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

Thursday, 4 December 2008

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Special Court deputy registrar honoured in Moyamba

By Ben Samuel Taray and Bruna Hallam

The deputy registrar of the Special Court for Sierra Leone was honoured last Friday at Palommy chiefdom in the Moyamba district. Binta Mansaray was adopted into the community. She also had a building at the Harford School for Girls named after her: the Binta Mansaray Resource Centre. The ceremony was to acknowledge her work with the Special Court.

Mansaray was once the court's outreach officer, and it was in this role that she first came to the Moyamba district. The people living there did not like the court then.

A Kamajor stronghold during the war, Moyamba was one of the first areas targeted for disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR). When Kamajor leaders were convicted by the Special Court in the case against the Civil Defense Forces (CDF), people were unhappy. Moinina Fofana was sentenced to 15 years, while Alieu Konneh was sentenced to 20 years. The men were convicted on counts of murder and inhumane acts as crimes against humanity, and on counts of murder and cruel treatment as war crimes. Chief Samuel Hinga Norman, who was also the deputy defense minister, was also charged but passed away before the judgment was issued.

"I testified for the defense in Chief Samuel Hinga Norman's case," said Paramount Chief Joseph Aliu Kavuna Konormom II. "When they [CDF leaders] were found guilty, I was the first there protesting."

Many people felt the same way. The pro-government CDF fought against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and protected the local communities. To many people, they were heroes. "The Kamajors were hired through the will of the people," explained Albert Senesse, a former counselor in one of the wards in Moyamba council. "People were unhappy with the court because they thought the Kamajors were innocent of the violations and should not have been tried."

The problem, he said, was that people - both the fighters and the civilians - did not know about international humanitarian law.

But the community’s feelings towards the court have changed. Thanks to the work of the Special Court’s outreach programs, people understand more about international humanitarian law. But the community’s feelings towards the court have changed. Thanks to the work of the Special Court’s outreach programs, people understand more about international humanitarian law.

"Now people appreciate it," Senesse said. "I myself did not know the role of the SC," Konormom said. "Later I agreed that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Special Court are good. We wouldn’t let the outreach team into a disarmament camp in Northern Sierra Leone, afraid that tensions would escalate into violence."

But to everyone’s surprise, the ex-combatants were very receptive to what the team had to say. Once the mandate of the court and its limitations - the fact that only those most responsible, and not the foot soldiers, would be tried - were explained, they even stood up and clapped.

The struggle for acceptance in former CDF strongholds hasn’t always been easy. Some people, Fatoma says, still have difficulty accepting that the Kamajors were indicted.

This makes the naming of the Moyamba school building for Binta Mansaray even more significant. "It’s another sign of support for the court," Fatoma said.

And the fact that people don’t agree with the court’s decisions is fine, he says. The role of outreach isn’t to convince people to agree with the court’s decision, just to make sure that they have accurate information and can have an informed opinion on its work. In that regard, Fatoma feels they have been successful.

"As the trials went on, perceptions changed," he said.

From the beginning, the outreach programs have included information not only on the court and its workings, but also on international humanitarian law and human rights.

During the trip to Moyamba, there was also a forum for women and children, which focused in part on Sierra Leone’s new gender acts and women’s and children’s rights.

Fatoma says this work is an important legacy of the Special Court. If people learn about their rights and international law, it could help bring development and good governance to Sierra Leone. It could even help prevent anything like the war from happening again.

"We are here to make sure peace holds..."
Fambul Tok reconciliation ceremonies start in Moyamba

Series of Fambul Tok reconciliation ceremonies are expected to commence in various parts of Moyamba district Southern Sierra Leone. The first ceremony would be held tomorrow in Yondu village, Kagboro chiefdom.

The reconciliation process would commence with a traditional bonfire, which is aimed at bringing especially victims and perpetrators together. The safe space would create an arena for people to tell their stories after the conflict.

Fambul Tok research and documentation officer, Sheku Koroma said: "The bonfire is one of the traditional ways to bring people together...during that time victims and perpetrators will come forward to tell their stories and ask for forgiveness."

Giving a background of Yondu community, assistant research and documentation officer of Fambul Tok, Momodu Kamara said during the rebel war, factions within the community did a lot of destruction to property and life.

He said people in Yondu would come forward to tell their stories in the upcoming ceremony to reconcile amongst each other and work towards development. The ceremonies will continue in other chiefdoms throughout the month of December.

Meanwhile, reconciliation ceremonies continue in Kailahun district.

Fambul Tok project is implemented by Forum of Conscience, a human rights non-governmental organization in collaboration with Catalyst for Peace, a US foundation which supports reconciliation processes in post-conflict countries.
During the Sierra Leone Civil War, there were claims from the Sierra Leone Government about some foreign governments backing the rebels. The Sierra Leone Government at that time alleged that the rebels were being supported by arms and ammunition. Well, the insider witness testifying against Charles Taylor mentioned two African states that supported the RUF rebels. Joseph Cheeseman reports.

CHEESEMAN: The RUF former Signal Commander, on direct examination, has told the Judges of the Special Court that the Sierra Leonean rebels received arms and ammunition from Libya and Burkina Faso through the Liberian Government of Charles Taylor.

Mr. Dauda Fornie testified that in December of 1998, during Taylor’s presidency, Liberia Special Security Service Director Benjamin Yeaten invited Sam Bockarie to Monrovia to make a trip to Libya to get arms and ammunition for the RUF. The insider witness recalled when they got to Monrovia, Sam Bockarie’s trip was diverted to Burkina Faso.

FORNIE: The people who went with Sam Bockarie to Ouagadougou were the late S.Y.B. Rogers and Eddie Kanneh from the RUF.

CHRIS SANTORA: How long were they gone for?

FORNIE: They spent up to a week in Ouagadougou.

SANTORA: During that week, where did you stay?

FORNIE: I stayed in Monrovia at Benjamin Yeatan’s house.

SANTORA: After Sam Bockarie arrived at where you were staying, do you know if he did anything else before leaving?

FORNIE: They were discussing the ammunition that Mosquito had brought, that the first target to hit was to be Kono and Tongo.

SANTORA: Who was having this discussion?

FORNIE: Sam Bockarie, Benjamin Yeaten, Eddie Kanneh. Before we took off from Benjamin’s house I asked him, I said “Master, where is the material that you went for?” and he said they are on the way. They are loaded at the Roberts International Airfield.

CHEESEMAN: Dauda said the arms and ammunition brought from Burkina Faso were used to attack several Sierra Leonean towns and cities including Freetown. One of the pieces of evidence produced by the Prosecution today included a recording of an interview BBC Robin White had with former RUF Commander Issa Sesay. According to the witness, this interview was held after the invasion of Freetown. Here is an excerpt of that interview played in court today.

ISSA SESAY: This is just to inform you we’ve again overthrown the SLPP government. About four hours ago this morning.

ROBIN WHITE: When you say “we” what do you mean?
SESAY: Combined forces of the AFRC and RUF.

WHITE: And where are you speaking from?

SESAY: I am down at [indistinct] at State House.

WHITE: And when did you get into State House?

SESAY: Um, four hours ago.

WHITE: Did you have to fight your way into State House?

SESAY: We met no resistance, no resistance from the ECOMOG.

WHITE: And how much of Freetown do you claim to control?

SESAY: [Indistinct] controlling the entire Freetown.

WHITE: What about Wilberforce Barracks?

SESAY: Wilberforce Barracks, our men are presently deployed there.

WHITE: But they haven’t captured it.

SESAY: I can’t talk to you now. The battle is going on, but someone has just told me that they have captured the main office – that is the [indistinct] room and the guard room.

WHITE: How many men were involved in today’s attack?

SESAY: Precisely speaking, 15,000 armed men.

CHEESEMAN: Former RUF Commander Colonel Issa Sesay. He spoke to BBC Robin White in an interview played in court by the Prosecution.

Dauda, the Sierra Leonean witness, said after the Freetown invasion, former SSS Director Benjamin Yeaten communicated with Sam Bockarie and advised him to move to safety zone prominent Sierra Leonean citizens including former President Joseph Momoh freed from the Pademba Road Prison. The witness told the court when ECOMOG pressurized the RUF in Freetown, Sam Bockarie ordered his commanders in Freetown to carry our mayhem and destruction.

FORNIE: Mosquito said if it is possible to give anybody short sleeves or long sleeves, meaning to amputate anybody. He said that wouldn’t be any problem. He said Gullit and others should raise alarm to the level of the international community so that they can come in. Maybe that would force the government to peace talks whereby Foday Sankoh would be released. And equally burn down houses including some important government buildings like the oil refinery. He passed a direct instruction if they had the chance they should set it on fire.

The insider witness told the court all of the arms and ammunition transported from Liberia were taken from an underground at White Flower, Mr. Charles Taylor’s residence in Monrovia. The RUF former Signal Commander, Dauda Fornie started his cross-examination late Wednesday.
The chief prosecutor for the International Criminal Court told the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday that the court might soon decide whether to issue an arrest warrant for Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on charges of genocide in the war-torn Darfur region. Luis Moreno-Ocampo warned that the Security Council should prepare for possible reprisals against peacekeepers and civilians if a warrant is issued. From United Nations headquarters in New York, VOA's Margaret Besheer has more.

Moreno-Ocampo says more than 5,000 displaced persons continue to die each month in Darfur. He said continued attacks against ethnic groups, rapes in and around camps, and the obstruction of humanitarian efforts are only possible with the compliance of the Sudanese government, headed by President Bashir.

"Such acts have required the sustained mobilization of the Sudanese state apparatus, including the military, security and intelligence services, the integration of the militia/janjaweed into the reserve forces, the coordination of the diplomatic and public information bureaucracies and the control of the judiciary," said Moreno-Ocampo said.

The prosecutor asked the court in July to issue an arrest warrant for Mr. Bashir on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. A decision is expected by early next year.

Moreno-Ocampo said the evidence shows that in March 2003, President Bashir ordered brutal attacks on villages and camps inhabited by the Fur, Masalit and Zaghawa tribes.

"At least 35,000 persons have been killed, around 300,000 suffered a 'slow death,' thousands of women and girls are the victims of rape," he said. "2.5 million people in the camps today are subjected to conditions of life calculated to bring about their physical destruction."

The prosecutor said that in response to his request for an arrest warrant, President Bashir and some of his officials have made direct threats against peacekeepers and civilians.

"Such threats should be seen for what they are - a confirmation of criminal intentions," Moreno-Ocampo said.

Moreno-Ocampo also charges that the president is protecting two other individuals for whom the court has already issued arrest warrants. One of them, Ahmad Harun, is a government minister.

"The impunity afforded to Ahmad Harun is a direct message to all perpetrators of crimes in Darfur," he said. "That message is the president will protect those who are following his orders."

Moreno-Ocampo said President Bashir could have disarmed the militias, stopped attacks on civilians and surrendered those with arrest warrants against them to the court, but that he has instead chosen to continue to implement his plans of genocide.
He said the council must be ready to take united and consistent action to ensure the implementation of an arrest warrant if the court issues one.

The U.N. Security Council originally referred the Darfur issue to the International Criminal Court, and has spoken in a united voice in demanding that Sudan end impunity. But there are some differences developing.

Council members China, Russia and Libya are close to Khartoum. And the African Union and the Arab League have asked that the Council consider deferring the investigation of President Bashir, saying it is not helpful to the peace process.

Costa Rica's U.N. Ambassador, Jorge Urbina, acknowledged differences exist among Security Council members on whether to invoke the Council's power to suspend the investigation for one year, and made clear that his country does not support such a move.

"We regret very much the pressure that has been put on the Council to defer the case from the court," he said. "We believe that this pressure should be put on the government of Sudan to comply with the decision of the court."

Human rights groups are also calling on the Security Council to send a clear and united message to Khartoum that it must comply with the court's decision and that no retaliatory violence will be tolerated.

Prosecutor Luis Moreno-Ocampo is also seeking arrest warrants against three rebel commanders for a 2007 attack on African Union peacekeepers in which 12 were killed.
UNMIL Public Information Office Complete Media Summaries  
3 December 2008

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

**Newspaper Summary**

UN Envoy says Liberian Government and international community must work together  
(Heritage, The Informer, Public Agenda)

- The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) to Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj said despite progress made in maintaining peace and stability in Liberia, the need to strengthen and reform legal institutions, social and justice systems, and to enhance the capacity of national institutions is still crucial in addressing remaining challenges in the country.

- She reconfirmed the commitment of the United Nations to the broader agenda of peace building in Liberia when she awarded medals to more than 550 members of the UNMIL Chinese military contingent in Zwedru. Commending the contingent comprising Transport, Engineering and Medical units for their contribution to peace and stability in Liberia, Ms. Løj said, “The contingent has made a sterling contribution to enhance the quality of life of the Liberian people”. China’s Ambassador to Liberia, Mr. Zhuo Yuxiao reiterated his country’s commitment, as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, to promote world peace and human development.

200 Prisoners Broke jail on Monday – Says Liberia’s Justice Minister  

- The Liberian Government put the number of prisoners who escaped the Monrovia Central Prison at 200. Justice Minister Philip Banks was widely quoted as blaming Monday’s jail break on ‘serious’ security lapses; ruling out the possibility that local security could have prevented the jail break. There are speculations that the incident resulted from a recent protest by correction officers assigned at the Central Prison over salary payment, a claim Minister Banks denies.

- Meanwhile, government yesterday issued a public appeal for help in tracking down the escapees. Information Minister Laurence Bropleh said authorities had already re-arrested 85 of the prisoners and that a manhunt has been launched to re-capture the remaining inmates.

Several Liberians to Be Deported from US today  
(The Inquirer)

- It has now been confirmed that 22 Liberians face deportation for committing various crimes in the United States.

- Speaking to journalists yesterday in Monrovia, Immigration Commissioner, Chris Massaquoi, said the affected Liberians were convicted of crimes ranging from gang rape, arson attack, and armed robbery to fraud. Commissioner Massaquoi said the group comprising 21 males and one female are due in the country today, Wednesday. He said the deportation was a matter of concern to the country and that government is taking all precautionary steps to ensure that those crimes committed are not repeated here.

- The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) Commissioner said there is an "operational plan which has been approved by the Justice Ministry regarding the issue. He said those who committed minor offences would be given to their parents, but those who committed heinous crimes would be in the government’s custody and thoroughly investigated before allowing them to leave."
Deputy Immigration Chief Reports Death Threats against him
(The Inquirer, Public Agenda)

• Deputy Immigration commissioner Archie Williams who was recently attacked by some unknown armed men have reported receiving threats of similar attacks or possible death.
• “You are nothing but already a dead body,” he quoted one of the threatening messages as saying. According to him, for the past two days he continues to receive threats, some of which threatened to eliminate him apparently for his position at the bureau. He said one of the threatening messages spoke of him behaving as if the bureau belongs to him.
• Mr. Williams said those who sent the messages via cell phone informed him that the first attack was not much, but that the second attack may lead to his death. He believes that these threats are coming from people within the bureau, perhaps for doing his job.

Radio Summary
Local Media – Radio Veritas (News monitored today at 9:45 am)

Government Confirms Escape of 200 Prisoners from Monrovia’s main Prison
(Also reported on Truth FM and ELBC)

Former Maritime Commissioner Vows Not to appear before TRC
• One of those listed to appear before the public hearings held by Liberia’s Truth Commission (TRC), former Maritime Commissioner Benoni Urey, says he will not appear before the TRC.
• Mr. Urey said he does not believe in the work of the TRC and as such would not provide testimony to the panel of commissioners.
• In an interview, the former maritime commissioner said he prefers to go to court, urging those with a case against him to seek legal redress.
• Over 300 people have been listed by the commission to provide testimonies of their role and knowledge of the Liberian Civil Conflict.
• They have been given a 17-day ultimatum to appear before the TRC.
(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth FM, Sky FM, and ELBC)

Rehabilitation Work on Sanquin River Bridge Commences
• Rehabilitation work on the damaged Sanquin River Bridge linking Sinoe and Rivercess Counties commences today, Wednesday.
• The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) said it is launching an emergency bailey bridge over the Sanquin River.
• The 190ft bridge was purchased by USAID in 2007 through a grant to the Ministry of Public Works.
• The construction of the bridge will be done in partnership with the Ministries of Public Works and Defense and other partners.
(Also reported on Star Radio, Truth FM, Sky FM, and ELBC)

Former Ruling Party Poise to Hold Reconciliation Forum
• The former ruling National Patriotic Party (NPP) says it will shortly hold a reconciliation forum intended to bring back its partisans that left the party for various reasons. Speaking to journalists in Monrovia, NPP Chairman, Cllr. Theophilus Gould said the party reconnection is to reunite with all partisans with the view to discussing the way forward.

****
The United Nations Children's Fund is calling for a halt to the forced recruitment of child soldiers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. It says all warring parties in North Kivu Province forcibly recruit children into their armies. Lisa Schlein reports for VOA from Geneva.

The U.N. Children's Fund said fighting between government and rebel groups in North Kivu is putting children at risk of abuse and exploitation. It said children displaced by the war are particularly vulnerable.

UNICEF spokeswoman Miranda Eeles said the forcible recruitment of children as soldiers is widespread throughout the region and is on the rise. She said this week UNICEF received unconfirmed reports that five children in Kitchanga were recruited.

"The recruitment of many children appears to be continuing amongst all the armed groups in North Kivu. UNICEF calls on all armed groups to immediately stop recruiting children and to release all children in their ranks," she said. "The recruitment of children is a war crime and commanders will be held accountable against international standards."

War in the eastern DRC has been raging for more than a decade between the Congolese government and various rebel groups. Human rights organizations estimate more than five million people have died, mostly from preventable disease and malnutrition. Hundreds of thousands of people have been made homeless.

Since the latest flare-up of fighting in August, more than one-quarter of a million people have been displaced. UNICEF said children who flee their homes are often separated from their families and left unprotected.

Eeles said displaced children in North Kivu are at risk of acute diarrhea and measles. She said many children are malnourished.

She said schools traditionally are seen as zones of safety and comfort for children. But, in North Kivu, she said schools no longer play this role.

"Unfortunately, 85 percent of schools in Rutshuru territory still remain closed to around 150,000 students ... Also, in addition to this, even if the schools were open, we are finding that parents are still afraid to send their children to school due to killings, disappearances and then, of course, schools seem to be a target for forced recruitment," Eeles said.

UNICEF is calling for all armed groups to create a safe environment so schools can re-open and children can peacefully resume their studies.
Rape as genocide

By David Scheffer

'In this society if you rape one woman, you have raped the entire tribe" - so said one observer of the mass rape occurring in Darfur.

People hear the word genocide and think of six million victims of the Holocaust or an estimated 800,000 dead in Rwanda. They do not imagine that mass rape can be so well planned and targeted that it wipes out a substantial part of an ethnic group as thoroughly, though more slowly, than widespread killings. Yet three judges sitting on the International Criminal Court will decide soon whether to confirm an arrest warrant against a head of state, President Omar Hassan al-Bashir of Sudan, on grounds that he masterminded rape as genocide against three ethnic groups in Darfur that have challenged his power.

The ICC's prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, has filed war crimes and crimes against humanity charges against Bashir. But the centerpiece of Moreno-Ocampo's application is the charge of rape as genocide "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group" and "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." Such acts of genocide arising from rape rather than from murder can be prosecuted as stand-alone crimes before the International Criminal Court.

Their complexity, despite helpful rulings from the Rwanda and Bosnia war crimes tribunals, may discourage the judges from affirming genocide charges while they opt for the more familiar terrain of other atrocity crimes charges. Hanging in the balance is whether the heinous strategy of mass rape in modern warfare will be condemned and prosecuted for what it truly is: genocide.

The judges have to find "reasonable grounds" to arrest Bashir on the rape-as-genocide charges. They need not establish proof beyond a reasonable doubt - that standard applies at trial. So far, the evidence presented by Moreno-Ocampo appears compelling under either standard.

The prosecutor's investigation reveals that Bashir's forces and agents forcibly drove approximately 2.5 million Sudanese, including substantial numbers of the Fur, Masalit, and Zaghawa ethnic groups, into camps of internally displaced persons. They then inflicted rape and other forms of severe sexual violence upon thousands of women and girls, and continue to do so. A common tactic is for the Janjaweed tribal militia and Sudan's armed forces and security agents to roam outside the camps raping and often gang-raping women and girls who must leave the camps to collect firewood, grass or water in order to survive. One witness said: "Maybe around 20 men rape one woman. ... These things are normal for us here in Darfur. ... They rape women in front of their mothers and fathers."

Babies born following the rapes are called "Janjaweed babies" who rarely have a future in the mother's ethnic group. Infanticides and abandonment of such babies are common. One victim explained, "They kill our males and dilute our blood with rape. [They] ... want to finish us as a people, end our history."

Imagine the collective horror if men and boys in these ethnic groups were raped and then castrated. Would anyone doubt that genocidal impulses were at work by depriving men of their ability to father babies within their own ethnic group? Raped women and girls are similarly crippled.

In the 1990's I met scores of rape victims from atrocities in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Uganda and eastern Congo. In most cases their experiences were so devastating to their character, their ethnic bonds and often
to their health that the logic of how mass rape can destroy a substantial part of a group and thus constitute genocide seemed clear. These women typically were ostracized from their communities, could not marry their ethnic men, or were physically incapable of rearing children.

The fairly unique circumstances in Darfur enable Bashir to inflict conditions of life that are destroying the three ethnic groups. Of the estimated 80,000 to 265,000 "slow deaths" in the camps to date, the targeted groups have suffered grievously. The evidence shows a highly sophisticated strategy at work combining scorched-earth assaults on ethnic villages followed by isolation in camps where starvation, illness, and rape are used to achieve genocidal aims.

The judges also must find reasonable grounds that Bashir has had the specific criminal intent to commit genocide through a strategy of mass rape. The rules on establishing the mens rea, or guilty mind, have been highly developed in genocide cases prosecuted before other war crimes tribunals. The genocidal intent can be inferred from the factual circumstances of the crime. In Darfur, there is no shortage of actions, including repeated mass rapes, from which to infer genocidal intent. The prosecutor argues that the only reasonable inference available on the evidence is that Bashir intended to destroy in part the ethnic groups.

The wild card remains the United Nations Security Council, which may yet cave into political pressure and prevent approval or execution of an arrest warrant against the Sudanese leader. But if the judges can continue their review and find reasonable grounds to charge rape as genocide, thousands of women and girls attacked by rapists as a means of decimating their ethnic groups will share a small measure of justice and peace.

David Scheffer, the former U.S. ambassador at large for war crimes issues (1997-2001), is a law professor and director of the Center for International Human Rights at Northwestern University School of Law.
Victims of atrocities committed by former Liberian President, Charles Taylor may receive compensation if the former warlord is convicted.

Stephen Rapp, the Chief Prosecutor of Taylor at The Hague, Netherlands, made the disclosure during a press conference in Abuja.

Rapp who hailed the role played by the Federal Government to arrest Taylor said that assets owned by Taylor were being traced across the globe.

Rapp explained that the assets recovered from Taylor would be handed over to Liberian government to be used as compensation for victims of the war who come forward to make claims.

According to him, the United Nations plans to establish a victim compensation fund for victims of the civil war in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Some Nigerians who were residents of Liberia were victims of the war.

Some had their hands amputated.

Meanwhile, contrary to earlier reports that Nigerian government was not cooperating with a team of experts set up by the United Nations Security Council to trace assets belonging to Taylor, Rapp said that there were reports showing that Nigeria had been very supportive of efforts to bring Taylor to justice.

He said, "since the first day of the court, the government of Nigeria has given us full support".

"Its representative at the United Nations has served on our management committee and it has made financial contributions.

Taylor was charged with 11 counts touching on crimes against humanity and war crimes involving murder, mutilations, rape, terror against civilians, enslavement, pillage and the use of child soldiers.

Rapp said that the evidence that has been presented against Taylor at the Hague showed that no one was more responsible for the suffering caused in Sierra Leone.

He said "the prosecution has nearly completed its case against Taylor with over 80 witnesses having testified.

"Once we close our case in the new year, the Defence will begin the presentation of its evidence and judgment is expected sometime in 2009 to be followed by an appeal.

According to him, Taylor's trial is both a concrete example and a symbol of a turning point for the region.

"Few thoughts he would ever see the inside of a courtroom. But the world refused to allow him escape justice," he added.
UN urged to support Sudan arrest

There are many rebel groups making peace efforts difficult. The International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor has warned the UN Security Council not to shield Sudan's president if the court issues an arrest warrant.

Luis Moreno-Ocampo accused President Omar al-Bashir in July of genocide in Darfur - a charge he denies.

Sudan has been campaigning for the UN Security Council to use its powers to suspend the ICC proceedings for a year.

Judges at the ICC are due to decide whether to issue an arrest warrant by the start of next year.

Some fear that if the president's indictment proceeds it could derail peace efforts in the region.

The ICC prosecutor has said there are grounds to believe Sudan's president bears criminal responsibility on 10 counts of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.

Mr Moreno-Ocampo warned the 15-nation Security Council not to be part of a cover-up.

"If the judges decide to issue an arrest warrant against President al-Bashir, there will be a need for united and consistent action to ensure its execution," Reuters news agency quoted the prosecutor as saying.

The Sudanese ambassador at the UN, Abdalmahmood Abdalhaleem Mohamad, told the BBC that Mr Ocampo "repeated his politically motivated allegations" adding that "it was a political statement not a legal one".

Sudan's government has always rejected charges that it armed the Janjaweed militias accused of widespread atrocities against civilians in Darfur.

Mr Moreno-Ocampo last month also asked judges for arrest warrants to be issued against three rebel commanders in Sudan's Darfur region.

The ICC has already issued two arrest warrants - in 2007 - for Sudan's humanitarian affairs minister and a pro-government militia leader for alleged war crimes in Darfur.

Sudan has refused to co-operate with the ICC and insists on conducting its own investigations.

The African Union supports Sudan's calls for the ICC proceedings to be suspended, arguing that arresting President al-Bashir would disrupt the peace process in Darfur.

The US is opposed, and European countries say there is no justification at present. But South Africa has called on the council to at least discuss suspension.

In November, Sudan's government called a unilateral ceasefire in Darfur, which rebel groups say was short-lived.

The campaign group Human Rights also warned the Security Council not to be hoodwinked by Khartoum into handing impunity to Sudan's president.

The UN estimates that up to 2.7 million people have been forced from their homes in Darfur and some 300,000 have died during five and a half years of conflict.