

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



Appeals Chamber Legal Officer Cyril Laucci departs on Thursday after a year at the Special Court.

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

Wednesday, 31 May 2006

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

Liberia Asks U.N. To Lift Sanctions / *New Vision* Pages 3-4

International Press

UN Backed Court Denies Motion / *Star Radio Online* Page 5

Court Denies Taylor's Motion / *Africa News Dimension* Page 6

Verdict Awaited in Liberian "Blood Timber" Trial / *Agence France Presse* Pages 7-9

US Investigate Taylor's Son: Torture & War Crime / *Scoop Independent News* Pages 10-11

Liberian President's Son's Arraignment in Miami Postponed / *Associated Press* Page 12

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary / *UNMIL* Pages 13-15

New Vision
Wednesday, 31 May 2006

Liberia Asks UN to Lift Sanctions

By A Correspondent

Liberia has formally asked the UN General Assembly to lift up sanctions imposed during the war by UN Resolution, as the country has regained peace and relative stability.

Sanctions on the export diamonds and other products



can now be lifted so that Liberia will generate revenue to finance its post conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction programmes.

In the first place sanctions against Liberia were mandated by UN Resolutions in its bids

Contd. Page 2

Liberia Asks UN to Lift Sanctions

to put an end to the long dragging civil conflict in that country which was later imported into neighbouring Sierra Leone. It is believed by many politicians that had it not been for the sanctions imposed by the UN on Liberia under the regime of Charles Ghankay Taylor, the civil war would have never ended.

But a lot of people do not share that view. The fact remains that sanctions alone would not have brought Taylor down on his knees. The presence of the UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone with the principal mandate to prosecute all those who bear the greatest responsibility for the decade long civil war in Sierra Leone is a major contributory factor to peace.

To look at the issue from another perspective it was not only a question of bringing to book warlords on the Sierra Leonean scene—such as Chief Hinga Norman of the Civil Defence Force (CDF) and the Kamajor faction, Gen. Issa Sesay of the RUF and their closest collaborators, but equally Charles Ghankay Taylor of the neighbouring Liberia, the former president of Liberia and ex-warlord.

If one closely analyse the civil conflicts in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, there were several instances of collaborations and similarities. One of such was the “blood diamond” syndrome, a process whereby revenue accrued from the illegal mining of diamonds in Sierra Leone and partly in Liberia by the rebels of Charles

Taylor significantly contributed to fueling the war in Sierra Leone.

The UN acted promptly by not only imposing sanctions on the sale of diamonds from Liberia, but from all conflict zones in the world especially Sierra Leone, Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo. It became crystal clear to the international community that the type of gem stones that usually emanate from Sierra Leone and Liberia in normal peace times were being flooded on the De-beer and other world markets in large quantities and with a substantial amount of the profits being directed to the Switzerland bank accounts of Charles Ghankay Taylor.

Indeed it was factual that Taylor was not only making huge profits from “blood-diamonds,” But equally from other precious revenue generating exports from Liberia such as timber, rubber, gold and iron ore. The sanctions imposed on Taylor’s despotic regime was thus done at least in two phases—on timber, diamonds and economics assistance from international institutions such as the EU and IMF.

Ironically it was not only Taylor’s regime that felt the pinch of the bites. Those who suffered the most out of sanctions were the common people of Liberia whose interests the sanctions were meant to safe-guard. The sanctions made the values of the exchange rate between the Liberian and the US dollar to

depreciate considerably, and on a daily basis prices skyrocketed.

The sanctions implied a complete freeze on the export of diamonds, timber, and other valuable, thereby considerably crippling the revenue generation capacity of the government.

But it appeared that the sanctions had little effects on Taylor himself and his closest associates as they always relied on their overseas bank accounts.

This is why it will never be an overestimation to indicate that although sanctions against Liberia were effective; their impact would have done little to force the regime to peace overtures. Taylor and his group resorted to tampering with the Liberia Maritime Funds which hardly dries out for personal use.

It was the international arrest warrant from the Special Court that was issued against Charles Taylor while attending an ECOWAS summit on Liberia in Accra, Ghana that cooled down his spirit, not the sanctions.

Now that the war in Sierra Leone officially ended in January 2002 and the 14-year Liberian Civil War officially ended after the installation of an interim government and now the democratically elected first post war government of Mrs. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, there have seen incessant cries from world leaders to the UN that all sanctions against Liberia that were imposed during the war should be lifted so as to address the humanitarian and development goals of that country.

Star Radio (Liberia)

29 May 2006

<http://www.starradio.org.lr/>



The UN-backed Special Court in Sierra Leone has denied the motion filed by the defense Counsel of former Liberian President Charles Taylor.

The motion sought for the trial of Mr. Taylor to take place in Sierra Leone.

The Appeal Chamber of the Special Court ruled that the court has no jurisdiction over the change of venue of the trial.

The Chamber said the determination of trial venue is the prerogative of the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone.

The ruling is an indication that the former Liberian President may likely be transferred to the International Court in The Hague.

African News Dimension

Tuesday, 30 May 2006

Court denies Taylor's Motion

By Patrick Wrokpoh

Monrovia (AND) Latest reports coming from Freetown, Sierra Leone, suggest that the Special War Crime Court has denied a motion filed by lawyers representing the former Liberian leader Charles Taylor.

The motion was requesting the court to conduct the case in Freetown, rather than transferring the case to the, Hague.

According to Star Radio, an independent Liberian Radio Station, which was broadcasting live from Freetown with its correspondent Saah Nyemah, the court, denied the motion today on grounds that the issue to change venue, does not fall with its mandate but rather the United Nations and the Sierra Leone government.

The station, which has a largest audience in Liberia and is awarded by the umbrella group of all journalists in the country as the leading radio station in Liberia, said the latest ruling now means that the case will likely be transferred to the Hague.

Asked on the issue of how Mr. Taylor's lawyers reacted to the ruling, the station's Freetown correspondent, said the motion was denied in an open court and as such, Mr. Taylor lawyers did not respond immediately.

On the issue as to what is next that that the motion has been dismissed, the station Freetown correspondent said it would take at least six months, before it will resume.

The lawyers of Mr. Taylor filed the motion last month, urging the court to try Taylor in Freetown.

Mr. Taylor himself also pleaded with the court to hear his case in Freetown, when he made his first appearance in court in April.

Agence France-Presse

Wednesday, 31 May 2006

Verdict Awaited in Liberian "Blood Timber" Trial

By Stephanie van den Berg

THE HAGUE, The Netherlands, (ENS) - The trial of Guus Kouwenhoven, a Dutch businessman accused of trading weapons for lucrative timber concessions in war-torn Liberia, officially closed in The Hague last week, pending a verdict from judges.

In a high-ceilinged courtroom overlooked by a large portrait of Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands, the three judges have spent the last five weeks hearing detailed evidence about the 14-year civil war that wracked Liberia, leaving some 250,000 people dead.

Kouwenhoven is accused under Dutch law of war committing war crimes and violating the United Nations arms embargo that was in place against Liberia in 2001-03.

Guus Kouwenhoven, a Dutch national, started a hotel and a gambling business in Liberia in the 1980s. (Photo courtesy The Liberian Post)

His so-called "blood timber" trade is said to have provided weapons for militias loyal to former Liberian president Charles Taylor, who fought his way to power and presided over years of conflict. In return, Kouwenhoven allegedly received logging concessions.

Taylor, who is himself facing charges of crimes against humanity, war crimes and violations of international human rights at the Special Court for Sierra Leone, this week refused to give evidence in the Kouwenhoven trial, despite requests from both prosecution and defence.

The former president, who is currently being held in the Sierra Leonean capital Freetown after he was arrested in Nigeria last month, may yet appear in The Netherlands. The United Nations-backed Sierra Leone war crimes court has asked for his trial to be held in The Hague for security reasons.

There has been strong opposition to Taylor's transfer from his defense counsel in Freetown, and – for different reasons - from local human rights groups who fear that the local population would not be able to follow the proceedings in detail if the trial was held in Europe.

The Dutch authorities have added the condition that a third country would have to provide a jail cell for Taylor in the event that he was convicted. So far, there have been no takers.

Hosting Taylor's trial would bolster The Hague's claims to be the world's "legal capital." The city already houses the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, ICTY; the newly created permanent International Criminal Court, ICC, and the United Nations' International Court of Justice, ICJ, as well as a number of other arbitration and settlement tribunals.

Dutch domestic courts are not left out of the picture, either. Under a new law passed in 2003 – to coincide with the setting up of the ICC – genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture committed abroad can be prosecuted in Dutch national courts, as long as the suspect is arrested in the Netherlands.

In Kouwenhoven's case, his alleged crimes date from before 2003, but he has been brought to trial under an earlier version of the law which allows Dutch citizens to face prosecution for war crimes committed abroad.

Since the national prosecutor's office set up a special team to investigate war crimes three years ago, there has been a steady stream of such cases.

"Tracking down and prosecuting international crimes such as war crimes have an understandably high priority," the Dutch prosecutor John Lucas told the court hearing Kouwenhoven's case.

Last year, the same national court in The Hague convicted two former high-ranking officers in the Soviet-era Afghan intelligence service of war crimes and torture. They each received prison terms of up to 12 years in prison.

In December, Frans van Anraat, an ex-chemicals trader, became the first Dutch national to be convicted of war crimes abroad, after he was found guilty of selling chemicals to the Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq; the substances were used in poison gas attacks on Kurdish villages. Van Anraat got a 15-year sentence.

During the Kouwenhoven trial, the prosecution painted him as a money-grubbing wheeler-dealer who cosied up to Charles Taylor to advance his business interests.

In exchange for privileges for his companies – the Royal Timber Company and Oriental Timber Corporation – prosecutors say he smuggled weapons into Liberia for Taylor's militias.

He used his contacts "to provide infamous war criminals with weapons, clothing, food, finances and transportation and medical care when they were injured", prosecutor John Lucas said in his closing arguments. "He personally instructed merciless Taylor supporters – many young and under the influence of drugs – [and] gave them encouragement and promises of cash rewards."

Lucas concluded, "This makes him as guilty of war crimes as if he had pulled the trigger personally, and therefore he should be convicted of participation in the commission of war crimes."

Kouwenhoven, known in Liberia as "Mr. Gus", was present when arms were unloaded in the Liberian port of Buchanan, said the prosecution, and he discussed military strategy with Taylor, the warlord turned president.

There were many testimonies from people who said that, while employed by Kouwenhoven's timber companies, they went to the front lines to fight as members of militias. They told horrific tales of crimes they had committed such as rape, decapitation, and burning people alive in their huts.

Illegally cut logs are identified by environmentalist Silas Siakor and a team of trainees.

Witness George Moore, who worked for the Oriental Timber Corporation from 1999 onwards, testified that he was sent to fight in 2001 in Gueckedou close to the border with Guinea. There he saw people cut open and their hearts taken out and eaten. He spoke of babies whose skulls were bashed against walls until they died, and other infants thrown down wells.

Prosecutors swept aside Kouwenhoven's arguments that he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, and that he did not want to abandon his businesses in Liberia because of the fighting.

To support their claim that he was a war profiteer, they pointed to the fact that he moved his business activities to Brazzaville after the fall of Taylor in 2003.

"He is not a businessman who was in the wrong place at the wrong time but a man whose affairs flourished in an environment of corruption, failing government and armed conflict," they said.

Throughout his trial, Kouwenhoven insisted he was innocent. He told the judges he did not hear much about the bloody civil war while it was going on around him in the 1990s, and was only aware in a general sense that atrocities were sometimes committed.

Defense lawyer Inez Weski tried to cast her client as someone who had been "crushed between the different forces working to remove the regime of Charles Taylor."

She suggested that various reports on the Liberian timber trade produced by the United Nations and nongovernment organizations, suggesting that Kouwenhoven's companies had exchanged guns for timber, were an attempt by opponents of Taylor to deprive him of logging concession revenues, his biggest income source.

The lawyer also pounced on the biggest apparent weakness in the prosecution case - the numerous contradictory statements by witnesses. Even the judges referred to the binder with the written transcripts of testimonies as "the big book of fairy tales" during the trial.

Kouwenhoven used his last words to profess his innocence once again.

"I never saw weapons on a ship in the port of Buchanan. I was never present when arms were handed out. I was never present at military meetings with Taylor. I never encouraged OTC [Oriental Timber Corporation] personnel to go to the front lines," he said.

Weski also alleged that the Dutch prosecutors were desperate to show the world that they could pursue war crimes cases. They were, she said, blinded by the limelight which comes with such high-profile war crimes trials, and had created a "self-fulfilling prophesy" in setting out the indictment.

The prosecution has asked for a 20-year prison sentence and a fine of 450,000 euros.

A verdict is expected on June 7.

Scoop Independent News

Wednesday, 31 May 2006

<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/>

US Investigate Taylor's Son: Torture & War Crime

Son of Ex-Liberian President in U.S. Custody, To Be Arraigned on Tuesday

(New York) – The U.S. Department of Justice should investigate with a view to prosecuting Charles “Chuckie” Taylor, Jr., the son of former Liberian President Charles Taylor, for torture and war crimes, Human Rights Watch said today. The younger Taylor is implicated in committing such abuses while he served as the commander of an elite pro-government military unit in Liberia.

The former Liberian president’s son is scheduled to be arraigned on Tuesday, May 30 at 10 a.m. in Miami before Judge Barry L. Garber in the New North Courtroom of the Dyer Building. He is indicted for falsely stating his father’s name in a U.S. passport application. He was taken into U.S. custody on March 30 when he attempted to enter the United States at Miami International Airport.

“‘Chuckie’ Taylor headed a military unit that allegedly committed egregious abuses such as burning Liberian civilians alive,” said Richard Dicker, International Justice director at Human Rights Watch. “Federal law allows for investigation and prosecution of such crimes. We look to the Justice Department to do just that.”

According to information and research by Human Rights Watch and other international human rights organizations, “Chuckie” Taylor was involved in committing serious crimes from approximately 1997 through at least 2002, most notably while he headed the notorious Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), a unit of the Liberian government security forces.

Although the younger Taylor lived in Liberia, he is a U.S. citizen who was born in the United States. It is a crime under federal law for a U.S. citizen to commit torture and war crimes abroad.

“Federal laws on torture and war crimes committed abroad have been on the books for years, but we don’t know of a single person who has been prosecuted for them,” said Dicker. “How serious can the U.S. be about justice when these laws have never been used to hold our own citizens to account? With ‘Chuckie’ Taylor in custody, this is an ideal moment to wield this authority.”

Recently, the U.N. Committee against Torture expressed concern that there have been no prosecutions under the U.S. criminal torture statute.

According to information and research available to Human Rights Watch, during “Chuckie” Taylor’s tenure as head of the ATU, the unit committed torture, including various violent assaults, beating people to death, rape, and burning civilians alive. This information suggests that the ATU also committed war crimes during Liberia’s armed conflict from 1999 to 2003 – including extrajudicial killing of civilians and prisoners, rape and other torture, abduction, and child soldier recruitment – while “Chuckie” Taylor headed the ATU.

To underscore the need for investigation and prosecution of Taylor, Jr. on torture and war crimes under federal law (18 USC sections 2340A and 2441), Human Rights Watch submitted a

memorandum to the Department of Justice on serious abuses in which “Chuckie” Taylor is implicated. The memorandum includes Human Rights Watch’s research and information from other human rights organizations, along with other open source material documenting the evidence against him to date.

Background on ATU

Shortly after his inauguration as Liberia’s president in 1997, Charles Taylor created the ATU. The ATU was initially used in Liberia to protect government buildings, the Executive Mansion, the international airport, and to provide security for some foreign embassies. According to Human Rights Watch interviews with former Liberian combatants, the ATU’s responsibilities were expanded in 1999 to include combat and other war-related duties, after rebels from the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy began operating in Liberian territory.

Associated Press

Tuesday, 30 May 2006

Liberian President's Son's Arraignment in Miami Postponed

MIAMI (AP) -- A judge in Miami has postponed the arraignment of the son of former Liberian President Charles Taylor on passport fraud charges.

Charles McArthur Emmanuel's hearing today was postponed because he's seeking a private lawyer. The next hearing is scheduled for July fifth.

Emmanuel was arrested in March at Miami International Airport after arriving from Trinidad. Prosecutors say Emmanuel, also known as Charles "Chuckie" Taylor Junior, lied about the identity of his father on his application for a passport.

Emmanuel, a US citizen who was born in Boston to a former girlfriend of Taylor's, is being held without bail.

Taylor, president of Liberia from 1997 to 2003, faces eleven war crimes and crimes against humanity charges in a special United Nations-backed court for his alleged role in a civil war. Emmanuel was head of Liberia's Anti-Terrorist Unit during his father's presidency.

United Nations  Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 30 May 2006

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

International Clips on Liberia

THE HERALD (UNITED KINGDOM) 05/30/2006 06:32:13

Briefing: Ma Ellen

SHE arrived in Britain yesterday for a three-day official visit that will include an audience with the Queen. Q: Ma Ellen? A: That's what Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is affectionately known as in Liberia, the country of which she is president. When she defeated George Weah, the former footballer, in polling for the presidency in late 2005, she became Africa's first female elected head of state. Q: Her manifesto? A: In speeches, she often compared Liberia to a sick child needing a loving mother's tender care (the country was in ruin after 14 years of civil war). Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf hopes to encourage British investment in Liberia to improve the country's prospects. Q: What can she offer in return? A: A commitment to honest, competent government that respects human rights. Also, zero tolerance of cata cata.

LIBERIA: Former fighters ordered off rubber plantations

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

MONROVIA, 26 May 2006 (IRIN) - President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has asked UN peacekeepers to help the government take control of two rubber plantations occupied by former rebel fighters who have been illegally tapping latex.

International Clips on West Africa

05/30/2006 10:19:04

AU expresses concern over delay towards Ivorian October elections

Addis Ababa_(dpa) _ The African Union's Peace and Security Council expressed concern Tuesday over "considerable delay" in implementing a roadmap for peace in Ivory Coast to hold free elections in late October. It urged Ivorian parties to implement fully the roadmap proposed by the International Working Group (IWG) and adopted by the Ivorian government at the gathering in Yamoussoukro in February.

COTE D IVOIRE: Hundreds given Ivorian ID in scheme's trial run

[This report does not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations]

ABIDJAN, 30 May 2006 (IRIN) - Mariam Diomande stood patiently clutching her application papers for a nationality document as she lined up with dozens of other young women in the sun-baked courtyard of the local town hall. Diomande, a 19-year-old water vendor, is illiterate and has never left Abidjan since her mother handed her over to an aunt at the age of three. To get around the city, she takes one of the overcrowded Sotra state-owned buses that ferry thousands of poor commuters between neighborhoods.

Local Media - Newspapers

Presidential Committee At Variance With Executive Mansion Statement

(The News, The Inquirer and Daily Observer)

- An ad hoc presidential panel that was set up to probe a passport incident involving aides of George Weah and immigration officers at the Roberts International Airport on Monday took exception to claims by the Executive Mansion that the panel's work was stalled by the non-cooperation of Weah and his Congress for Democratic Change (CDC). Conversely, the panel said that it has not made any official or formal preliminary report to the government on the matter.

UNMIL to Deploy At Mining Sites to Quell Diamond Rush in Gbarpolu County

(The Inquirer, New Democrat, The Informer and The Analyst)

- Lands, Mines and Energy Minister Eugene Shannon on Monday revealed plans by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to deploy a task force in response to reports of insecurity and widespread mining in the Kumgboi forest in the North-western Liberian County of Gbarpolu.
- Minister Shannon said that the presence of UNMIL police will undoubtedly quell the smuggling of Liberian diamonds to other countries by unscrupulous individuals, much to the disadvantage of the government in terms of the UN sanctions imposed on Liberian diamonds.

Illicit Miners Threaten Sarpo National Park

(The Inquirer)

- The Country's only forest reserve, Sarpo National Park, in Sinoe County is under threat from human activities such as mining. According to Stephen Davis and Sam Freeman who coordinate zones one and two of the Park, the miners believed to be ex-combatants and foreigners, entered the park from surrounding villages in Grand Gedeh County.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Subpoena Suspected War Criminals

(New Vision)

- Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) said it will formally begin hearing cases by June this year. Speaking to a cross section of Liberians in the Americas, the Commission's Chairman, Counselor Jerome Verdier, justified that no legislator or public official can claim any form of immunity as a means of evading appearance before TRC, adding that the Commission will hear all cases regardless of the individuals involved.

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

Presidential Committee Reports on Manhandling Weah

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Rivercess County Citizens Vote in Run-Off Legislative By-Election Today

- Registered voters in Electoral District Number #1 in Rivercess County will today vote in a run-off legislative by-election which is being contested by Charles Barteo of the opposition New Deal Movement and Elizabeth Williams of the ruling Unity Party, a National Elections Commission press statement said.

UN Peacekeepers Clean Up Monrovia Suburbs on Peacekeepers Day

- United Nations Mission in Liberia peacekeepers yesterday participated in community outreach activities by clearing the streets of garbage and white-washing school blocks around Monrovia as part of programs to mark International Day of UN Peacekeepers, UNMIL Sector One Commander Brig.-Gen. Donatus Edi told journalists yesterday.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

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

Special Court for Sierra Leone Denies Motion Not To Transfer Taylor

- The Special Court for Sierra Leone said that it had denied the motion filed by the defence counsel of former President Charles Taylor which sought to prevent the transfer to The Hague of the trial of Mr. Taylor.
- According to correspondents covering the Court, the Court's Appeal Chamber ruled that it had no jurisdiction to change the venue of the trial and that it was the prerogative of the United Nations and the government of Sierra Leone to decide on whether or not to transfer Mr. Taylor.

Complete versions of the UNMIL International Press Clips, UNMIL Daily Liberian Radio Summary and UNMIL Liberian Newspapers Summary are posted each day on the UNMIL Bulletin Board. If you are unable to access the UNMIL Bulletin Board or would like further information on the content of the summaries, please contact Mr. Jeddi Armah at armahji@un.org.