

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



Charles Taylor, at the resumption of his trial in The Hague. See additional photos in today's *'Special Court Supplement'*

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:

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

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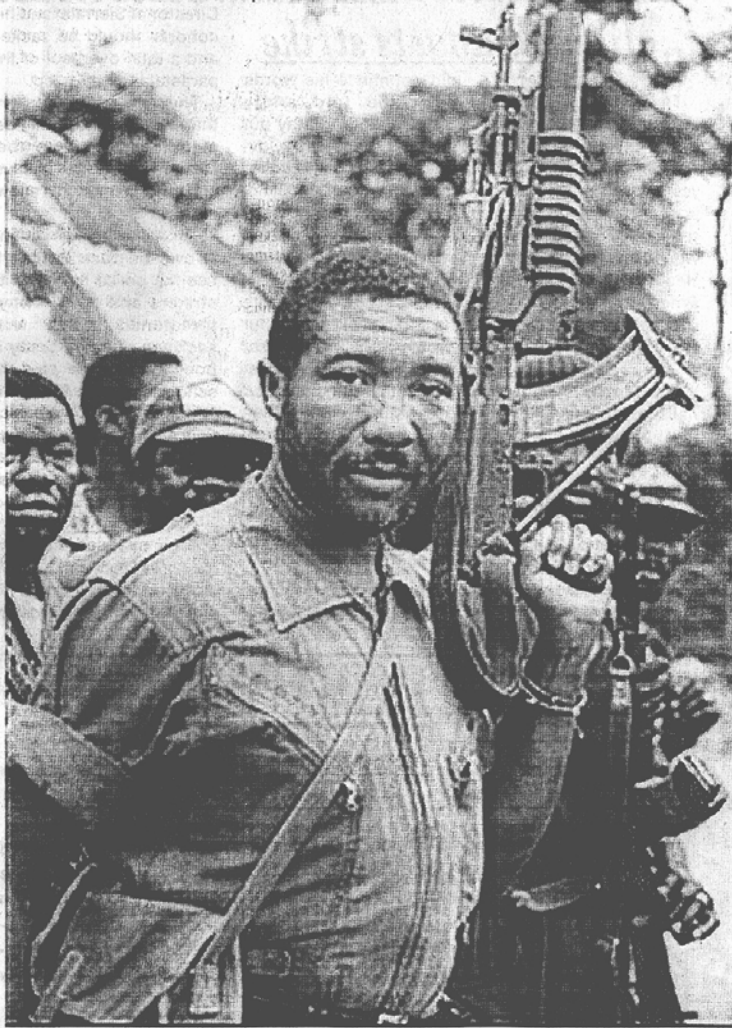
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The Exclusive

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Vol. 1 No Tuesday January 8, 2008

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Will Taylor Free?

By David A Jabati former President of Liberia resumed yesterday 7 January 2008 at the
 As the trial of the day 7 January 2008 at the Contd. page 2

From front page

International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, Stephen Rapp, the Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone has said that the case against Taylor is very serious to the point that he is not sure Taylor

will go free.

According to Rapp, twenty witnesses from Liberia are set to testify against Taylor in the coming weeks. The witnesses he said are expected to testify about the link between Taylor and the

former Revolutionary Front (RUF) rebels and his dealings in diamonds in Sierra Leone.

The Prosecutor further revealed that the trial will be concluded and judgment is expected in 2009.

The Special Court budget for 2008 is according to the Prosecutor \$ 33 million with another \$20 million needed to complete the trial in 2009.

Taylor is reported to have been boycotting court sittings. Whether or not Taylor appeared in yesterday's trial The Exclusive was not informed up to press time. However, Rapp has stated that if Taylor boycotts yesterday's proceedings, it will be left with the Judges to determine whether or not the case should proceed.

For di People
Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Taylor war crimes trial resumes

THE WAR crimes trial of Liberian former President Charles Taylor has resumed in The Hague after a six-month delay.

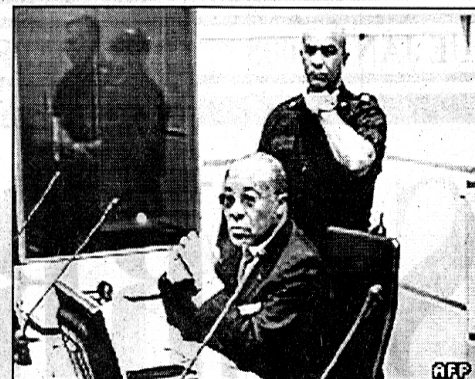
Mr Taylor - who is accused of trading weapons for diamonds - showed no emotion as the first witness, an expert on "blood diamonds", testified.

He is the first African former head of state to face an international war crimes court and faces

11 charges. He denies responsibility for atrocities committed by rebels during the civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The trial opened in June last year but proceedings were postponed after Mr Taylor fired his defence lawyer and boycotted the opening of the trial.

He now has a new defence team - a senior British lawyer, who is being paid for by the court, as Mr



Prosecutors are trying to prove Taylor's alleged links to rebels

Taylor says he cannot afford it himself. The BBC's Mark Doyle in The Hague says this will surprise many people in Liberia, who claim he made lots of money by selling timber and diamonds.

The former Liberian leader was dressed in a dark suit and stared impassively through gold-rimmed glasses as witness Ian Smillie traced the history of the diamond industry in Sierra Leone, our correspondent reports.

Prosecutors say Mr Taylor's desire for access to diamonds and other natural resources from Sierra Leone was one of the root causes of his alleged involvement in the war. Mr Taylor is accused of responsibility for the actions of Revolutionary United Front rebels during the 1991-2001 civil war in Sierra Leone, which included unlawful killings, sexual slavery, use of child soldiers and looting.

RUF fighters were also notorious for hacking off the arms and legs of the civilian population with machetes.

As the first international criminal prosecution against a former African ruler accused of misdeeds, the case is of crucial importance, our correspondent says.

Mr Taylor has pleaded not guilty to all 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The prosecution will also be calling a Sierra Leonean victim and a Liberian witness who is said to have belonged to Mr Taylor's inner circle.

Both witnesses are protected, which means their names have not been revealed. In all, the prosecution intends to call 144 witnesses, though only half are likely to appear in person. Chief prosecutor at the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, Stephen Rapp, said: "We owe it to the victims to present some testimony in a live sense [so as] not to drain the case of the human element completely."

The trial is expected to last about 18 months.

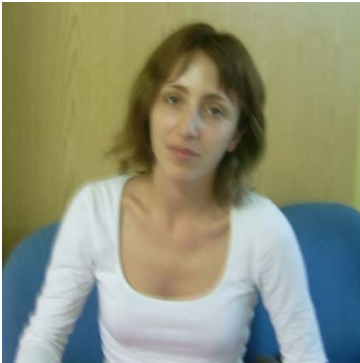
It is being held in The Hague for fear that staging it in Sierra Leone might lead to fresh unrest there.

If convicted, the UK has offered to jail him - again in case his presence in West Africa led to instability.

Awoko

Monday, 7 January 2008

War crimes trial analyst commends Special Court's Outreach



Ana Perovic war crimes analyst

Ana Perovic, an analyst of the war crimes trial in the Serbia Trial Chamber, during their visit to the Special Court for Sierra Leone commended the court's Outreach section.

The analyst said the purpose of their visit was to learn “from experiences from this court and to see what are the main obstacles in the work of the Special Court and also to learn about their Outreach campaign which is very much developed.”

She added that, “we are basically here to learn from experiences gained on how to implement certain models of the SCSL and apply them in Serbia in order to overcome existing problems. And so far we have learnt a lot about the organization and structure of the court and also about the developed outreach campaign which is a very important thing in the whole process of reconciliation.”

Concerning the obstacles faced by the Special Court, Ana Perovic explained that one major obstacle the court was faced with “is [the] provision of security to witnesses who have testified in the court.”

“Another obstacles faced is people's perceptions that huge amount of money is spent on the court especially since the people of Sierra Leone are very poor. Although the court faces some funding problems, they have managed to carry out all these services which are very fine and I most emphasize that the outreach campaign and the witness support centres are very important,” she noted.

About the role of the Outreach section she maintained that, “the people in this section are doing their best although there are always pros and cons I think they should continue in their effort of always explaining to people why it was important to form the court.

She stressed that, “the main success of the outreach is that they have managed somehow even though they go through some technical problems to bringing the court closer to the people....I think trying those for war crimes is a clear message that needs to be sent that this court is here to end impunity.”

Standard Times

Monday, 7 January 2008

\$200,000 For Charles Taylor's Defense Team Raises Concern In Sierra Leone

The \$200,000 set aside by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for the defense team of Charles Gangay Taylor former Liberian president and presently indicted by the Court for committing crimes against humanity and war crimes in the country had drawn many concerns from the public and victims of the country eleven year old conflict.

Charles Gangay Taylor was charged by the Special Court for Sierra Leone with eleven count charges of war crimes and is presently undergoing trial in The Hague, Netherlands.

Many people contacted have described the award of the \$200,000 by the Donor Community for the Taylor's defense trial as 'not useful' for the country considering the lives and innocent civilians that have allegedly suffered for the sake of Taylor. Mr. John Caulker is the executive Director of Forum of Conscience in Sierra Leone. He said in an interview that 'the money provided for the defense team of Taylor is too much'. This is because many people have suffered under the auspices of Charles Taylor but today too much money is being spent for him leaving the victims in detriment. He preferred for that \$200000 to have been spent on reparations to the victims of the war in the country.

Mr. Jusu Sakka is the president of the Victims of war in Sierra Leone. He described the award of the money as not relevant stating that the money should have been given to the victims of war in the country. There was an agreement between the government of Sierra Leone and the donor community about the reparations which are yet to reach to fulfilment.

Many Sierra Leoneans are waiting to see Taylor being jail for the crimes he is allegedly accused of committing during the conflict in Sierra Leone. Britain has said that if Charles Taylor is convicted they are ready to receive him to serve his jail term in that country.

AllAfrica.com

Monday, 7 January 2008

Charles Taylor Trial Gets Under Way

The war crimes trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor finally got under way at The Hague in the Netherlands on Monday.

Taylor is appearing before the Special Court for Sierra Leone, a tribunal set up jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone.

He is charged with crimes against humanity and war crimes arising out of his involvement in the civil war in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2001. The charges relate to killings, mutilations, rape, other forms of sexual violence, sexual slavery, recruiting and using child soldiers, abduction and using forced labour.

The trial first opened last June but was delayed by Taylor's initial refusal to appear in court, and wrangles over his legal representation.

At a news conference held by the Special Court on Friday, chief prosecutor Stephen Rapp said he envisaged that eight witnesses would testify in the first two or three weeks of the trial.

The website set up by non-governmental organisations to monitor the trial, www.charlestaylortrial.org, reported that Rapp said:

59 witnesses will testify about the linkage between the crimes and Taylor and his associates;

77 crime-based witnesses would give evidence, 10 in person and 67 in writing; and

Evidence from eight expert witnesses, including one with knowledge of the diamond industry, would be presented.

The human rights group Amnesty International has noted the trial is the first in which a former head of state or government has been prosecuted in an international criminal court for crimes committed in Africa against Africans.

AllAfrica.com

Monday, 7 January 2008

Liberia: Citizens Lose Interest in Taylor Trial

The trial of former Liberian leader Charles Taylor on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity, is set to resume on Monday. But Boakai Fofana of allAfrica's Monrovia office says the case has not generated a high level of interest.

It's the new year. The streets are as lively as ever with commuters moving up and down to meet their day's requirements, while thousands of miles away in the Hague, the Netherlands, their former president, Charles Taylor, is being arraigned again before the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

The resumption of the trial of the charismatic man who dominated the Liberian political scene for more than a decade after launching a rebellion in 1989, should have generated a very high level of national interest, especially considering that he was president of the country for about six years before stepping down following pressure from another rebel group opposing his regime.

But this doesn't appear to be the case. Aside from a few media outlets that have carried the story, most Liberians are not particularly aware of the various intricacies surrounding the case and its delays and are therefore not giving it much attention.

Some political pundits are of the opinion that there is a "quick-to-forget syndrome" that affects many Liberians. These observers think Liberians get excited and overly sentimental in the immediate aftermath of an incident, but as time elapses, memory of that incident, no matter how grave it is, tends to fade away.

A very good example is that of the former rebel general, Prince Johnson, who is notorious for his part in the death of the former president, Samuel Doe. Johnson is now a senator, voted in by his constituency. He seems to ply the streets of Monrovia without any semblance of security, sometimes waving to on lookers as though a national hero. His past deeds? Gone in oblivion!

Taylor and his trial may face the same fate, albeit in a different way. What concerns ordinary people nowadays, according to one young Liberian, Edwin Wilson, is "rebuilding the country, the prices of basic commodities and job provision rather than an endless trial."

Liberia has a huge population of young people, from whom Taylor boasted that he drew his support. When he was at the peak of his power, many believed in him so much that they thought there was nothing so complicated that the "Papay" (Liberian slang for "Father") could not solve.

But walking the streets of Monrovia today, and gauging people's opinion, it is clear that his sympathizers have either lost hope in the possibility of his acquittal, or that they too have fallen prey to the "quick-to-forget syndrome."

Taylor's family members, party loyalists and former members of the defunct National Patriotic Front of Liberia, the rebel group he headed prior to his presidency, are still glued to unfolding events from the Hague. During the weekend, they organized a "prayer service" for the former president at the First Baptist Church in Monrovia.

For its part, the government of Liberia under President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has said that it is hopeful that Taylor will receive a fair trial. Deputy Information Minister Gabriel Williams said that the interest of the Liberian government is to see that the rule of law is carried out to the fullest, and that Taylor receives a fair trial.

The Australian

Monday, 7 January 2008

Blood diamond expert to testify

Correspondents in The Hague

AN expert on the international trade in blood diamonds will be the first witness to testify at the war crimes trial of former Liberian president Charles Taylor, which resumed last night after months of costly delays that have plunged the process into financial uncertainty.

Taylor, 59, the first African head of state to appear before an international war crimes tribunal, is accused of terrorising the people of neighbouring Sierra Leone by orchestrating atrocities committed by militias known for hacking off victims' limbs during the country's 10-year civil war that ended in 2003.

The 11 charges against him include murder, rape, enslavement and conscripting child soldiers.

Taylor, who appeared in the courtroom last night wearing a dark suit and tie, has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Prosecutors say Taylor's desire to get his hands on diamonds from Sierra Leone was one of the root causes of his alleged involvement in that country's civil war.

Their first witness will be Ian Smillie, an expert on conflict and blood diamonds -- so called because the proceeds from their illegal sales have been used to fund wars across Africa since the 1990s.

Mr Smillie is the first of 144 prosecution witnesses, although trial lawyers expect only half of them to appear in person.

The second witness scheduled to testify was a victim of the militias. Taylor's defence team does not deny the atrocities happened in Sierra Leone, and has argued that calling victims is an unnecessary appeal to the emotions of judges.

But the chief prosecutor at the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, Stephen Rapp, said he had an obligation to highlight the suffering of victims.

"We owe it to the victims to present some testimony in a live sense," Mr Rapp said, so as "not to drain the case of the human element completely".

Later this week, a former member of Taylor's inner circle will testify about how the former Liberian president allegedly controlled and encouraged militias in neighbouring Sierra Leone. Nearly 60 witnesses will be called to draw links between Taylor and the militias; most are expected to do so anonymously for fear of reprisals by Taylor supporters.

Taylor is receiving legal aid of \$US100,000 (\$115,000) a month. Faced with such costs, the Special Court for Sierra Leone is making a fresh appeal for international donors to ensure that it can complete the trial process.

The court, which has put nine other senior figures from the 1991-2002 civil war on trial in Sierra Leone, must prepare to run well into 2010 should Taylor appeal against a verdict expected in about 18 months to two years. Officials have admitted privately that despite pledges covering most of the original cost projections, there is enough money to run only until October.

The court increased the defence budget after fears that the trial would be seen as unfair to Taylor and cause fresh unrest in Liberia or Sierra Leone, where the case is being followed closely.

The trial is being held in The Hague for fear that staging it in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, could spark fresh unrest there.

But the trial action is being beamed to Freetown and the public has been invited to watch.

Today's resumption comes six months after Taylor boycotted the start of his trial, claiming he would not be given a fair hearing, and fired his attorney. He has since appointed a new team led by experienced British lawyer Courtenay Griffiths.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Former Liberian leader faces war crimes tribunal

Stephanie Kennedy

TONY EASTLEY: Liberia's former president, Charles Taylor, rose to power through a bloody civil war, and he'll be further remembered for plunging his country into economic ruin in the early 1990s.

Now, he's set a new mark. Taylor is the first African head of state to appear before an international war crimes tribunal.

He's accused of backing the rebels in a civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone and he's facing charges of murder, rape, enslavement and conscripting child soldiers.

The 59-year-old has pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Stephanie Kennedy reports on the historic trial in The Hague that's resumed after a six month delay.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: Just over a decade ago, Charles Taylor came to power promising his country peace and prosperity.

CHARLES TAYLOR: Charles Taylor is about progress, peace, and Charles Taylor is about moving this country back into the world community of nations.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: But six years later, under international pressure, the Liberian president was forced to resign.

CHARLES TAYLOR: I can no longer see you suffer, the suffering is enough, for you are good people. You have been very good to me through the grace of God, and I love you from the bottom of my heart.

I will always remember you wherever I am, and I say to you, God willing, I will be back.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: Mr Taylor now stands accused of terrorising the people of neighbouring Sierra Leone by orchestrating atrocities committed by the rebels.

These militias hacked off the limbs of thousands of people during the country's 10 year civil war that ended in 2003.

Jabati Mambu is one of those victims.

JABATI MAMBU: They went into our house, dragged me under the bed, you know, threw me outside, and they asked that they should cut my hands off. Then I said, "Well, instead I should join you." They said "No," and one of the guys, the commander, commanded a 12-year-old boy, and the guy came with an axe, and that was what they used to chop my right hand off.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: Prosecutors allege that Charles Taylor armed, trained and controlled Sierra Leone's revolutionary rebels in exchange for blood diamonds.

The chief prosecutor at the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone is Stephen Rapp, and he acknowledges that this case is a difficult one to prove.

STEPHEN RAPP: We recognise that that's our challenge. We don't allege that Charles Taylor ever crossed the border into Sierra Leone, or that he chopped off anybody's hand himself, or raped anybody on the streets of Freetown.

But we have a challenge and we are going to meet that with a variety of witnesses from the inside. There are people that are quite close to him, there are people that further away from him that, nonetheless, hear communications or are privy to the orders that he has provided, or who observe his key lieutenants in the field in Sierra Leone giving orders, or providing material.

STEPHANIE KENNEDY: The trial is being broadcast live to Freetown, and the public has been invited to watch.

This is Stephanie Kennedy reporting for AM.

Voice of America

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Supporters of Former Liberian President Charles Taylor Predict He will Be Exonerated

By James Butty
Washington, D.C.

Some supporters of former Liberian President Charles Taylor have been reacting to the resumption Monday of his trial in The Hague. Chief Cyril Allen is chairman emeritus of Taylor's former National Patriotic Party of Liberia. He says the Taylor trial would be the first time in the history of the International Criminal Court that an indicted person would be exonerated.

Chief Allen told VOA the defense would prove that there is no evidence linking Mr. Taylor to war crimes in Sierra Leone.

"It is very difficult and almost impossible to do that because if you are talking about evidence it has to be internationally accepted. Anyone can make any allegations and any group of people can sit and collate a lie that can send any man to his grave. So no one is expecting that you will have honest people coming forward to present professional evidence. You will expect that most of these people are thoroughly briefed, and they will tip the case to wherever they want it to go. But the cross-examination and the defense will come through, and let's wait for that occasion and then we can make that logical deduction," he said.

An expert witness testified on day one of the resumed trial telling the court Taylor might have wanted Sierra Leone's diamonds because they have far better quality than diamonds from Liberia. But Allen disagreed, suggesting that the so-called blood diamonds might not have come from Sierra Leone or Liberia.

"I was surprised that the expert did not also mention that huge quantities of diamonds came from Eastern Europe at the fall the Russian Empire that went into Western Europe and was falsely declared from various Africa countries, including Liberian and Sierra Leone. I thought if he were such an expert he would have mentioned that," Allen said.

Supporters of Charles Taylor held a prayer service Sunday in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Allen said the prayer service was a show of support to prove that Mr. Taylor is not guilty.

"Categorically there is no one in Liberia that believes that anyone is guilty unless they have been proven so. International law and all internationally accepted principles and practices say that you have to prove beyond all reasonable doubt that someone is guilty before they are actually guilty. You are talking about female genital mutilation and amputation, and you're talking about rape and all those things then you need to have a lot evidence that Charles was sitting in the Executive Mansion in Liberia raping little girls in Sierra Leone, or that he gave instructions to do that," Allen said.

He also said Taylor could not have committed such crimes for which he has been accused because Allen said Taylor is a Christian.

"We keep saying that Mr. Taylor is a Christian and amputation of a body is a Moslem doctrine. It has nothing to do with Liberia. It was the tendency of how those people conducted their war in Sierra Leone. And it couldn't have been on his orders," he said.

At the start of his trial last June, Taylor expressed concern that he would not get a fair trial. Allen said the defense would prove Mr. Taylor innocent.

"This trial would be the first time in the history of the International Criminal Court that someone has been indicted and they have come out clean. Once they are trying to link Mr. Taylor the activities in Sierra Leone with RUF (Revolutionary United Front rebels) they cannot produce evidence because there is no real evidence about that, there is no reality about it," Allen said.

Cocorioko

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Taylor's trial : A powerful message to African leaders

Written by Joseph Sherman COCORIOKO's Assistant Editor

The trial of Charles Ghankay Taylor which begins on Monday January 7, at The Hague should send a powerful message to abusive political leaders in Africa and an important signal that impunity will not be allowed to stand and that the rule of law must prevail.

Although political and legal obstacles to the prosecution of government leaders for serious human rights abuses remain a strong force to contend with because governments are often constrained to take up cases outside their borders as was the case of the Sierra Leone government and Charles Taylor. It is crystal clear that most heads of state accused of serious human rights abuses use the traditional immunity from prosecution for acts committed in office. In some instances, the differences between national and international legal system and the absence of competent institutions can expose the irritating questions of jurisdiction and procedure.

Africa's stance to hold senior government officials and rebel leaders accountable for torture, murder, rape and other serious crimes against humanity is a step in the right direction. The trial of Charles Taylor who faces charges ranging from terrorism, rape and to mutilation and the use of child soldiers is the first time a former African head of state had been arrested and charged with human rights abuses committed while in office.

What African leaders should bear in mind is that justice belongs not to this class or that class, nor to a particular relationship between classes but to society functioning as a whole. Justice evolves through the progress of society and has its foundation on natural law of equal treatment. It is also important for justice to be seen and done to all officials of the most powerful countries who necessarily remain exempt from prosecution if international justice will become a more level playing field.

The key to fair treatment under the law and ending impunity is to work towards having each African state fully exercise its responsibility to ensure the rule of law is upheld. The efforts to end the cycle of violence by ensuring accountability for past crimes, states should work closely with affected populations and governments as possible if the foundation of democracy is to be sustained. Some African leaders may be prepared to accept the risk of injustice to others believing themselves to be immune from the risk of suffering injustice at the hands of their governments. Perhaps they might reflect on Pastor Niemoller's lament in Hitler's Germany:

"... They came for the Communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came up for the trade unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up."

The African people deserve to be ruled by leaders who respect the rule of law. The courts and their processes are the only sure protection of individuals-and ultimately the only sure protection of a community- against illegal injustice. It would be naïve to think that could be any adequate approach to international justice without constant awareness of the present state of knowledge concerning justice in the domestic context. Whatever happens, the days of injustice and impunity are numbered in Africa

Hirondelle News Agency (Lausanne)

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Resumption of Charles Taylor Trial

The trial of Charles Taylor will resume Monday 7 January before the judges of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) with the testimony of the first prosecution witness.

The former president of Liberia is accused of crimes against humanity and war crimes committed between 1997 and 2002, during the civil war which began in 1991, in Sierra Leone. Ian Smillie, a Canadian expert of the diamond industry, is the first of the 144 prosecution witnesses.

In addition to the trial of the former head of state, the first brought by international judges against an African president, this trial will also be that of illegal diamond trafficking, according to the prosecutor, who proves that Taylor wanted "to seize the diamond riches" of Sierra Leone.

The expected difficulty of the prosecutor will be to establish the links between the head of state of Liberia and the war in the neighbouring country.

For the prosecutor, Taylor had used his reserve troops of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), whose leader, Foday Sankoh, he had met in a training camp of Libyan President Mouammar Kadhafi.

Taylor would have then armed, financed and trained the rebel army in exchange of diamonds.

Among the witnesses, 77 will be direct victims of the rebel crimes, eight will be experts and 59 will be called to testify the connection between Taylor and the crimes committed in Sierra Leone. Among them, will be "insiders", former associates of the warlords.

Concerning the witnesses, the defence lost, at least temporarily, a battle aiming to have the UN lift the sanctions imposed against acquaintances of Taylor, freezing of assets and a ban on travel.

The lawyers of the former president estimate that these sanctions could prevent a great number of defence witnesses from testifying at the Court.

The first defence interventions imply, without surprise, that Taylor will use political arguments to accuse, in his turn, those which supported him in his deadly adventures.

In August, Courtenay Griffith, Bar of London, notably evoked a letter from the personal records of the defendant, addressed by the former American President Jimmy Carter. The prosecutor has since tried to have access to these archives, but was denied by the judges.

The former warlord, who had boycotted the opening of his trial on 4 June 2007, now has a solid team of lawyers and investigators, mostly paid by the special court.

The team receives 70,000 US Dollars monthly in honoraries, to which is added nearly 30,000 US Dollars in various administration and investigation expenses.

The annual budget of the special court was increased in 2007 to nearly 36 million Dollars.

Indicted on 3 March 2003, Taylor had been in exile in Nigeria until 29 March 2006, where he was arrested then transferred to The Hague in June

at the request of the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, according to whom, the trial of Taylor in Freetown constituted a risk of regional destabilization.

Associated Press

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Charles Taylor war crimes trial resumes with blood diamond expert's testimony

By MIKE CORDER, Associated Press Writer

THE HAGUE Netherlands

The first witness in Charles Taylor's war crimes trial testified that Sierra Leone rebels backed by Taylor mutilated and terrorized civilians to seize diamond fields, and that Taylor used the profits to buy weapons.

But lawyers for the former Liberian president on Monday challenged prosecutors to present evidence that linked Taylor to widespread murder, rape and amputations during Sierra Leone's bloody civil war.

Miners often slave laborers kidnapped by Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front or RUF dug up diamonds worth between \$60US million and \$125US million each year, said Ian Smillie, a Canadian expert on conflict diamonds.

Prosecutors allege the diamonds were smuggled through Liberia and Taylor used the proceeds to buy arms and ammunition for the rebels earning them the name "blood diamonds."

Taylor's trial resumed after a six month recess. It was adjourned last June after a chaotic opening day during which he boycotted proceedings and fired his lawyer.

Taylor, 59, is accused of orchestrating rape, murder and mutilation in Sierra Leone from his presidential palace in Liberia's capital Monrovia. He has pleaded innocent to all 11 charges.

Taylor is the first former African head of state to appear before an international tribunal.

Taylor looked confident as he sat in court wearing a gray suit and tie and gold rimmed glasses. At the end of the hearing, he smiled and chatted with his new defense team and blew a kiss to supporters in the public gallery.

Smillie was part of a UN team that investigated arms smuggling in Liberia in 2000, a probe that included interviewing Taylor. In that interview, Taylor conceded that Sierra Leone diamonds likely were being smuggled into and out of Liberia, but denied involvement.

However, Smillie said he stood by the findings of his team's report and read to judges a summary that was included in a 2001 Security Council Resolution imposing sanctions on Taylor's regime.

The resolution said that diamonds smuggled through Liberia were the key source of RUF income "and that such illicit trade cannot be conducted without the permission and involvement of Liberian government officials at the highest levels," Smillie told judges.

He also explained why the RUF developed the signature atrocity of the 10-year Sierra Leone civil war that ended in 2003.

"I think that part of the tactic in chopping hands and so on was to create such a fear of the RUF that the areas would be cleared for them to do whatever they wanted, including diamond mining and foraging for supplies," he said.

Fleeting video images of maimed victims cast a grim shadow over the first day of evidence.

One diamond miner shown in a video clip said RUF rebels forced him to lay out his arms and then hacked off both his hands so that he could never again vote in elections.

Another woman said she was sexually assaulted by a rebel and then saw her husband staggering out of the jungle with blood spurting out of his arms where his hands had been hacked off.

Taylor's defense team objected that videos had no relevance for Smillie's testimony, and the court said it will only rule later whether to admit them into evidence.

"I think they're desperate," Taylor's lead attorney Courtenay Griffiths said. "Let us now see what the firm concrete evidence is that he was directly involved ordering the atrocities in Sierra Leone."

Observers welcomed the resumption of the trial.

"This is a huge moment, as a former head of state is being tried for these most serious crimes," said Elise Keppler of Human Rights Watch. "For crimes like that to be committed with impunity would be a travesty."

Smillie showed the judges photos of a plane formerly used by the Seattle SuperSonics the basketball team's logo still on the tail he said was used to smuggle 68 tons of Ukrainian weapons and ammunition.

The arms in cases strapped into and crammed under the plane's leather seats were smuggled into Liberia through Burkina Faso in March 1999, Smillie said.

Defense attorneys objected to Smillie being portrayed as an expert on Sierra Leone history and to the video images.

Judges agreed Smillie should not be allowed to testify about atrocities and it was not clear if they would admit the video as evidence.

Prosecutors have 144 witnesses, but only expect to call half of them to appear in person. The complex case was expected to last nearly two years. An appeal would likely carry the legal process into 2010.

The second witness scheduled to testify likely Tuesday was a victim of the militias. Taylor's defense team does not deny the atrocities happened in Sierra Leone, and has argued that calling victims is an unnecessary appeal to the emotions of judges.

Later in the week, a former member of Taylor's inner circle will testify about how the former Liberian president allegedly controlled and encouraged Sierra Leone militias.

The trial is being held in The Hague because of concerns that holding it in the Sierra Leone capital, Freetown, could spark new unrest.

In Monrovia, the Liberian capital, hundreds of pro-Taylor worshippers attended a prayer service Sunday night, gathering before a mammoth poster of the accused ex-president.

Baptist preacher Joseph Johnson told the congregation: "We strongly believe in the innocence of the accused as a church."

Taylor's support in his home country is led by his family, who say he was not in control of those that carried out the crimes.

Associated Press Writer Jonathan Paye-Layleh contributed to this report from Monrovia, Liberia.

The News (Liberia)

Monday, 7 January 2008

Taylor's Trial is 'Political,' Baptist Prelate Tells Supporters

A group of family members and supporters of indicted former Liberian President Charles Taylor have been told that the trial of the ex-warlord is political and it is an international conspiracy.

The Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Congo Town near Monrovia, Rev. Gardea Johnson said his church will support Mr. Taylor in his trial because the ex-president is a "Child of God", and because it is about Liberia.

Speaking at a thanksgiving and intercessory service Sunday, Rev. Johnson urged the Liberian people to take interest in the trial of Mr. Taylor not only because it is about a former President, but it is also about Liberia.

The Baptist clergyman said as a pastor it is his responsibility to pray for Mr. Taylor not only for his physical wellbeing but also for his spiritual growth.

The thanksgiving service was attended by family members and supporters including his wife Senator Jewel Howard Taylor.

The thanksgiving service was held barely hours before the resumption of trial of the former warlord and dictator who allegedly fueled war in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Taylor, a former deacon of the Baptist Church, faces eleven counts of war crimes and crime against humanity including rape, among others.

Proceedings into Taylor's trial are expected to begin at 9:00 local (Dutch) time; 8:00GMT (Sierra Leone and Liberia time).

Both the prosecution and defense lawyers have said that they would be ready to present evidence when the war crimes trial commences today.

The former Liberian President's trial began in June 2007, but proceedings were postponed to allow his new defense team more time to prepare.

At a status conference in The Hague on December 11, 2007, lawyers from both sides told the court they would be ready to proceed when the trial begins.

It can be recalled on June 4, 2007, Mr. Taylor boycotted the start of the trial when the prosecution gave its opening statement.

He told the judges by letter that he was poorly represented by the court-appointed attorney and was accorded inadequate funds to mount a proper defense.

After one more session boycotted by Mr. Taylor, the trial was adjourned. However, in a hearing which lasted less than 10 minutes, the prosecution and defense agreed they would be ready to hear the first evidence today (January 7, 2008) when the UN-backed Special Court begins a schedule of 25 ½ hours of hearings per week.

Taylor, the first African leader to face an international court, is charged with arming and supporting Sierra Leone's 10-year civil war, which ended in 2002.

Prosecutor Brenda Hollis told the court she would present a list of witnesses shortly who will appear during the first two weeks of the trial and will file a motion to grant protective measures for some witnesses - the final measures before the trial can begin in earnest.

Prosecutors have said they will present witnesses from Taylor's inner circle who will testify that from his headquarters in Liberia he controlled rebel forces in neighboring Sierra Leone to exploit its timber, diamonds and other resources.

They also have proposed bringing victims mutilated by the rebels, although Taylor's defense team has argued that such testimony was irrelevant and only intended for its emotional appeal, since no one disputed that atrocities occurred during the brutal war.

BBC NEWS

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Taylor's War Crimes Trial Resumes

The war crimes trial of Liberian former President Charles Taylor has resumed in The Hague after a six-month delay. Mr. Taylor - who is accused of trading weapons for diamonds - showed no emotion as the first witness, an expert on "blood diamonds", testified.

He is the first African former head of state to face an international war crimes court and faces 11 charges.

He denies responsibility for atrocities committed by rebels during the civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

The trial opened in June last year but proceedings were postponed after Mr. Taylor fired his defence lawyer and boycotted the opening of the trial.

He now has a new defence team - a senior British lawyer, who is being paid for by the court, as Mr. Taylor says he cannot afford it himself.

The BBC's Mark Doyle in The Hague says this will surprise many people in Liberia, who claim he made lots of money by selling timber and diamonds.

The former Liberian leader was dressed in a dark suit and stared impassively through gold-rimmed glasses as witness Ian Smillie traced the history of the diamond industry in Sierra Leone, our correspondent reports.

Prosecutors say Mr. Taylor's desire for access to diamonds and other natural resources from Sierra Leone was one of the root causes of his alleged involvement in the war.

Victims' stories

Mr. Taylor is accused of responsibility for the actions of Revolutionary United Front rebels during the 1991-2001 civil war in Sierra Leone, which included unlawful killings, sexual slavery, use of child soldiers and looting.

RUF fighters were also notorious for hacking off the arms and legs of the civilian population with machetes. As the first international criminal prosecution against a former African ruler accused of misdeeds, the case is of crucial importance, our correspondent says.

Mr. Taylor has pleaded not guilty to all 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. The prosecution will also be calling a Sierra Leonean victim and a Liberian witness who is said to have belonged to Mr. Taylor's inner circle.

Both witnesses are protected, which means their names have not been revealed. In all, the prosecution intends to call 144 witnesses, though only half are likely to appear in person.

Chief prosecutor at the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, Stephen Rapp, said: "We owe it to the victims to present some testimony in a live sense [so as] not to drain the case of the human element completely."

The trial is expected to last about 18 months. It is being held in The Hague for fear that staging it in Sierra Leone might lead to fresh unrest there.

If convicted, the UK has offered to jail him - again in case his presence in West Africa led to instability.



Ex- Pres. Charles Taylor

Reuters

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

"Blood Diamond" Expert Called In Taylor Trial

By Alexandra Hudson

THE HAGUE (Reuters) - Prosecutors called an expert on Sierra Leone's illegal diamond trade that funded one of Africa's bloodiest wars when the trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor on war crimes charges began in earnest on Monday.

Taylor, once one of Africa's most feared warlords, faces charges of rape, murder, mutilation and recruitment of child soldiers at the U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone, set up to try those most responsible for the 1991-2002 conflict.

The 59-year-old, the first former African head of state to face an international court, has pleaded not guilty to all charges. He looked relaxed in court, wearing gold-rimmed spectacles, a dark suit and tie.

More than quarter of a million people were killed in intertwined wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone which shocked the world with stories and images of child soldiers high on drugs, killing, raping and looting.



Former Liberian President Charles Taylor (front L) sits in the courtroom of the International Criminal Court before the hearing of witnesses in his trial in The Hague January 7, 2008. REUTERS/Michael Kooren

Prosecutors want the trial to set a precedent worldwide and end decades of impunity for African strongmen.

Taylor is accused of trying to gain control of Sierra Leone's mineral wealth, particularly its diamond mines, and seeking to destabilize its government by supplying the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels.

Prosecutors called as their first witness Ian Smillie, a Canadian expert on the trade in conflict diamonds or "blood diamonds", smuggled out of Africa and used to fund wars.

Smillie said diamonds had a history of destabilizing Sierra Leone, describing his time as a teacher in a diamond-producing area in 1967-68: "It was very volatile. Almost like a Wild West town ... There were thousands of illicit diamond diggers."

He will be followed by a victim of the violence in Sierra Leone, and then an insider once close to Taylor's regime.

Fears of Instability

In Sierra Leone, a generation of civilian amputees -- their hands or legs hacked off by rebels -- are a painful reminder of the cruelty of the conflict, in which drugged rebels and militias, often child soldiers, killed, raped and maimed.

The trial is being held in The Hague because of fears it could spur instability if held in Sierra Leone.

Prosecutors intend to call 144 witnesses but hope half of them can submit their testimony in writing, allowing the prosecuting team to wrap up their case in around eight months.

They expect a judgment by the end of 2009, though an appeal would be likely to stretch into 2010. Taylor boycotted the opening of his trial last June in a dispute over the resources allocated to his defense, prompting legal wrangling and repeated delays.

More funds were eventually made available to Taylor and a new defense team was appointed in July. The former strongman is receiving legal aid despite suspicions he amassed a considerable personal fortune.

In the past, ousted African dictators have often fled overseas to live out their days unpunished. Taylor found exile in Nigeria after being overthrown in 2003, but was later handed to the court under international pressure.

Sources: BBC NEWS/REUTERS

BBC

Tuesday, 8 January 2008

Liberia to launch truth hearings

By Will Ross

BBC West Africa correspondent

Public hearings are about to start at a Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in Liberia to look into violations in the conflict that ended in 2003.

The commission was established along similar lines to South Africa's post-apartheid body.

Since 2003, Liberia has inched forward, helped by the presence of thousands of peacekeeping troops.

The conflict saw the rise and fall of Charles Taylor, who is now on trial for war crimes in The Hague.

Not trials

It is not surprising that Liberians are divided on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Some feel the memories of a war that was closely linked to Sierra Leone's conflict are still too fresh.

Others, including Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, believe the country will never achieve lasting peace if the truth behind the turmoil remains speculation and hearsay.

The seven-member commission does not have the power to try cases but will investigate crimes; and as the hearings begin, victims, witnesses and alleged perpetrators will tell their version of events.

In truth, the investigation would not be complete without also researching the appalling levels of corruption in Liberia which fuelled resentment and the war.

In recent months the commission has taken statements from people around the country - some of them extremely gruesome testimonies of how lives were shattered as men, women and children with guns and crude weapons targeted civilians.

Charles Taylor was central to the conflict

For now, he is unable to take part in the TRC public hearings as his war crimes trial is under way in The Hague.



UN peacekeepers are still needed in a country recovering from war



Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf wants to dispel speculation and hearsay

UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries 7 January 2008

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

Newspaper Summary

UNMIL Debunks "Victory, End of Peacekeeping" Story

(New Democrat)

- The New Democrat reports that the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has denied that its peacekeeping mission in Liberia has ended and has requested a retraction of the story carried in the paper last Thursday's edition which stated that the UN declared victory and the end of peacekeeping here. In a rebuttal release, the mission said contrary to accepted journalistic practice, the paper has not identified the source of the reports which it claimed was gathered from the internet saying the report contains erroneous and misleading information.

Ex-President War Crimes Trial Resumes as Home Supporters Pray

(New Vision, New Democrat, The Inquirer, Liberian Express, The News and The Inquirer)

- The trial of former President Charles Taylor resumes today, 7 January in The Hague, Netherlands. Both the prosecution and defense lawyers have expressed readiness to begin presenting evidence. The Liberian Express reports that an insider once closed to Mr. Taylor who can link him to the atrocities in Sierra Leone will be among the first witnesses in Taylor's trial, prosecutors has said.
- The New Vision said the first witness to take the stand today is an expert on economic development and conflict diamond. Ian Smillie's testimony will focus on the prosecution's claims that Taylor hatched a plan to control Sierra Leone. Meanwhile, the media reports that a special prayer and thanksgiving service for Taylor was held on Sunday, January 6 ahead of the trial today.
- The Association for the Legal Defense of Taylor headed by John T. Richardson said the service was to offer thanks and seek God's continuous strength as the former Liberian leader is arraigned today. The News, quoting the Pastor of the First Baptist Church, Rev. Gardea Johnson said the trial of former President Taylor was "political and an international conspiracy" and pledged his Church's support to the ex-President's trial.

Media Group Shuns TRC's Media Accreditation Process Unnecessary

(New Democrat, The Inquirer, Liberian Express, The News, Heritage, Public Agenda and The Monitor)

- The Centre for Media Studies & Peace Building (CEMESP) said its attention has been drawn to an announcement from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) requiring the accreditation for journalists wishing to cover the TRC public hearings and said that the process was unnecessary and unduly bureaucratic. In a letter to the TRC, CEMESP noted that once the hearing is "public" requiring accreditation would be discriminatory thereby exposing journalists to hassles.

Over a Billion Dollar Iron Ore Bidding Process Questioned

(Public Agenda, New Vision, Heritage, The News and The Analyst)

- The media reports that the recent pronouncement by the Minister of Lands Mines and Energy, Eugene Shannon that the winner of the Western Clusters Iron Ore Deposits bidding exercise would be announced at the end of December 2007 has proven otherwise as the year has gone without the winner being known.
- The Western Clusters Iron Ore deposits which is worth USD\$1.5 Billion consists of Bomi Hills, Bea Mountains and the Mano River Iron Ore Deposits (formerly the National Iron Ore Company). The bidding process is being contested by seven companies and despite the

failure of the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy to announce a successful winner of the bid, the media reports that one of the seven companies the Delta Consolidated Company has reportedly claimed victory.

President Sirleaf to Check Hikes

(The Analyst)

- In the wake of mounting concerns about the escalation in the prices of commodities on the Liberian market, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf says her government will set up a special body this week that would be charged with the responsibility of reviewing some of the many problems associated with the increase in the price of basic commodities.

Radio Summary

The Hague Taylor Trial Resumes

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth FM, SKY FM and ELBS)

Students Praise President for Ordering Re-Autopsy on Girl's Remains

- According to a statement issued in Monrovia over the weekend, the Liberia National Students Union welcomed President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's call for an independent autopsy to be done on the remains of the late 13-year-old Angel Togpa.

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth FM, SKY FM and ELBS)

Ministry Present China-donated Sewing Machines to the Disabled

- Presenting sewing machines to various target groups around the Country, Gender and Development Minister Varbah Gayflor said that the machines were donated by China intended to benefit the Disabled Female Association of Liberia; the Bomi Women Development Association; Tiawall Women Development Association and the Liberia Women Empowerment Network, among others.

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth FM, SKY FM and ELBS)

Weah Says Leadership Not about Credentials

- Addressing graduates of a vocational institute named in his honor, the Congress for Democratic Change former Presidential Candidate George Weah said that leadership is not about credentials but something to make people happy, become good citizens as well as the concern for humanity.
- He called on the graduates to meaningfully contribute to the society to encourage others to follow suite.

(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth FM, SKY FM and ELB)

Special Court Supplement
Photos from The Hague: Resumption of the Taylor Trial
Monday, 7 January 2008

