

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PRESS BRIEFING

August 4 2010
AI Index: AFR 51/006/2010

Sierra Leone: Charles Taylor and the Sierra Leone War

The devastating war in Sierra Leone is over now but impunity for conflict diamond trafficking remains a burning issue and casts a large shadow over the war crimes trial of former Liberian President Charles Taylor in The Hague.

The Sierra Leone civil war 1991-2002

During Sierra Leone's civil war, approximately 75,000 civilians were killed, though estimates of conflict-related deaths range from 50,000 to 200,000. Over one-third of the population was displaced (more than 2 million people). Women and girls in Sierra Leone suffered extraordinary levels of rape and sexual violence. More than 5000 children – both boys and girls – were forcibly recruited to fight in both government and opposition forces. Perhaps most notoriously, the Sierra Leonean war came to be known for its signature atrocity; amputation and mutilation.

Charles Taylor

Charles Taylor, former President of Liberia, has been accused of committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. He is the first former head of state to have been prosecuted in an international criminal court for crimes committed in Africa.

Charles Taylor stands accused of unlawful killings, mutilations, rape and other forms of sexual violence, sexual slavery, the recruitment and use of child soldiers, abduction, and the use of forced labour by Sierra Leonean armed opposition groups, which he is alleged to have actively supported.

Blood diamonds and Amnesty International

Amnesty International researched atrocities committed by all parties to the Sierra Leonean civil war, including crimes committed by Charles Taylor's forces, and also researched links between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and Charles Taylor. Amnesty International actively campaigned for Charles Taylor to stand trial before the Special Court for Sierra Leone - Mr Taylor sought to avoid prosecution by claiming asylum, and lived in exile in Nigeria between 2003 and 2006.

The war in Sierra Leone was fuelled by the diamond industry. All armed groups engaged in diamond mining and used the proceeds to buy weapons and ammunition.

Amnesty International participated in establishing the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme - an international certification scheme aiming to break the link between the illicit trade in rough diamonds and mass human rights abuses associated with armed conflict.

The Kimberley Process brings together governments, the diamond industry, and civil society and was designed to trace diamonds from their source to the moment they are polished. Unfortunately, the Kimberly Process has not fully addressed, monitored, and ended the international trade in conflict diamonds.

Amnesty International has called on the Kimberley Process to strengthen its commitment to protecting human rights; to protect from harm those communities involved in diamond mining; improving decision-making processes; setting defining standards and improving the peer review mechanism.

The system is not appropriately funded, nor has it established a permanent secretariat.

Amnesty International and the Government of Sierra Leone

Amnesty International has campaigned for the Government of Sierra Leone to

- set aside and disregard amnesties granted to the warring parties that signed the Lome Peace Accord, which led to the cessation of hostilities,
- immediately promulgate domestic legislation to outlaw international law crimes, such as crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide;
- investigate and prosecute those who committed or were complicit in acts constituting crimes under international law in fair trials;
- pass legislation providing for reparations to victims of the civil war;
- implement recommendations made by the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, many of which have yet to be addressed;
- send a strong signal to the diamond industry that corporate impunity for past crimes relating to blood diamonds will not be tolerated, and that prosecutions will be launched that address the link between gross human rights violations and the exploitation of diamonds and other natural resources in Sierra Leone.

Amnesty International and Liberia

Amnesty International has also called for justice with respect to war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the Liberian civil war, in Charles Taylor's own country. To date, no single individual has stood trial in Liberia for the war crimes and crimes against humanity committed there.

A zip drive is available on request containing all Amnesty International's videos, photos and research documents on blood diamonds and Sierra Leone.

For further information on any of the above or to arrange an interview with an Amnesty International spokesperson, please contact Katy Pownall on +44 (0)207 413 5729 or email katy.pownall@amnesty.org

Please note that Amnesty International will not comment on the Charles Taylor trial or Naomi Campbell's appearance at The Hague.

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org