Flashback to November 2003: Construction of the courthouse.

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:
Friday, 15 February 2008

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday. Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact Martin Royston-Wright Ext 7217
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Fight Against Impunity Continues

Now 46 years after independence, it seems very clear that the fight against impunity which started in May 25 1997 is continuing unabated and for many good reasons.

Impunity which means getting away with wrong doing especially when no form of punishment is prescribed was rejected in 1997, when Johnny Paul Koroma announced his coup against President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. It happened at a time when the OAU was meeting in Zimbabwe with the full participation of the out gone UN Secretary General Kofi Annan.

The shock waves experienced by the OAU leaders in Zimbabwe following the Johnny Paul Koroma coup and the carnage that followed had forced the UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan and other Heads of State assembled in Zimbabwe to declare that the days of impunity were over and that future coup makers would have to contend with the consequences of their coup.

This declaration in Zimbabwe in 1997 served to strengthening the hands of civil society in Sierra Leone who rose up against the Johnny Paul Koroma regime and chased it out of power eleven months later. Those soldiers who survived the counter coup mostly referred to as ‘sobels’ were rounded up and tried for treason in which 24 of them were found guilty and executed publicly in Freetown, including a female officer, Major Kula Samba.

The government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah at the time had affirmed strongly that impunity would never again be allowed to rear its ugly head.

Shortly after that the international community turned its attention to the ending of the eleven year rebel war in Sierra Leone and when the Lome Peace Accord was signed, the international community refused to grant amnesty to the Sierra Leone rebels in the name of fighting impunity.

The fight against impunity continued when parliamentarians and other groups organized a demonstration against Foday Sankoh for the unlawful capture and imprisonment of 538 Zambian soldiers.

As the demonstrators approached Foday Sankoh’s gates, shots where fired from inside, a stout display of impunity which was countered later and Foday Sankoh and some of his cohorts were arrested and incarcerated awaiting a trial.

Subsequently the leader of the RUF Foday Sankoh died in prison as the fight against impunity continued. Earlier, the leader of the Kamajors was also arrested as it was widely rumoured that Kamajors had killed and maimed a lot of helpless citizens with impunity.

The imprisoned leader of the Kamajors later died in detention and under the authority of the Special Court of Sierra Leone, as that court claimed that the fight against impunity must continue.

And only recently the fight against impunity was again spotlighted when the chairman of the National Electoral Commission declared that those who were involved in malpractices in the run-off election of September 8 2007 were blacklisted as not fit to take any part in the conduct of future elections according to the regulations of NEC.
Whatever way one looks at it, it was evidently clear that the blacklisting of presiding officers is another way of fighting impunity which sometimes implies the identification and punishment of wrongdoers. Some of these presiding officers who have lost their credibility for positions, and lost their chances of continuing with NEC might not have personally engaged in election malpractices that resulted into excess votes in 477 polling stations all over Sierra Leone.

There is however, the feeling that a man of authority may delegate his authority to a subordinate but can never delegate his responsibility if something goes wrong after delegation of authority. This means that if a subordinate whom one has trusted to carry out responsibility on his behalf or underperforms, the responsibility will always be on the shoulders of the one who delegated the authority.

This is how some of the 477 presiding officers of polling stations where excess votes were found to lose their positions.

There were some who didn’t care whether they had done wrong or not, thereby promoting the idea of impunity which is now declared as zero tolerant in Sierra Leone.

The lessons to learn here is that one must always realize that he is ultimately responsible for the action or non-action of his subordinates.

The days of doing wrong and getting away with it are gone forever, and this is a lesson we must all learn, especially the 477 presiding officers who have lost their jobs, even though some of them may be innocent or not personally responsible for over-voting in their areas. Let us accept the situation as it is and continue to grow.
BBC World Service Trust  
Thursday, 14 February 2008

By Joseph Cheeseman at The Hague

The Prosecution twelfth witness took the stand today, Thursday, and testified from behind a screen with her face and her voice distorted by a mechanical technology. This was a protective measure put in place by the Court and the parties for this Sierra Leonean woman, only identified as TF1-026. The distorted Krio of the crime base witness is being interpreted.

Witness TF1-026 started her testimony with confidence, but was later overwhelmed by distress. She broke down in tears after she testified that four RUF fighters raped her in 1999.

The Court called off the trial proceeding five minutes before its usual morning break which is 11:30 a.m. Netherlands time to allow the distressed witness recovered from her grief.

BRENDA HOLLIS: Witness, what was the fourth rebel doing when the third rebel was using you?

WITNESS: He was standing, waiting, telling him to hurry up.

HOLLIS: Witness, what did you do when this was happening to you?

WITNESS: I was crying that time.

HOLLIS: Witness, when this was happening to you, do you know what was happening to the other seven girls that were in the parlour?

WITNESS: Yes, it was the same thing that they were doing to them, because it was a big living room.

HOLLIS: Are you able to describe what was happening to them?

WITNESS: Yes.

HOLLIS: Your Honour, can the Court perhaps ask the witness if she’d like a break?

JUSTICE DOHERTY: Madam Witness, are you feeling all right and are you able to continue?

WITNESS: I want to have some time away. (Crying)

JUSTICE DOHERTY: Support unit please...(off microphone). We will take the mid-morning break early in light of the witness’s distress.

After the witness was escorted out of the courtroom on the order of Presiding Judge Teresa Doherty, Defence Lawyer Courtney Griffiths made a submission that it was not necessary for the Prosecution to prove the guilt of the accused by subjecting a witness to her distressful past.

GRIFFITHS: Your Honour, I thought it would be difficult to experience anything more distressing than the DVD we watched the other week, but this experience certainly comes close. Now there has to be a limit to which the Prosecution are willing to go in calling this kind of evidence. I say this for this reason: Why do we need to go into this degree of detail given the nature of the case being put by the Prosecution...
against this accused man? Does it really assist the Court in deciding his role to be causing this young woman to relive this experience in this kind of detail? I cannot see how, given the way in which the indictment is put, any of this detail is necessary, or indeed relevant.

CHEESEMAN: But Prosecution lawyer, Brenda Hollis, said it was this cruelty as described by the witness, perpetrated by the RUF under the command of the accused former Liberian President that brought the parties to Court. So, the testimony was necessary no matter how unbearable it was.

HOLLIS: Prosecution must prove not just this Accused’s involvement in these crimes, but the crimes themselves. And the world, if they see this, that is part of this process. Now we do not bring witnesses who say they will not come, because we understand how distressing it is. But talking about it in Court is no doubt much less distressing than when it was happening. It is because of the crimes that we are here in Court, and there’s certainly relevance to it. There are three things we have to prove: the underlying act; the rapes such as she is describing and the other crimes, that they were crimes against humanity or that they were violations of Common Article 3 or they were other serious violations. And thirdly, this Accused’s involvement in all of this. So this is a component of our proof, and it is most distressing. It’s unfortunate that we’re here at all, but it is a part and a very real part of this case.

CHEESEMAN: The Court had to make a determination whether the witness’s testimony should be continued or terminated.

JUSTICE DOHERTY: If it is alleged that crimes have been committed, then there is an obligation and a duty on the part of the Prosecution to prove those crimes in the absence of any other form of agreement or agreed facts. The evidence of the witness will proceed.

CHEESEMAN: The Prosecution twelfth witness then continued the testimony by saying she was marked with the inscription RUF on her chest, and subjected to forced marriage. Witness TF1-026 testified that to date she and her nine year old daughter born to a RUF fighter from the forced marriage suffered rejection and humiliation, constantly being referred to by neighbours as rebels. The testimony of the crime base witness, or victim of the Sierra Leonean war, was intermittently stopped because of the expression of unbearable grief accompanied by weeping from the witness.

Following the afternoon break of the Special Court, the Sierra Leonean female Prosecution witness had not overcome the trauma, so the Court, in agreement with prosecution and defence, postponed testimony to a later date.

The suspension of the testimony of witness TF1-026 led to immediately bringing on the witness stand another crime base witness, an amputee from Sierra Leone. He has started testifying to how the RUF amputated him and others.

This is Joseph Cheeseman reporting for the BBC World Service Trust and Search for Common Ground, from The Hague.
Star Radio (Liberia)
Thursday, 14 February 2008

RUF victim testifies against Taylor

Written by Wellington Geevon Smith

The 12th witness for the prosecution in the trial of detained former President Charles Taylor took the stand Thursday in The Hague.

Report says the witness testified from behind a screen with her face and her voice distorted by a mechanical technology.

This is a protective measure put in place by the court and the parties for this Sierra Leonean woman only identified as TF1-026.

The female witness started her testimony with confidence but was later overwhelmed by distress when she broke down in tears.

This followed her testimony that four RUF fighters raped her in 1999.

The court called off the trial proceeding five minutes to allow the distressed female witness recovered from her grief.

However, the defence said it was not necessary for the prosecution to prove the guilt of Mr. Taylor by subjecting a witness to her distressful past.

But the prosecution said it was this cruelty of the RUF under the command of the accused former Liberian President that brought the parties to court.

The prosecution maintained the testimony was necessary no matter how unbearable it was.
Defense lawyers for former President Charles Taylor Wednesday sought to discredit a Gambian mercenary’s testimony of weapons transport into Sierra Leone, the existence of the Small Boys Unit at the feared Cobra Base near Gbarnga, and Taylor’s personal role in these affairs.

The witness, Suwandji Camara, told the court that the leaders of Gambian mercenaries serving in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, simply known as Dr. Manneh, was privy to confidential plans for Sierra Leone’s invasion.

In the absence of direct quotes from the proceedings, the summary of the exchange between witness Camara and Taylor lawyer Terry Mutyarad is reproduced here, courtesy blog “The Trial of Charles Taylor.”

Defense Counsel Terry Mutyarad continued his cross-examination of Prosecution Witness Suwandji Camara and questioned him on the following:

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As previously mentioned, Cameron did not know how to drive a car. He also did not know how to pay bills, nor did he know how to make phone calls. However, he was very good at making decisions. He always knew what he wanted and made sure that he got it. This made him very popular among his peers.

Cameron's education was also very important to him. He studied hard and always tried to get the best grades possible. He believed that education was the key to success and always made sure to attend the best schools.

Despite his challenges, Cameron managed to overcome them and become a successful businessman. He never gave up and always believed in himself. This is what made him so special and why everyone loved him.

In conclusion, Cameron was a true inspiration. He showed us that with hard work and determination, anything is possible. He will always be remembered as one of the greatest entrepreneurs of all time.

As we say goodbye to Cameron, let us remember the lessons he taught us. Never give up, always believe in yourself, and always work hard. These are the values that will help us succeed in life. Cameron will be missed, but his legacy will live on forever.