

SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
PRESS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE



PRESS CLIPPINGS

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

Friday, 7 April 2006

The press clips are produced Monday to Friday.
If you are aware of omissions or have any comments or suggestions please contact
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Post
7 April 2006

Special Court folds up this December

The Vice President Solomon E. Berewa has told Reuters that the intention to transfer Charles Taylor to The Hague was not for security reasons, as widely believed.

Answering a question by Nicholas Tattersall of Reuters on Tuesday this week at his Spur View Office, the Vice President said that there was enough security in the country to have Charles

Taylor tried. But the main issue, he told the Reuters West Africa Correspondent, had to do with the Special Court's exit strategy.

Honourable Solomon Berewa said that the Special Court had already mapped out at exit strategy, which involved bringing their operations to a conclusion at the end of December 2006. In

this regard, continued the Vice President, if a case of any magnitude such as Charles Taylor's were to be started, it would mean taking the Special Court far into 2007 or even beyond.

Mr. Solomon Berewa also told Reuters, in answer to a question if the PMDC was a challenge to the SLPP, that Charles Margai was no threat to the SLPP. The Vice President said that Charles Margai had always been

moving in and out of the SLPP-any time he lost the leadership contest. "The only difference this time is that he has gone ahead to form his own Party". Honourable Solomon Berewa said that Margai's for forming his own Party was most unfortunate. "The desire to become President should not be the rationale for forming a political party", he told Reuters.

Emmanuel Aiah Senessie



V.P. Berewa, talks tough

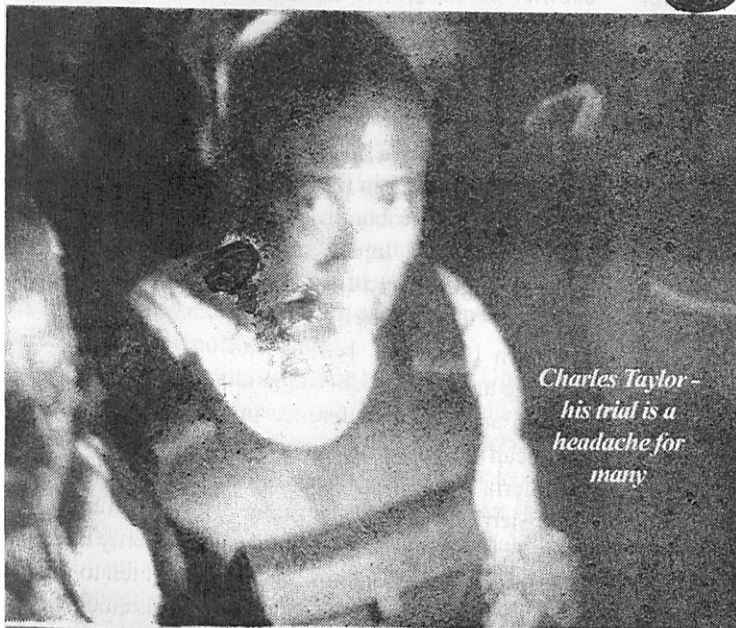


Charles Taylor, to The Hague

Concord Times
7 April 2006

Security Council tasked...

Address costs of Taylor's trial in The Hague



*Charles Taylor -
his trial is a
headache for
many*

If the war crimes trial of Liberia's ex-president Charles Taylor is moved from Sierra Leone to The Hague, the international community must shoulder the increased financial costs and address the likely negative impacts for Taylor's victims, the Open Society Justice Initiative warned Wednesday.

The warning comes as the UN Security Council is widely expected to consider a resolution to relocate the trial at the Special Court for Sierra Leone from Freetown to The Hague because of concerns over the potential impact of the trial on security and peace in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

"Moving the trial from Freetown to The Hague will impose considerable burdens on victims and witnesses, and increase the challenge of ensuring broad public engagement in Taylor's trial," said James A. Goldston, executive director of the Justice

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Address costs of Taylor's trial in The Hague

From page 1

Initiative. "The Security Council must do everything in its power to overcome these costs."

The Special Court for Sierra Leone mixes international and local elements and has rightly been praised for successfully prosecuting serious crimes in the place where they occurred. Among other benefits, this has permitted public interaction with the Court and its officials, facilitated access for victims and witnesses, and directly confronted impunity in West Africa. Any relocation of the trial must ensure that the positive message of prosecution is not undermined by its removal from the Mano River region.

"The victims of Taylor's crimes are the Special Court's primary constituency," said Chidi Anselm Odinkalu, the Justice Initiative's senior legal officer for Africa. "The Security Council must ensure that a decision to move the trial does not overlook their interests as witnesses, participants, and advocates."

According to the Justice Initiative, the extra costs of holding Taylor's trial in The Hague would include: the need to relocate judges, prosecutors and court staff; the need to transport witnesses and victims, many of whom are physically disabled and psychologically traumatized; the impossibility for a significant number of Sierra Leoneans to be physically present in the courtroom; the diluted impact of the trial on political leaders and the general public in West Africa; the difficulty for Mano River Union media to cover the proceedings; and the risk that the move might delay and/or prolong the trial.

It is therefore essential that if the trial is relocated, the Security Council should plan for, and minimize, these costs by identifying

and providing extra financial resources, above and beyond the existing Special Court budget, from United Nations assessed funds to pay for these needs. The move to The Hague should not be paid for with voluntary contributions from UN member states.

Specifically, the Security Council should accept responsibility for funding or facilitating the following measures:

- o Broadcasting the trial throughout West Africa, including on television, radio, the internet, and on video disk. The scarcity of electricity and appropriate equipment in much of the region will require additional investments in facilities and technology. Funding should also be made available to ensure presence of Sierra Leonean and Liberian media at The Hague.
- o Providing fast-tracked visa applications, transportation, and accommodation in The Hague, to allow witnesses and victims to attend the trial.
- o Arranging to meet the special needs of victims and witnesses attending the trial who are without limbs, otherwise physically disabled, and/or in need of psychological support services.
- o Maintaining the Court's expeditious pace, so the move to The Hague does not compromise the defendant's right to speedy trial or the victims' interest in seeing justice as promptly as possible. Trials held at the Special Court for Sierra Leone are intended to send a clear message to the people of West Africa and beyond that anyone who commits mass crimes will be held legally accountable. Any relocation of the trial of Charles Taylor must ensure that this positive legacy of the judicial process for the peoples of the region is preserved.

Awareness Times
7 April 2006

Taylor to serve jail term in Sweden



Charles Taylor

By Theophilus S. Gbenda
Reports monitored by this press have so far indicate that the Swedish Government has consented to host the former

warlord and President of Liberia, Mr. Charles Ghankay Taylor, in its prison facility in an event that he is convicted

Contd: page 2

Taylor to serve jail term in Sweden

From front page

by the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone.

This gesture by the Swedish Government came following an appeal by the United Nations to locate a country that will agree to host Mr. Taylor when he is eventually convicted.

This move by the Swedish Government comes as a welcome news especially so when it forms part of the fulfilment of the criteria needed to have the trial of Mr. Taylor transferred to The Hague.

It is not known when Mr. Taylor will be transferred to The Hague, but what is clear however is that the President of the Special Court, Justice A. Raja N. Fernando and the international community including the United Nations and the United States Government, are poised to have the trial of Mr. Taylor transferred to The Hague.

The new Liberian President, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, has also expressed the need for Mr. Taylor to be tried in The Hague or else where out side the Sub region, citing security concerns.

Mr. Taylor, on the contrary, has said during his initial appearance before the Special Court that he prefers to be tried out here in Freetown, arguing that if he is taken to The Hague or indeed any where else, his family might not have adequate access to him.

According to Mr. Taylor, he needs the moral and otherwise support of his family, and that in view of this, it is only fair that his family has sufficient and easy access to him.

Up to press time, there has been no clear cut statement as to whether the much awaited and much talked about trial will be held in The Hague (as preferred by the International Community, the Special Court and the Liberian Government), or here in Freetown (as preferred by Mr. Taylor and a host of civil society activists, private individuals and a good number of Parliamentarians here in Sierra Leone).

While all this is unfolding, the Government of Sierra Leone has kept a cool head, although certain civil society organizations including the Forum of Conscience (FOC), have begun piling pressure on the Government to take a definitive position on the issue at stake.

Meanwhile, the Principal Defender of the Special Court, Mr. Vincent O. Nmehielle, has officially assigned Mr. Karim Asad Ahmad Khan (a Barrister in the Chambers of David Waters Q.C. of 2 Hare Court, Temple, London) as the Provisional Counsel of Mr. Charles Ghankay Taylor.

Mr. Khan's assignment starts effective April 5, 2006, and will last for a period of ninety days.

New Vision
7 April 2006

Taylor May Be Jailed In Sweden

Since his arrest a week ago, Charles Taylor's presence and trial in Freetown has caused quite a stir among political leaders in the sub region some of whom have already called on the United Nations backed Special Court to transfer Mr. Taylor's trial to The Hague for security reasons. The government of the Netherlands though has agreed to make available the facilities of the International War Crime Tribunal, would not be able to provide prison in the event Mr.

Taylor is convicted and jailed for life. Here is the report.

The Swedish government is considering request by the Special Court to provide jail for the former President of Liberia Charles Ghankay Taylor if he is convicted by the Court where he faces an 11 counts charge of genocide and other related war crimes. The Swedish government yesterday said they are considering the request by the United Nations whether or not to accept Mr. Taylor as a

Contd. Page 2



Charles Taylor

Taylor May Be Jailed In Sweden

prisoner if he is convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the ongoing trials in the United Nations backed Special Court for Sierra Leone.

Charles Taylor is standing trial on an eleven count charge of crimes against humanity and for supporting

the Revolutionary United Front rebels in Sierra Leone. He made his first appearance on Monday this week where he pleaded not guilty.

Meanwhile, the President of Special Court has written a letter to the government of Netherlands requesting the use

of facilities at the International Court of Justice in The Hague to try Charles Taylor.

The government of the Netherlands has accepted on the condition that, Taylor serves his jail term in another country and that a Security Council resolution should be passed to allow Taylor to be tried in that

New Citizen
7 April 2006

"TRY TAYLOR ELSEWHERE"

- Influential Heads of Government Advise

Peter Anderson of the Public Affairs arm of the Special Court said yesterday that the decision as to whether or not Charles Taylor should be tried in Sierra Leone squarely rests on Heads of State within the sub-

region and influential members of the international community such as the UN system, the United States and the United Kingdom.

He said that modalities are being put in place to address the issue of the venue of Charles Taylor's trial as President Helen Johnson Sirleaf's position

that Charles Taylor be tried outside Sierra Leone is still being discussed by sub-regional leaders and other members of the international community.

Peter Anderson explained, "already, we know that President Helen Johnson Sirleaf opposes the trial of



Charles Taylor

Cont. back page

TRY TAYLOR ELSEWHERE

thing goes wrong."

Peter Anderson also explained that it is possible for Charles Taylor to be tried at The Hague, utilizing the facilities of the International Criminal Court as the ICC is quite prepared to serve as landlord of the Special Court once the Special Court moves over to The Hague. The President of the Special Court, A Raja N. Fernando made his statements about the possibility that Charles Taylor could be tried in The Hague out of sub-regional concerns.

"Up to this time, apart from members of civil society in Sierra Leone, and other citizens of Sierra Leone, nobody else, of course, apart from Charles Taylor, has asked the international court to try Charles Taylor in Sierra Leone. None of the West African leaders has suggested that Charles Taylor be tried in Sierra Leone and what is very clear is that Johnson Sirleaf who is the President of Liberia, Charles Taylor's home country, insists that Charles Taylor be tried outside West Africa."

When asked whether

President Helen Johnson Sirleaf still holds the view that Charles Taylor be tried outside West Africa, even after his appearance before the judges at the Special Court in Freetown, Peter Anderson replied that even after Charles Taylor's appearance at the Special Court, Helen Johnson Sirleaf still made a speech in Liberia to explain that Charles Taylor should be removed from Sierra Leone to a court outside West Africa.

But Peter Anderson explained, "you cannot move the court overnight because there are legal and diplomatic implications which must be clarified by the Security Council, and which the Security Council can actually address, and there is also the need to clarify the Headquarter status of the Special Court and to make it operate as if it were operating in Sierra Leone." Asked about the possibility that if Charles Taylor is taken to a foreign country, he can ask for political asylum in that country, Peter Anderson explained that such a

possibility is remote and that according to the authority given to the Special Court by the United Nations and the Sierra Leone government, the Special Court can sit anywhere in the world.

"It is just possible that after the AFRC trials, the Special Court will be relocated to some other part of the world, possibly the ICC facilities in The Hague, to continue its activities, but it should not be forgotten that Sierra Leone is still the Headquarters of the Special Court," Peter Anderson underscored. In conclusion, Peter Anderson insisted that he saw a great possibility that Charles Taylor would be transferred to The Hague for trial and this possibility has largely been created by the fact that a good number of sub-regional leaders in West Africa would prefer the trial of Charles Taylor to take place outside West Africa, apart from the fact influential leaders such as George W. Bush and Tony Blair have advised that Charles Taylor be tried outside West Africa.

Sierra News
7 April 2006

"Taylor's going to the Hague not for Security Reasons" Berewa

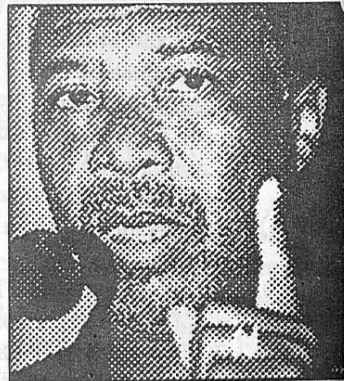
By Emmanuel Aiah Senessie

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tude such as Charles Taylor's were to be started, it would mean taking the Special Court far into 2007 or even beyond.

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The Vice President said that Charles Margai had always been moving in and out of the SLPP any time he lost the leadership contest.

"The only difference this time is that he had gone ahead to form his own party".

Mr. Berewa said that Margai's

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should not be the rationale for forming a political party", he told Reuters.

Post
7 April 2006
Opinion

EDITORIAL

Charles Taylor and history

Now that a clearer picture has emerged regarding the trial and the venue of the possible imprisonment of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, this paper can now take a definitive position on the issue.

It has been established that the UN backed Special Court for Sierra Leone will fold up in nine months time, which suggests the court will not be in position to begin Taylor's trial as it is very unlikely that the court would have completed the paper work and put together its key witnesses for commencement of the hearing.

As reported elsewhere in this edition, Taylor's imminent transfer to the War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague is more connected with the expiry of the mandate of the Special Court than the widely believed security concerns.

What this nation should know and understand is that no one man can hold the international community to ransom and get away with it. With the concerted efforts of peace loving nations, Taylor no matter how powerful he is, he can not be allowed again to plunge this sub region into chaos and anarchy.

Having said this, it is refreshing to note that Sweden has already guaranteed a safe keeping place for Charles Taylor if he is found guilty of the charges levied against him.

Now that the Taylor issue is almost settled, the distraction he has caused in the last two weeks will immediately melt away so that we will concern ourselves with more pressing issue confronting us as a nation.

Voice of America

6 April 2006

US Says Action Near to Shift Taylor Trial to Hague

By David Gollust
Washington
06 April 2006

U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton said Thursday, the U.N. Security Council is close to adopting a resolution moving the war crimes case of former Liberian President Charles Taylor from Sierra Leone to The Hague. He says the action could come by the end of the week.

The United States was quick to endorse the request by the U.N.-backed war crimes tribunal for Sierra Leone to move the Charles Taylor case to The Hague because of security considerations.



AP Photo

Ambassador Bolton, who has had a lead role in consultations for an enabling resolution, told State Department reporters he thinks a Security Council decision is imminent.

"I am hoping that we will have a Security Council resolution this week that effects the transfer of Taylor to The Hague, and sets up the arrangements, whereby the special court in Sierra Leone will be able to prosecute him there. I think, we are very close, as I said. I would hope by the end of this week, we would have that resolved,"

he said.

The former Liberian president faces 11 counts of war crimes charges for supporting the brutal rebel movement in Sierra Leone that raped and mutilated civilians during a 10-year civil conflict that left some 50,000 people dead.

The Sierra Leone tribunal asked for the venue change last week, citing fears the trial might spark unrest in Sierra Leone, or neighboring Liberia. Despite the move, the trial would remain under the jurisdiction of the African court.



AP Photo

Charles Taylor at Special Court in Freetown, April 3, 2006

Taylor, who was arrested in late March after an attempt to flee Nigeria, where he had been given temporary refuge, made his first appearance before the court in Freetown Monday. He pleaded not guilty to all the charges, while also challenging the legality of the tribunal.

On another African issue, Ambassador Bolton said the United States is actively investigating a "substantial number" of persons who may be responsible for crimes in Sudan's western Darfur region and subject to sanctions by the U.N.

Security Council.

But he said there should be solid evidence for such a designation, otherwise, the credibility of the U.N. would suffer.

Bolton made the comment in response to a question about news reports Wednesday that the United States had opposed the inclusion of several Sudanese government officials on a list of sanction candidates proposed by Britain.

The ambassador did not respond to specifics of the reports, but said the United States is working on a sanctions list with Britain, among others, and wants to be sure of the facts in each case.

"As we have gone back and forth with some other governments, the British in particular, we are looking at the evidence that we have, and we are looking at the evidence they have. And when it's sufficient for us to make a decision, we are prepared to move forward. We are eager to move forward. It has been a year since this sanctions provision was created. It has not yet been exercised. We think it should be exercised. We just want to make sure we have the facts straight," he said.

Bolton indicated that the sanctions list could include figures from the Sudanese government, the Arab "Janjaweed" militiamen, who have waged war in Darfur on the government's behalf, and Darfur rebels. All of them, at various times, have been accused of atrocities in the three-year-old Darfur conflict.

The U.N. envoy said, while the process of identifying individual war crimes figures has been slowed by bureaucratic issues, he said the Bush administration knows what the "big picture" is on the violence in Darfur.

That is why, he said, it is pushing hard for the transformation of the African Union observer force in Darfur into a full-fledged U.N. peacekeeping operation.

BBC

6 April 2006

Sweden considers Taylor detention

Sweden says it is considering a UN request to accept former Liberian President Charles Taylor as a prisoner if he is convicted of war crimes.

He faces the charges in the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, which requested his trial be transferred to The Hague for security reasons.

But the Dutch government said it would only accept this if any ensuing jail term was served in another country.

Mr Taylor is accused of backing rebels in Sierra Leone's 1991-2002 civil war.

They committed widespread atrocities, such as chopping off people's limbs, as they fought to topple the government.

Legal basis

Sweden was one of several countries being approached by the United Nations, said Swedish foreign ministry official Hans Dahlgren.

Austria has already said it lacks the legal basis for Mr Taylor to serve a possible sentence there.

Two former Bosnian Serb leaders, Biljana Plavsic and Miroslav Deronjic, are currently serving prison sentences in Sweden after being convicted by the UN tribunal for the former Yugoslavia based in The Hague.

Mr Taylor was transferred to Sierra Leone last week after being arrested in Nigeria.

Nigeria had given him asylum under an agreement to end Liberia's own civil war in 2003.

Earlier this week he pleaded not guilty to the charges against him and said he did not recognise the jurisdiction of the UN court.

The Special Court was set up to try to bring to justice those responsible for crimes during the country's decade-long civil war which officially ended in 2002.

The tribunal operates under both Sierra Leone domestic law and international humanitarian law.

AFP

6 April 2006

Taylor assigned free lawyer for three months

Freetown, Sierra Leone

The Special Court for war crimes in Sierra Leone said on Thursday it had assigned a lawyer free of charge for Liberia's former warlord and president Charles Taylor, who faces trial for crimes against humanity.

Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, a barrister with a British firm, has been appointed to represent Taylor for three months, said the court's principal, Vincent Nmehielle, in an order posted on the court's website.

Taylor is considered to have been mainly responsible for a series of civil wars in Liberia and neighbouring Sierra Leone between 1989 and 2003, which between them left around 400 000 people dead.

Nmehielle said he decided to assign Taylor a counsel from a list of lawyers available to represent suspects who cannot afford to pay for their own chosen defence experts after he found Taylor to be "partially" indigent.

"Considering that the accused may not have sufficient means at the present time to retain counsel of his own ... the principal defender directs the assignment of ... Khan as provisional counsel to the accused for a period of 90 days, effective April 5 2006," said the order.

Taylor was hauled before the court here after being caught last week trying to escape from his refuge in Nigeria, after that country's president, Olusegun Obasanjo, gave the green light for his trial.

The court wants him tried in The Hague, in the Netherlands, to minimise the security risk posed by his presence in the volatile region where he is thought to still command significant support.

Taylor, who pleaded not guilty on Monday to 11 charges relating to atrocities in Sierra Leone's brutal civil war, has been consulting with lawyers from the United States, Liberia and Ghana.

Relatives on Wednesday said he has almost completed putting together his legal team and will retain some of the lawyers who have so far visited him for his trial, the date of which is yet to be fixed subject to a decision on its venue. -- AFP

Reuters

6 April 2006

Taylor chooses British lawyer for war crimes trial

By Nick Tattersall

FREETOWN (Reuters) - Former Liberia leader Charles Taylor has provisionally chosen a British lawyer from a list of court-approved legal specialists to defend him against war crimes charges in Sierra Leone.

Taylor pleaded innocent on Monday before a U.N.-backed special court to 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity for backing Sierra Leonean rebels who raped and mutilated civilians during a 1991-2002 civil war.

In a cell within the Special Court compound in Freetown heavily guarded by U.N. peacekeepers, Taylor has met with legal advisors from across the region in recent days in an effort to choose a defence team for the high-profile case.

"Taylor's provisional counsel was assigned as of yesterday. He chose someone from the list of qualified counsels," said Special Court spokesman Peter Andersen.

The lawyer selected by Taylor, Karim Khan, is a specialist in international criminal and human rights law working at the London-based chambers of David Waters Q.C.

He has previously worked as a legal advisor to the United Nations criminal tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. He also acted as a defence council in a war crimes trial for the former Yugoslavia, according to the chambers' Web site.

Taylor, whose uprising to seize power in Liberia in 1989 turned into a brutal 14-year on-off civil war that spilt across borders, was represented at Monday's hearing by a staff lawyer from the tribunal, Vincent Nmehielle.

The former Liberian leader's aides have said Taylor would eventually like Harvard law professor Alan Dershowitz, one of the world's foremost civil liberties lawyers, to lead his defence team.

While not addressing the Taylor case Dershowitz, who only accepts a handful of cases each year, says on his Web site he regards the "representation of a guilty and despicable defendant, with little prospect of winning, as a challenge -- and, indeed, as one of the highest obligations of my profession".

A quarter of a million people died in Liberia's civil war, which Taylor triggered with the uprising to overthrow despotic military strongman Samuel Doe in 1989, but the Special Court charges only relate to Sierra Leone's parallel civil war.

The charges before the U.N.-backed court accuse Taylor of supplying weapons to Sierra Leone's RUF rebel force in return for diamonds to fund his regime in Liberia. Taylor denies links with rebels in Sierra Leone, whose war officially ended in 2002.

The U.N.-backed tribunal has asked for Taylor's trial to be moved to The Hague, citing fears of unrest in Sierra Leone or neighbouring Liberia if he is convicted. Britain circulated a Security Council resolution last week authorising Taylor's transfer to the Netherlands.

As part of the deal to move the tribunal, the United Nations has approached Sweden and other countries to consider hosting Taylor in one of their jails if he is convicted.

A Swedish jail already holds a former Bosnian Serb president convicted of war crimes in The Hague, Biljana Plavsic, who is serving an 11-year sentence for Bosnian war atrocities.

African News Dimension

6 April 2006

Court Grants Permission Taylor's family members to see him

By Andnetwork .com

Monrovia (AND) Charles Taylor's sisters have been granted permission to see him in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The other two family members have been asked to get security clearance from the Liberian government.

Mr. Sando Johnson, left Liberia to see him in the Sierra Leone, told Liberian radio via phone from Freetown that only Mr. Taylor two biological sisters were permitted to see him in detention. Mr. Johnson who is a cousin to the former President, said the rest of them who he said are four in number, were not allow to see the former President.

According to him, the authorities of the special court, have directed the rest of the other family members to obtain security clearance from Liberian authorities before they would be allow to join the others to see the former President.

Mr. Johnson, who is a former member of parliament in the Taylor's government and the transitional government of Charles Gyude Bryant, accused the Liberian authority of interfering with the visit of the family to Freetown. He did not say exactly how the government has interfered with the family visit.

When the Minister of Information was contacted on the matter, Mr. Johnny McClain said he nor did the government have the knowledge of what the Taylor's family is talking about.

Mr. Johnson declined to comment on what the two Taylor's sisters discussed with the former President.

Earlier this week, he told the nation from Freetown, that they have not been molested, harass or intimidated since they arrived in Freetown to see the former President.

He said the family is pleased that Freetown be used as the venue of the trial.

By Patrick Wrokpoh, Liberia Bureau

The Analyst (Monrovia)

5 April 2006

Engage Public

FORMER LIBERIAN LEADER, Charles Ghankay Taylor, was finally taken to Freetown, Sierra Leone, to face what is generally regarded as his nemesis. He faces 11-count indictment for war crimes and crimes against humanity which prosecution says include murder, rape, maiming of non-combatants, and supply of arms and ammunition to RUF rebels in exchange for diamonds.

Yesterday Taylor pleaded not guilty to all of the charges. He stated categorically in his own defense: "Most definitely, your honor, I did not and could not have committed those acts against the sister republic of Sierra Leone. I think that this is an attempt to continue to divide and rule the people of Liberia and Sierra Leone and so most definitely I am not guilty."

THE EVENTS THAT culminated into Taylor's arrest and arraignment before the Special Court in Freetown were tortuous, jumpy, and nerve-racking for some Liberians and simply unnerving for others, for want of proper description of what swept over this nation between March 22 and April 3, 2006. The irony of the situation is Liberians were groping, at times almost jumping at one another's throats, for solution to a major national breach of order that was known to the international world and most Liberians to be clearly outside the control of the government of Liberia or any other group of Liberians. While some Liberians thought the situation could be prevented and are therefore indicting the government for not doing enough to let Taylor off the hook, a large number of other Liberians has no doubt that justice had served its course leaving the opportunity for Liberians to move ahead with the healing and rebuilding process.

This group sounds as though these postwar imperatives perch solely on the outcome of Taylor's Freetown trial and reading from the lips of U.S. Congressman Ed Royce and other members of his congressional subcommittee on Africa, they needn't be blamed much.

BUT WHATEVER THE reality, by-and-large, the bottom line, the new national rethink, is what the government of Liberia leads its citizenry to do so that they do not divide themselves along trivial lines and lock their arms in vain duels. This new way of looking at the nation's postwar healing and reconstruction agenda is better appreciated when one considers that it is becoming increasingly topical and fashionable for radio talk programs to dwell on issues related to Taylor's trial: safety, fair trial, legality of arrest and transfer, and whether or not others should be indicted along with Taylor. While these talks go without event, they point to one thing: a nation once again on the way to being divided down the middle on the argument of whether or not law must take precedence over expediency for the sake of "peace".

The government had inaugurated the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and it is not a bad thing to begin to look at this divide critically in order to design plans and strategies that will help moderate it.

IT IS IN this vein that we are hoping that somehow in the next few months, significant national effort will be put into measures geared towards identifying and examining existing groups beyond the ethnic contentions to which many often point with relish when they talk about the root-causes and intractability of the Liberia's conflict. If you ask our opinion, we will identify political bigotry, blind loyalty to certain economic godfathers, and sheer geo-political and economic biases that are harbored by a minute but influential members of society as those divides that must be

tackled head-on beginning now. These must, no doubt, be treated as forerunners to the process of truth-telling, forgiveness-exacting, and national reconstruction that the nation chose over arbitration in the court of law and jurisdiction under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA).

WE THEREFORE CALL on Liberians who find themselves by design or fate in any of these splinter groups of contention to make the conscious effort to let go. For instance, those who are convinced that Taylor is in Freetown because someone in Monrovia willed it so must begin to reexamine their conviction with due circumspect so that the truth will lie and the action because of it can become amicable. Those who think that this government has disinherited them and will therefore ensure that it does not success must come to the realization that a man that sits on a branch of a tree and undertakes to cut that branch in order to hurt the tree is risking greater injury. Those who think that appointment in government is their right the denial of which is a declaration of war of weights and ethnicity must begin to realize that the government cannot employ all Liberians and that there are vast importunities in the private sector that can be explored and utilized. In sum, all Liberians of worth and substance must begin to cultivate attitudes and behavior that will encourage external assistance, for no one will want to assist a nation that is divided along lines that are indelible or that seem to be indelible.

AS WE STATED earlier, the Sirleaf Administration will have to lay the foundation for the type of national reawakening we are talking about. Now that the Taylor is laid to rest but not without leaving redrawing old lines of contentions, we call on the government to design a program will hold dialogue these contentious groups whether or not the contention is related to government programs or inaction. We single out the discontentment of the Taylor loyalists and the contentions along tribal or socio-economic lines that are holding back the speedy constitutions of local governments for start.

City on a Hill Press

6 April 2006

http://chp.ucsc.edu/paper/world/african_leader.txt?40_21

African Leader Captured in Nigeria

Former president of Liberia faces wrath of Sierra Leone War Crimes court

Oliver M. Style

Former president of the Republic of Liberia, Charles Ghankay Taylor, was delivered to a UN-backed war crimes court in Sierra Leone after being arrested by security officials on the Nigeria/Cameroon border on Wednesday, Mar. 29. He stands accused for his alleged role in the devastating civil war in Sierra Leone, which neighbors Liberia to the northwest.

The 58-year-old ex-president faces 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including acts of terrorism, unlawful killings, sexual and physical violence, use of child soldiers, abductions and forced labor, looting and burning, and attacks on UN personnel.

Taylor was in the process of fleeing Nigeria, where he had been living in exile following his 2003 departure from Liberia, when he was detained by border guards. The scramble for his capture came one month after Liberia's newly elected president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, demanded an end to Taylor's asylum in Nigeria so that he may face an indictment by the Special Court in Sierra Leone.

The confirmation by Nigeria's President Olusegun Obasanjo on Mar. 28 that Taylor had disappeared from his villa in Calabar, a city located in southeast Nigeria, sparked fears that the exiled former leader had escaped justice. Those fears were put to rest, however, when an official at a border crossing recognized Taylor and subsequently had him arrested.

The news of Taylor's capture is seen by many across the African continent as an important step towards establishing accountability for the actions of ruthless leaders who have carried out such atrocities without fear of punishment.

Robert Sullivan, a spokesperson for the United Nations, told City on a Hill Press (CHP), "Secretary-General [of the UN] Kofi Annan strongly believes that Charles Taylor's capture and trial will send a powerful message to the region and beyond that impunity will not be allowed to stand and that the rule of law must prevail."

Following Taylor's transfer to Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, a slew of African newspapers echoed the same positive reaction to his pending trial and prosecution. Many of them, including Kenya's People Daily, reported that the trial would bring a strong precedent to the continent, since Taylor is the first African leader to ever face a tribunal like the one in Sierra Leone.

There is, however, trepidation among those who continue to doubt the importance and urgency of Taylor's prosecution for war crimes. Le Pays, newspaper of the West African nation Burkina Faso voiced apprehension over the possibility of renewed tension in and around Liberia due to the trial's presence in the region.

“One has to consider what kind of pressure was placed on the Nigerian government to ensure the handing over of Charles Taylor to the court, because Nigeria is hardly a paragon of virtue itself,” said Ronnie D. Lipshutz, professor of international politics at UC Santa Cruz.

The question of jurisdiction also remains unclear because as a former head of state, Taylor does have a certain level of sovereign immunity.

“This worries the United States, because with its strong imperial tendencies and an emerging global constitutional order, US leaders must now explain why they can claim sovereign immunity while other world leaders cannot,” Lipshutz said.

Local leaders in Liberia have also raised concerns as to whether it is possible for Taylor to receive a fair trial in Sierra Leone.

Ryan Perreault, fourth-year UCSC politics major felt that an unfair trial would be a valid worry for the UN-backed court.

“A fair and open trial is of course extremely important, for the simple reason that the people will view Charles Taylor’s conviction as a legitimate one if they know he has been afforded all his rights under international law,” Perreault said.

Charles Taylor was elected as Liberia’s president in 1997 amidst a raging civil war that had already claimed up to 200,000 people and forced another million from their homes.

Prior to his election, Taylor is believed to have supported the Sierra Leone Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group through the selling of diamonds and purchase of weapons. RUF is responsible for the political destabilization of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Guinea, as well as the deaths of tens of thousands of people.

After much of Liberia descended into chaos and multiple rebel groups took control of the country, the United States and a number of African countries urged Taylor to abandon his presidency in order to stem the civil conflict.

Taylor formally resigned on Aug. 11, 2003, following an offer by Nigeria to host the leader on the condition that he stays out of Liberian politics. Prior to his exit from Liberia, he made a lengthy speech during which he proclaimed, “History will be kind to me.”

Africa Reports

6 April 2006

Opinion

http://www.iwpr.net/?p=acr&s=f&o=260537&apc_state=henpacr

Taylor Arrest Could Herald Change for West Africa

West Africans hold their breath to see whether Liberia's ex-leader Charles Taylor will be brought to trial.

By Eric A. Witte in Luxembourg (AR No. 57, 27-Mar-06)

Fear has tempered the jubilation felt by Liberians and Sierra Leoneans after Nigeria agreed to the extradition of former Liberian president Charles Taylor.

Barring an embarrassing escape from Nigeria, Taylor will either go directly to Sierra Leone to face charges at the war crimes tribunal there, or will be sent there via Liberia.

Following the Nigerian government's March 25 decision to extradite him, Taylor issued a threat through his "spiritual advisor" who promised that transferring the former Liberian leader would precipitate "chaos", "tens of thousands of people fighting", and "bloodshed".

The Liberian capital Monrovia has been rife with rumours that Taylor's former commanders are conspiring to incite violence and overthrow the reformist president Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, elected last November as Africa's first female head of state.

The political rump of the Taylor-sponsored Revolutionary United Front, RUF, rebel group in neighbouring Sierra Leone has warned that his detention could destabilise that country, too.

It should not surprise anyone that such threats terrify both Liberians and Sierra Leoneans. Both nations emerged only recently from years of brutal and devastating war for which Taylor was largely responsible.

Over the past week, even as civil society organisations across West Africa continued to call for Taylor's delivery to the United Nations-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, fear of the repercussions has led other West Africans to issue pleas to let sleeping dogs lie. Since President Johnson-Sirleaf has just put together a capable government, an ambitious development plan, and the necessary international financing for it, some argue that now is not the time to focus on the past.

The historical record suggests that West Africa has a pattern of caving in to threats from Taylor, that it has been encouraged to do so by the wider international community, and that the consequences have always been fatal.

After first invading Liberia from Ivory Coast in 1989 and launching his forces into Sierra Leone in 1991 to seize its diamond fields, Taylor quickly learned that negotiations and diplomacy were useful tools for buying time, rearming and planning the next attack. Threats of a return to mayhem were a good way to get what he wanted.

In 1996, Taylor's 14th peace agreement with rival warlords and West African peacekeepers paved the way for elections the following year. During the election campaign, Taylor openly threatened to return the country to war if he lost. Liberians, desperately hoping for an end to the butchery, chanted, "He killed my ma, he killed my pa, I will vote for him." They gave Taylor's party 75 per cent of the vote and made him president, and western countries deemed the election free and fair.

In Sierra Leone, Taylor increased his support to the RUF in Sierra Leone, rearming it for its "Operation No Living Thing". Memories of that offensive from January 1999 still haunt residents of Sierra Leone's capital Freetown. RUF members killed 6,000 people, conducted mass amputations, rape, and looting, and abducted hundreds of women and children destined for lives of sexual slavery or combat.

Taylor and the RUF were rewarded by a 1999 peace treaty that elevated a Taylor protégé to Sierra Leone's vice presidency and gave him oversight of its diamond resources. The treaty included a general amnesty to prevent the past interfering with the country's new-found peace.

But when a UN mission deployed into Sierra Leone's diamond-rich east in accordance with the peace agreement, the Taylor-sponsored RUF took 500 peacekeepers hostage. This prompted a British intervention and a strengthened UN presence, which quickly brought the conflict to an end.

Meanwhile, war still raged in Liberia as rebel movements sponsored by Guinea and Ivory Coast moved against Taylor's regime in retaliation for his sponsorship of guerrillas on their territories. With enemy forces closing in on Monrovia in June 2003, Taylor agreed to negotiations that would pause the fighting while his forces regrouped and rearmed.

But when Taylor arrived for peace talks in Ghana, he was greeted with the news that the prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone had indicted him three months earlier on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The prosecutor said Taylor was among those bearing the greatest responsibility for grave crimes during the Sierra Leonean conflict.

Just when it appeared that Taylor's career as a warlord could be brought to a definitive end, the diplomatic community rescued him. Ghana sent him back to Liberia instead of arresting him.

Taylor then led his forces in fierce fighting against rebels who had arrived in the capital. Although the indictment made his continued presence unpalatable, international negotiators proved willing to overlook Taylor's past if doing so could end the devastation of Monrovia.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan joined the United States, Britain, the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States in prevailing upon Nigeria to grant Taylor asylum, in exchange for an agreement to relinquish power.

Taylor left Liberia on August 11, 2003, promising, "God willing, I will be back."

Nigeria made it a condition of Taylor's asylum that he avoid engaging in Liberian matters and stay away from the media, but he broke those conditions repeatedly. As detailed last year in a report by the Coalition for International Justice, the exiled president asserted control over the Liberian embassy in Nigeria, maintained his own business network in Liberia, and used couriers to dole out cash to supporters.

Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo warned Taylor on at least three occasions that he was in breach of the terms of his stay. Yet Obasanjo was understandably annoyed at the pressure he came under to hand Taylor over after the international community had foisted the warlord upon him. He refused to send Taylor to Sierra Leone for trial.

Since August 2003, President Obasanjo has said he would only relinquish Taylor at the request of an elected Liberian government. When President Johnson-Sirleaf made such a request earlier this month, he complied.

Taylor used his influence to finance candidates for last October's parliamentary election in Liberia, in a bid to place cronies in key positions. That strategy succeeded, and now President Johnson-Sirleaf faces a legislature dominated by Taylor allies. These include the speaker of the House of Representatives, and Taylor's top battlefield commander and his semi-estranged wife in the Senate.

There is concern that Taylor loyalists may be plotting disturbances in response to his arrest. Some former child soldiers – traumatised and ostracised after serving in Taylor's army – could heed calls for violence from the man they called their "Papay".

However, unless Nigeria allows him to escape, none of Taylor's threats will allow him to re-enter the struggle for power and plot an opportunistic return to coincide with the eventual departure of the 15,000 peacekeepers now in his country.

Johnson-Sirleaf - a 67 year-old, Harvard-educated economist - has ambitious plans for Liberia, including reclaiming control of the country's natural resources from cronies of Taylor and other warlords, and putting the revenue to work for a nation devastated by nearly a decade and a half of war.

She also wants to establish the rule of law to end chronic human rights abuses and give Liberia a foundation for economic development.

This progressive agenda has put the president on a collision course with hard-line Taylor supporters. But ensuring Taylor is brought to trial could have the added benefit of weakening this opposition by removing the central figure in their network.

Success could set a standard for neighbouring countries, in a region still waiting to see whether the cycle of misrule and violence can be broken.

Sierra Leone remains plagued by a kleptocratic elite. Liberia's other neighbours are also in fragile shape - not least because of the corrosive influence Taylor has continued to exert from exile. A tenuous cease-fire holds in Ivory Coast, while Guinea is braced for potential upheaval as rival factions manoeuvre to succeed ailing dictator Lansana Conté.

In Taylor's West Africa, atrocities and the threat of war were rewarded with power and exile in luxury. But President Johnson-Sirleaf is the leading architect of an effort to build a new West Africa - one in which mass murder leads not to power but to criminal prosecution.

While she is cooperating with the United Nations Mission in Liberia to contain potential troublemakers and violent disturbances, and Nigeria is deciding whether to follow through in facilitating Taylor's arrest, people in Sierra Leone and Liberia are waiting nervously before celebrating the execution of justice.

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

President Johnson Sirleaf has refused to let threats from Taylor deter her from embracing justice. And that has given West Africans a genuine chance of an enduring peace.

Eric A. Witte is a Luxembourg-based senior associate of the Democratisation Policy Council. He is former political advisor to the chief prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

United Nations  Nations Unies

United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 6 April 2006

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

International Clips on Liberia

BBC Last Updated: Thursday, 6 April 2006, 08:53 GMT 09:53 UK

Sweden considers Taylor detention

Sweden says it is considering a UN request to accept former Liberian President Charles Taylor as a prisoner if he is convicted of war crimes. He faces the charges in the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, which requested his trial be transferred to The Hague for security reasons. But the Dutch government said it would only accept this if any ensuing jail term was served in another country. Mr Taylor is accused of backing rebels in Sierra Leone that committed widespread atrocities, such as chopping off people's limbs, as they fought to topple the government.

Taylor assigned free lawyer for three months

FREETOWN, April 6, 2006 (AFP) - The Special Court for war crimes in Sierra Leone said Thursday it had assigned a lawyer free of charge for Liberia's former warlord and President Charles Taylor, who faces trial for crimes against humanity. Karim Asad Ahmad Khan, a barrister with a British firm, has been appointed to represent Taylor for three months, said the court's principal Vincent Nmehielle in an order posted on the court's website.

EDITORIAL

Taylor must be tried

Source: Contra Costa Times (Walnut Creek, CA) (KRT) Date: April 06, 2006

Apr. 6--For a while, it looked as if former Liberian President Charles Taylor might go the way of Uganda's Idi Amin Dada, living to a ripe old age in pampered exile. That's usually what happens to brutal African strongmen after their fall from power. But in a surprising departure from business as usual, Taylor, the warlord turned president, was captured when he tried to slip out of Nigeria into neighboring Cameroon. Taylor was loaded onto a helicopter bound for Sierra Leone. On Monday, a U.N.-backed war crimes court indicted him on charges that included forcing children to become soldiers and murder.

Local Media – Newspapers

Alleged Russian Rapists to be Extradited

(Heritage)

- Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss told journalists in Monrovia yesterday that the five Russian rape suspects who fled the country recently could be extradited to Liberia to face trial if there are charges against them. He said that UNMIL had taken up the issue with the United Nations and the Government of Russia to ensure that the men do not escape justice.

Former UN Envoy Questions NGOs' Role in Liberia

(The Analyst and Liberian Express)

- Addressing a forum in the United States recently, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jacques Klein said that most non-governmental organizations operating in Liberia are doing nothing and are unable to give account as to how they are using donor funds intended for Liberia. He said that only a few were doing a commendable job.

Sierra Leone's Civil Society against Taylor's Transfer to The Hague

(The Inquirer)

- The Civil Society Movement of Sierra Leone (CSM-SL) has opposed moves to transfer former President Charles Taylor's trial to The Hague.
- CSM-SL Acting Chairman Festus Minah said that the transfer would deny many witnesses the opportunity to testify against Mr. Taylor.

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

UN Security Council Pleased with Liberian Peace Process

- Addressing a news conference in Monrovia yesterday, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss declared that the UN Security Council was pleased about the progress made in the Liberian peace process, citing the inauguration of an elected government and the progress being made to lift sanctions on Liberian diamonds.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

World Bank Approves US\$25 Million for Emergency Road Repairs

- Appearing on a radio talk show yesterday, Public Works Minister Willis Knuckles announced that the World Bank had endorsed a grant for US\$25 million to carry out emergency repairs of Liberia's roads. He also announced that international donors gave US\$200,000 to rehabilitate the Ministry edifice.

United States Supports Lifting of Liberia's Diamond Sanctions

- Speaking at the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding aimed at lifting sanctions on Liberia's diamond yesterday, United States Ambassador Donald Booth said that the US government would assist Liberia to ensure the lifting of sanctions on diamonds in Liberia.
- Lands, Mines and Energy Minister Eugene Shannon commended the US government for its support and assured the international community that the Liberian government would institute the appropriate measures to remove the sanctions.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

US-Based Carter Center Pledges Support to Liberia's Rebuilding

- Speaking during a visit with House of Representatives Speaker Edwin Snowe yesterday, the visiting US-based Carter Center delegation head Thomas Crick said that the center would work with the Liberian government to realize its reconstruction objectives.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Special Court Poised to Transfer Taylor to The Hague

- UN envoy Victor Angelo told Journalists covering the Special Court for Sierra Leone that there was a strong possibility that former President Taylor would be moved to The Hague and that a UN resolution to that effect would be adopted in the next few days.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

Special Court Allows Taylor Family Members Visit

- According to journalists covering the Special Court for Sierra Leone, Taylor-family spokesman Sando Johnson yesterday said that the Court had granted permission to two members of detained former President Charles Taylor to visit him in prison.
(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

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

Miami Court Denies Taylor's Son Bail

- Sources told ELBS Radio yesterday that a Court in Miami, Florida has ordered that the son of detained former President Charles Taylor be held without bail. Mr. Charles Taylor Jr. was arrested last week when he entered the United States from Trinidad with a passport bearing Charles McArthur Emmanuel to conceal the identity of his father on his application for the passport.

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 armahj@un.org.

Boston Globe

6 April 2006

Opinion

A beckoning in West Africa

WITH ITS PROSECUTION of the former Liberian leader Charles Taylor, the United Nations will send a message to the strongmen of Africa that they can no longer export terror and death to neighboring nations. The trial needs to proceed fairly and quickly to convince Africans that the international community is serious about enforcing norms of conduct on this most vulnerable of continents.

The location of the trial shouldn't be Sierra Leone, where Taylor faced charges this week for allegedly fomenting a revolt that resulted in the deaths or mutilations of thousands of people. He is still a feared figure in this section of West Africa, and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, his successor as president of Liberia, wants him out of the region and tried at The Hague, the traditional seat of international tribunals. The United States supports the move, and Britain is circulating a resolution to this effect at the United Nations.

Some people in Sierra Leone oppose the move, on the grounds that they want the man they consider their tormentor tried at the scene of the crimes. But the fragility of West Africa argues in favor of a more stable location. Before the special UN court is moved, however, someone must pay for the expense of witnesses and lawyers living in the Netherlands, as well as the cost of transmitting video of the proceedings back to Africa.

The Bush administration has already done much to bring Taylor to justice by cajoling Nigeria, where he had sought refuge, into giving him up. The United States, Britain, and the rest of the developed world need to provide the money to make sure his trial is scrupulously conducted and widely publicized.

Taylor's six-year rule of Liberia was brutal, but he's not being accused of crimes there. Instead, the trial will focus on his attempts to subvert the government of Sierra Leone by backing an insurgent army loathed for its brutality. Meddling in the affairs of weaker neighbors is hardly a behavior confined to Africa, but the continent became unusually susceptible to outside interference after the breakup of the colonial empires starting in the late 1950s.

A few of the interventions come quickly to mind: apartheid South Africa's support for a rebel group in Mozambique, US backing of a guerrilla army in Angola, Libyan leader Moammar Khadafy's meddling in Chad and (in support of Taylor) in Liberia, and most recently, the Ugandan and Rwandan invasion of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In hindsight, with the possible exception of the Rwandan attack (self-defense following the genocide), none was justified. When outside interference descends to the brutality of the struggle for Sierra Leone, it is time to establish a marker for international conduct that other leaders, in Africa and elsewhere, will be expected to follow.

Al Ahram Weekly (Cairo)

6 April 2006

Opinion

<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/789/in1.htm>

Fall From Grace

Charles Taylor's fall is a reminder of the perils of absolute power, writes Gamal Nkrumah

I sat back and watched Liberian ex-president and former Baptist preacher Charles Ghanakay Taylor handcuffed, visibly shaken and dishevelled, taken prisoner in a United Nations aircraft surrounded by UN peace-keeping troops, popularly known as the blue berets. The scene seemed somewhat incredulous. Still, I had the strange feeling that I had seen it all before. A pervasive sense of déjà-vu engulfed me. It was a typical cloak- and-dagger drama with its characteristic mix of whim and menace.



sagas -- the witch trials, the paranoia, the conspiracy theories and the exacting personal price of power.

The Taylor drama has all the hallmarks of the Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic sagas -- the witch trials, the paranoia, the conspiracy theories and the exacting personal price of power. For a drama so full of protents and omens, the signs are not good. Many African leaders started out as anti-corruption advocates. And invariably, it was not long before their quest for power resulted in murder and mayhem. Taylor is no exception, but why was he singled out? Like Saddam and Milosevic, he will no doubt be subjected to methodical and almost ritual degradation. In an interrupted telephone interview, Liberian ex-president told Al-Ahram Weekly that behind his fall were machinations and betrayals that he did not foresee. "I was betrayed by the Nigerian authorities," he said. And despite his ordeal, he stressed that he was in "comfortable surroundings" and that he was being handled by "very professional people". Immediately afterwards, our conversation came to an abrupt end.

But, internationally speaking, there must have been a reason why, of all African leaders, he has been singled out as the sacrificial lamb. Observers say that Taylor's adventures, above all else, have left a thick red smear of blood across the war-torn West African countries of Sierra Leone and Liberia.

No doubt this is true. But below the stormy surface of international politics is a concerted attempt to reshape this corner of West Africa in America's image and likeness. "History is the chronicle of the victor," Akyaba Addai Sebo, independent consultant on preventive diplomacy and conflict transformation, and formerly special envoy of International Alert, told Weekly. He also helped broker peace negotiations between the fighting groups in Liberia and Sierra Leone. "They desperately needed a trophy," he explained. "They cannot tolerate a civilian who took up arms against a military dictatorship and won free and fair democratic elections in spite of the onslaught of the United States, Britain and the powers that be." He went on: "They have had their way, their pound of flesh. Taylor is most likely to go the way of Milosevic or even Sankoh for that matter."

Taylor is currently held by a special UN court set up for Sierra Leone in 2002. The UN already runs a tribunal in The Hague to prosecute war crimes suspects connected with conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s, and Taylor is scheduled to be flown in to the Netherlands in due course. The Dutch government has no qualms about hosting the trial of Taylor, but it wants clearance from the UN first. "His presence in the custody of the special court sends out a clear message that no matter how powerful or feared people may be, the law is above them," explained Desmond de Silva, chief UN prosecutor.

Taylor plans to assemble a team of international lawyers for future hearings. Among the lawyers who were mentioned by the international media are Alan Dershowitz, law professor at Harvard, and Karim Khan, a British lawyer who represented Taylor when he challenged the jurisdiction of the war crimes tribunal in 2003. The Ghanaian solicitor Kofi Akinyah was also approached to defend Taylor. Meanwhile, Vincent Nmehielle, the UN special court-appointed defence lawyer, is defending the former president in Sierra Leone.

The accusations of unfair treatment have already begun. Taylor's sister Louise Edna Taylor-Carter, who heads a delegation of six family members in Sierra Leone, said the family was denied access to Taylor. "He'll never get a fair trial here," she said. And she has a point: it is undoubtedly the case that Taylor will not receive a fair trial in Sierra Leone. But it is not clear whether he will receive a fair trial in The Hague either.

Taylor is not charged with crimes he committed in his country, but rather in Sierra Leone. James Bleeton, editor of Liberia's New Standard newspaper, told the BBC that had Taylor contested the presidential elections that brought Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to power, he would easily have won as he did in the 1997 polls. To this day, Taylor remains tremendously popular in Liberia, which explains why the Liberian government was reluctant to receive him. For his presence in the country would have caused something of a commotion. "Are the people stupid then? Taylor is popular for a reason. And his captors realise that all too well. Indeed, the victims [of Taylor] are much more humane than the elite in power," Addai-Sebo explained. Indeed even in Sierra Leone, where he has many enemies, most people do not particularly seek revenge -- rather justice. "Many of the amputees themselves do not seek revenge. The responsibility of the carnage cannot be restricted to a single person."

Behind all the commotion, perhaps oil is one of the reasons that the US in particular is interested in Liberia. West Africa has emerged as a new source of oil for the West, which is uneasy about dependence on the unstable Middle East. Liberia is rich in offshore oil reserves, and in fact Taylor was seeking to invite the Chinese, who have deep sea oil technology, to develop the Liberian oil industry. "The idea behind Taylor's trial is the continued denigration of the stereotypical African they say has a chip on his shoulder. The West wants 'yes men', not African leaders who have their own opinions," Addai-Sebo said. "They cannot accept African solutions that are not a result of pressures from outside."