

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



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

as at:

Monday, 31 March 2008

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

Monday, 31 March 2008

Special Court donates £50,000 worth of books to FBC

By Solomon Rogers

In a bid to strengthening the legal system and education in Sierra Leone and the sub-region, the Special Court for Sierra Leone has donated over 1,000 copies of law books to the department of Social Sciences and Law at Fourah Bay College through a project entitled: 'The Algernon Montage Sierra Leone Book Project.

Before the official presentation of the books, the president of the Sierra Leone Special Court Hon. Justice George Gelaga King expressed great appreciation for the administration of the University of Sierra Leone for up keeping the university after eleven years of rebel war.

He explained that the consignment was in two folds: the first consignment of over 500 copies would go to the Law School of Sierra Leone and over 1000 copies for Fourah Bay College.

Expressing affection for the college, Justice King noted that Fourah Bay College still maintained its standard as the "Athens of West Africa".

He stated that the project was initiated by John Try and Eric Jean-Pierre of the Kingston University in the United Kingdom who had planned to give more support to legal education in Sierra Leone if the first gesture would be judiciously utilized.

Acknowledging receipt of the books the acting deputy chancellor of Fourah Bay College, Dr Dan Foday, registered gratitude to the Special Court and donor or trustee the United Kingdom.

He noted that after the rebel war the college had been able to survive on donations from donors, friends and well wishers.

Dr Dan Foday expressed optimism that other organizations and people would emulate the Special Court.

Eventhough there were multiple books, he said, the focus of the gesture was on the Faculty of Law, noting that other faculties at the university were in dire need of assistance, he therefore pleaded to benefactors to consider the other faculties at the university to promote quality education.

"These books would not be locked up in cupboards to accumulate dust but would be judiciously utilized to the advantage of the students," he said.

Giving the background to the project, director and trustee Eric Jean Pierre explained that some four years ago, he and his colleague lecturers at the law school at the Kingston University initiated an idea of assisting legal education in Sierra Leone and that that dream came to reality with the support of friends law firms and donors in the United Kingdom.

He maintained that their aim was not to support individuals, but Sierra Leone as a country through the legal education system to meet the needs of Sierra Leone and the sub-region.

The Dean of Social Sciences and Law, Dr Osman Gbla in receiving the books, stated that the gesture came at the most appropriate time and promised to use them judiciously for the benefit of the students.

He also extended a collaborative relationship to Kingston University in the UK to boost education in Sierra Leone.

The occasion was chaired by Mr S.N Dumbuya the university registrar.

Concord Times
Monday, 31 March 2008

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Feature

By Oluwuyi Oyundej

The Special Court for Sierra Leone observed a judicial recess from March 17 until Friday, March 28th. Proceedings in the ongoing trial of Liberia's former President Charles Taylor will resume today March 31st.

Going down memory lane, it would be recalled that when the UN Security Council passed a resolution that paved the way for the trial of Taylor to be moved to The Hague in The Netherlands, many Sierra Leoneans heaved a sigh of relief.

It was as if a foreseen crisis was averted from their capital, Freetown.

Their fear was that Taylor's presence in Freetown could attract a guerrilla army - because it is on record that he retains the ability to mobilise a fighting force of armed young men which could pose a threat to the newly-restored peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

In another quarters, it was also believed that a trial in The Hague might also allay the fears of some Liberians who think Taylor would not get a fair trial in Freetown, even if the judges were international.

But all these apprehension have little or no chances of reaching The Hague now that the trial is ongoing.

On one of the websites developed to provide news and expert throughout the trial, www.charlestaylortrial.org, many revelations came to fore as reported in various analysis which are updated regularly when the Court is in session.

14th March, 2008, prosecution witness Joseph D. "Zigzag" Marzah concluded his testimony in a dramatic fashion ahead of the two-week break in the trial. Angered by defense counsel suggestions that he was never close to Charles Taylor, Marzah alleged that he, Taylor and Benjamin Yeaton were all in the same Poso society and that Taylor himself had eaten human hearts with him on multiple occasions.

Another hard to believe revelation that popped up recently centres on whether ECOMOG prevented or assisted arms deliveries to Sierra Leone. Marzah alleged that some Nigerian officers in ECOMOG were corrupt and had been bribed by Taylor. Specifically, he testified that a Nigerian captain named Victor (not General Victor Malu, he said) had been assigned to Taylor's residence, and had arranged for Taylor and his men to transport weapons through the airport, and past checkpoints in ECOMOG vehicles.

Taylor's trial which began in The Hague in June 2007 made history as he became the African head of state to face war-crimes charges. Though still under the jurisdiction of the UN-backed Sierra Leone Special Court, the trial in faraway The Hague has seemingly helped to seal the end of the war and as a succor for war victims in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The Special Court for Sierra Leone is an ad-hoc international-national court, referred to as a "hybrid" or "mixed" international tribunal. The court was established in 2002 through an agreement between the United Nations and

Charles Taylor trial revisited



the Sierra Leonean government with a mandate to "prosecute persons who bear the greatest responsibility for serious violations of international humanitarian law" committed in Sierra Leone and also violations of Sierra Leonean law committed in the country. The court can only hear cases of crimes committed since 1996 though Sierra Leone's conflict lasted from 1991 to 2002. The crimes under the court's mandate include crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law, such as recruitment of child soldiers.

Taylor's trial in The Hague has also sent a shivering signal to many of the dictatorial leaders everywhere especially on the African continent. "The world has turned a page in the wake of Taylor's arrest," argues Special Court prosecutor Stephen Rapp. "[Crimes against humanity] cannot be ignored, and there will have to be prosecutions. The days are gone when leaders accused of atrocities could escape into exile."

Born on 28 February 1948 in Arthington, Liberia, Charles Taylor studied in the United States. In 1979, he was arrested for threatening to occupy the Liberian diplomatic mission in New York. Later he became the president of Liberia between 1997 and 2003 but his terms of office were marked by rebellions and conflicts in the region.

It was reported that the civil conflicts Taylor fomented in Sierra Leone and Liberia cost about 400,000 lives between 1989 and 2003. These killings were said to be characterized by incredible brutality and widespread use of child soldiers. Taylor was initially charged with 17 counts, but the indictment was amended in March 2006 to 11 counts so the specific counts against him are:

- o Five counts of war crimes: terrorizing civilians, murder, outrages on personal dignity, cruel treatment, and looting;
- o Five counts of crimes against humanity: murder, rape, sexual slavery, mutilating and

beating, and enslavement; and

- o One count of other serious violations of international humanitarian law: recruiting and using child soldiers.

Human Rights Watch, an independent, non-governmental organization, supported by contributions from private individuals and foundations worldwide, reported that Taylor's presidency, which lasted from 1997 to 2003, was characterized by intolerance of dissent and harassment of the press, civil society and political opposition. The group added that these and other human rights abuses were accompanied by near-total impunity and the repression ultimately fueled the formation of two rebel groups and, in 1999, a return to armed conflict in Liberia before he was forced from office in August 2003 following rebel incursions into the Liberian capital Monrovia.

In 2003, Taylor traded the Liberian presidency for exile to Nigeria, where he lived until he was arrested in March 2006.

Taylor's trial began on June 4, 2007 and Special Court's prosecutor, Stephen Rapp, has estimated that the trial will last between 12 and 18 months so the verdict is likely to be given before December 2008.

But there are still some pressing concerns for the war victims. As the trial is ongoing in The Hague, about five years after the war ended, Sierra Leone still remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Many of these victims care little or less about the possible outcome of the trial as their immediate pressing needs are yet to be met. Their argument is that the government giving them nothing and the court is not really for them.

"You can free Charles Taylor today and we will not feel it much. You can kill Charles Taylor today and we will not feel it much," says Farma Jalloh, a former government soldier blinded while fighting the RUF rebels. "The international community wants to try Charles Taylor but what will it achieve for the victims?"

Salone Times
Monday, 31 March 2008

TAYLOR'S CLOSE ASSOCIATE FREED

A Dutch appeals court has acquitted a businessman who had been convicted of selling weapons to former Liberian President Charles Taylor.

The court argued that there had been insufficient evidence for a conviction, annulling Dutch timber trader Guus Kouwenhoven's eight-year sentence.

He had been convicted in 2006 of trading weapons for logging rights in Liberia, breaking a UN arms embargo.

Mr Kouwenhoven, an associate of Mr Taylor's, denied the charges.

Civil war

The appeal court criticised the prosecutors' investiga-



Guus Kouwenhoven

tion, saying they had not sufficiently verified witness statements.

"The suspect must be acquitted of these deeds because of far-reaching lack of reliable evidence on which to base a conviction," the judges said.

Mr Kouwenhoven was president of the Oriental Trading Corporation between 2000 and 2003, when the arms smuggling allegedly



Charles Taylor

took place.

Prosecutors had appealed for a tougher sentence

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Taylor's Close Associate Of The Hook

and wanted an additional conviction for war crimes.

He was a close associate of Charles Taylor, who is now on trial in The Hague at a UN-backed court on charges of crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Mr Taylor is accused of backing militias in Sierra Leone that murdered, raped and tortured civilians during the country's civil war from 1991 to 2001.

Mr Taylor gave evidence last month in a closed session of Mr Kouwenhoven's trial. *Credits BBC*

Awareness Times

Friday, 28 March 2008

NMDHR Ends National Consultative Meeting for CSOs in Sierra Leone

By Bintu A Sesay.

The Network Movement for Democracy and Human Rights has concluded a two-day consultative meeting for civil society organizations, human rights focused NGOs and other stakeholders on advocacy campaign for the domestication of the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in Sierra Leone. The event took place at the National Stadium Hostel Hall in Freetown from 26th to 27th march 2008.

The main objectives of the consultative meeting are in the first place to continue to build the network of civil society organizations working on International Justice issues, and also for participants to develop strategies on how to engage the Sierra Leone Government in fulfilling of its obligations under International law by enacting legislation that would incorporate the elements of the Rome Statute into Sierra Leone law.

The meeting is being sponsored by the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC), a global network of over 2,500 civil society organizations working to ensure that the International Criminal Court and the Global Justice system borne from the Rome Statute fight all forms of impunity.

Daily Mail
Friday, 28 March 2008

Courting disaster in Sierra Leone: The £75m bureaucratic farce

by DAVID MATTHEWS –

How the UN Special Court in Sierra Leone, which was set up to try the country's warlords and mass murderers, has turned into a £75m bureaucratic farce...

Draw up a league table of Third World poverty and Sierra Leone is not poor, nor one of the most poor.

It is, by official measure, the poorest.

Of all the world's 177 nations, it is ranked 177th.

Life expectancy is 41 and infant mortality is the worst in the world.

Sixty-five per cent of its GDP is in aid donations, of which the UK contributes £40 million per annum.

A large amount of this investment sits just outside the capital, Freetown, surrounded by razor wire and armed guards.



The Special Court in Sierra Leone: An ongoing war crimes tribunal set up by the Sierra Leonean government and the UN in 2002, to prosecute those who have violated against human rights

Like an alien craft descended on the jungle from another world, the Special Court was for a long time the only place in Sierra Leone that had 24-hour electricity, phone lines, internet access and air conditioning. It houses a modern-day Jarndyce v Jarndyce, Dickens's almost endless Bleak House legal case; an ongoing war-crimes tribunal set up by the Sierra Leonean Government and the UN in 2002 to prosecute those "who bear the greatest responsibility" for human rights violations during the country's ten-year civil war.

Small gangs of low-paid workmen spent months breaking rocks in the baking heat, laying cement and even constructing a helipad in readiness for the day when former Liberian President Charles Taylor would be brought to justice.

"Bring Taylor to the Special Court and there'll be a queue around the block," a local told me.

"Without Taylor, people aren't interested." Only bagging the 59-year-old widely held responsible for the civil war would justify the £75 million Special Court bill being met by the international community, which means mostly the UK and the US.

But when Taylor was finally brought to justice, he was sent for diplomatic reasons to The Hague – his trial began in January and is expected to go on for a year.

The Special Court in Sierra Leone may well, therefore, be the most expensive and ill-advised expression of UN posturing in history.

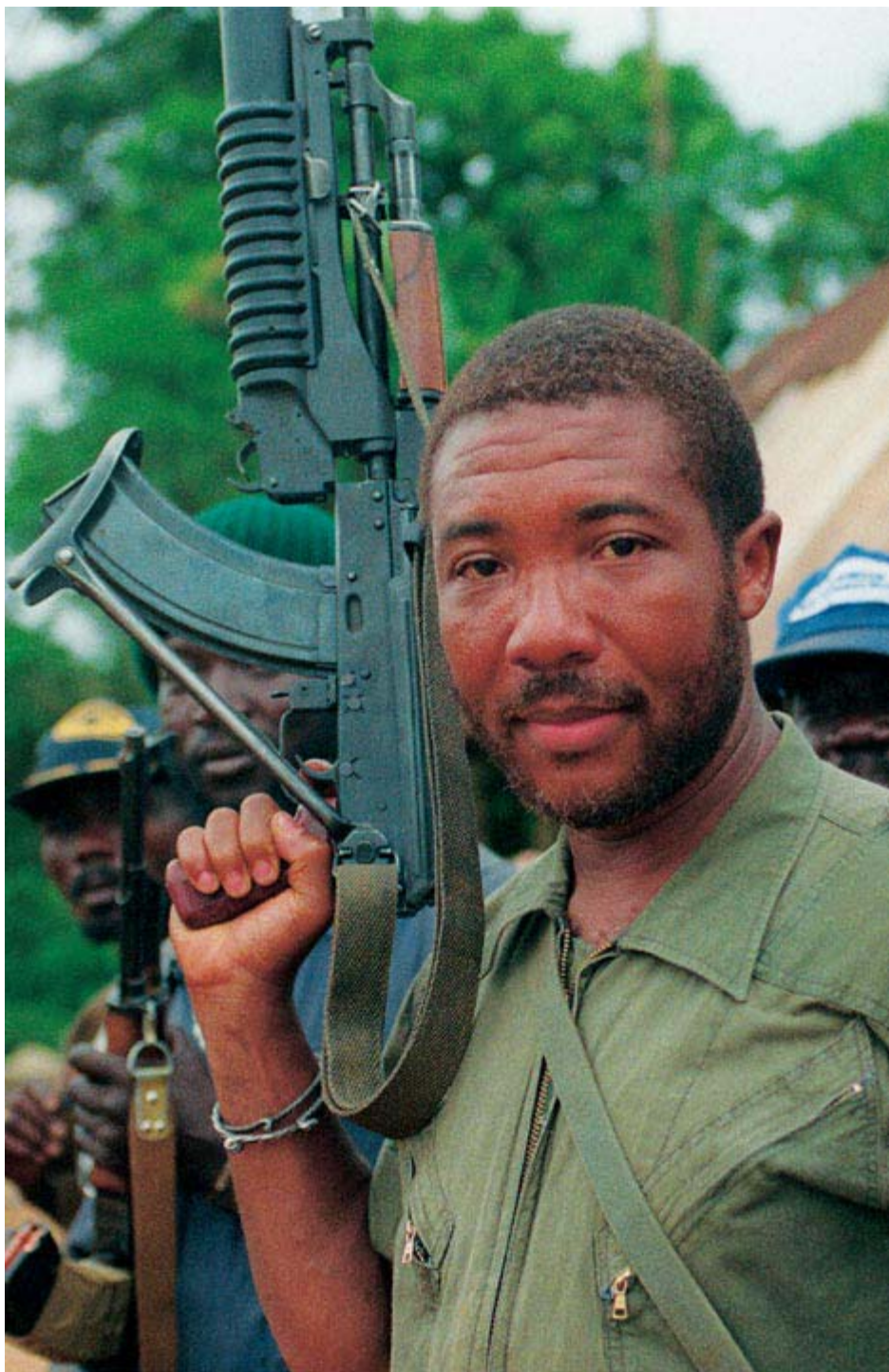
Thus, the court justifies its existence meting out justice to lesser protagonists.

Defendants picked apparently by lottery from the embers of civil strife sit in the dock intermittently, as trials that lumber on for years are rotated.

In between, they go down to the cells guarded by former warders from the H-blocks of Ulster's Maze prison.

The prisoners are prosecuted and defended by QCs, many from Britain, who are constantly on the hunt for witnesses to help build their cases.

Go-betweens are paid with UN money to scour Sierra Leone with "expenses" to draw in rare witnesses – reluctant ex-soldiers, amputees whose limbs were hacked off in the conflict, time-wasters and foreign officials.



Former Liberian leader Charles Taylor (above in 1990) is widely held responsible for the civil war. He was sent for diplomatic reasons to The Hague - his trial began in January and is expected to go on for a year

Who are these go-betweens?

They are freelance investigators, ex-CIA men, or journalist friends of the London barristers; people who, after a few months in Freetown, find themselves living out a Graham Greene novel and wondering at the Kafka-esque process where vast sums

of money change hands to establish truths that cannot be truly established and are only truths depending on one's point of view.

People like me.

The ex-military chopper clattered its way up into the night sky, fighting to get airborne.

I looked around the shabby cabin at my stony-faced fellow travellers, and then out of the porthole at the dense bush below.

Suddenly, we were over an expanse of water.

I heard mumbled prayers.

For a moment, the noise and vibration of the helicopter had me thinking the rotor was about to snap.

To allay this fear, I tried to imagine the chopper as just one big funfair ride. It worked, until I noticed the rusting, second-rate safety equipment with emergency instructions in Russian.



Issa Sesay (centre in orange robe) laughs during his trial. He is charged with murder, rape, mutilation, use of child soldiers, abduction, looting and burning

I knew of at least three Russian-built choppers that had crashed in the past few years, including one the previous summer. All 22 people on board died in the crash.

But what was safer – this machine or the ground beneath me?

I was largely on my own if I got into trouble.

As a UN employee, I'd been provided with the standard "security handbook".

Useful tips on personal safety included "keep a low profile" and "maintain a seven-day supply of food, water, medication and necessary equipment".

Armed robberies and residential burglaries are frequent in Sierra Leone, the handbook noted.

My favourite section, however, was on hostage survival.

Top of the list of helpful hints were "your only job is to survive", and, "fear is a normal reaction immediately after you have been taken. Pause, take a deep breath and try to relax".

It wasn't working. I was already tense from a turbulent flight from Gatwick and an unofficial reception committee at Lungi International Airport that included an amputee who accosted me for money with two stumps where his hands once were.

The chopper into Freetown landed safely.

Twenty minutes later I was in a UN 4x4 stuck in a traffic jam at a chaotic intersection called Lumley roundabout.

Gangs of scrawny youths lurked in the shadows.

Hawkers pressed up against car windows with bread rolls, cigarettes, tea towels and assorted cheap junk.

But for flickering candles, gas lamps and the odd rickety light powered by a clattering generator, the area – the whole city in fact – was enveloped in complete darkness.

The atmosphere matched the lighting: dark, foreboding, tense.

Masses of people with blank expressions moved like zombies; faces were backlit from car headlights; figures appeared from nowhere, then disappeared.

With youth unemployment standing at 80 per cent, there's no shortage of feral kids sitting around smoking weed and drinking gin from plastic bags in this poor, grim, deadbeat city.

I'm a journalist, but I'd gone to Sierra Leone to moonlight as a private investigator.

My invitation had come from a barrister friend, Wayne Jordash, who for three years has represented General Issa Hassan Sesay, one of the rebel leaders on trial at the Special Court.

Jordash shares his chambers with QCs Helena Kennedy and Geoffrey Robertson.

A pugnacious human rights lawyer specialising in criminal defence, he got the gig on the strength of his advocacy skills.

I got the gig on my gift of the gab.

"You know a bit about Sierra Leone, don't you?" Wayne had asked, his voice fading in and out over the crackling mobile phone from Freetown.

"A bit, I guess," I'd replied. I'd read a bit about it, watched a few documentaries, and knew it was in West Africa. "Why do you ask?"

"Well, I've got a little job for you, if you're interested. Cases like this don't come along every day," he told me.

He wasn't kidding. I was to track down witnesses for the defence of General Sesay. I had a few misgivings. Jordash had none.

"To my mind there is no moral dilemma about representing someone charged with crimes against humanity or war crimes," he said firmly.

"The idea that you can create a court to promote the rule of law, but then don't provide them with a strong defence is morally repugnant."

Morally repugnant is how most of us would assess the Sierra Leone conflict.

Over ten years, it cost an estimated 75,000 lives – in a country of just over five million, there is no Sierra Leonean alive today who has not been touched by the fighting in some way.

The case against 37-year-old father of two Sesay is this: as commanding officer of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) he was responsible for war crimes committed by his subordinates and himself.

Included in the 18 counts on his indictment are charges of terrorising the civilian population, the unlawful killing of "several hundred civilians in various locations..." extermination, murder, forced "marriage", rape, physical violence including mutilations involving "cutting off limbs and carving RUF on the bodies of civilians", use of child soldiers, abductions and forced labour, looting, burning and attacks on UN personnel.

He, however, argues that he shouldn't bear responsibility for war crimes because he was fighting for what he believed was a legitimate cause.

From my reading of the case, and from speaking to Sierra Leoneans on the ground, Sesay is something of a patsy, a fall guy caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The chief of the detention facility, Barry Wallace, met me at the cell block attached to the Special Court.

He is in his sixties, grey-haired, physically unimposing; a man of few words, to me at least.

He had a steely calm about him. He was a bit like Tom Hanks as the chief warden in a Sierra Leonean version of *The Green Mile*.

The Maze guys, and the local screws for that matter, seemed to take everything in their stride.

I didn't know what to expect from my first meeting with Issa Sesay.

In photos he appeared to be a skinny, unassuming character no different to any hawk or hustler I'd encountered on the streets of a thousand Third World cities.

Then he appeared at the cell door. He wore a white basketball vest, blue shorts and flip-flops.

Here was the former leader of one of the world's most notorious modern guerrilla armies, a man accused of killing an untold number of men, women and children, and he was dressed for the beach, ambling along as though he didn't have a care in the world.

"Mr David," he said, extending his arm.

I shook his hand: it was soft, gentle. He then touched his heart in a customary show of respect.

"Issa, good to see you," I said.



The Special Court in Freetown: 'The UN saw the Special Court as a noble enterprise, but many of the staff had no interest in dispensing justice'

We appeared to have got straight on to first-name terms.

We scrutinised each other momentarily.

For an alleged war criminal, he wasn't what I'd imagined.

In discussing the charges against him, he was laid-back, but occasionally he'd show signs of frustration – condemning the Nigerian peacekeepers and Sierra Leonean President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah for their "betrayal". We sat down and got to business.

Sesay stared at me with dark, yellowing, almost vacant eyes as he produced a crumbling address book and reeled off names and numbers of potential defence witnesses.

"As my special investigator, my brother," said Sesay, still eyeing me intently, "I have faith in you."

He shuffled off with a slight limp, the result of a bullet lodged in his pelvis. I took "brother" as nothing more than courtesy.

Sesay could think what he wanted of me, as could those who thought he deserved nothing more than a rope.

I left the detention centre armed with a clutch of leads and Sesay's protestations ringing in my ears. Notions of innocence and guilt, right and wrong seemed even more blurred.

My role was to try to uncover documentary evidence – news cuttings, TV footage and radio transcripts – and track down a few witnesses.

I began by trawling around Susan's Bay, a slum by the shoreline in Freetown.

As I stepped off the steep concrete steps leading from the city streets onto the slum floor, I felt the ground move.

It was soft, squidgy, matted earth.

The slum literally had no foundations. "All this is reclaimed land," said my local guide Charlie.

Children played in effluent with pigs, as locals dressed in rags eyed us curiously.

The stench of rotting garbage hung heavy in the air.

"These are the conditions in which the rebels were born," said Charlie.

"This is where the Issa Sesays come from..."

For the first week in Freetown I stayed in relatively palatial splendour at the Lacs Villa Hotel, an ex-colonial spread tucked away off a dirt road not far from the Special Court.

For a hundred bucks a night you didn't get much, but at least the room was spacious and it had the essentials: mosquito net, fan, air-con and a TV that worked.

One day, while waiting for a cab that never came, I noticed a young guard sitting at the wrought-iron hotel gate, the first line of defence between the guests and the throng of hustlers outside.

"What are you reading?" I asked.

He looked up listlessly, and turned the book to show me the cover: Graham Greene. *The Heart Of The Matter*. I laughed.

The guard failed to see the irony.

The novel is based on Greene's work as an agent with the Secret Intelligence Service in Sierra Leone during World War II.

Given the nature of my business, Greene's central line seemed all too poignant: "If one knew the facts, would one have to feel pity even for the planets? If one reached what they called the heart of the matter?"

With the last 3,000 UN peacekeepers set to leave the country, there was an air of nervous expectation in Freetown.

As a hack, I was naturally cagey about who I dealt with and where I went.

I had a couple of minor altercations with secret-service goons in Freetown, bunged a couple of cops to let me go about my business, witnessed a handful of street fights and the odd moment of police brutality, but on the whole avoided trouble.

I did, however, have a laptop mysteriously lifted from my luggage at Lungi airport.

A potential witness I'd lined up was beaten up by a gang of youths and robbed of a computer, £1,000 in cash and some research he'd carried out.

Being naturally paranoid, I always watched my back. I was under no illusions as to the potential danger of what I was up to.

During the following days and weeks I became accustomed to the Byzantine nature of the conflict, the Special Court, Sierra Leonean politics and weird tales, dead ends, lies and obfuscation that came with it.

Running around in circles became the norm.

Whether it was being regaled with tales of militiamen cannibalism or the various methods of amputation used by rebels, everyone I met seemed to be long on tall tales but short of concrete evidence.

I sent one witness, for example, on a mission to find some RUF communiqués and documents.

When he came back, he instead produced what purported to be a bill for more than 500,000 leones (£85) from a "nurse who had treated him for a motorcycle accident". The bill was clearly written in his own hand.

But I was getting nowhere with small-fry.

I needed a heavyweight witness – suffice to say, most of the phone calls I made were met with, "What? Hold on," followed by a beeping and then the sound of silence.

There were some successes, however, at least in terms of response.

For instance, the Nigerian Foreign Minister at the time, Oluyemi Adeniji, who had been the head of the UN's Sierra Leone mission (UNAMSIL) when the conflict ended in 2002, had told me over the phone that he was prepared to make a statement on Sesay's behalf, thus providing evidence of his peacemaking efforts.

Yet when I tried to "close" him and get him to actually come to the Special Court as a defence witness he said, diplomatically of course, "Well, given my position in the Nigerian Government that would be something of a problem..."

Unsurprisingly, President Kabbah was also reluctant to have his day in court. Having despatched a number of suitably fawning written invitations to him, I decided to doorstep Mr Big at his residence with yet another grovelling letter inviting him to give evidence.

The letter was duly received by one of his heavies before I was politely shown the exit.

I wasn't uncovering the truth. I felt like I was wading in misery.

Muckson Sesay – no relation to Issa – was someone who had helped bring about peace.

He had organised the conflict's first disarmament meeting in 1999 and was responsible for the release of 1,000 children from the rebels.

An urbane man in his thirties, Muckson, like Issa Sesay, had been forced into the RUF, but under very different circumstances.

"I was alone. I dug a grave and wrapped the remains of my father in banana leaves and buried him," he told me, having explained how the RUF had attacked his village and burned his father alive in his home.

"I didn't realise the RUF were about to ambush me. They surrounded me, stripped me and beat me. I was detained and given two options: either join them or be killed."

Muckson's story was heart-wrenching but by no means the worst.

One local investigator told me about his nephew, a boy barely in his teens, who had hero-worshipped the RUF.

"Every time they came to town he followed them around," he said. "He pestered them for a gun."

The boy's persistence eventually paid off and he was given an AK-47.

"The thing was bigger than he was. Then one day, at an RUF gathering, the stupid boy was messing around with it. Somehow the trigger caught..." The gun went off, spraying bullets. Someone was killed, others were injured. The boy was beaten to death.

Ultimately the gravy train ran dry, at least as far as I was concerned.

I'd done all I could, which in the scheme of things didn't feel like much.

But Issa Sesay still thought I had work to do, places to go, people to meet.

"You need to go to Nigeria and talk to Obasanjo and the generals," he said. Didn't he realise that these people didn't want to play ball? Anyway, events overtook us.

The UN caught Taylor after the Nigerian authorities sold him out.

But rather than try him in Sierra Leone, he's in the dock in The Hague, far from the glare of those who deserve to see him face justice.

With his defence adding another £50,000 a month to the Special Court bill and several key players now dead, many feel the UN's flagship legal institution is well past its sell-by date.

The court was due to complete its business four years ago; still it stumbles on.

Sesay only finished giving evidence just before Christmas and his trial is likely to go on until late summer.

"I don't think the Special Court is a model worth replicating elsewhere," says Wayne Jordash.

While the UN undoubtedly saw it as a noble enterprise, of the more than 300 staff, plenty were idle and useless and had little or no interest in the dispensation of justice.

Local people soon became bored and cynical about its purpose.

The court was big on talk of "legacy", but as far as I could see the only legacy it would provide would be an opportunity for the well-connected to plunder and loot every scrap of material from the compound once the whole game was up.

I'd already observed people eyeing up the air-con units in court.

Sierra Leone itself is getting back on its feet.

It is a nation of resourceful, stoical people who no longer have the will for war.

But the idea that the UN's Special Court could endure beyond the last bureaucratic act of rubber stamping was a joke.

Once the circus has left town, the complex – offices, furniture, wood-panelled courtrooms and all – will be picked apart, like a rotting carcass in the harsh West African sun.

A NATION TORN IN TWO

The civil war in Sierra Leone started on March 23 1991, after years of dictatorship, rampant corruption and contempt for the populace, when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), led by the Fagin-esque Foday Sankoh and backed by Charles Taylor crossed the border from their camp in Liberia and attacked a small town.

In the years that followed, there would be three coups - not to mention a thriving 'blood diamonds' industry - that would suck in UK-based mercenaries Sandline and South African hired guns Executive Outcomes, a gung-ho Nigerian peacekeeping force known as Ecomog and finally a UN deployment of some 17,500 troops – the biggest in its history.

In September 2000, 11 British soldiers had to be rescued just outside Freetown by a combined force of SAS troops and soldiers from 1 Para in 'Operation Barras', after being kidnapped by the notorious Westside Boys - a rebel gang with little or no political affiliation comprised of escaped prisoners, ex-soldiers and assorted miscreants.

After Foday Sankoh was arrested and imprisoned by the Sierra Leonean Government in 2000, Issa Sesay was installed as RUF 'interim' leader during peace negotiations at the end of the war.

With Sankoh in jail (where he died three years later) Sesay and the government reached a settlement, which included power-sharing between President Kabbah's Government and the rebels, an amnesty for crimes committed up to the signing of the agreement and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The twist came when a UN special representative attached a disclaimer excluding crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. Sesay was arrested.

Since then, more than 70,000 combatants have been disarmed and the country has re-established a democracy.

UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries 28 March 2008

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

Newspaper Summary

National Census Extended by three Days

(Heritage, Daily Observer)

- The Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information services Thursday announced the extension of the enumeration period by three additional days starting today, Friday, March 28 to Sunday, March 30, 2008 in a bid to ensure that all Liberians living in the country are counted. The process should have ended on 21 March.
- In a statement, LISGIS asked all coordinators, inspectors and field supervisors to redeploy enumerators who have completed their EA's to areas that have not been fully covered. Meanwhile, LISGIS has requested the public to continue to show its usual understanding and patriotism in accomplishing this national development process.

Lawmakers Set up Committee to Probe Rising Prices

(The Inquirer, National Chronicle, Heritage)

- Members of the House of Representatives say they are frustrated over the continued increase in the prices of basic commodities on the market and vowed to institute all necessary measures to bring the situation under control. At its regular session yesterday, some members of the lower House said the situation must be treated as an emergency and want an immediate action taken to remedy the problem.
- A report read by the House committee on Commerce outlined certain factors that they thought were responsible for the hike in the prices of basic commodities on the market. Meanwhile, the House plenary has added four persons to the existing seven-member Commerce Committee to investigate the hike in the prices of basic commodities on the local market.

Liberian Government Requests Return of Refugees to Buduburam Camp

(New Vision, Public Agenda, The Inquirer, The Analyst, Daily Observer,)

- The Government of Liberia has requested the Ghanaian government to return over 600 Liberian refugees taken at Kordiabe in the east of the country back to the Buduburam camp. Speaking to journalists on Thursday, Information Minister Laurence Bropleh said the request followed an assessment of the area and thought there was no need for the refugees to be held in isolation during this period of intervention.
- On the resolution by the Ghanaian government to send Liberian refugees back home, Minister Bropleh said the government has called for a stay order. He said government wants some time to prepare as it is currently not in the position to receive and reintegrate over 10,000 refugees at once. Minister Bropleh however, said if the diplomatic requests are not accepted by Ghana, government would have no option but to receive its citizens. Foreign Minister Olubanke King Akerele is heading the Liberian delegation that is negotiating with the Ghanaian government.

President Sirleaf Tours Visiting U.S. Military Ship

(Daily Observer, The Analyst)

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and an array of government officials on Thursday toured two U.S. military ships, the HSV SWIFT and USS Fort Mc-Henry currently visiting the country. The ships are visiting Liberia as part of the Africa Partnership Station (APS), an initiative to promote maritime safety and security on the continent.
- Speaking during the tour, President Sirleaf commended the Africa Partnership Station for its effort in ensuring maritime security in the country and challenged the 40 personnel of the new Armed Forces of Liberia trained by the American servicemen to practice what they have learned.
- The APS trained the soldiers in dealing with illegal trafficking, extremism, unlawful fishing, smuggling and drugs trafficking.

Police and Media Agree on Mutual Cooperation

(Daily Observer, The Inquirer, The Informer)

- The Liberia National Police (LNP) and the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) yesterday held an interactive forum aimed at finding a common ground relative to the operations of the two institutions. The forum which brought together an array of senior police officers and the media discussed among other things what the media termed as police excesses against journalists in the execution of their duties.
- The police for its part advised the media to adhere to restrictions in the execution of their duties saying the job of the police is to ensure security and that duty cannot be compromised. At the close of the forum, the two organizations agreed to engage each other constructively for the good of all in the execution of their respective duties.

Radio Summary

Local Media – Radio Veritas (News monitored today at 9:45 am)

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(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth F.M. and ELBC)

Liberia Wants Ghana Release Refugees from Isolation

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth F.M. and ELBC)

Lawmakers Worry over Soaring Prices

Star Radio (News culled today from website at 8:35 am)

China Constructs Modern Hospital in Nimba County

- In an interview, Chinese Ambassador, Zhou Yuxiao says China is constructing a US\$10 million hospital with modern facilities in Tappita, Nimba County and would consist of 100 beds when completed. Ambassador Yuxiao said his country would also build an Agricultural Technology Demonstration Hub at the Centre for Agricultural Research Institute in Bong County and said when completed it would be used to train local farmers to engage in agriculture to reduce the importation of rice.
- He put the construction of the Agricultural Technology Demonstration Centre US\$30 million.
- Meanwhile, the All -China Women’s Federation donated a consignment of training materials to the Ministry of Gender and Development Ministry to support its women empowerment programme.

Associated Press

Friday, 28 March 2008

Hariri Tribunal Has Startup Funds

By ALEXANDRA OLSON

The international tribunal for suspects in the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri has enough funding to keep it running for a year, meeting a key criteria for its final approval, the U.N. legal chief said Thursday.

U.N. member countries have pledged some \$60 million for the tribunal, surpassing the \$50 million needed for its establishment and first year of operations, said Nicolas Michel, the U.N. undersecretary-general for legal affairs. The tribunal has so far received about \$34 million of the promised funds, he added.

That removes one obstacle for the tribunal's final go-ahead by U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon nearly a year after the Security Council voted to create it.

But the U.N. chief must also receive indications though not concrete pledges that the tribunal will have enough money for its second and third years.

He must also be satisfied with the progress made by a U.N. investigation into the Feb. 14, 2005 truck bombing that killed Hariri and 22 others. Nobody has been charged in the attack, and a U.N. inquiry has gone through several chief investigators since it began in 2005.

The new chief, former Canadian prosecutor Daniel Bellemare, is expected to release his first report soon, and the Security Council will likely begin discussing it in early April, Michel said.

Many Lebanese have blamed neighboring Syria for the assassination, and four pro-Syrian Lebanese generals have been under arrest for almost two years for alleged involvement. Syria denies any involvement, but the furor over the attack forced Syrian troops to withdraw from Lebanon after a 29-year presence.

The United States has been one of the biggest contributors, pledging \$14 million.

Because much depends on the status of the investigation, Michel said he could not give an approximate date for the establishment of the tribunal. But he said he was confident funding would not be an obstacle.

United Nations News Centre

Friday, 28 March 2008

Call for judges at UN-backed tribunal to investigate more Khmer Rouge crimes

28 March 2008 – Co-prosecutors at the United Nations-backed tribunal trying Khmer Rouge leaders accused of mass killings and other crimes in Cambodia in the late 1970s have called for new investigations of possible crimes committed at a security and detention centre in the South-East Asian country during the notorious era.

In a formal submission to co-investigating judges on Wednesday, the co-prosecutors at the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia (ECCC) in Phnom Penh, the capital, have requested a probe into allegations raised by civil society groups and victims.

The allegations relate to a security centre where numerous Cambodians were unlawfully detained, subjected to inhumane conditions and forced labour, tortured and executed between 1975 and 1979.

Co-prosecutor Robert Petit said that “these factual allegations, if founded, could constitute crimes against humanity, and violations of the 1956 Penal Code punishable under ECCC law and we have so alleged in our supplementary submission.”

The co-prosecutors have also requested that Nuon Chea, Ieng Sary, Khieu Samphan, Ieng Thirith and Kaing Guek Eav – who are all currently in the custody of the ECCC – be investigated for their involvement in these crimes.

The supplementary submission was accompanied by about 1,500 pages of analytical reports, witness statements and other documents from the era.

Under an agreement signed by the UN and Cambodia, the ECCC was set up as an independent court using a mixture of Cambodian staff and judges and foreign personnel. It is designated to try those deemed most responsible for crimes and serious violations of Cambodian and international law between 17 April 1975 and 6 January 1979.