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:
Friday, 26 January 2007

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
Martin Royston-Wright
Ext 7217
### Local News

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From Dakar...

Chief Norman Denies PMDC Link

Special Court indicted Chief Sam Hanga Norman yesterday denied links with the Peoples Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) of Mr. Charles Margai.

Speaking to the New Vision yesterday by phone from his Hotel room in Dakar, the former Kamajoor Chief denied knowledge of any

Contd. Page 10

Charles Margai
Norman Denies PMDC Link

Norman Denies PMDC Link

He said: “I’ve been told of a document claiming that we have joined PMDC being circulated in Freetown. This is news to me, but since I am far away and here in Senegal for treatment, we will respond to that as soon as I am through with my operations,” Chief Norman said.

Mr. Norman was flown to the Senegalese capital, Dakar a week ago to undergo a surgery on his right ligament.

A press statement circulated mostly by PMDC supporters and similar statements made by the PMDC leader, Charles Margai claimed that a number of Special Court indictees including Chief Norman had declared for their party; an allegation which Mr. Norman now denies;

Sources close to the families of other indictees, Moinina Fofana and Aliou Musa Kondewa who were also alleged to have declared for the PMDC questioned the legality and genuineness of the signatures of both men who are unlettered.

“From what we know, Monina Fofana and Kondewa do not actually sign their names but instead used their thumb prints. I have no doubt those signatures were forged”, Mohamed Sumaila declared.

A political analyst yesterday dismissed the press statement as another PMDC cheap propaganda. “If it is true Chief Norman and others actually signed that document on January 11th, why do they have to wait for more than one week before they circulate the document”?

Chief Norman had on a number of occasions disassociated himself from the PMDC or any other political party and has always pledged loyalty and support to the SPLPP even in detention.

It can be recalled that PMDC has on several occasions used the detention of Chief Norman and several former Kamajor leaders to gain favour in the South and East.

This latest move by Chief Norman, observers believe will for once lay the matter to rest.
NORMAN'S DEFECTION BIG BLOW TO SLPP!

The declaration of former deputy Defence minister Chief Sam Hinga Norman for the newly registered Peoples Movement for Democratic Change has set shockwaves down the spines of leading SLPP officials.

Our underground reporter was out and about yesterday. He had problems getting a coherent response from senior officials.

*confusion*

“It’s not true...” a senior SLPP secretariat official initially said.

When shown a copy of the declaration for the PMDC, signed by Hinga Norman and eight other Special Court indictees, he tried to wave it off.

“Norman is going to jail... what can he do?”

Another SLPP official, who asked not to be named, admitted that the detection of Chief Norman was a blow. “But we’ll overcome it”.

Political analysts say Norman’s declaration will definitely dent the SLPP in its eastern and southern heartlands where the former CDF leader is still popular.

And if Norman walks free... after the Special Court judgement, (expected in June) the political impact will be even greater.

*key quotes from detainees declaration*

We are fully aware of our current plight as detainees of the Special Court for Sierra Leone who have been accused of bearing the greatest responsibility for various war crimes alleged to have been committed in Sierra Leone....

We have each been held in confinement and pain for the past several years by the Special Court for Sierra Leone regardless of our efforts to bring peace, unity, stability and security to our country, Sierra Leone, whilst those who we believe bear greatest responsibility for events of the civil war in our country, are either dead or still out there with you....

We have also continued in confinement and pain, notwithstanding provisions of the Lome Peace Agreement of 1999 granting absolute pardon to all combatants and their collaborators (the) Lome Peace Agreement was passed into law by our present Parliament.

Because we love our country; because we love peace, unity and stability for our country; because we believe in the development of our country and the welfare of our people; and above all, because we believe that the present SLPP Government does not stand for peace, reconciliation, unity, stability and the development of our country and our people, we hereby unite and state as follows.

1. That we have put our individual differences aside to support a single Political Party of our choice in the forthcoming elections.

2. That we know that the only dividing force that bears greatest responsibility for the current problems in our country, Sierra Leone, is the Government of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP)....
Addressing the Issue of Interpretation in District Court in Sierra Leone: An Examination of a Tale of Two Cities

By Sheku Koroma, Bo and John Shangai Koroma, Makeni

Introduction

Court proceedings in magistrate and other superior courts in Sierra Leone are generally conducted in English, the official language of court proceedings in the country. But the reality is that majority of the people using the courts in the provinces are not comfortable with the lingua franca of the courts. They feel more at ease using their mother tongue; thus the need for court interpreters. In the absence of court interpreters, most litigants cannot comfortably make their cases and are often exposed to embarrassment, ridicule and intimidation during cross-examination by counsel. As a result, some of them may prefer to remain silent which keeps the truth untold thereby impeding justice. This communication barrier becomes a major hurdle in the administration of justice and may also contribute in perverting justice. This is the situation that obtains in the cities of Bo and Makeni.

Who is a Court Interpreter?

The expression ‘court interpreter’ could be defined as a person who possesses the ability to orally translate speech between parties speaking different languages in a court trial. Section 23(6a) of the Constitution of Sierra Leone, 1991 provides that a person charged with a criminal offence shall be accorded, without payment, the assistance of an interpreter if such person cannot adequately understand the language of the court. However the same did not say who an interpreter is. Additionally, the SLJCMP is not aware of any written direction issued by the Chief Justice to that effect. Nonetheless, since the work of an interpreter is an administrative function, it should therefore be the responsibility of the court’s registry.

The constitutional provision for an interpreter is couched in the fair trial provision to protect the rights of the accused. The essence is to ensure that the accused understand the proceedings so that when such person starts testifying, he will not implicate himself and will also be able to respond to the issues raised thereafter. Moreover, the assistance of an interpreter serves the purpose of expediting proceedings thus ensuring fair and speedy trial. However, the objective of having interpreters will only be met if the interpreter is competent or legally mandated to interpret proceedings in a court of law.

Fair Trial Rights of Accused Persons

Based on the laws governing fair trial (national and international), courts must provide interpreters in trials so that the accused or witness will be able to follow proceedings. For instance, Article 14(3) f of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) provides that persons charged with criminal offence should be entitled to free assistance of an interpreter during trials if such persons cannot speak the language of the court. Similarly so in Sierra Leone, the provision of an interpreter as provided for in section 23(5) does not only cover the time of arrest, it also sufficiently covers the trial proceedings as well. The fundamental principle is to ensure fair trial by way of protecting the right of the accused and in addition to expediting the trial process. Furthermore, the availability of an interpreter also enhances equality of arms, another provision
for fair trial. The role of interpreters under the above circumstances is thus indispensable in the administration of justice. In applying the principle of equality of arms, both parties in the litigation process should be afforded opportunities before the law to present their own side of the story with none enjoying any undue advantages over his opponent by virtue of a tendency to be much more clearly heard and understood by the arbitrator.

To this end, this article seeks to assess the role played by court interpreters against the backdrop of the administration of justice in the District magistrate courts in the cities of Bo and Makeni.

The Tale of Bo

The SLCMP experience in Bo shows that even tough the court provides interpreters, however, the quality of interpretation is poor and inadequate. This is as a result of the fact that persons providing interpretation are either untrained to handle the complex court scenario or they are overwhelmed with other functions at a time. For instance, in Magistrate Court No. 1 clerks who serve as court recorders also double as interpreters. In other words, during court proceedings, court clerks take notes as well as interpret for the court. The situation is even worse in Magistrate Court No. 2 presided over by Justice of the Peace, where the interpreter, an employee of the Bo District Council, is paid Le 1000 (one thousand leones) by litigants in order to interpret for them. The problem here is not only about the fact that the litigants are not suppose to pay, it is also about the fact that the interpreter, who is an employee of another institution, may not be available at all times. Consequently, proceedings are adjourned whenever the interpreter is not around thereby prolonging the trial process.

The Tale of Makeni

In Makeni the lack of qualified interpreters has been a major cause for delays in proceedings as well as source of intimidation and embarrassment for litigants. Like in Bo, court clerks in Makeni also often serve as interpreters. More startling the fact that Police prosecutors also serve as interpreters. The duty of the Police is to represent the Inspector General of Police in prosecuting criminal matters and not to interpret for the court. It is the responsibility of the court’s registry to provide litigants with interpreters where it is absolutely necessary. It is unreasonable for a prosecutor to translate on a matter he is prosecuting. Thus, prosecutors acting in the capacity of translators tremendously erode the rights of the accused to a fair trial as the accused is at the mercy of the interpreter who might have the tendency to inform the court what the accused did mean to say. This practice has increased the rate of bribery and corruption by serving as a means of intimidating and extorting money from litigants. Furthermore, when a court clerk doubles as an interpreter, it also affects his other duties of recording the proceedings, filing documents and assisting the Bench. Further worsening the matter is that interpreters only choose to translate in cases they have interest in either because of personal relationship with litigants because of an anticipated ‘palm greasing’ at the end of the proceedings.

Implications for Justice

The Implications for justice here is that cases, because of lack of interpreters, are frequently adjourned for lengthy periods thus violating the right of an accused to a speedy trial. Furthermore, in instances where prosecutors interpret, one cannot be certain of the way in which it is done as the interest of most prosecutors is to ensure that accused persons are found wanting of crimes alleged rather than protecting their rights. Court clerks, by performing other duties may also be neglecting other important functions that may be equally important to ensure fair and expeditious trial. In effect, the accused person’s right is compromised if he is not given a qualified interpreter. Consequently, people prefer to take their cases to the local courts when they are allowed to express their grievances in their native dialect.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The Sierra Leone judiciary needs to provide guidelines to enhance fairness and consistency in translation process. In order to enhance this, the following is worth considering:

Every magistrate court and superior courts throughout the country should have trained interpreters. The fact that every field of study has its own language, it makes it more compelling for the judiciary to have trained personnel in the different Sierra Leonean languages to serve as interpreters. When the Special Court started operations, because they knew that they would be dealing with people who may not necessarily understand English, the official language of the Court, they embarked on training interpreters. Today, they have a language unit within the Court Management section of the Registry.

Issue of interpreting is highly technical and professional. Technical because certain words are used that may not necessarily be in the local dialect. A qualified interpreter may be able to device a better way of interpreting complex court jargons. A professional interpreter that knows the ethics of interpretation would not laugh when for instance; a woman is explaining how she was raped. In fact, this brings the need to have trained women interpreters so that they will interpret during gender sensitive cases.

Interpreters should also be paid by the court and not by the litigants as it is happening in Bo. This is due to the fact that it is their right to have an interpreter free of charges and also to ensure the independence, neutrality and impartiality of those translating.
Guinea crisis will destabilise
Salone, women's group warns

By Abdul Karim Koroma
Mano River Women’s Peace Network (MARWOPNET)

Wednesday expressed fears about the continuing deteriorating security situation in Guinea, warning that it has the potential to destabilise both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

The group is therefore calling on both Presidents Tejan Kabbah and Ellen Jonthon Sirleaf of Liberia to intervene swiftly in order to bring the Guinean government and the Labour Unions to the negotiating table to resolve the impasse by peaceful means.

“We also urge the Guinean populace to reject any attempt to settle this dispute by violent means,” a MARWOPNET statement disclosed yesterday.

There is an ongoing labour strike in Guinea and after 12 days of confrontation between government and Labour Unions, the dispute is yet to be resolved.

“MARWOPNET is extremely saddened by these developments in a sub-region that is slowly emerging from almost two decades of armed conflict and has just started the process of human and infrastructural reconstruction/rehabilitation and peace building,” the release stated, adding that the organisation was mindful of the recent bitter experiences of armed conflict in the past.
One big step for Liberia was the arrest of Charles Taylor in March, which sent a shudder of relief through the country.

When the former president was in exile in Nigeria, which granted him asylum after the war ended in 2003, the question of his extradition on international war-crimes charges dogged President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf everywhere — especially on a trip to the United States, which had pressed for his arrest. Hoping to attract donor money, she asked a reluctant Nigeria to hand him over.

Then came the news: Taylor had escaped.

"At first I thought: 'How could this be? Was this with the knowledge of the Nigerian government? Were they setting him free? What would be the implications for our whole peace here? Would he end up here?' And the implication of that was serious. But then, when he was caught, I realized that Nigeria has its own ways of solving problems," said Johnson-Sirleaf, laughing wryly.

Later she had to face the fury of Taylor's greatest supporter, Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi. In a meeting in Tripoli, the Libyan capital, Gadhafi thrust out his wrist at her, displaying a flashy watch. Look at it, he told her. Charles Taylor gave it to me. Then he berated her over the decision to hand Taylor over to a U.N. war-crimes tribunal.
UNMIL Public Information Office Media Summary 25 January 2007

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

International Clips on Liberia

VOA 24 January 2007

Liberian Lawmakers Ordered to Testify on Speaker's Removal
By Kari Barber, Dakar

Lawmakers in Liberia are being ordered to testify before the Supreme Court about their recent vote to oust controversial House Speaker Edwin Snowe. Earlier in the week, the court reinstated Snowe pending his appeal that his removal was done illegally. Some representatives who oppose Snowe say they will not follow the court's orders, while others say this case is a test of the country's post-war government. Kari Barber reports from our West Africa bureau in Dakar.

International Clips on West Africa

ECOWAS chief to broker Ivorian peace talks in Feb
By Mathieu Bongkoungou

BOBO-DIOULASSO, Burkina Faso, Jan 24 (Reuters) - Burkina Faso's president said on Wednesday he would work to broker a meeting next month between Ivorian President Laurent Gbagbo and a rebel chief whose forces control the north of Ivory Coast. Burkina Faso's Blaise Campaoré, who holds the rotating chairmanship of West African economic bloc ECOWAS, announced the planned timing of the talks after a three-hour meeting with Gbagbo in the western town of Bobo-Dioulasso.

Local Media – Newspaper

Public Wants President Address Joint Assembly at Pavilion
(The Inquirer)

• [sic:] As President Johnson-Sirleaf prepares to address the joint assembly of the National Legislature, some citizens are calling on the Liberian leader to deliver her annual message to the joint assembly at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in Monrovia. Several callers on a phone-in programme on Sky FM want the President to uphold the Constitution by addressing the National Legislature at the Centennial Pavilion where the Speaker, Edwin Snowe is presiding.

Third Status Conference on Taylor’s Case Tomorrow
(Liberian Express)

• A third Status Conference in the war crime case against former Liberian President Charles Taylor takes place tomorrow, 26 January at the International Criminal Court in The Hague. The Conference will be presided over by Special Court Justice Teresa Doherty.

Central Bank Generates Surplus

• The Central Bank of Liberia has generated a staggering cash surplus of US$1.06 million for 2006 compared to a deficit of US$215,000 agreed with the International
Monetary Fund under the IMF staff-monitored programme and a deficit of US$2.09 million in 2005.

**UNMIL Says No Security Threat at Liberia-Guinea Border**

- The United Nations Mission in Liberia said it has not received any report of incident taking place along the Liberia-Guinea border, declaring the border safe and secured. UNMIL Military Chief of Operations, Colonel Gerald Aherne, told a regular press briefing on Wednesday that the Mission last Monday launched the second phase of an operation co-named “Seskin II” to conduct a normal routine patrols along the Liberia-Guinea border.

**“Majority Bloc” to Elect New Speaker This Week**
*(The Analyst)*

- [sic:] Reports from the Unity Conference Center, the venue of majority members of the House of Representatives, speak of plans among the Lawmakers to go to the poll anytime this week to elect a new Speaker to replace Mr. Edwin Snowe, who they claimed has been voted out.

**Joint Security Operation Commences at Liberia-Guinea Border**
*(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)*

**Central Bank of Liberia Records Cash Surplus for Last Year**
*(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)*

**Majority Lawmakers Urge Judicial Committee to Study Joint Resolution**

- Correspondents covering the National Legislature reported that majority members of the House of Representatives who have been meeting in Virginia yesterday urged the Judicial Committee of the House to study a Joint Resolution which the House of Senate sent to them to concur that the Unity Conference Center (UCC) is the official venue to transact business of the National Legislature. But sources told correspondents that the Lawmakers were unlikely to concur with the Resolution while sitting at the UCC in Virginia.
- Meanwhile, the majority members yesterday selected Gbarpolu County Representative Armah Sannoh as the new Presiding Officer after Montserrado County Representative Dr. Ketterkumeh Murray failed to attend session amidst newspaper reports that he is wanted in the United States for alleged attempted rape of a 13-year-old girl in the U.S. in 1996.

(Also reported on ELBS Radio and Star Radio)

**Star Radio** *(News culled from website today at 09:00 am)*

**County Superintendents Meet to Plan for Sustainable Development**

- In an interview yesterday, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. Ambullai Johnson said that Superintendents of the 15 Counties have been meeting in Monrovia to prepare for development programs for the Counties for 2007.

Complete versions of the UNMIL International Press Clips, UNMIL Daily Liberian Radio Summary and UNMIL Liberian Newspapers Summary are posted each day on the UNMIL Bulletin Board. If you are unable to access the UNMIL Bulletin Board or would like further information on the content of the summaries, please contact Mr. Weah Karpeh at karpeh@un.org.
No Security Threat At Guinea Borders

By Melissa Chea-Annan

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), said it has not received any report of incident taking place along the Liberian-Guinean border, and as of now, the border is safe and secured.

Briefing the press on Wednesday in Monrovia, UNMIL Military Chief of Operations, Col. Gerald Aherne, said the Mission, last Monday launched the second phase of an operation named "Seskin II to conduct a normal routine interaction on the Liberian-Guinean border, and the Green Horizon II, which is currently taking place in Sierra Leone.

According to him, the Mission does not have any fear of any security threat at this time because it has a contingency plan for any activity, should it arise along the Liberian-Guinean border.

The Chief of Operations further stated that just as the Mission has set up a contingency plan for the Special War crime Court in Sierra Leone, it has also drawn up a contingency plan, several months ago to prevent any form of security threat for the raising of tension in Guinea.

At the same time, UNMIL said it has been monitoring the situation along the Liberian-Guinean border, and that there has been no observed influx of people from Guinea to Liberia.

Col. Aherne indicated that there has been no change of UNMIL troops or posture along the Liberian-Guinean border. He said the Operation Seskin II, will end this Friday while the third phase of the operation is expected to commence in February of this year. The first phase started on November 27, 2006 and ended on December 1, 2006.

The Chief of Operations further stated that at the end of the third phase of the operation, Seskin will become a normal routine border monitoring liaison activities with the Guinean military and the civilian authorities, just as the UNMIL Force has routine liaison and operation along the border with Sierra Leone and Ivory Coast.

He said this routine border monitoring will continue into the future to ensure that the proper security is put in place in Liberia and its surrounding and to restore peace to the people and the sub-region.

According to Col. Aherne, the operation is a routine part of military business to exercise its contingency plans. He concluded that from the UNMIL's point of view, the entry points on the Liberian side from Guinea remain normal, and there is no cause for fear or alarm.
Human Rights Watch
Friday, 26 January 2007
Press Release

Senegal: Speed Up Trial of Chadian Ex-Dictator

AU Should Name Envoy to Prepare Habré's Trial

(Brussels, January 26, 2007) - Six months after Senegal agreed to an African Union request that it prosecute Chad's former dictator, it has moved very slowly in bringing Hissène Habré to trial on charges of crimes against humanity, Human Rights Watch said in a briefing paper released today.

In the paper, released ahead of an African Union summit that will review Senegal's progress in the case, Human Rights Watch noted that Senegal had not even passed the legislation needed to try Habré. Human Rights Watch called on the AU to name a special envoy to help Senegal prepare Habré's trial.

"Senegal can show that African courts will deliver justice to African victims for atrocities committed by African leaders," said Reed Brody, special counsel at Human Rights Watch, who works with Habré's victims. "But the Senegalese government has gotten off to a very slow start."

Habré was first arrested in Senegal in February 2000 on charges of crimes against humanity and torture stemming from his 1982-1990 rule in Chad. After Senegal refused to prosecute him in 2001 or to extradite him to Belgium in 2005, Dakar on July 2, 2006 agreed to an AU decision that Habré be put on trial in Senegal. On November 2, 2006 the Senegalese government announced the establishment of a commission to prepare the trial and the revision of its laws to permit such a trial. Although Senegal's cabinet approved a draft law in November, the assembly has not yet taken up the bill.

Habré's victims joined Human Rights Watch in calling on Senegal to move swiftly.

"We have been fighting for 16 years to bring Hissène Habré to justice, and many survivors of his regime have died in the seven years since Habré was first arrested in Senegal," said Ismael Hachim Abdallah, president of the Chadian Association of Victims of Political Repression and Crime (AVCRP, or Association des victimes de crimes et répressions politiques). "Unless Senegal takes action soon, there won't be any victims left at the trial."

In the briefing paper, Human Rights Watch noted that Senegal is now faced with the "complex and costly task of investigating and prosecuting massive crimes committed many years ago in another country."

Human Rights Watch called on the international community to provide training and funding to assist Senegal in bringing Habré to trial. But donors should also insist on measurable political commitment from Senegal. Senegal has complained that it has not received international assistance, but Human Rights Watch noted that Senegal has not presented a plan or a budget nor made any requests for funding.

The African Union, whose summit will be held in Addis Ababa on January 29 and 30, should assist Senegal and monitor its progress by naming a special envoy for the case. A group of 12 leading African and international human rights organizations in Africa echoed this call in a letter
to the African Union. On January 22, Chad's current president, Idriss Déby Itno, also publicly called for the African Union to follow up with Senegal.

"The African Union has called on Senegal to prosecute Hissène Habré and Senegal has done very little in six months, other than establishing a commission to prepare the trial and sending a law to the National Assembly," said Alioune Tine of the Dakar-based African Assembly for the Defense of Human Rights (RADDHO, or Rencontre Africaine pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme). "It is the African Union's responsibility to see that its decision is put into practice. The AU's credibility, and that of all Africa, is at stake here."

Background
Habré ruled the former French colony of Chad from 1982 until he was deposed in 1990 by Déby Itno and fled to Senegal. His one-party regime was marked by widespread atrocities. A 1992 Truth Commission accused Habré's regime of some 40,000 political murders and systematic torture.

Habré was first indicted in Senegal in 2000 before courts ruled that he could not be tried there. His victims then turned to Belgium and, after a four-year investigation, a Belgian judge in September 2005 issued an international arrest warrant charging Habré with crimes against humanity, war crimes and torture committed during his 1982-90 rule. Pursuant to a Belgian extradition request, Senegalese authorities arrested Habré in November 2005.

When a Senegalese court refused to rule on the extradition request, the Senegalese government announced that it had asked the African Union to recommend "the competent jurisdiction" for Habré's trial. On July 2, 2006, the African Union, following the recommendation of a Committee of Eminent African Jurists, called on Senegal to prosecute Habré "in the name of Africa," and President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal declared that Dakar would do so.

The Human Rights Watch briefing paper, "The Trial of Hissène Habré: Time is Running out for the Victims," is available in English at:
http://www.hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/habre0107/

The paper is also available in French at:
ECOWAS condemns Guinea violence

By Wellington Geevon Smith

The regional body, ECOWAS has condemned the mounting death of civilians in Guinea as a result of the recent crisis in the country.

The regional body said any loss of life is regrettable but the killing of unarmed civilians is particularly unacceptable.

In a statement issued in Abuja, Nigeria, ECOWAS called upon the Guinean authorities to guarantee the safety and security of its citizens.

The regional body sees the development in Guinea as the people’s expression of their constitutional rights of freedom of association.

What started as a labor union strike has escalated into a political crisis against the government of ailing President Lassana Conte.

ECOWAS said it stands ready to work with all Guinean political forces, the government, political parties, civil society, trade unions in the search for a lasting solution.
Offer fails to end Guinea strike

The general strike in Guinea is continuing despite President Lansana Conte's offer to name a new prime minister - a key union demand.

Thousands of people have held protests in the eastern town of Kankan, reports the AFP news agency.

Talks are also continuing, focused on how much power the president would hand over to the prime minister.

Almost 60 people have died in 16 days of protests, organised by unions who say Mr Conte should step down.

Officials now say that at least 49 people were killed in the capital, Conakry on Monday - 16 more than were previously said to have died.

AFP says the authorities did not try to stop the Kankan march, while there are fewer police than in previous days on the streets of Conakry.

The talks are attended by trades union leaders, members of the Supreme Court and religious leaders.

Action

The trades unions said they wanted first to see concrete action from President Conte before ending the strike.

"The people of Guinea do not want any more promises. They want something concrete," said Abdoulaye Sow, one of the leaders of the Syndicated Union of Workers of Guinea (USTG).

"It is an agreement in principle. Now it is necessary to put it into practice," he said.

There is no word from the government on the outcome of the talks.

Mr Conte seized power in a 1984 coup but has since won three elections.

The strikers accuse Mr Conte, who is his 70s and suffers from diabetes, of mismanaging the economy and personally securing the release from prison of two men accused of corruption.

This is the third general strike in a year.
Ugandan Rebels 'Lose Faith' in Mediator of Peace Talks

Ugandan rebels say they have lost faith in the mediator of the group's peace talks with the Ugandan government.

A spokesman for the rebel Lord's Resistance Army said Thursday that the government of southern Sudan has declared "hostile action" against the group.

On Monday, the president of southern Sudan's semi-autonomous government, Salva Kiir, accused the LRA of terrorizing his region's population. He said everybody with a gun should help the army hunt the rebels down.

The rebel spokesman said Thursday that the LRA has not attacked anyone in southern Sudan.

He also accused southern Sudan of planning to arrest the rebel group's leaders, and hand them over to the International Criminal Court to face war crimes charges.

The peace talks between the rebels and the Ugandan government have stalled in recent months following a ceasefire reached last August.

The talks are aimed at ending the rebels' 20-year uprising in northern Uganda. Fighting in the region has killed tens of thousands of people, and forced more than 1.5 million others into displaced persons' camps.

The ceasefire raised hopes that the talks would be successful. But both sides have accused each other of violations.

The International Criminal Court has arrest warrants for LRA leader Joseph Kony and four of his top aides. LRA fighters are accused of killing, kidnapping and mutilating thousands of civilians during their fight against the Ugandan government.

Some information for this report was provided by Reuters.
Knee-deep in water the colour of coffee, Richard Foray swirled a heavy sieve of pebbles in ever-faster circles, his eyes trained on the smallest slivers left in the centre.

This time, as all too often, his search for the trademark opacity which would tell him he had found a diamond was fruitless.

But even if he had unearthed a gemstone, he and thousands of other small-scale miners in Sierra Leone fear that Hollywood's portrayal of their country's civil war could now rob them of their livelihoods.

Blood Diamond, Leonardo DiCaprio's latest film, opens across Britain today, charting the trade in illegally-mined and sold gemstones during Sierra Leone's 11-year conflict, which ended in 2002. Bootleg copies of the film are already showing here, on flickering screens in tin-shack video halls. Few are impressed.

"It's true that it shows the way things were during the war, but people here are so worried that others in the West will think that is the way it is now," said Mr Foray, 41, in Koidu, 210 miles northeast of Freetown.

It is not. The people who are mining now are not the rebels; we are true miners trying to make money for feeding the family and school fees."

Koidu, the capital of the country's Kono district, is Sierra Leone's diamond mining heartland, peppered with craters excavated by hand by the town's 100,000 artisan miners. Beneath hills covered in coconut palms and along muddy riverbanks lie some of the richest diamond deposits in the world. Working mines already earn Sierra Leone more than £75 million a year.

It was this easily smuggled commodity that brought the Revolutionary United Front, to Kono, in 1991. The rebels forced thousands of civilians into work gangs harvesting the stones, which they handed to Charles Taylor, neighbouring Liberia's infamous warlord, in return for arms. They earned an estimated £60 million a year to fund their campaign. The illicit trade is also believed to have helped al-Qa'eda fund the September 11 attacks.

Progress has been made since the war ended. Organisations like the Peace Diamond Alliance are teaching miners how to spot valuable stones and make sure they are not cheated.
Mr Foray and 34 friends have banded together into a makeshift cooperative to mine two 100ft by 200ft plots.

The labour is shared, and in return, each man shares the profit from whatever is unearthed. But not much is found. The team last sold a diamond a week ago, a tiny sliver less than half a carat. They each earned less than £2. Far higher profits are still being made from illegal sales in West Africa. The UN estimates that rebels in the north of Ivory Coast have sent £12.5 million worth of illicit gemstones into Ghana, where they are certified as clean and sold on.

Those selling legitimate diamonds face a backlash from consumers worried that they cannot be sure the gem they are buying is "clean".

Ansumana Turay, of the PDA, said: "People must not stop buying because they are worried they are blood diamonds. That would be the worst thing for Sierra Leone."