapha Mansary, a villager, was twice asked by a defense lawyer if he could read and write English, until he held up his two bandaged stumps.

“I have no hands to write anything,” Mr. Mansary replied.

Witness 064, a rape victim, described the day rebels came to her village. With axes, they cut up and decapitated many adults and children as she was held indoors. The gang leader then ordered her to go outside to look for her family. The severed heads of her relatives were put in a sack dripping with blood, including the heads of her two children.

“They gave me the heads to carry,” she said. She couldn’t, she told the court.

But prosecutors struggled with a legal puzzle of how to link such atrocities to Mr. Taylor. There was no paper trail showing orders. He was not at the scene of the crimes, and they were not committed by Liberia's army, which was under his command.

To build their case, prosecutors used radio and telephone intercepts and brought in radio operators who had connected Mr. Taylor's residence in Monrovia, the Liberian capital, to the rebels in Sierra Leone. People close to Mr. Taylor, his head of security, bodyguards and other associates, some of them relocated abroad as protected witnesses, testified about arms and ammunition shipments for the rebels and about seeing raw diamonds arriving as payment.

Bank records were displayed in court, showing how tax payments and other government income moved into Mr. Taylor's accounts, ostensibly to pay for the war effort, or to pocket for himself. Defense lawyers dismissed much of the evidence as hearsay. And they repeatedly said the trial was a political exercise by Western countries that wanted to keep Mr. Taylor out of West Africa.

The defense presented as evidence two secret diplomatic cables from 2009, part of the cache revealed by WikiLeaks, in which American diplomats wrote about Mr. Taylor. One, dated March 2009, quoted the American ambassador to Liberia as saying that "the best we can do for Liberia is to see that Charles Taylor is put away for a long time."

The most important defense witness was Mr. Taylor himself. Eloquent and respectful of the court, he managed to stay for almost seven months on the witness stand, giving his version of his life and his role as a peacemaker, without being cut off by the judges during his many digressions. He told the court that he had been trained in Libya and had once received money from Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi for "medical expenses." While he was in a Massachusetts jail, awaiting extradition on charges of embezzling \$900,000 of Liberian government money, he said, he did not escape, but was let out with the help of the C.I.A.

Mr. Taylor said he would "never, ever" have permitted atrocities. The many tales from his life, replete with details of his career as a rebel, a prisoner, a negotiator and a president, were followed by a large radio audience at home in Liberia and drove up his popularity.

Lawyers said that judges seemed to be bending over backward to appear fair. "Taylor had every day in court he could have wished for," said Stephen J. Rapp, a former prosecutor at the court and now a United States ambassador for war crimes issues.

At the start of the two-hour hearing, Mr. Taylor waved and smiled at some of his relatives in the public gallery, but he left looking somber. Charen Taylor, one of his daughters, said: "Of course I'm not happy, but we have to be optimistic about the appeal. It's been a very long process."

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Child soldiers in PKK

Former Liberian president Charles Taylor has been found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity by a special tribunal in The Hague, which ruled that Taylor aided and abetted severe human rights abuses carried out by rebels during Sierra Leone's civil war. Taylor was found guilty on all 11 counts, which included charges of murder, rape, sexual slavery, recruitment of child soldiers and enslavement.

It seems that Charles Taylor's punishment for crimes against humanity, the recruitment of child soldiers and enslavement could have serious consequences for the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its leaders. It is a well-known fact that since the 1990s, the PKK has been recruiting child soldiers. Even the PKK does not hide the ages of some of its militants, as reported by some international media outlets. The exact number of the PKK's child soldiers is not known, however, with the death reports that the PKK releases after each operation, it seems that at least 15 to 20 percent of PKK militants are under the age of 18.

According to international NGOs, the recruitment of under-18s of both sexes had been reported in 2003. The PKK is believed to have used children in its forces since 1994 and was believed in 1998 to have had 3,000 child soldiers, more than 10 percent of them girls, in its forces based in Iraq and operating in southeast Turkey. (<http://www.childsoldiersglobalreport.org/content/turkey>)

The UN's Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict sets 18 as the minimum age for direct participation in hostilities, for recruitment into armed groups and for compulsory recruitment by governments. "Armed groups that are distinct from the armed forces of a state should not, under any circumstances, recruit or use in hostilities persons under the age of 18 years."

In addition, the UN Security Council has passed a series of resolutions condemning the recruitment and use of children in hostilities. These are resolutions 1261 (1999), 1314 (2000), 1379 (2001), 1460 (2003), 1539 (2004) and 1612 (2005) on children and armed conflict.

There is no consensus on the definition of terrorism in the international community. Thus, international law often does not apply to PKK leaders for their involvement in terrorism activities.

The Charles Taylor case, at a special tribunal in The Hague, can be applied to PKK leaders as well. Since Mr. Taylor was found guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity for his actions, many of which are similar to what the PKK has done in the last 30 years, including recruiting child soldiers, one could bring PKK leaders before the International Court.

One wonders why the Turkish government doesn't highlight the PKK's use of child soldiers to the international community.

It seems that the Turkish state has found itself comfortable since the PKK was recognized as a terror organization by the EU and the US, however, bringing the PKK's use of child soldiers before an international judicial process would limit PKK leaders' movements around the world. If an international court found the PKK and its leaders guilty of a crime against humanity and the use of child soldiers, it would certainly limit the PKK's activities in Europe.