

Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone

THE SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE AND THE RESIDUAL SPECIAL COURT FOR SIERRA LEONE, FREETOWN AND THE HAGUE

The Taylor Trial

Charles Taylor was the first sitting African head of state to be indicted, and the first former head of state since Nuremberg to be indicted and subsequently tried and convicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity by an international criminal tribunal.

Taylor Trial Timeline

7 March 2003 - Court approves Taylor indictment under seal.

4 June 2003 - Prosecutor unseals indictment while Taylor is visiting Ghana.

11 August 2003 - Taylor steps down as President of Liberia and goes into exile in Calabar, Nigeria.

4 December 2003 - Interpol circulates a "Red Notice" for Taylor.

31 May 2004 - The Appeals Chamber dismisses a motion challenging the indictment on the grounds of sovereign immunity and extra-territoriality.

16 March 2006 - The Court approves an amended indictment reducing the counts from 17 to 11.

29 March 2006 - Taylor is apprehended by the Nigerian authorities and flown to Monrovia where he is arrested by UNMIL. He is then transferred to the Special Court.

3 April 2006 - Taylor makes his initial appearance at the Special Court in Freetown. He pleads not guilty to all charges.

16 June 2006 - UN Security Council Res. 1688 clears the way for Taylor to be tried in The Hague, saying that his presence in the sub-region was "an impediment to stability and a threat to the peace".

20 June 2006 - Taylor is transferred to The Hague.

4 June 2007 - The trial opens in The Hague before Trial Chamber II. The Prosecutor makes his opening statement

The Prosecutor vs. Charles Ghankay Taylor



Background

Charles Ghankay Taylor, at the time of his indictment in 2003, was President of Liberia.

On 7 March 2003, the Court approved a 17-count indictment, which was ordered kept under seal. The Prosecutor unsealed the indictment on 4 June 2003 while Taylor was attending a peace conference in Ghana.

On 11 August 2003, under international pressure and with LURD and MODEL rebels advancing on Monrovia, Taylor stepped down as President of Liberia and went into exile in Calabar, Nigeria. On 4 December 2003 Interpol circulated a "Red Notice" based on a Special Court arrest warrant.

Through counsel, Taylor challenged the Court's jurisdiction on the grounds of sovereign immunity and extra-territoriality. On 31 May 2004 the Appeals Chamber dismissed the motion and ruled that he was subject to the jurisdiction of the Special Court.

On 16 March 2006 the Court approved an amended indictment, reducing the number of counts from 17 to 11.

Arrest and Transfer to the Special Court in Freetown

On 29 March 2006, following lengthy negotiations, the Nigerian authorities arrested Taylor near the Cameroonian border as he attempted to flee the country. He was flown to Liberia, where he was formally arrested by UNMIL and transferred by helicopter to the Special Court in Freetown. He was then re-arrested by the Prosecution.

Taylor made his initial appearance before Judge Richard Lussick in Freetown, where he pleaded not guilty to all charges.

Transfer of the Trial to The Hague

On 16 June 2006 the UN Security Council Res. 1688 cleared the way for Taylor to be tried in The Hague, finding that his presence in the sub-region was "an impediment to stability and a threat to the peace". On 20 June 2006 he was transferred to The Hague. The trial was held by the Special Court for Sierra Leone, initially in an ICC courtroom and later, after the ICC's increasing caseload created scheduling conflicts, in a courtroom at the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.

The Prosecution Case

The trial opened before Trial Chamber II in The Hague on 4 June 2007, with the Prosecution opening statement. Minutes before the trial opened, Taylor sacked his legal team, demanded new counsel, and boycotted his trial. The trial resumed on 7 January 2008.

The Prosecution called its first witness on 7 January 2008 and concluded on 30 January 2009. On 5 August 2010 the Prosecution was allowed to re-open its case to hear the evidence of three additional witnesses. The evidence of 100 witnesses was presented to the Court. 94 testified live, written statements were admitted from four crime base witnesses and reports from two additional expert witnesses.

The Prosecution formally rested its case on 27 February 2009, after the Trial Chamber handed down decisions on pending motions.

Motion for Judgement of Acquittal

On 27 February 2009, the day the Prosecution rested its case, the Defence announced it would file a Rule 78 motion, a Motion for Judgement of Acquittal. The Trial Chamber heard oral submissions on the motion from the Defence on 6 April 2009 and oral submissions from the Prosecution in response on 9 April 2009. On 4 May 2009 the Trial Chamber, in an oral ruling, dismissed the motion in its entirety. On 28 May 2009 the Trial Chamber granted the Defence leave to appeal, and on 23 June 2009 the Appeals Chamber, by a majority, upheld the Trial Chamber's ruling.

The Defence Case

On 13 July 2009 the Defence made their opening statement, and on 14 July 2009 called Charles Ghankay Taylor to testify in his own defence. Mr. Taylor's testimony concluded on 18 February 2010, and his Defence then called twenty additional witnesses. The Defence rested their case on 12 November 2010.

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7 January 2008 - Prosecution witness testimony begins.

30 January 2009 - Prosecution witness testimony ends. In all, 91 witnesses testified, including 58 crime base witnesses, 29 insider (linkage) witnesses and four expert witnesses. In addition, written statements were admitted from four crime base witnesses, and reports from two additional expert witnesses.

27 February 2009 - After the Court hands down decisions on pending motions, the Prosecution formally rests its case.

4 May 2009 - The Trial Chamber dismisses in its entirety a Motion for Judgment of Acquittal brought by the Defence.

13 July 2009 - The Defence opens their case. Charles Taylor is the first defence witness.

5 August 2010 - The Prosecution reopens its case to call three additional witnesses: Naomi Campbell and, in September, Mia Farrow and Carole White.

12 November 2010 - The Defence concludes their case after calling 21 witnesses, including Mr. Taylor.

8 February 2011 / 9 to 11 March 2011 - The Trial Chamber heard closing arguments.

26 April 2012 - Trial Judgement. Taylor is found guilty on all 11 counts for both planning and for aiding and abetting.

30 May 2012 - Sentencing Judgement. Taylor is sentenced to 50 years in prison.

26 September 2013 - Appeal Judgement. The Appeals Chamber upholds Taylor's conviction and sentence.

15 October 2013 - Taylor is transferred to the UK to serve the remainder of his sentence.

30 January 2015 (made public 25 March 2015) - Trial Chamber denies Taylor motion to transfer him to Rwanda to serve the balance of his sentence.

21 May 2015 - President of the RSCSL confirms Trial Chamber decision, denies application to appeal.

On 22 October 2010 the Trial Chamber ordered the parties to submit their final trial briefs by 14 January 2011 and scheduled closing arguments for 8-11 February 2011. The Defence, acting on instructions from Charles Taylor, declined to file their final brief on time or to accept service of the Prosecution brief pending decisions on a number of motions they had filed after the closure of their case. The Trial Chamber declined to stay proceedings or to grant the Defence additional time, and refused to accept the Defence final brief when it was subsequently