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 27 June 2006

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
Martin Royston-Wright
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>300 Witness to Testify Against Taylor / <em>Independent Observer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America Welcomes Bringing Charles Taylor to Justice / <em>Independent Observer</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States Lauds Taylor Facing Justice / <em>Awareness Times</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Backs Taylor Transfer / <em>New Vision</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kofi Annan Heads for Salone / <em>New Citizen</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International News</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UK TaxPayers Face Bill Over War Crimes / <em>The Scotsman</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor's Trial Frightens African Leaders / <em>The News (Monrovia)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Africa / <em>Toledoblade.com</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former Liberian President Heads to The Hague for War Crimes Trial / <em>News Hour Extra</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Chemildi Explains His Ordeal on His Visit to Sierra Leone / <em>Awareness Times (Online)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Victory Begs Claim / <em>The Analyst (Monrovia)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is justice in Africa Inferior? / <em>Cape Argus</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary / <em>UNMIL</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictators in the Dock / <em>IRIN News</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNMIL's Lapsing Security! / The Analyst (Monrovia)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRESS RELEASE / <em>World Organization Against Torture (Geneva)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
300 Witnesses To Testify Against Charles Taylor

Newspapers and a radio station in Holland reported last week, shortly after Charles Taylor's arrival in the Hague, that about 300 witnesses have been lined up to testify for the prosecution in the matter of the former Liberian leader. Speaking early on Sunday morning in an interview with D.J. Base on the talk show programme 'NIGHT LINE' on UN Radio, Lamin Dumbuya quoted a newspaper "SPEAK" as one which carried the story. He also quoted another newspaper "METRO" and 'Radio One' which reported fears that some of these witnesses, once they arrive in The Netherlands, might decide not to return to either Liberia or Sierra Leone by seeking asylum.

Lamin who resides in The Netherlands but currently in Germany from where he spoke, also quoted the Dutch Foreign Minister as saying the cost of flying witnesses to The Hague and their accommodation is not going to be the responsibility of his government but the Special Court for Sierra Leone. He said reaction amongst Sierra Leonian in The Netherlands to the Taylor trial in The Hague are mixed just as it was in Sierra Leone. But most prefer him being tried in Freetown.
America Welcomes Bringing Charles Taylor to Justice

Statement by Adam Ereli, Deputy Spokesman, US Department of State

The United States welcomes the June 20 transfer of former Liberian President Charles Taylor from Sierra Leone to The Hague where he will stand trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This action is an important step forward for justice and accountability and will contribute to stability in Western Africa after decades of civil conflict.

Charles Taylor’s arrest and trial is the result of years of support for democracy and diplomatic efforts by the U.S and our international partners. Beginning in 2001 when President Bush took office, we have been working toward a democratic transition in Liberia. In 2003, President Bush demanded that Charles Taylor step down to help bring peace to Liberia. Nigeria offered Taylor a temporary place of exile in order to facilitate his departure. However, the United States always maintained that Charles Taylor needed to be held accountable for his actions. We therefore supported Nigeria’s decision in March to turn Taylor over to the democratically elected Government of Liberia.

Before this transfer took place, the United States worked in the UN Security Council to make Taylor’s trial possible. We authored Resolution 1638 last November giving the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) the authority to arrest Charles Taylor and take him to The Sierra Leone Special Court. We subsequently worked to ensure the adoption of Resolution 1688 on June 16, which authorized the Special court to be able to hold Taylor’s trial in The Hague.

Charles Taylor is the first African president to face charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. His trial will demonstrate the international community’s commitment to holding individuals responsible for their actions. We applaud the efforts all those who have worked with us to bring Charles Taylor to justice.
United States lauds Taylor facing justice

By Sayoh Kamara

The United States Government has lauded the efforts of the international community in taking Charles Taylor to The Hague to stand trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

According to a press release from the Embassy of the United States in Freetown, Sierra Leone, the Deputy Spokesman at the US Department of State, Adam Ereli referred to the action as “an important step forward for justice and accountability and will contribute to stability in West Africa after decades of civil conflict.”

Charles Taylor arrest and trial according to Mr. Ereli, is the result of years of support for democracy and diplomatic efforts by the US and its international partners.

“Beginning in 2001 when President Bush took office, we have been working toward a democratic transition in Liberia...However, the United States always maintained that Charles Taylor needed to be held accountable for his actions,” the Deputy Department of State Spokesman is quoted by the release as saying. He therefore expressed support for Nigeria’s decision in March to turn over Taylor to the democratically elected Government of Liberia.

Adam Ereli disclosed in the release that the US had worked in the Security Council to make Taylor’s transfer possible by authoring Resolution 1638 last November, giving the UN Mission in Liberia the authority to arrest and hand over him to the Special Court for Sierra Leone.
US Backs Taylor’s Transfer

The United States welcomes the June transfer of former Liberian President, Charles Taylor from Sierra Leone to The Hague, where he will stand trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity. This action is an important step forward for justice and accountability and will contribute to stability in West Africa after decades of civil conflicts.

Charles Taylor’s arrest and trial came as a result of years of support for democracy and diplomatic efforts by the U.S.
US Backs Taylor’s Transfer

Government and our international partners. Beginning in 2001, when President Bush took office, in 2003 his current Deputy Spokesman in the State Department, Adam Ereli noted: “We have been working towards a democratic transition in Liberia. In 2003, President Bush demanded that Charles Taylor step down to help bring peace to Liberia. Nigeria offered Taylor a temporary place of exile in order to facilitate his departure. However, the United States always maintained that Charles Taylor needed to be held accountable for his actions. We therefore supported Nigeria’s decision in March to turn Taylor over to the democratically elected Government of Liberia”.

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Charles Taylor is the first African President to face charges of war crimes and crime against humanity. His trial will demonstrate the international community’s commitment to holding individuals responsible for their actions. “We applaud the efforts all those who have worked with us to bring Charles Taylor to justice”, he concluded.
KOFI ANNAN
HEADS FOR SALONE

United Nations Secretary General, Ghanaian-born Kofi Annan, is expected to arrive in Freetown during the first "Cont. page 5"
KOFI ANNAN

From page 1

The week of July after the AU Summit slated for Banjul. The Gambia next weekend.

The Secretary General's visit to Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast has been seen by reliable sources within the UN system as Kofi Annan's administrative and diplomatic strides to work towards the consolidation of peace in the three West African countries that have at one time or the other been severely affected by internal feuds. In Sierra Leone, according to UN sources in New York, Kofi Annan is expected to pay tribute to Sierra Leoneans for performing remarkably well in the area of adhering to the peace process. Sierra Leone, which has now been seen as a model for the enhancement of peace and excellent post-conflict programmes, has also been seen as an example from which other post-conflict countries in Africa can learn the vital lessons of post-conflict administration.

Kofi Annan is also expected to deliver a statement about the exemplary manner in which Sierra Leone is administered and he is also expected to pay tribute to the members of the government for putting in place very vital modalities for the conduct of elections that promise to be fair and transparent.

The rapid rehabilitation of the country, especially in the building of institutional capacity and the promotion of working economic policies have been seen by the UN as achievements for which Sierra Leone deserves a pat on the back. However, the UN Secretary-General is also likely to raise a few issues of concern but these issues of concern have still not been made available to the New Citizen.
UK taxpayers face bill over war crimes

UK TAXPAYERS will foot the bill if Charles Taylor, the former Liberian president, is convicted of war crimes and imprisoned in Britain, the government said last night.

Taylor faces 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity stemming from his alleged role in backing Sierra Leonean rebels during the 1991-2002 civil war.

The International Criminal Court was asked to host the trial, fearing it might destabilise the region if held in Africa. The Netherlands agreed to host the trial on condition a third country jail Taylor if convicted and Britain has volunteered.
Taylor's Trial Frightens African Leaders

By Chris Stephen
Freetown

Sahrbona Tombudu stands on the high grassy banks of a small river whose muddy waters run by the village of Komadu in the heart of Sierra Leone's diamond country. Jungle-clad hills rise on both sides in a scene that could have come from a tourist postcard.

Sahrbona (45) points down to a spot in the swirling waters where, eight years ago, he was forced to sift what became known as "blood diamonds" for the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

These soldiers spent the day lounging on the bluffs overlooking the river and operated a simple rule: Those too tired to work the dawn-to-dusk shifts would be shot.

"They would flog us, beat us, shoot us," he explains. Sahrbona, a mechanic by trade, escaped one day by running into the bush and surviving long enough to find UN forces.

He smiles when I ask what he would have thought of the idea that Charles Taylor, the man accused of being the RUF's boss, would one day go on trial for war crimes. "I would not believe it."

Believe it Sahrbona. Last Tuesday, Charles Taylor, the man whose exploitation of Sierra Leone's diamond fields was responsible for the current conflict diamond laws, was flown to a prison cell in The Hague to await trial.

For more than a decade, since seizing control of neighboring Liberia in 1989, Taylor brought terror and death to Sierra Leone.

To control the diamond fields, home to the world's second purest gems, Taylor is accused of sending battalions of drugged child soldiers into battle.

Women were herded into camps and kept as sexual slaves. Murder, beatings and mutilation were common and up to 200,000 are reckoned to have been killed in a decade of slaughter.

The struggle to put Taylor on trial began in earnest in 2003 when he escaped civil war in Liberia for political asylum in Nigeria.

His indictment for war crimes by the Special Court of Sierra Leone raised the hopes of people across Africa that, in a continent where the 'Big Man' usually gets away with anything, the warlord could be made to answer for his actions.

The campaign caught the imagination of young Africans across the continent, and more than 300 organizations joined together in a huge effort.

While rights groups in Nigeria threatened legal action against their own government to force them to hand Taylor over, others petitioned Western Governments.
"The object of this campaign was a deterrent," says Voke Ighorodje of the Nigerian Coalition for an International Criminal Court. "We wanted leaders to see that a man like Taylor can be tried."

Three years of campaigning paid off in January when Liberia's new president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, asked Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo to hand Taylor over.

The European Union then added its voice and in March, so did the United States.

"There was a lot of pressure from everywhere and Obasanjo knew it," says Ighorodje "Bush and Blair were hearing what the NGOs were saying."

At that point Nigeria announced that Taylor had absconded. The United States said that unless he was found, it would scrub an imminent visit by Obasanjo to Washington.

Hours later, Charles Taylor was magically found and arrested. In fact, Nigeria knew where he was all along.

"We were tracking Taylor through his mobile phone as he moved across the country," one source told The Irish Times.

But the Special Court worried that Taylor was too big a man for the court to try in Sierra Leone, and requested the trial be moved to The Hague.

America and Britain backed the move, and the International Criminal Court, newly created in The Hague, offered to rent out one of its courtrooms.

This split the ranks of civil rights groups, with many wanting Taylor tried in Sierra Leone to show that Africa could administer its own justice.

Then came a new problem. Holland refused to sanction the trial on its territory unless someone else agreed to take Charles Taylor if he was found guilty.

Nobody volunteered. Approaches to Austria, Denmark and then Sweden fell flat. Other UN states asked why, if Britain and the US were so keen to have the trial in The Hague, they did not offer to jail him themselves.

Meanwhile, the court was wrestling with a new crisis. It is jointly controlled by the UN and the Sierra Leone government, and money comes from pledges by UN states.

This year, just nine of the 24 million budget has been pledged and accountants warned that the court may run out of money this summer.

In May, Taylor's defense lawyer, Karim Khan, petitioned the court to keep the trial in Sierra Leone, and this month civil rights groups wrote to the UN demanding that Taylor stay in Africa.

With the crisis deepening, London last week broke the deadlock, offering to hold Taylor in its maximum security Belmarsh prison.

On Friday, June 16th, the UN Security Council made the move official and four days later Taylor was flown out of Africa, possibly for the last time. If found guilty, the 58-year-old faces at least 20 years in jail.
"We worked hard for two years to get him here; a lot of behind the scenes diplomacy went on," said the Special Court's retiring chief prosecutor, Desmond de Silva.

A long and difficult trial still lies ahead, but if it works, supporters of international justice say dictators across Africa will be put on notice that human rights violations will no longer go unpunished.

Meanwhile, back in Sierra Leone, arrangements are being made to beam pictures of the trial to the few TV sets operating in cafes and bars in Kono province.

Sahrbona intends to reserve a front row seat. "It will be good to see him tried," he said. "He brought all these problems on us."
Out of Africa

Charles Taylor, the former Liberian president who escaped custody from a Nigerian villa a few months ago, gets his wish: he’ll face a war crimes tribunal at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, Netherlands, not in Africa.

Africa didn’t want him, and he didn’t want Africa. But the change of venue aside, Mr. Taylor still has serious troubles ahead. He faces 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He’s blamed for 200,000 deaths, and for dragging Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea into the violence that engulfed his 14 years of leadership and plunged Liberia into civil war.

Sierra Leoneans were thrilled to see him leave the region. For one, he had supported that country’s Revolutionary United Front rebels, who dragged children into battle and then killed, mutilated, and raped during the 1990s war.

In the end, the U.N.-backed Special Court for Sierra-Leone agreed he should leave the region before progress could occur. Now that he is gone, efforts to consolidate peace between Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea should move more smoothly.

Earlier this year he managed to escape from Nigeria, although it is difficult to believe he did so without the help of corrupt authorities. He had been in Nigeria since 2003 when he agreed to end Liberia’s civil war and was granted asylum.

In a democracy like ours the accused are presumed innocent until proven guilty. However, betting on an acquittal in Mr. Taylor’s case would be risky business. If the former dictator is found guilty, Britain has agreed to allow him to serve his prison sentence there. If that happens, the world will join African nations in rejoicing that another evil dictator is finally behind bars.
Former Liberian President Heads to The Hague for War Crimes Trial

Ex-warlord and former Liberian President Charles Taylor will appear in a United Nations-backed court to face charges that he committed war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The International Criminal Court

Taylor becomes the first African leader to face charges of war crimes before the International Criminal Court (ICC).

His trial marks a potential milestone for prosecuting other African leaders accused of war crimes.

"Allowing Charles Taylor to stand trial for war crimes sets a very controversial precedent for African heads of state and former heads of state because many of them ... have blood on their hands," said Corinne Dufka of Human Rights Watch, Reuters reported.

Historically, there have been other tribunals to address war crimes perpetrated by the Nazis in World War II and those in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the early 1990s.

But the ICC is the first permanent court. The United Nations created it in 1998 to "promote the rule of law and ensure that the gravest crimes do not go unpunished."

Such crimes include genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of aggression.

The United States has not endorsed the ICC, due to concerns that it could be used politically against Americans. However, the United States was instrumental in urging Nigeria to surrender Taylor to Sierra Leone.

The trial had been postponed until a country volunteered to incarcerate Taylor for the rest of his life if he is found guilty. Britain agreed to do so earlier in June. The ICC does not accept the death penalty as punishment.

Taylor denies the charges against him.

"Most definitely, your honor, I did not and could not have committed those acts against the sister republic of Sierra Leone," he told a temporary tribunal, the Associate Press reported.

Although not a part of this trial, many Africans accuse Taylor of inciting Liberia's civil war, which killed more than 200,000 in the 1990s, and of harboring the
members of al-Qaida responsible for the bombing of U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 that killed 200.

Why an international court?

U.N. officials worked to find a country to hold Taylor, fearing that his presence in Sierra Leone would destabilize that country, as well as neighboring Liberia, where Taylor's supporters are still active.

His trial will be a warning to other leaders who have seen other African warlords live relatively comfortably in exile, including Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko and former Ugandan President Idi Amin.
Michael Chemildi explains his ordeal on his visit to Sierra Leone

By Vidal Boltman

The American, Michael Chemildi who was on a visit to Sierra Leone and was subsequently arrested for taking a photograph of the Special Court of Sierra Leone has explained his ordeal to Awareness Times.

He said that he came to Sierra Leone to visit his friends whom he was working with in Iraq. Michael was in the US Marine and was on assignment in Iraq where he met these Sierra Leonean friends he said. According to him, he promised to visit them in Sierra Leone upon his return home after he would have completed his tenure. He said he was in the company of these friends who had taken him on a tour of Freetown, when upon arrival by the Special Court premises, he decided to take a snap shot of "the magnificent complex" when they were arrested by security guards at the court.

Michael said, he had been in difficult circumstances before, but what he went through in Sierra Leone is his worst experience so far. He said conditions at the prison are deplorable, stating that he slept on a bare mat on a cold and dry floor shared with several inmates battling for space to sleep at night.

According to him after their third appearance before Magistrate Fisher, they were acquitted and discharged for lack of evidence only to be rearrested when he went to collect his documents at the CID Headquarters.

He said he is presently short of money even to go about and feed himself, while they await the next call of their case.

"I don’t even have money to pay my hotel bills not to say to buy a ticket to return home when I shall have been acquitted and discharged of the charges levied against me and my friends. He maintained their innocence and said he believed they will not be found culpable."
Major Victory Begs Claim

EDITORIAL

THE FORMER PRESIDENT of Liberia, Charles Taylor, was on the morning of June 20 transferred to the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, The Netherlands. That transfer was inevitable given the tumbling of events over one another during the last two months. The transfer itself would not have been a surprise to many thereby opening itself up to various interpretations and sparking off suspicions of international intrigue and conspiracy safe for the immediate preceding events: it was announced by the Special Court that the trial was about to enter a pre-trial stage. Instead, the transfer came 24 hours of that stage. Since then, allegations have been flying in the face of victory hoots from Washington, London, New York, and capitals of some of African and European countries.

FEW OR AT least two of these victory hoots especially caught our attention and raised within us the need to call attention to equally essential areas of international cooperation and collaboration. We refer here to international cooperation and collaboration that are basic to the consolidation of the peace and the reconciliation that UN and international stakeholders are convinced is an important step forward for justice and accountability that will contribute to stability in West Africa after decades of civil conflict. The two victory hoots of interest came from the U.S. government and the Secretary General of the UN Security Council, Kofi Annan.

SAYS U.S. STATE Department Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli in a release last Friday: "Charles Taylor's arrest and trial is the result of years of support for democracy and diplomatic efforts by the US and our international partners." Ereli then proceeded to reveal how the US authored Resolution 1638 that authorized the arrest of Taylor by UNMIL and subsequently worked to ensure the adoption of Resolution 1688 on June 16 which authorized the Special Court to be able to hold Taylor's trial in The Hague. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, for his part, called the transfer of Taylor to The Hague to face trial for war crimes and crimes against humanity a victory against impunity. A UN release quoted him as saying that he is confident that Charles Taylor's trial will mark a further victory in the struggle to end impunity and will contribute to reconciliation in Liberia and the restoration of peace and stability in Liberia and in Sierra Leone.

THESE ARE FINE appraisals of Taylor's transfer and the events leading up to it notwithstanding counter appraisals that say Taylor was kidnapped and that his transfer without recourse to his lawyers and family members is a graphic demonstration of the beginning of international conspiracy to deny him fair and transparent trial. But because they are adjudged "fine" should not make them ends in themselves. That is the point we intend to strike home here. While we agree the trial of Taylor does not only set the stage for the eradication of bad governance and criminal impunity in the region, we are convinced that several more coordinated steps need to be taken inside Sierra Leone and especially Liberia in order to solidify what the international community seems convinced is an achievement against injustice and impunity.

WHEN WE SAY several more coordinated steps, we speak of the synchronization and training of measures being taken on concrete and achievable objectives in order to ensure security in the sub region. We have no information on the security status of Sierra Leone four years after the
successful cessation of hostilities and the holding of election. But what is obtaining in Liberia vis-à-vis the restoration of security, even for IDPs and returnees who are voluntarily returning to their places of origin, is a nightmare. In most cities across Liberia, criminals move about freely at night and sometimes in broad day light without hindrance from security men, brandishing machetes and other dangerous weapons with which they subject large communities to curfew, hack up their victims, and extorting valuables from them.

ALL OF THIS is happening even though the security-personnel-to-square mile ratio for Liberia had increased twenty-folds since UNMIL took charge of security from the ECOWAS vanguard force, ECOMIL, on October 1, 2003. Despite the fact that personnel of the large and better equipped UNMIL peacekeeping force duck-sit at well-decorated and barricaded checkpoints and at facilities belonging to UN agencies, foreign missions, and the government of Liberia while the communities and highways of the nation grow increasingly insecure, major international players seem convinced that the mere transfer and trial of Charles Taylor in The Hague will guarantee peace and reconciliation. More than that, they seem contented, the transfer will discourage impunity in Liberia and Sierra Leone and stabilize the sub region. This is being over simplistic besides being typical of mockery of the reality. There certainly is no way the international community can turn a blind eye on the "peace-time" violence and mayhem being visited upon Liberians who have decided to throw the ugly past behind them and restore their lives and expect to get a favourable turn of events from the fallacy that Taylor's trial, in itself, can guarantee a brighter future.

WE SAY THIS because we have no doubt that the increased level of criminality in Liberia today is not unrelated to the failure of the DDRR programme initiated and run by UNMIL and the unfortunate failure of UNMIL to put into place remedial measures to hold in check the criminality that was bound to surge as the direct result of that failure. It is therefore our conviction that in order to consolidate the victory being claimed by the US government and the United Nations over Taylor's transfer, they must win the victory over criminality that is seriously undermining the peace process and the eventual achievement of stability in the sub region. It is this victory that commandeered the attention of the moment and that begs claim. Ignoring it and hoping exclusively in Taylor's trial and transfer is like building a sand castle, which Liberians abhor most.
Is justice in Africa inferior?

The trial of former Liberian dictator and tyrant Charles Taylor for human rights abuses (à la Slobodan Milosevic and Saddam Hussein) is to be transferred to the International Court in The Hague from Sierra Leone where he was to be arraigned.

As welcome as this step may be to the West, it is demeaning to Africa as a whole since it is a tacit admission by Africans that we are not geared up to dispense justice.

A precedent was set with the butchers of Rwanda and Burundi who were also tried in international tribunals and not in local courts.

Why were apartheid masters not tried at The Hague or elsewhere for their crimes against South Africans of colour? These have also been branded human rights abuses.

And why is the circus in Baghdad, in what is called the "trial" of Saddam Hussein on the same charges/crimes, with the accused and the chief justice (or is it chief performer?) slanging it out, still continuing?

Are we, in due course, going to witness the spectacle of a George W Bush, Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Tony Blair and others from the coalition forces' governments tried for their crimes against humanity/human rights violations/ individual criminal acts in Afghanistan and Iraq?

Is the "Butcher of Beirut", Ariel Sharon, already paying the price and suffering for his own "Milosevicism and Saddamhusseinism" - whom the media has conveniently chosen to ignore - also being put on trial, just as Pinochet of Chile was, notwithstanding his advanced age and crippling illness?
UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 26 June 2006

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

International Clips on Liberia

Ghanaian GBC Radio 26 June 2006

Ghanaian diplomat urges Liberians to return home

Ghana's ambassador to Liberia Maj-Gen Francis Adu-Amanfeh has called on Liberian residents abroad to return home to contribute to the ongoing reconstruction process, saying there is a sense of security and safety in Liberia. The ambassador made the call when he interacted with Ghanaian journalists in Monrovia. He said his observation about life and feelings of the people clearly indicates that Liberians are now committed to peace and are prepared to let bygones-be-bygones in order to see to the development of their country.

International Clips on West Africa

VOA 25 June 2006

Ivory Coast: Opposition Lawmakers Agree to Go Back To Work

Opposition deputies in Ivory Coast's parliament have agreed to go back to work, ending a boycott which lasted several months. State-run media quoted President Laurent Gbagbo saying the accord is an example of how Ivorians can solve problems themselves, without the help of the international community.

Local Media – Newspapers

Taylor Kept Incommunicado, Says Lawyer

(New Democrat and National Chronicle)

- The lawyer representing former President Charles Taylor, Karim Khan, was recently quoted by Concord Times of Sierra Leone as saying that Mr. Taylor had been denied telephone access in The Hague, which was granted to him while in Freetown.
- Mr. Khan argued that while his client is presumed innocent he cannot be denied access to communication facilities, which other accused persons at the Special Court for Sierra Leone continue to enjoy. He also requested the issuance of Dutch visas to family members of Mr. Taylor to pay visits to him, but Harpinder Athwal of the Special Court said that it was not the right of the accused.

Lawmaker to Intervene in University Crisis

(Daily Observer, The Inquirer, New Democrat, Heritage and Liberian Express)

- In an interview in Monrovia over the weekend, House Speaker Edwin Snowe said that he would meet with members of the University of Liberia Faculty Association to avert their plan to boycott classes in demand for the payment of their salary arrears and benefits.
Speaker Snowe said that he would request the faculty to abandon the planned boycott to ensure a continued learning atmosphere at the University.

Ex-Combatants Welcome Truth Commission  
*(Liberian Express)*

- Speaking recently at the formal launching of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), a spokesman for ex-combatants in the Liberian civil war, Ebenezer Johnson, said that ex-combatants were prepared to testify before the TRC.
- According to him, the ex-combatants were willing to make true confessions of their wrongs, believing that such will lead to genuine reconciliation.

Women’s Group Want Special Court for Rape  
*(The News and Heritage)*

- Liberian women under the banner of the Women of Liberia Shelter for Abused Women and Children INC. recently demonstrated before the Justice Ministry demanding the establishment of a special court to expeditiously prosecute rape cases. The group’s President, Mariah Fyneah, said that their demand was based on the delay by the criminal court in prosecuting rape cases. She said that currently there are 20 rape cases on the criminal court’s docket.

UNMIL and Ministry of Justice Conclude Human Rights Seminar  
*(The Telegraph)*

- UNMIL in collaboration with the Ministry of Justice last week concluded a four-day seminar in Monrovia on Strengthening the Rule of Law and Human Rights Protection in Liberia. County Superintendents and Magistrate and Circuit Court Judges participated.

Local Media – Radio Veritas *(News monitored yesterday at 6:45 pm)*

Lawmaker to Intervene in University of Liberia Faculty Dispute  
*(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)*

Lawmaker Donates Educational Materials

- A press release issued in Monrovia over the weekend said that Montserrado County Representative Edward Forh donated educational and sporting materials valued at L$100,000 to the county’s electoral District #12. He promised to sponsor a one-month workshop to improve the capacity of teachers in the District.  
  *(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)*

Liberia Observes International Day Against Drug Abuse

- Liberia will today join other countries of the world to celebrate the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking under the theme ‘Children and Drugs.’
- A press release issued by the Drug Enforcement Agency said that the day will be observed with a parade through the principal streets of Monrovia and climaxed by an indoor program at the Ministry of Gender.  
  *(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)*
Elections Commissioner Calls for Sensitization Campaign for By-Election in Margibi County

- Speaking at a meeting in Kakata, Margibi County over the weekend, National Elections Commission Chairman James Fromoyan called on heads of political parties and members of the civil society to massively sensitize citizens of the county’s Electoral District #12 for them to turnout in their numbers for the by-election slated for August 29.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)

Civil Society Groups to Develop Master Plan for Liberia

- A committee of civil society organizations will today in Monrovia begin a workshop to develop a civic education master plan for Liberia with funding from the UNDP.
- According to the Liberia Democratic Institute’s press statement, the forum, which will have Education Minister Dr. Joseph Korto as keynote speaker on behalf of Vice President Joseph Boakai, will design a comprehensive civic education agenda for stakeholders and grass root Liberians.

(Also reported on ELBS and Star Radio)
IRIN News
Monday, 26 June 2006

Dictators in the dock

Now that former Liberian president Charles Taylor has been flown off the continent to face charges of war crimes at The Hague, West Africans are turning their attention to another African leader who faces prosecution away from home.

Ex-Chadian president Hissene Habre, who has been living in exile in Senegal since 1990, is waiting for the African Union to determine his fate during its annual summit next month in the Gambian capital Banjul.

Habre is accused of murder, torture and other atrocities inflicted on thousands of people. Alleged victims of his eight-year regime filed charges of war crimes against him in Senegal and he was indicted in 2000. Later, though, Senegalese courts ruled that he must be tried elsewhere.

Habre’s alleged victims turned to Belgium, where some of them lived, and Belgium indicted him last September. But a Senegalese court early this year said it was not competent to rule on the case and turned the decision over to the AU.

Western nations and international donors are increasingly giving aid on the basis of respect for human rights and good governance. Analysts consider impunity to be a major impediment to development. They say that without justice there is no security, no rule of law, no transparency and little respect for human rights.

Governments appear to have taken note. “I think there has been a real sea change,” said Reed Brody, special counsel for New York-based Human Rights Watch.

“I think the days when tyrants could brutalise their people and pillage their treasury and then meet up with their bank accounts in some other country are gone,” Brody said. “The question of justice is always on the table. One of the big resistances has been that of African leaders.”

But Brody said that the decision by Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo and Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to hand Taylor over to the Special Court for Sierra Leone last year might have broken a psychological barrier in terms of impunity for African leaders. Taylor had been living in exile in Nigeria since he was deposed in August 2003.

Local human rights advocates are more cynical. “For the moment we can’t say that things have changed regarding the violation of human rights in Africa. There has been no court decision yet regarding Charles Taylor and the case of Hissene Habre is still being discussed,” said Fatou Kama, a lawyer with the Dakar-based African Meeting for the Defense of Human Rights.

“We can say there is an awareness -- at least there is that. Today, African leaders know that they might appear in court and answer to accusations of human rights abuses,” Kama said.

Tribunal for Rwanda to try suspected perpetrators of the genocide. Other nations took note.

Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone are among countries that established truth commissions to heal the wounds inflicted under military regimes or during civil wars.

With the backing of the United Nations, the Special Court for Sierra Leone was established. It indicted Taylor and retains jurisdiction, but the trial will be held at The Hague because of fears that Taylor might attempt to destabilise the West African sub-region from his jail cell.

Although Taylor and Habre have recently grabbed headlines because of the international angle to their cases, they are not the only African leaders to face the courts. Others have been summoned to tribunals in their own countries. They include Moussa Traore of Mali and Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the Central African Republic.

Traore was jailed for 11 years with his wife, Mariam, on corruption charges. They had been sentenced to death but the sentences were commuted to life imprisonment. They were pardoned in 2002.

Bokassa was arrested in 1986 and tried for treason, murder and embezzlement. He was sentenced to death, but the sentence was later commuted to life imprisonment and then to 20 years. He was released in 1993 under a general amnesty.

Ethiopia has been trying former leader Mengistu Haile Mariam in absentia on charges of genocide. A verdict has been postponed until next year. Mengistu has been living in exile in Zimbabwe since 1991.

As the reformed Organisation of African Unity, the AU has sought to distance itself from its post-colonial predecessor’s reputation as a “dictators’ club”. The AU is establishing an African Court on Human and People’s Rights, based in Arusha, Tanzania, comprising 11 judges from around the continent.
UNMIL's Lapsing Security!

Residents of Monrovia and other parts of Liberia have good reasons to run to their bedrooms even as early as 8:00 pm nowadays.

Not only are they not protected against armed robbers that reverberate their communities with gunshots in attempts to rip off valuables, but they are also not protected against hordes of machete-brandishing marauding gangs that prowl the communities, major city thoroughfares, and streets with busy nightlife, hacking hapless residents who may be going to or returning from work or who may simply be taking evening strolls after a long day’s work.

Without fear of UNMIL and unarmed personnel of the Liberian National Police (LNP) that sometimes conduct token or far-in-between patrols of the city at night, these criminals stalk, hack their victims with machetes and other dangerous home-made weapons, and walk away in no hurry in fear of response from law enforcement agencies.

Initially, UNMIL and LNP bid residents of the city call emergency numbers 911 or 355 to get help, but no sooner had residents begun using the numbers than voices on the other end of the lines began directing them to seek assistance from the unarmed police and local depots that barely over overnight or if open, dare accompany any victim to the scene of ongoing crime.

In turn, the police have begun hanging on to the excuse of not having patrol vehicles and weapons to fight crimes perpetrated largely by former ex-combatants who observers say are, by comparison, more skilful gun-wielders.

In light of this, unfortunately, Liberians, especially residents of the capital, Monrovia, are ceasing all commercial activities at night in order to preserve dear life which is only safe through the mercy of God even at home behind barricaded doors and windows.

For example more than ten acts of banditry and mayhem were reported within the month of June alone with no reports of police arrest, let alone to talk about court prosecution.

The closest these crimes came to justice was the police's placing of bounty for a murder committed in Paynesville and announcement that most crimes committed were being investigated to track down the perpetrators.

A local daily reported June 19 that a group of girls dubbed "Black Bra" after a Nigerian movie film attacked one Jenneh Massaquoi in the Paynesville Red-Light Community and brutally wounded.

Jenneh had gone to visit her fiancé during the evening hours of June 17 when she met her fate. The "black bra" group accused her of loving to the boyfriend of one of their members.

Normally even during the tyrannical regime of Charles Taylor when Liberians were said not to be safe, observers recalled, Jenneh would have rushed to a police depot and gotten redress, but under
the present security arrangement when Liberia is believed to be "liberated and given the first ever chance to restore peace and democracy", she had only to ensure her escape with the help of passers-by and nurse her wounds at home.

Another local daily reported on June 21 that thugs were on the rampage in Grand Cape Mount County despite UNMIL's huge presence in the county.

According to the report, which quoted remarks made by Grand Cape Mount Superintendent Catherine Watson-Roberts during the recent visit of President Sirleaf to the county, two gangs of youths in Robertsport were victimizing fishermen and other residents of the isolated western provincial city.

One gang called "Don Bosco Boys", according to her, was behaving like pirates, terrorizing canoe owners and fishermen and taking their fish and money.

On June 22, two local dailies reported incidences in which armed bandits attacked the residence of former Liberian Ambassador to Taiwan, John Cummings, at SKD Boulevard, flogged him severely and broke his arm in the process, leaving him to nurse his wounds at the at John F. Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Monrovia.

Another incidence reported on the same day concerned the murder of 18-year-old Jestina Kerjula in the Paynesville area during an armed robbery spree for which police has placed a US $1,000.00 bounty for information leading to the arrest of the perpetrators.

For the within time during the same time, the police for the first time, raided a criminal hideout and reportedly confiscated 200 cell phones allegedly stolen from hapless citizens.

It is not clear whether arrests were made or not, nor is it clear to whom the cell phones were returned, but another local daily reported also on June 22 that unknown armed men broke into the head office of National Social Security Corporation (NASSCORP), at about 3:00 a.m. on June 21, and took away several electronic items including computers and other equipment.

So far, no trace of the equipment has been reported.

Police, as usual, are reportedly continuing probes into the incident.

Obviously, according to observers, these men may have passed through UNMIL checkpoints placed strategically across the city, but again they took their loot away without hindrance. Thanks to what some say is UNMIL's security lapse.

Another report on the same day said ex-fighters in the Guthrie rubber plantation were demanding a 3-year control of the rubber plantation.

According to the reports, the fighters were making the demands as precondition for relinquishing the farm to government without a fight, forcing observers to believe that the demand may have grown out of the conviction that they have a fighting edge over the government or UNMIL or both.

Twenty-four hours later on June 23, local dailies reported two spectacular and violent crimes committed in the city.
According to one daily quoting police sources, armed robbers using AK-47 rifles attacked GSA Compound on UN Drive early this month and shot the watchman, Saah Samukai, to death. Saah's bullet-ridden body was found near the scene of the robbery the following morning.

Surprisingly, the GSA Compound is located at the western tip of the Barclay Training Center (BTC) not far from an UNMIL checkpoint.

Cognizant of these unbridled spate of violence in so-called peace-time Liberia, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan reported to the Security Council June 20, 2006 that Liberia's security remains fragile.

He told the council that there was a need to manage the various threats to stability, which he said, emanated mainly from several disaffected groups, including demobilized personnel of the Armed Forces of Liberia who are dissatisfied with severance and pension benefits and ex-combatants.

He however failed to call for the issuance of new robust mandate to UNMIL to redouble its efforts and liberate Liberia's resource based being occupied by ex-combatants.

Instead, he reiterated the scheduled downsizing of UNMIL periodically by battalions and insisted that that would not comprise the security of Liberia.

The downsizing of UNMIL when it seems overwhelmed by terrorist gangs comprising mainly ex-combatants even in its full-size of 15,000-strong, many say, portends danger for the security of Liberia.

But the question, analysts say, should not be what will become of Liberia when UNMIL leaves, but that rather it should be how will the security gap be bridged even while UNMIL is here with its vast unused arsenal while crimes soar and continue to devastate the communities?
World Organization Against Torture (Geneva)
Monday, 26 June 2006

International Day in Support of Victims of Torture - Victims of War Remain Without Reparations

PRESS RELEASE

On the occasion of the International Day in Support of Victims of torture, the World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT) and Forum of Conscience (FOC) call upon the Government of Sierra Leone to establish with the utmost urgency the Special Fund for War Victims.

In July 1999, the Lome Peace Agreement put an end to the brutal conflict that broke out in Sierra Leone on 23 March 1991 and made up about 4.5 million direct and or indirect victims as a result of the conflict. Article xxvi of this agreement provided for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC): "To address impunity, to respond to the needs of the victims to promote healing and reconciliation and to prevent a repetition of the violations and abuses suffered."

To achieve these objectives, the TRC report recommended the implementation of the Reparations programme for Sierra Leone with specific purpose of providing redress to the victims of human rights violations using the Special Fund for War Victims. In this light, it was recommended to the Government of Sierra Leone to seek outside financial or donor support to help implement the reparation programme, especially from countries that contributed to the war in Sierra Leone and to set up a sub unit within the National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) that will implement the programme. Consequently, the Special Fund for War Victims was further recommended to be established within three months of the handover of the Commission's Report to the President in August 2005.

To date, the Special Fund for War Victims has not been established and victims of war remain totally unassisted.

As far as the ex-combatants are concerned, their welfare was handled by the Government of Sierra Leone with support from international countries and institutions such as the United Kingdom, Germany, the United States of America and the World Bank through the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (NCDDR) programme from 2000 to 2003, which started less than six months after the signing of the peace agreement. !

In order to prevent revenge, recurrence of the trauma caused by the war, victims need to be empowered by providing them with basic welfare facilities in order to restore their lost dignity in accordance with human rights standards such as the UN Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law.

On 26 June 2006 in Freetown, FOC, OMCT and Redress (Seeking Reparation for Torture Survivors) will in collaboration with NaCSA organise a Seminar at the Conference Hall of The Bintumani Hotel in order to work out practical Issues and urge the Government of Sierra Leone to set up the Special Fund for War Victims within the shortest delays.