SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE
OUTREACH AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE

PRESS CLIPPINGS

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:
Tuesday, 22 December 2009

Press clips are produced Monday through Friday.
Any omission, comment or suggestion, please contact
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Ext 7217
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Test for a Court...
Prosecutors Face Charles Taylor

From front page
former president of Liberia, has appeared as a confident witness at his own war crimes trial through more than 50 days, casting himself as a man striving for peace - not the warlord who brought death and havoc in West Africa, as prosecutors portray him.

Charles G. Taylor, the former president of Liberia, addressing the Special Court for Sierra Leone in The Hague in July. He is on trial on charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Time and again, he has denied accusations that he enriched himself from the nation's coffers or ran smuggling operations of weapons and diamonds. He said he had nothing to do with enslaving child soldiers or using the country's riches to fund war. Rather, he claimed, he had settled disputes between warring factions and obtained the release of abducted United Nations peacekeepers.

The charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity brought against him at his trial in The Hague, he said, "are all lies."

Now that he has told his side of the story, it is the prosecutors' turn to cross-examine, and they say that Mr. Taylor's long testimony in the trial will provide even more ammunition for them: they accused him of lying repeatedly under oath. They said they would now also seek to impeach him as a witness, which could seriously weaken his defense.

Mr. Taylor's long and direct testimony is unusual for international war crimes trials, where only a few defendants have spent even short periods on the stand. Defense lawyers usually warn talkative clients of the perils of being questioned during cross-examination. Mr. Taylor's cross-examination, now under way, is expected to last several weeks.

One of the prosecution's first steps has been to challenge Mr. Taylor's testimony under oath that he had never funneled government funds into private accounts. On the witness stand, he repeatedly dared his accusers to show any financial wrongdoing.

In a surprise move this month, prosecutors presented records of a bank account opened in 1999 in Mr. Taylor's name, with deposits adding up to more than $14 million.

"This was a cover account," Mr. Taylor conceded, appearing uncomfortable. The money was the government's, not his own, he said. Bags of cash were withdrawn from the account and taken to his mansion to pay for arms, ammunition and special operations, he continued. "It was used covertly, and I'm under no obligation to tell you what those covert operations were."

A close to $2 million deposit came from a timber company, and a $3.5 million deposit was made by the government of Taiwan, the prosecutor noted. "Why is it covert?" the prosecutor asked. "Because it is going directly into your pocket?"

No, Mr. Taylor replied. These were secret government funds, he explained. If the money had gone to the central bank, he said, "the I.M.F. and the World Bank would know about it." And at the time, Liberia was under an international arms embargo, he recalled.

The exchange was a telling moment in a complex trial that touches on a web of violence and corruption reaching from Liberia into Sierra Leone, Guinea and Ivory Coast. Prosecutors say that Mr. Taylor, in his drive to expand his power in the region, was at the center of it all.

An international panel of four judges, based in The Hague, is trying Mr. Taylor specifically for arming and controlling a brutal rebel force in Sierra Leone during the country's 1991-2002 civil war that led to the deaths of some 200,000 people. His indictment holds him accountable for the rebels' crimes as they pillaged, killed and raped, used children as soldiers and hacked off hands to terrorize civilians. Many others died in his home country, Liberia, but events there are not within the mandate of the court.

Much is at stake at this first war crimes trial of an African president. It is seen as a new test for trying a former head of state in an international tribunal. The case against Slobodan Milosevic, the former Serbian president, ended inconclusively when he died in his cell in The Hague.

The court has also come under greater scrutiny from some African governments since another African leader, President Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, has been sought by a different international court on charges similar to those leveled against Mr. Taylor. African leaders so far have said they will not cooperate in detaining Sudan's president.

Mr. Taylor's trial, which began in earnest in January 2008 after a halting start and an initial boycott by the defendant, has seemed to go smoothly, not least because of the calm and respectful court manners displayed by Mr. Taylor and his defense team.

But budget problems continue to haunt the Special Court for Sierra Leone, which is backed by the United Nations but financed through voluntary contributions. Eight other defendants have been tried and sentenced by the court, and Mr. Taylor's is the last case.

But in recent days anxious court officials said the Taylor case could come to a standstill for lack of money early next year because so far they had pledges for less than half of the $16 million needed for 2010.

More than $1 million a year goes to salaries and rent for Mr. Taylor's defense team. He has claimed poverty, even though he is accused of having built a fortune in kickbacks from licenses and sales of the array of natural resources of Liberia and Sierra Leone. Mr. Taylor, when forced out of office in 2003, claimed to own real estate worth $1.5 million. But he said that he had no hidden fortune and that his presidential salary was only $2,000 per month.

British lawyers and investigators on several continents have been hunting for Mr. Taylor's legendary missing wealth. He has not been charged with stealing in Liberia, but any hidden accounts or assets are considered vital for prosecutors.
3 Condemned Female Prisoners Appeal To President Koroma

Christmas is the time when Christians celebrate the birth of their saviour and a second chance for humanity. This year, three women on death row hope that they will be given a second chance. They hope that their stories will be heard and understood. They hope that the President will grant them a pardon.

Woman 1 - Mankaprire Kamara: a shy Tonkolili lady in her 30s, has been on death row for over 4 years. Each day she fears it might be her last. The mental anguish of facing the threat of death is well documented. In many jurisdictions 4 years on death row would be considered inhumane and degrading treatment, something that every citizen should be protected against according to the Constitution.

Mankaprire’s ordeal began over 6 years ago, in 2003 in the Port Loko district, when the child of her husband’s second wife became sick. The family immediately sought help from the local “peppeth” doctor but, by the following afternoon, the child was dead. Mankaprire, her husband and the child’s mother were taken to the Paramount Chief and then to the nearest Police Station for questioning. Only Mankaprire was charged with the child’s murder.

So how did Mankaprire alone find herself facing this grave charge? From her arrest until shortly before trial, Mankaprire received no legal advice or assistance. Instead, a barely literate woman, trying to find her way out of a terrifying and confusing situation, she trustingly listened to those she thought were trying to help her. This included her husband, himself a suspect. While at the police station, Mankaprire was entirely without support, and under pressure from her husband to say yes to everything the police asked her. She was also pregnant at the time and suffered a miscarriage while in jail. In the end, exhausted and terrified, Mankaprire signed the confession which was later used against her at trial.

Mankaprire was then cast adrift in the legal system, abandoned by family and friends in the gloom of her cell. Mankaprire explains that she had no idea what was happening to her. It was not until 2005 that a lawyer was appointed by the State to defend her. This overworked lawyer agreed to take the case for free but was only able to meet with Mankaprire three times. Each meeting lasted about 15 minutes. Unsurprisingly, Contd. on page 6
3 Condemned Women

From page 8

Mankaprie's defence failed. She was found guilty of murder and sentenced to death. It was only later, when her lawyer explained the outcome that Mankaprie fully understood the verdict and the enormity of what had just happened. After 2 years Mankaprie's legal limbo was brought to a stark conclusion.

Since the trial, Mankaprie's plight has again been hindered by the many problems which still plague our post-war legal system. Mankaprie had no lawyer with time or resources to file a timely appeal. The charitable assistance she received months later became bogged down in the end by delays in finding and typing up case files. When Mankaprie's case finally came before the Court of Appeal in October 2008 she was not allowed the chance to have her case reviewed by a higher court: it was found she was too late.

The rules governing appeals are outdated laws, remnants from colonial times. According to s 64 of the Courts Act 1965, appeals against criminal convictions must be brought within 21 days of the initial conviction. This period can be extended by the Courts but not in cases involving the death sentence. This law, repealed many years ago in England, is unduly harsh, especially in a legal system which provides limited legal representation to those who cannot afford it. It denies Sierra Leoneans the fundamental human right to have the ultimate punishment, the sentence of death, reviewed again by a higher court. This law also sits uneasily with the Constitution which protects Sierra Leoneans' right to a fair trial and with Sierra Leone's international obligations under several human rights treaties.

While the law remains linked to the past, Mankaprie looks to the future. As we count down the days to Christmas, Mankaprie counts the days until she finds out whether her life will be spared. She prays that the President will show compassion, exercise his Constitutional power and grant her mercy this Christmas.

Sadly, Mankaprie is not the only woman with this Christmas wish.

Woman 2 - Nyallay Foday: a vibrant Mende lady in her early forties. She has been on death row for over 2 years. Her story is similar to Mankaprie's: the first wife's daughter died tragically and Nyallay was forced to confess to the death despite repeated denials.

Woman 3 - Grandmother Sia Mbekie: a very frail Kono lady aged over 70 years. She was accused of killing or arranging the death of a neighbour's child. Nyallay and Sia are also illiterate and poor. They too were abandoned by their families and communities. They too struggled to mount an effective defence. They too were unable to lodge appeals within the cruelty short 21 day time limit. They too plead to the President to pardon them or at the very least commute their death sentences to life imprisonment.

These three women have asked AdvocAid to voice their simple plea for them since they are illiterate and feel powerless to change the law:

"Please do not kill us. Please do not leave us behind prison walls thinking every day about when we will be hanged. Please give us another chance this Christmas. Please pardon us."
December 20, 2009 (KHARTOUM)
The advance party of military contingent from Sierra Leone arrived to Darfur this week to work with the hybrid peacekeeping mission, the UNAMID said today.

Sierra Leone will send 160 military personnel to join the UNAMID, Free Town announced earlier this month.

"The contingent consists of 53 peacekeepers, 4 of them women, and is led by Lieutenant Colonel S.E.T. Marah," reported the daily bulletin of the hybrid operation. The advance group it includes 30 personnel from the engineering division.

Deputy Chief of Defense Staff of the Sierra Leone Armed Forces Brigadier Robert Koroma said on December 3, that all the necessary logistics of the contingent have been sent well in advance.

The Sierra Leone peacekeepers who arrived in South Darfur today, will conduct security and confidence-building patrols. They will also provide escorts for humanitarian missions to hazardous areas, thus ensuring the arrival of aid to many IDPs.

There are now nearly 15,000 military personnel from 38 countries deployed in the mission, representing over 76% of the authorised strength. Earlier this year UNAMID said expecting to reach 95% of its full strength: 20,000 troops and more than 6,000
Guinea junta leader Camara should be tried - UN

Guinea's military leader should be charged with crimes against humanity over the killing of opposition protesters, a leaked UN report says.

The UN panel says Capt Moussa Dadis Camara bears "direct criminal responsibility" for the killings.

The report said it could identify 156 people who were killed at the protest - contradicting claims from the ruling junta than fewer than 60 people died.

Earlier this month Capt Camara was shot and wounded by one of his own soldiers. Junta spokesman Idrissa Cherif accused the UN of rushing out the report and said there had been a "procedural fault" in the way it had been communicated.

"I get the impression people want to speed things up as if it were a race against the clock. It is not normal," he told Reuters news agency.

Sex crimes

The report, commissioned in October by the UN, backs up claims made repeatedly by rights groups and opposition supporters - and contradicts starkly the accounts offered by Guinea's military rulers.
The panel of experts, who visited Guinea, said soldiers took part in mass murder and also carried out mass rape and sexual abuse of women at the protest, in the capital Conakry on 28 September.

The report, based on interviews with more than 600 people, said at least 109 girls and women were subjected to rape, sexual mutilation or kidnap for repeated rape. Hundreds of people were also subjected to torture and abuse, it said.

Capt Camara had previously sought to distance himself from the atrocities by blaming unruly elements in the army.

But the report says: "The commission considers there are sufficient grounds for presuming direct criminal responsibility by President Moussa Dadis Camara."

Another passage states: "The commission recommends that the International Criminal Court be seized with respect to those persons on whom, according to this report's findings, weighs a strong suspicion of crimes against humanity."

**Junta in turmoil**

Critics of the junta had gathered in a sports stadium in the capital, Conakry, to protest at reports that Capt Camara intended to stand for president in an election planned for 2010.

But troops opened fire on the protesters in what human rights groups have described as a pre-planned massacre.

Guinea has been in turmoil since the military took over last December, but the shooting of Capt Camara by one of his soldiers on 3 December this year has thrown the country into even greater chaos.

Capt Camara was flown to Morocco for treatment after the shooting and has not yet returned - fuelling rumours that he was seriously injured.

The soldier implicated in the shooting, Lt Toumba Diakite, has been on the run ever since.

He has been accused of being in charge of some of the soldiers who opened fire on the protesters, and the UN panel recommended that he should also face charges.

Lt Toumba, in an interview with French media last week, said he had shot Capt Camara because he feared he would be blamed for the stadium killings.

A third member of the junta, the drug police chief Moussa Sakho Camara, was also named by the UN experts as bearing responsibility for the massacre.
U.N. Panel Calls for Court in Guinea Massacre

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

UNITED NATIONS — A United Nations panel investigating the massacre and rape of unarmed protesters in Guinea three months ago said in a report released Monday that the nation’s military ruler and some of his adjutants should be referred to the International Criminal Court for “crimes against humanity.”

Protesters watched in September as security forces blocked them from approaching a protest at a stadium in Conakry, Guinea.

The 60-page report, compiled by three African legal experts, describes in gruesome detail the violence unleashed on what had been something of a festival of protest being held in a stadium in Conakry, the capital, on Sept. 28. The attacks left at least 156 people dead or missing and about 109 women raped or sexually abused.

Because some of the victims were found in mass graves, it is likely that the death toll was far higher, the report stated. The panel interviewed nearly 700 witnesses, some in Conakry and some who fled to Senegal for their safety, to create a portrait of a military run amok.

Soldiers, many from the Presidential Guard, burst into the stadium and fired at close range on the thousands of people who had gathered there in a carnival-like atmosphere, dancing and praying. Once the troops ran out of ammunition, they attacked the unarmed civilians with daggers, bayonets, bludgeons and even catapults, the report said. People scattered in every direction, and those who paused to help the wounded were gunned down.

The panic caused some people to suffocate in the crowds streaming for the exits, with the lack of oxygen exacerbated by tear gas. Some victims were trampled to death or electrocuted when they tried to climb over the fences; soldiers had attached electrical lines that they had downed to the metal fences, according to the report.

Women were a particular target. Soldiers shoved a gun inside one victim of a gang rape and pulled the trigger, killing her, the report said. Another had her throat slit when she lifted her blindfold. At least four women were abducted and held for days as sex slaves, the report said; they were drugged and photographed while being assaulted. France has asked that the Security Council take up the report, but Michel Kafango, the ambassador from Burkina Faso and the Council’s president this month, said that would have to wait until the report was translated from French.
The report described the attacks as “widespread and systematic,” which is the basis for crimes against humanity in international law. Because Guinea is a signatory to the International Criminal Court, the court does not have to await a referral from the Security Council, and the court’s prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, has said he has already started an investigation.

In an unusual tactic, the report singled out three people as bearing direct responsibility for the violence, because the attacks could not have happened without their orders: Capt. Moussa Dadis Camara, the country’s leader; Lt. Aboubacar Chérif Diakité, known as Toumba, Captain Camara’s aide-de-camp and chief of the Presidential Guard; and a third officer, Moussa Thegboro Camara, who is in charge of the special services. The two aides were at the stadium during the massacre.

Lieutenant Diakité told the panel that he had gone to the stadium to ensure that opposition leaders were protected. He also said that he had not seen any violence, nor would anybody “even think of touching a woman,” the report quoted him as saying. But it also reported that a witness said Lieutenant Diakité had said at the stadium: “Nobody gets out of here alive. They all must be killed. They think there is democracy here.”

The demonstrators had gathered to denounce plans by the junta leader, Captain Camara, to run in presidential elections. The captain, who is 45, seized power last December in a military coup after the death of the nation’s longtime dictator, Lansana Conté. The instability plaguing the country became even more pronounced after Captain Camara was shot in the head this month and taken to Morocco for medical treatment. Lieutenant Diakité has admitted shooting the captain, saying that he suspected that Captain Camara was trying to make him the fall guy for the massacre and rapes.

Saidou Diallo, speaking for the mission of Guinea to the United Nations, said that his office had not yet seen the report and could not comment. The report said that the government in Conakry has acknowledged 63 deaths and 1,399 people wounded, and that local hospitals have confirmed that at least 33 women were raped. After the massacre, the authorities destroyed evidence, cleaned the stadium, denied treatment to victims, altered medical records and tried to intimidate witnesses, the report said.

Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations secretary general, said in a statement that it was the responsibility of Guinea’s government to protect the victims and other witnesses who testified to the three-member Commission of Inquiry. The members are Mohammed Bedjaoui, a former Algerian foreign minister and chief justice; Françoise N. Kayiramirwa, the minister of human rights in Burundi, among other posts; and Pramila Patten, a lawyer from Mauritius who specializes in women’s rights.
International Clips on Liberia

International Clips on West Africa
Sierra Leone

New Processing Centres Raise Cassava's Outlook in Sierra Leone

Dec 21, 2009 (TradeInvest Africa/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- Cassava's profile as a food security and poverty-reducing crop got a boost with the commissioning of five new processing centres in Sierra Leone, thanks to the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC), International Institute of Tropical Agriculture and Sierra Leone Agricultural Research Institute and other partners. The processing centres, which are located in five different communities including Waterloo, Bo District, Njala Agricultural Research Centre (NARC), Makeni City/Teko, and Hamdalai in Sierra Leone, are part of a $1.6 million CFC funded project involving Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Benin Republic. The project is seeking value addition to cassava and to consequently boost production and generate wealth. "It will also improve livelihoods, and incomes of farmers and stakeholders in the cassava enterprise," says Prof Lateef Sanni, project coordinator, for the CFC funded project. "More importantly, this will create markets and drive the production of cassava."

Unamid Receives Additional Peacekeepers From Sierra Leone

Dec 21, 2009 (United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur/All Africa Global Media via COMTEX) -- On Thursday 15 December, UNAMID welcomed the arrival of the advance party of a military contingent from the Republic of Sierra Leone. The contingent consists of 53 peacekeepers, 4 of them women, and is led by Lieutenant Colonel S.E.T. Marah. The peacekeepers arrived in South Darfur today, where they will conduct security and confidence-building patrols. They will also provide escorts for humanitarian missions to hazardous areas, thus ensuring the arrival of aid to many IDPs in the troubled region. There are now nearly 15,000 military personnel from 38 countries deployed in the mission, representing over 76% of the authorised strength.

Guinea

Guinea's wounded junta chief still in hospital: minister

CONAKRY, Dec 21, 2009 (AFP) - The head of Guinea's junta, Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, wounded in the head on December 3 by his aide de camp, is still recovering in hospital in Morocco, a government minister said Monday. In response to rumours that Camara had discreetly returned to Conakry, the permanent secretary of the junta, Colonel Moussa Keita, told AFP in Dakar by telephone: "He's not yet back, he's still in Rabat, he's resting a bit." Keita said that Camara's health had "greatly improved" and that "he could be back in a little while." "The president talks to us by telephone. If he doesn't communicate publicly, that's because he wants to respect doctor's orders." The self-proclaimed president of Guinea has made no statement or public appearance since he was shot by Lieutenant Aboubacar "Toumba" Sidiki Diakite, who is in hiding. Camara came to power on December 23, 2008, in a military coup hours after the death of Guinea's strongman Lansana Conte, who had ruled the country since 1984.
Guinea mayhem was 'crime against humanity': UN report

UNITED NATIONS, Dec 21, 2009 (AFP) - Killings perpetrated by Guinean security forces in Conakry in late September amount to "crimes against humanity," according to a report by a UN inquiry panel released Monday. The commission said it was able to confirm the identity of 156 people killed or missing and said at least 109 women were subjected to "rapes and other sexual violence, including sexual mutilations and sexual slavery." "It is reasonable to conclude that the crimes perpetrated on September 28 and the following days can be described as "crimes against humanity," it noted.

Cote d'Ivoire

Ivory Coast Cocoa Output Seen Abundant Next Month
Source: Reuters
21/12/2009

Good weather since October will sustain Ivory Coast's cocoa output through January, with arrivals for the month possibly at 100,000 tonnes, farmers and exporters said, contrary to fears volumes would drop sharply in the New Year. Farmers interviewed in the top cocoa grower said trees had received the right balance of rain and sun in recent months, strengthening the growth of pods which were now ripe for harvest. Most exporters polled by Reuters forecast at least 20,000 to 25,000 tonnes of arrivals per week in January.

Fears of a sharp drop in exports volumes next month have helped push cocoa futures to multi-decade highs in the past week.

Ivory Coast's crop, which supplies 40 percent of the world's cocoa, is being closely watched by markets after a disappointing season last year. State cocoa officials have said they expect output to at best match the 1.2 million tonnes crop last year.

Local Media – Newspaper
UN Lifts Arms Embargo on Liberia Government, But Maintains Travel Ban

- The United Nations Security Council has exempted the government of Liberia from an arms embargo placed on the country six years ago.
- A unanimous council resolution extended for another year the arms embargo for all non-governmental entities and individuals operating in the territory of Liberia, but lifted it for the sale of weapons to the Liberian government for an experimental 12-month period.
- The Security Council asked a panel of UN experts to assess the impact of the decision, specifically the effect on the stability and security of the country.
- Meanwhile, the Council has extended for another year a travel ban and assets freeze targeting some associates of former president Charles Taylor and former senior government officials.
- Mr. Taylor has been on trial in The Hague since January 2008 on 11 charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity stemming from the brutal 1991-2001 civil war in neighboring Sierra Leone.

Two Media Managers Charged With Sedition and Criminal Libel Release from Detention
(New Democrat, New Vision, Public Agenda, The Monitor)

- The Publisher of the Plain Truth newspaper, Syrenius Cephus and the Manager of a local printing press, Michael Makinde has been released from detention.
- The two media managers were arrested and detained in connection with a publication which suggested that government was supplying arms to Guinean dissidents. They were subsequently charged with criminal libel and sedition.
Their arrest and detention sparked criticism from the media and other organizations which equated the action of Government against the two men as anti-media maneuvering but the Government has since disparaged the suggestion.

**Unknown Gunmen Shoot Security Guard Dead in Gardnersville Suburb**
(Daily Observer)

- Reports say unknown persons early Sunday morning shot and killed a private security guard, Musa Domuyah in the Gardnersville suburb.
- An eyewitness said the gunmen brandishing single barrel guns stormed the newly established Super Star Entertainment Centre at the Barnersville Junction in Gardnersville fired at the security guard and then fled the area.
- No reason has so far been established for the “cold-blooded” killing of the guard, whose death has created fear amongst residents of the community and its environs.
- The report say security investigators from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Liberia National Police (LNP) arrived at the crime scene shortly after the incident occurred.

**Interim Management Team Named for “Controversial” Sinoe Rubber Plantation**
(Daily Observer, The Inquirer)

- An agreement has been signed between the Government of Liberia (GOL) and the Lee Group of Enterprises for an interim management of the Sinoe Rubber Corporation.
- According to Agriculture Minister Florence Chenoweth, the Lee Group of Enterprises is expected to manage the plantation under the custodianship of the Government.
- Minister Chenoweth said after the interim management period, Government plans to turn over the management of the plantation to a concession company on a permanent basis after the conclusion of an international bidding process.
- The agreement was signed by Minister Chenoweth, Finance Minister Augustine Ngafuan and the Lee Group of Enterprises Managing Director, Terry Tam.

**Over 100 Provisional Police Officers Commissioned**
(Liberia Journal)

- The National Police Training Academy in Paynesville has commissioned 151 provisional police officers.
- The officers of the 36th Class included 50 females and 101 males who were commissioned following a six-month theoretical studies at the academy.
- The Commandant of the National Police Training Academy, James Hallowanger said the officers will be assigned in the field to undergo six-month of practical experience following which they will formally graduate from the academy.

**USAID Gives Local NGO Grant For Cash Food Crop Production**
(Daily Observer)

- A local non-governmental organization, Liberia Agro Systems has received a grant from the United States Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Liberia Community Infrastructure Programme (LCIP).
- The grant will be used for the implementation of a Cash Food Crops Production and Marketing project in River Gee and Grand Gedeh Counties.
- The project currently ongoing in River Gee and Grand Gedeh Counties addresses improved operational efficiency in order to increase cash food crops production.
- The project is also designed to provide improved cultivation techniques, farm-as-business management, value chain development, market linkages, and food processing and preservation skills.

**US General Visits Liberia….Meets President Sirleaf, Others**
(New Vision)
• The Assistant Commander of the US Marine Corps, General James F. Amos yesterday paid a courtesy call on President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Monrovia.
• The meeting between President Sirleaf and General Amos covered areas of cooperation between Liberia and the United States military in the field of training.
• Collaboration on the control of narcotics and support for the Coast Guard as well as Liberia’s Defense sector Reform was also discussed.
• General Amos also met with Defense Minister Brownie Samukai, the Special Representative of the Secretary General in Liberia, Madam Ellen Margethe Løj and UNMIL Force Commander, Lieutenant General Sikander Afzal.
• During the meetings, General Amos discussed ways the Marine Corps can support US efforts to assist in maintaining peace and security in Liberia.
• Meanwhile, sixty one military mentors from the U.S. are due to arrive in the country next month as part of a military-to-military cooperation between Liberia and the US.

**Liberia’s Solicitor General Demands Death for Murderers of Little Angel**
(New Democrat)

- Liberia’s Solicitor General, Counsellor Wilkins Wright says those responsible for the death of 13-year-old Angel Togba should be given the death sentence by hanging if convicted.
- Cllr. Wright of the prosecution team argued recently against the defense motion to waive jury trial in the case.
- Though the defense team argued there is no more death penalty on the statue, the prosecution maintained that Liberian criminal procedure law makes the provision in such a case where murder has been ensued by the conduct of the defendants.

**IMF Approves US$7M for Poverty Reduction**
(New Democrat)

- The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has approved US$7 million for poverty reduction after completing its third review under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) arrangement for Liberia.
- According to an IMF release, the review completion was on a lapse of time basis and will enable the immediate release of SDR4.44 million about US$7 million under the arrangement.
- This will bring total disbursements under the arrangement to SDR225.7 million (about US$357 million).

**Local Media – Star Radio** *(culled from website today at 09:00 am)*

**Catholic Justice and Peace Commission Condemns “Controversial” Plain Truth Newspaper Publication**

- The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) has described as irresponsible, a Plain Truth Newspaper story which suggested that government was supplying arms to Guinean dissidents.
- JPC boss, Cllr. Augustine Toe said the story has serious security implications and could endanger the lives of thousands of Liberians in Guinea.
- He said such information should have been passed onto the government for verification instead of just publishing it.
- Meanwhile Cllr. Toe has dismissed suggestions that government’s action against the publisher of the Plain Truth newspaper was censorship of the local media.

(Also reported on Radio Veritas, Sky F.M., and ELBC)

**Representative Zaza Warns Against Implementing TRC Report**

- Margibi County Representative Ballah Zaza has warned against the full implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) report.
- Representative Zaza said any attempt to prosecute key perpetrators of the war as recommended by the TRC report could plunge Liberia into chaos.
- The Margibi lawmaker said Liberians must be careful in making decisions regarding the TRC report.
- He said it was his belief that key perpetrators of the war including Nimba County Senator Prince Johnson and Representative Saah Gbolie of Margibi County have been forgiven by Liberians.
Child Fund Liberia Deplores Gbarpolu Health Care Delivery System

- The National Director of Child Fund Liberia, Mr. Falie Baldeh says the health care delivery system in Gbarpolu County is very poor.
- Mr. Baldeh said it was disappointing that emergency cases are still being transferred by means of hammock.
- Child Fund Liberia boss attributed the difficult health condition in Gbarpolu to bad roads and long distances from the referral hospital in the county.
- He disclosed his organization was considering attracting donor funding in the future to secure some motorcycles and ambulances for rural dwellers.

Consolidated Group Executive Director Wants Reduction In Government Ministries And Agencies

- Consolidated Group Executive Director Simeon Freeman has called on President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to reduce the number of ministries and agencies of government.
- Mr. Freeman said government was unnecessarily spending on dozens of ministries and agencies that have duplicate functions.
- Mr. Freeman speaking at the launch of a youth organization in Grand Bassa County, made specific reference to the Ministries of Transport and Labor, which he claimed have huge operational budgets but were not performing to expectation.
- He said reduction in the number of government ministries and agencies could enable government save millions of dollars and carryout infrastructure development.

Radio Veritas (News monitored today at 09:45 am)

Judge Wants Top Police Officer Quiz On “Alleged” Armed Robbery Link

- Margibi County Circuit Court Judge James Glean is asking the Justice Ministry to question Deputy Police Chief for Anti-Robbery Amos Soumie for his alleged link to recent armed robbery in the county.
- Judge Glean quoted by the Liberia News Agency, said defendants in the armed robbery case mentioned in their testimonies that Mr. Soumie masterminded the robbery.
- The defendants who have been sentenced to five years imprisonment said the Police Deputy Chief for Anti-Robbery escorted them in the commission of the crime.

President Sirleaf Dedicates Radio Station In Nimba County

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf over the weekend dedicated a new independent radio station in Nimba County.
- President Sirleaf challenged citizens of Nimba to use the radio station to promote peace and reconciliation in the county.
- The President’s message was contained a statement delivered on her behalf by Nimba County Superintendent Edith Gonglo-Weh.
- The new station will cover Bong and Grand Gedeh Counties.

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DRC judges request training in The Hague

By Hélène Michaud

“We need experience in judging international crimes”. In a meeting with the highest official of the International Criminal Court, DRC military judges requested training with the ICC in The Hague in order to improve their skills.

The military judges told ICC President Sang-Hyun Song during his first visit to the country this past week that military courts in the DRC lack skills in drafting judgments related to international crimes such as war crimes and crimes against humanity.

“At the ICC you have all the experts, with lots of experience, and our judges will stand to gain from interaction with those experts in The Hague,” they said.

Judge Innocent Mayembe, president of the Bunia military court in Ituri District, said that his was one of the first jurisdictions to have applied the Rome Statute that established the ICC and its functions.

The court in Bunia has taken up a handful of cases which involved war crimes allegedly committed in the war-ravaged Ituri district. Judge Mayembe admitted that it had been difficult and even “heroic” to try to apply a legal instrument “that we do not know very well”.

In 2006, Judge Mayembe sentenced Mandro Panga Kawa, a former member of the militia led by Thomas Lubanga, now on trial in The Hague, to a 20-year prison term for the murder of 14 persons in a village massacre. The decision was later reversed by a higher tribunal.

According to Judge Mayembe, judges are often confronted with corruption and are submitted to psychological and political pressure. And despite efforts to reform the judiciary in Ituri district, at the national level, the system is still considered dysfunctional.

In addition, there are still no adequate means in Ituri to protect fearful witnesses in dealing with crimes against humanity.

Currently in the DRC, military tribunals have the sole competence to judge international crimes. Colonel Nsimba Binyamwa, Deputy President at the High military court in Kinshasa, pointed out that it was still not yet clear which jurisdiction, military, civil, or a combination of both, will ultimately be allowed to judge war crimes in the DRC, but that it was important to train magistrates, as there are no appropriate programmes in Congolese universities.
“We would like to become familiar with the working methods used within the ICC. It is not enough to read a compilation of texts on international law”, he said.

Training in The Hague and exposure to the ICC’s working methods would help them judge the co-authors of the crimes that are now under scrutiny in The Hague. “This would also help us manage the participation of victims and witnesses in the trials”, said Judge Mayembe.

President Sung, the ICC’s highest official, responded that the ICC did not offer such training programmes, but that working visits for junior, not yet established members of the legal profession were possible. He referred him to the Clingendael Institute in the Netherlands and other institutions in the European Union and in the United States that can provide appropriate training.

President Song underscored the principle of complementarity between the international and national jurisdictions, with the ICC prosecuting the “big fish”, and the national courts small scale perpetrators.
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Monday, 21 December 2009  

**STL: Chief Prosecutor visits Beirut**

By Karl Dowling

Daniel Bellemare, chief prosecutor at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) spent the first week of December in Beirut for his first visit since the formation of the new Lebanese government.

The STL press office stated that Bellemare’s visit was an opportunity to thank the Lebanese authorities for their support and ensure the continuation of this cooperation. It is also a chance to work with the Deputy Prosecutor and his staff based in the Beirut office.

Speaking about the people of Lebanon Bellemare said that “although we are operating from [The Hague], we have not forgotten about them and we are still pursuing the truth on their behalf.”

**“ Courtesy call”**

His efforts seem to have been successful. In a statement President Sleiman reiterated his country’s ongoing support for the tribunal. While Bellemare’s spokeswoman Radhia Achouri told Lebanon’s Daily Star newspaper “we have never got any sign of any difficulty or problem with the Lebanese government contributing its share”.

Commenting on the visit, Michael Bluhm of the Daily Star told Radio Netherlands that it was not a sign of any “major breaks or hot leads”, and was simply “just a courtesy call.” Asked about the public response to Bellemare’s visit he said, “the public noted it but there was no major reaction.”

The STL was set up to prosecute those responsible for the 14 February 2005 attack which killed former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri and 22 others in Beirut.
Travails of a war criminal

By GWYNNE DYER

Alan Watkins is my favourite British journalist. Well into his 70s now, each week he produces a knowing column, usually about British politics. And with a casual understatement that you might easily mistake for irony, he has for the past six years referred to former prime minister Tony Blair as "the young war criminal."

That may seem harsh, for never has an alleged war criminal seemed more sincere, more open, more innocent. As he said about his 2003 decision to involve Britain in the US invasion of Iraq in his resignation speech four years later: "Hand on heart, I did what I thought was right." But everybody does what they think is right.

They may mean pragmatically, morally or ideologically right, but people will find ways to justify their actions to themselves: Pol Pot believed his actions were justified. When people's choices lead to the deaths of others, they must be judged by more objective criteria than sincerity. That is happening to Blair.

Yet another public inquiry in Britain is looking into the origins and consequences of his decision to attack Iraq, but it will not find him guilty of anything. It is what Conservative Party leader David Cameron called "an establishment stitch-up."

Yet the existence of the Chilcot inquiry has so shaken Blair that he has made an extraordinary admission. On December 13 he said he would have invaded Iraq even if he had known at the time that the "intelligence" about weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) there was wrong.

"I would still have thought it was right to remove (Saddam Hussein)," he told BBC interviewer Fern Britton. "Obviously, you would have had to use and deploy different arguments about the nature of the threat." He seemed unaware that he was throwing away the only justification for his actions that might stand up before International Criminal Court (ICC).

Why I am devoting all this space to a discredited ex-leader whose country once played a minor role in the invasion of a middle-sized Arab country. The point is there is a law, and they broke it. Since 1945, it has been a crime to invade another country: that was the main charge brought against the Nazi leaders at Nuremberg.

You have the right to defend yourself if another country attacks you, but you are not allowed to attack another country on the grounds that it has a wicked ruler, or follows policies you disapprove of, or because you think it might attack you. No unilateral military action is permitted, and joint action against a threatening country is only permissible with the authorisation of the UN Security Council.

The US, under the junior Bush administration, announced a "national security" doctrine that contradicts this international law, arrogating to the US government the right to attack any country it suspects of harbouring evil intentions towards the US.

Britain would have declared the same when it was top dog in the 19th century, had there been any such international law. Britain is no longer top dog, and there is a law now.

There is the ICC to enforce it, although it never takes action against the leaders of rich and powerful countries.

Blair will never face the ICC, and the Chilcot inquiry will be gentle with him. But he started a war on false pretences - there were no WMDs - and at least 100,000 people died. He has admitted he would have started it even if he knew that the WMDs didn't exist (as he probably did). He is a war criminal.