

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

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Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
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The Case of Prosecutor v. Charles Ghankay Taylor at the Special Court for Sierra Leone

FEATURE

Charles Taylor is the former president of Liberia. From 1989 to 1997, Taylor led a rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), which sought to unseat Liberia's then-president, Samuel K. Doe, and to take control of the country. The conflict ended on August 2, 1997, when Taylor was sworn in as president after elections that were part of a peace agreement brokered by the regional body ECOWAS.

Taylor's presidency, which lasted until 2003, was characterized by intolerance of dissent and harassment of the press, civil society, and the political opposition. Forces under Taylor's command also were implicated in supporting and participating in armed conflicts, cross-border raids, and human rights abuses in neighboring countries, including Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Côte d'Ivoire. There was near-total impunity for these and other human rights abuses.

Taylor's repression of the Liberian people fueled a rebellion to unseat him, which began in 1999. Following rebel incursions into Monrovia, the Liberian capital, and the unsealing of Taylor's indictment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) for crimes committed in Sierra Leone, Taylor stepped down as president in August 2003. He was offered safe haven in Nigeria, where he stayed until his surrender to the Special Court in March 2006.

The Taylor judgment will be a watershed moment for efforts to hold the highest-level leaders to account through a credible judicial process. The Taylor judgment will be the first since Nuremberg of a former head of state in an international or hybrid international-national court on charges of serious crimes committed in violation of international law. Before Taylor, Slobodan Milosevic, president of the former Yugoslavia, was tried by an international tribunal, but he died before a judgment was issued. Karl Doenitz, who was a German naval commander and president of Germany for approximately one week at the end of World War II, was convicted by the International Military Tribunal of Nuremberg.

The judgment in the Taylor case comes approximately five months after Laurent Gbagbo, the former president of neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, became the first former head of state to appear at the International Criminal Court (ICC) on charges of crimes against humanity.

The Taylor judgment is also a milestone for the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Upon the conclusion of this case, the SCSL is set to become the first international tribunal to complete its work and to close down its operations.

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. 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



Charles Taylor

a "big man" was taken into custody and forced to answer for his alleged crimes. Sierra Leonean civil society members consistently told Human Rights Watch that Taylor's trial was essential to overall efforts to ensure justice for crimes in Sierra Leone. Liberian civil society members expressed disappointment that Taylor has not been held to account for crimes in Liberia.

The Special Court indicted Taylor on March 7, 2003 on 17 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international law for his role in supporting Sierra Leonean rebel groups during that country's armed conflict. The abuses took place both while Taylor was head of the NPFL and while he was president of Liberia. The indictment was amended and reduced to 11 counts on March 16, 2006. The specific charges against Taylor are:

- " Five counts of war crimes: terrorizing civilians, murder, outrages on personal dignity, cruel treatment, and looting;
- " Five counts of crimes against humanity: murder, rape, sexual slavery, mutilating and beating, and enslavement; and
- " One count of other serious violations of international humanitarian law: recruiting and using child soldiers.

The indictment cites a multitude of locations where crimes were committed in Sierra Leone, covering 6 of Sierra Leone's 13 districts. The in-

dictment alleges that Taylor can be held individually criminally responsible for the crimes based on three legal principles:

- " Individual Criminal Responsibility: Taylor planned, instigated, ordered, committed, or aided and abetted planning, preparation, and execution of the alleged crimes.
- " Joint Criminal Enterprise: Taylor participated in a common plan, design, or purpose that consisted of or involved the commission of the alleged crimes, or those crimes were reasonably foreseeable consequences of the common plan, design, or purpose.
- " Command Responsibility: Taylor held positions of superior responsibility and exercised command and control over subordinate members of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), RUF/Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) alliance, and Liberian fighters. Taylor knew or had reason to know that subordinates, responsible to him, were about to commit the alleged crimes or had done so and he failed to take necessary and reasonable measures to prevent such acts or punish those responsible.

The prosecution does not allege that Taylor entered Sierra Leone during the time in question, but that "from the outside he was responsible for those crimes through his

participation, involvement, concerted action with and command over the criminal conduct of his proxy armies," the rebel RUF and later the RUF/AFRC alliance.

The prosecution contends that Taylor's support of the RUF and RUF/AFRC alliance took many forms, including providing strategic instruction, direction, and guidance; providing arms, ammunition, and manpower; training fighters; creating and maintaining a communications network; and providing a safe haven for fighters and financial and medical support.

Taylor pled not guilty to all counts.

Following the end of the conflict in Sierra Leone, the domestic justice system lacked the capacity to hold those responsible for serious crimes committed during the conflict accountable. Prompted by a request from President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to the United Nations, the Special Court for Sierra Leone was established in 2002 by an agreement between the Sierra Leone government and the United Nations to prosecute serious crimes committed during the second half of the war based on "international standards of justice, fairness, and due process of law."

The court is the first stand-alone "hybrid" or "mixed" international war crimes tribunal that is not a part of a domestic justice system. The hybrid court differs from earlier established international war crimes tribunals in that it is staffed

by international staff members and Sierra Leoneans, rather than by an entirely international staff, and its statute includes both domestic and international crimes, instead of only international crimes. Also, its headquarters are in the country where the crimes occurred and all of the trials except Taylor's have been held in Sierra Leone. The SCSL relies solely on voluntary contributions from the international community.

The Special Court has jurisdiction over "serious violations of international humanitarian law and Sierra Leonean law committed in the territory of Sierra Leone since 30 November 1996." This mandate notably excludes crimes committed during the first five years of Sierra Leone's 11-year civil war. Its mandate is also limited to prosecuting those who "bear the greatest responsibility" for the crimes.

On June 4, 2003, the Special Court unsealed its indictment against Taylor, still president of Liberia, while he was attending peace talks in Ghana to end the conflict in Liberia. The unsealing of the indictment during peace talks generated controversy and Ghana provided him with a presidential plane to return to Liberia instead of arresting him.

In August 2003, as rebels opened an offensive against the Liberian capital, Taylor stepped down as presi-

dent and accepted an offer of safe haven in Nigeria. In May 2005, the then-president of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, indicated that he would consider supporting Taylor's extradition to Liberia if a formal request was made by a duly elected Liberian government. In March 2006, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf made the request.

On March 25, 2006, President Obasanjo indicated that Liberia was "free to take former President Charles Taylor into its custody," although Nigeria did not arrest Taylor. Within 48 hours, Taylor disappeared, but on March 29, he was detained by Nigerian police near Nigeria's border with Cameroon. He was then sent back to Liberia, where he was taken into UN custody and transferred to the Special Court in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital.

The same day Taylor was transferred to the SCSL, its president submitted requests to the Netherlands and the International Criminal Court (ICC) to relocate Taylor's trial to The Hague, citing concerns about the stability of the West African sub-region if Taylor was tried in Freetown. Sources involved with Taylor's surrender have indicated that President Johnson-Sirleaf was only willing to request Taylor's surrender on the condition that he be tried outside of West Africa.

Taylor was transferred to The Hague on June 30, 2006 after UN Security Council Resolution 1688 provided the legal basis to transfer the trial, the ICC consented to the use of its facilities, and the United Kingdom agreed to provide detention facilities for Taylor if he

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was convicted. On May 17, 2010, Taylor's trial was relocated from the ICC premises to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon premises in Leidschendam, in the outskirts of The Hague.

The Special Court does not have the authority to hear cases involving crimes committed in Liberia. The Liberian government has made no progress in ensuring the prosecution of those responsible for war crimes committed during Liberia's armed conflicts.

The judgment is scheduled to be delivered at 11 a.m. April 26, 2012 in the courtroom belonging to the Special Tribunal for Lebanon in Leidschendam, in the outskirts of The Hague.

If Taylor is found guilty on any counts, he has 14 days from the receipt of the full judgment to file a written notice of appeal with the registrar. If he is found not guilty on any counts, the prosecution also has 14 days from the receipt of the full judgment to file a written notice of appeal. If Taylor is acquitted on all counts, the Trial Chamber may issue an order for his continued detention pending the determination of any appeals.

The Appeals Chamber of the Special Court, consisting of five judges, will hear any appeals. Its decision will be final.

If the Appeals Chamber determines that Taylor is not guilty, he may walk out of the court a free man, and no other judicial body will have the power to put Taylor on trial for the crimes for which he has already been prosecuted. However, such exclusion applies only to the charges in the indictment, which relate solely to the conflict in Sierra Leone.

If Taylor is found guilty on any of the 11 counts, the Trial Chamber will schedule sentencing proceedings. The statute of the Special Court for Sierra Leone provides that sentences should be "imprisonment for a specified number of years." Sentences may also include forfeiture of any "property, proceeds and any assets acquired unlawfully or by criminal conduct."

The prosecution has seven days after a conviction is entered to submit to the Trial Chamber any information that it deems relevant in determining an appropriate sentence. The defense has seven days after the prosecution's filing to submit any information it deems relevant to sentencing.

If either the prosecution or defense wishes to appeal the sentence handed down by the Trial Chamber, it has 14 days from the receipt of the sentence to file a written notice of appeal with the registrar setting forth the grounds.

Taylor would serve any sentence in the United Kingdom based on an agreement with the Netherlands.

The Special Court conducted a robust outreach and public information program, which meaningfully contributed to ensuring those most affected by the crimes had adequate information about proceedings. This program increased the impact of the work of the Special Court in general and the Taylor trial in particular.

In May 2007 the court opened a sub-office in The Hague. From both The Hague and the Freetown offices, staff worked with local and international media, civil society, and human rights groups, among others, to disseminate information about the Taylor proceedings to the public. The Office of Public Affairs (OPA) created audio and video summaries of the trial that were played on the radio in West Africa and screened at outreach events. The office also facilitated monitoring visits to The Hague by civil society members from Sierra Leone and Liberia, who in turn disseminated their impressions of the proceedings to their communities.

Local West African news media, including newspapers and radio stations, covered the trial, and a BBC World Service Trust project provided support to Sierra Leonean and Liberian journalists to travel to The Hague to report on the trial. Media also relied on an Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI) website that posted summaries and analysis of the proceedings.

The prosecution called 94 witnesses to the stand, presented written statements from 4 witnesses testifying to the crimes committed, and presented reports from 2 expert witnesses. The 94 witnesses called to the stand included 58 people who testified

Prosecutor v. Charles Ghankay Norman Special Court for Sierra Leone

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about crimes committed by fighting forces in Sierra Leone, 32 who testified to links between Taylor and the crimes, and 4 experts, including a medical expert and experts in West African society and politics.

The defense called 21 witnesses to the stand. These witnesses included Taylor himself and former leaders and fighters from the RUF and NPFL. Their testimony challenged the allegations that Taylor controlled, supported, or assisted the RUF or RUF/AFRC alliance.

The Special Court has held 3 trials of a total of 12 people on charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law committed during the Sierra Leone conflict, in addition to the Taylor trial. The suspects were grouped according to their affiliation with the three main warring factions. Four defendants have died or disappeared since their indictments. The remaining eight are serving their sentences in Rwanda under an agreement with Sierra

Leone. No other indictments are expected, and the court is in the process of winding down its operations.

Four leaders of the AFRC—Alex Tamba Brima, Ibrahim Bazy Kamara, Santigie Borbor Kanu, and Johnny Paul Koroma—were charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. Koroma fled Freetown in January 2003 and his fate and whereabouts are unknown. The AFRC trial began in March 2005, with closing arguments delivered in December 2006.

In June 2007, Trial Chamber II found Brima, Kamara, and Kanu guilty of war crimes, including acts of terrorism, murder, collective punishments, rape, and murder as a crime against humanity. These were also the first convictions by a UN-backed tribunal for recruitment and use of child soldiers. The Appeals Chamber upheld the convictions and the prison sentences, ranging from 45 to 50 years, in February 2008.

The trial of three leaders of the CDF—Allieu Kondewa, Moinina Fofana, and Samuel Hinga Norman—for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law started in June 2004, with closing arguments delivered in November 2006. In February 2007, Norman died of natural causes before a judgment was issued.

Trial Chamber I found Fofana and Kondewa guilty of murder, cruel treatment, pillage, and collective punishment as war crimes in August 2007. Fofana was also found guilty of conscripting or enlisting child soldiers. Following the Appeals Chamber judgment in May 2008, which overturned some convictions but entered new convictions on other counts, Fofana is serving 15 years and Kondewa 20 years in prison for murder and other inhumane acts as crimes against humanity.

Five leaders of the rebel group the RUF—Foday Sankoh, Sam Bockarie, Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon, and Augustine Gbao—were indicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, although Sankoh and Bockarie have both since died and their indictments were withdrawn on December 8, 2003. The trial of the three remaining accused began on July 5, 2004, with closing arguments delivered on August 5, 2008.

The defendants were found guilty of war crimes, including acts of terrorism, murder, rape, sexual slavery, and crimes against humanity, including murder and enslavement, in February 2009. Sesay was also found guilty of conscripting or enlisting child soldiers and enslavement. In October 2009, the Appeals Chamber upheld most, but not all, of the convictions, and upheld the imposed prison sentences of 52 years for Sesay, 40 years for Kallon, and 25 years for Gbao.

Justice Human Rights

Sierra Leone Special Court Offers Lessons for Prosecuting Highest-Level Suspects

Sierra Leoneans sit in front of a television relaying images from the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague on the day of the Taylor verdict, April 26, 2012. (Photo courtesy: SCSL)

In an outreach programme sponsored by the Special Court for Sierra Leone Outreach and Public Affairs section, residents of Port Loko district in Northern Sierra Leone glued to a television relaying programme at the site of mass graves near the village of Mathiri in Port Loko district. It's about the Taylor Trial.

The outcome of the programme brought in new discoveries and lessons for the international judicial system while at the same time; Sierra Leone provided lessons for prosecuting highest placed officials who commit human rights violations. Taylor's trial shows that credible prosecutions of the highest-level suspects for the gravest crimes are achievable. It was a long road and there was room for improvement, yet the proceedings were relatively well-managed, more than 100 witnesses testified, and expert defense counsel strengthened the proceedings.

The trial of the former Liberian President Charles Taylor for war crimes and crimes against humanity during Sierra Leone's armed conflict was a largely well-run proceeding, Human Rights Watch said in a report released today.

The trial benefited from a high-quality defense, sound handling of witnesses, and dynamic outreach to communities affected by the crimes. At the same time, Human Rights Watch's analysis identified areas in which practice should be improved for future trials of the highest-level suspects before domestic, international, and hybrid war crimes tribunals.

The 55-page report, "Even a Big Man Must Face Justice: Lessons from the Trial of Charles Taylor" analyzes the practice and impact of Taylor's trial by the United Nations-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone. The report examines the conduct of the trial, including issues related to efficiency, fairness, and witnesses and sources.

It also examines the court's efforts to make its proceedings accessible to communities most affected by the crimes, and perceptions and initial impact of the trial in Sierra Leone and Liberia. "Taylor's trial shows that credible prosecutions of the highest-level suspects for the gravest crimes are achievable," said Annie Gell, international justice fellow at Human Rights Watch and the author of the report. "It was a long road and there was room for improvement, yet the proceedings were relatively well-managed, more than 100 witnesses testified, and expert defense counsel strengthened the proceedings." The report is based on research in Sierra Leone, Liberia, The Hague, London, and New York from September 2011 to June 2012.

The Taylor trial took place against a backdrop of criticism and concern over the feasibility of trying national leaders before international or hybrid war crimes courts following the 2002-2006 trial of former Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic before the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. That trial was notable for its sometimes-chaotic atmosphere and Milosevic's death before a judgment was issued.

The Taylor trial largely avoided major interrup-

tions that could have marred the proceedings, Human Rights Watch said. Taylor's decision to be represented by counsel appears to have contributed to the generally respectful and organized tenor of the courtroom. Human Rights Watch urged tribunals handling such trials in the future to take measures to enhance trial management. Notably, the judges in Taylor's trial adopted practices that sought to improve efficiency but sometimes contributed to delays, such as the ambitious courtroom calendar and inflexibility on parties meeting some deadlines.

Other practices - such as the Trial Chamber's non-interventionist approach to witness testimony and the admission of evidence of the underlying crimes - lengthened the proceedings. More active court efforts to address defense concerns prior to the trial's start could have encouraged smoother proceedings and improved fairness, Human Rights Watch said. Increased transparency and stronger guidelines for the prosecution's provision of funds to potential witnesses and sources during its investigation could also have been helpful.

Trials like Taylor's are significant beyond the events in the courtroom, Human Rights Watch said. One crucial objective is to convey a sense of accountability to communities most affected by the crimes so that justice has local resonance and becomes meaningful.

"The court's dynamic outreach activities brought the trial to local communities in Sierra Leone and Liberia and helped to explain the proceedings," Gell said. "Trial impact is hard to judge but Sierra Leoneans and Liberians expressed greater expectations for justice and interest in promoting the rule of law in their countries."

Increased expectations for justice have also

resulted in some frustration, though, over the absence of wider accountability in Sierra Leone and Liberia, Human Rights Watch said. A domestic amnesty for crimes committed during Sierra Leone's conflict remains in effect and Liberia has yet to investigate and prosecute serious crimes committed during its armed conflict. "Domestic efforts to investigate serious crimes committed in Sierra Leone and Liberia beyond the Special Court's mandate are essential for more complete justice," Gell said. "The Sierra Leonean and Liberian governments should take concrete steps to pursue justice for serious crimes committed in their countries."

Vanity Fair

July 2012

Amazing Grace?

He's now an evangelical minister, but in his former life Liberia's Joshua Blahyi was a warlord and cannibal who went by the name General Butt Naked. And he has a story to tell.



By Tom Freston.

Of Africa's 55 nations, I've always been the most curious about Liberia, on the southern curve of West Africa. First off, only Liberia and Ethiopia were never colonized. Liberia's history is in fact unique. The country was founded in 1820 by freed slaves from the United States. The capital, Monrovia, was named after President James Monroe. Then, in true Jim Crow style, those freed slaves (called Americo-Liberians) took what they had learned from the master-slave plantation system in the U.S. and used it to dominate and suppress the local native population—97 percent of the country's people. The locals were denied citizenship until 1904 and could not vote until 1963. The Americo-Liberians held power until a coup in 1980 led by Sargent Samuel Doe, a semi-literate member of the local Krahn tribe, dislodged them.

The overthrown president was disemboweled and his 13 Cabinet members were tied to telephone poles on the beach and shot by drunken soldiers. Liberia began to unravel under Doe—wholesale corruption, ethnic violence, increasing poverty. Civil war broke out in 1989, the rebels led by Charles Taylor, an Americo-Liberian. He dislodged Doe, but the war continued until 1996, cooled down for a bit, and then blew up again in 1999, continuing to 2003 when Taylor went into exile.

Of all the African conflicts in late 20th century, the Liberian civil wars stand as among the most macabre, gruesome, and sensational. President Doe was videotaped being tortured; his ears were cut off and he was

told to eat them. He finally bled to death on the floor as his captors sat around drinking Budweiser. Child soldiers, some as young as nine, ruled the streets. Taylor called his recruits the “Small Boys Units.” They were fueled by cocaine, alcohol, and marijuana, and would at times fight dressed as women, wearing wedding dresses, wigs, shower caps, and Halloween masks. Some fought naked, cutting off limbs and beheading people as they went. Cannibalism was not unusual. Some 250,000 people died in these wars, about 1 Liberian in 12.

In 2005 Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected president, the first female African leader. She has been called the Liberian “Iron Lady” and was a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2011. Sirleaf has had her hands full trying to bring Liberia back to life. The country has been strip-mined and traumatized. Liberia lost 90 percent of its G.D.P. between 1989 and 1995. There is 80 percent unemployment; a large percentage of all women have been sexually assaulted. The health and education systems were gutted during the wars, as was the rest of the country’s infrastructure. Today, according to some reports, only an estimated 5,500 homes are connected to the electrical grid. Under Sirleaf, though, there has been modest progress.

I traveled to Liberia in June with a bipartisan delegation brought together by the One Campaign, the anti-poverty advocacy group founded by Bono, of which I am board chair. We regularly do these trips and they have proven to be extremely effective. The idea is to demonstrate to a group of politically influential people how smart, effective aid programs are not just productive but essential in post-conflict nations. We visited rebuilt hospitals and farms set up to rehabilitate former child soldiers. We met with diplomats, ministers, entrepreneurs, and President Sirleaf herself.



For all Liberia’s problems, it’s hard not to be struck by its citizens’ belief that redemption and recovery are possible. For an extreme example of that, I left the group one day and sought out a meeting with the notorious former warlord and self-admitted cannibal who called himself General Butt Naked—a killer who converted to Christianity when, he says, Jesus appeared to him during a human sacrifice and asked him to repent his sins. Today known as Joshua Blahyi, he devotes himself to running a ministry, making amends, and rehabilitating former child soldiers. In his former life he ran the Butt Naked Brigade, a militia aligned with Samuel Doe. There were countless militias in those days, led by men who adopted noms de guerre such as General Bin Laden and General Mosquito. Butt Naked’s soldiers were particularly ruthless—killers and rapists who fought naked except for guns and shoes. Their nakedness was meant to instill fear and, they also thought, to protect them. By their own admission, before battle they often sacrificed young children, ate their hearts, and drank their blood. “The hearts were roasted,” Blahyi told me, as if that were a mitigating detail. In 2008, in front of Liberia’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he claimed that he and his followers had killed more than 20,000 people.

Because of Mr. Blahyi's new evangelical status, I asked Ralph Reed, the former head of the Christian Coalition, who was in our delegation, if he wanted to come and meet this self-styled warlord turned evangelist. He was curious and agreed. "I've never met a warlord before," he said. So Ralph and I headed out one hot, humid afternoon in search of the former General Butt Naked, living now in a rundown suburb of Monrovia called the Chocolate City, as in the P-Funk album. George Clinton, like President Monroe, is on the Liberian map.

We were told to look for the general along the side of the road, just after the gritty port area, so he could guide us to his current headquarters. We drove through a crazy-quilt mix of dilapidated architecture—unfinished and war-torn buildings next to concrete huts with rusting corrugated-tin roofs, all framing an endless street bazaar. We spotted Joshua Blahyi next to a ramshackle market. He is a husky, well-built man and gave us a broad smile. He was in a spotless brown army shirt and had on a nametag. We followed him deep into Chocolate City, coming at last to an open-air, half-finished concrete-block structure with a dirt floor, where he runs his ministry for young men from the slums.

A group of Joshua's staff and supporters, including a minister from neighboring Nigeria in a sharp suit, were assembled to greet us, along his current group of about 20 boys, whom he had handpicked from the slums for his program of rehabilitation that aims to get them detoxed and religious, and give them a craft to support themselves. We sat in a circle of plastic chairs and introduced ourselves. When Ralph said that he once headed the Christian Coalition, a huge cheer went up. Joshua had the boys stand one by one and tell their stories. All were drug addicts, now in withdrawal. They calmly related their recent pasts as rapists, armed robbers, child soldiers, outcasts from their families, orphans, graveyard dwellers. Several had the hollow, dehumanized gaze you've seen in photos of Kalashnikov-toting street toughs.

Joshua then, with preacher-like cadence, recounted the story of his training at 11 as a tribal priest whose job it was to perform human sacrifices and cannibalism to protect his people, and how he brought that practice to the battlefield with his "Butt Naked Brigade" to spread terror and mentally fortify his young fighters. He described his conversion as a moment in battle in 1996 when he had just sacrificed a "peaceful, kind, three year old girl." He had bloodstains on his hands and heard a voice behind him speaking in his dialect. "I saw a man in white linen, but he was so bright—brighter than the sun. And I discovered later that that man was Jesus, who told me finally to repent and live—or refuse and die." Ralph asked him if he had known anything about Jesus. He said no, but that a group of Christians, an "evangelistic ministry," came to teach him, embraced him, and let him stay in their pastor's house. After 54 days of struggle, he finally accepted Jesus as his savior, and General Butt Naked became Joshua Blahyi the evangelist—a conversion noted throughout the country. Joshua said it gave Liberians hope because they figured, "If God can change me, He can also change your children."

There are skeptics who believe Blahyi is just trying to dodge charges of war crimes, even though he freely admits to them and says, "There should be action for all the negative things I did in the past. But I know whatever action there is cannot tamper with my freedom with Jesus."

Ralph Reed says that it is hard to judge the legitimacy of Blahyi's conversion but that one must look kindly at the good works he has been engaged in. Such is the reality of Liberia. Criminal judgment has been postponed. There are even acknowledged killers in the nation's senate. One government official said, "If we went to prosecute all the warlords now, they'd just go back to the jungle and we'd have more war. We have a country to rebuild first." They speak of the Cambodian model, where only now, decades after the Killing Fields, the aged Khmer Rouge leaders are being put on trial.

Perhaps the war-crime shoe will drop one day in Liberia. In the meantime, it may be that good has won a slight advantage over the evil that has been so pervasive. There seems to be a church on every corner. The international community, particularly the United States, has been providing smart aid and assistance. One sees the diaspora of talented Liberians returning. Liberia has a long way to go to shake off its terrible history, but the process, however strange and tenuous, has begun.

OpEdNews

Monday, 30 July 2012

Opinion

State Department Says Obama Official Misquoted on Rwanda

Last week the Guardian quoted the head of the U.S. Office of Global Criminal Justice, **Stephen Rapp**, saying that the president of Rwanda may be tried for possible war crimes in the International Criminal Court (ICC). The story was puzzling for several reasons. Neither Rwanda nor the United States is a member of the ICC, established in 2002 as a permanent war crimes tribunal.



Near Congo/ Rwanda border by Georgianne Nienaber

Ironically, Ambassador Rapp joined the ICC in 2001 and led the prosecution against the leaders of the RTLM radio station and Kangura newspaper for inciting the Rwandan Genocide of 1994. 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered by the Interahamwe militia. He is probably best known for directing the prosecution of former Liberian President Charles Taylor during the Sierra Leone Civil War. It seemed improbable that Rapp would make such a reckless statement, especially given his expertise about media and its ability to generate misinformation, hate crimes and prejudice.

A phone call and email to the press office at the Department of State revealed that the Guardian misquoted Rapp and took comments completely out of context -- a mistake that the Guardian has yet to correct.

A senior State Department Official provided the following in an email:

In his Guardian interview, Ambassador Rapp sought to underscore the importance of holding to account those responsible for crimes against humanity, noting as a general principle that neighboring countries have been held responsible in the past for cross-border support to armed groups. He was not calling for any specific prosecutions in this case. (emphasis added)

The background briefing included "deep concern" about Rwanda's involvement in the region, echoing previous State Department comments on the M23 rebellion in eastern Congo.

The United States has repeatedly expressed to the Rwandan government its deep concern about Rwanda's support to the Congolese rebel group called M23, as outlined in the UN's Group of Expert's Report. Our immediate focus is on the cessation of violence in eastern DRC, the end of outside support to all rebel groups, and the demobilization of those groups. We support regional cooperation against armed

groups, including joint military operations that are conducted with civilian protection as the foremost consideration and that are based on mutual consent and respect for sovereignty.

Unfortunately, the erroneous suggestion by the British press that Rapp was calling for the specific prosecution of Paul Kagame was immediately picked up by world media and subsequently used by anti-Rwanda hate groups and lobbying organizations calling for the United States to pull back funding. In a token gesture, the US had pulled \$200,000 in funding for the end of fiscal year 2012, but the funding will immediately kick in again in October 2013. The Netherlands followed suit after the Guardian article and suspended 6 million USD in aid. Whether the funding decisions were a priori in nature is impossible to determine. History will judge.

The monetary amount is inconsequential except in the arena of public opinion, and public opinion is easily manipulated in this day of immediate response and rumor mongering by social media.

An indictment by the ICC is reserved for the worst war criminals, and the erroneous Guardian story significantly wounded an already beleaguered country in the arena of public relations.

In the absence of a coherent African policy, is the Obama administration playing to an election cycle of rumor diplomacy? Or is this just another excuse to bolster AFRICOM forces in place of solid policy as this article suggests?

The lack of political muscle at State and USAID on Africa has come at a time when the Pentagon is increasingly active across the continent. The Pentagon's Africa Command, known simply as Africom, is well-resourced (established in 2007, Africom already has more personnel than the total number of USAID international staffers working on the continent), and wading into policy debates in ways that the Pentagon rarely did in the past when it came to Africa.

Rwanda has consistently and vehemently denied speculation that it is supplying arms to the M23 rebels. The M23 rebellion has issued press release after press release saying the same, but the Washington Post is the only media outlet that is reporting on the content.

As reported by Voice of America, Rwanda went through a United Nations report on arms smuggling "line by line" at a meeting with the Group of Experts who prepared the report. Foreign Affairs Minister Louise Mushikiwabo said Rwanda submitted a counter argument to the Security Council on Friday. The final report by the group of Experts is due later this year, but press leaks and lobbying by anti-Rwanda and anti-Tutsi hate groups have fanned discontent. Rumors are rampant on social media that Rwanda has been abandoned by the United States, its strong ally since the 1994 genocide.

Rwanda is not a perfect country and neither is any country in Africa or the western world for that matter. You can examine the conflict in Syria, the Israel/Palestine quagmire, or US actions in Iraq and Afghanistan and make arguments and counter arguments for placement of blame and whether atrocities occurred.

Personally, I believe the current conflict in DR Congo will become the historical poster child for media bias, distortions, under-reporting and outright lies that have contributed to hate speech in social media and an escalation of a conflict that could have been resolved at the beginning by negotiation and implementation of the 2009 Goma Peace Accord.

NOTE: The Guardian "updated" its story this weekend with another quote from Rapp.

We have a lot of influence with the Rwandans. We've been very supportive of them. We're prepared to speak frankly to them as we have privately in the past, and now publicly," Rapp said. "M23 was reinforced by Rwanda, and that has to stop. And that's the message we're delivering.