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Sierra Leone: Ex-leader of Liberia to War Crimes Court

Former Liberian President Charles Taylor was captured as he attempted to escape Nigeria on March 29, and he was transferred to the U.N.-backed war crimes court in Sierra Leone. Human Rights Watch played a leading role in pressing government and U.N. officials, publicly and privately, to ensure that Taylor would be held accountable for his alleged crimes. We helped keep the issue of Taylor's arrest alive in the press and with policy makers. We met last year with new Liberian president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and publicly called on her to request Taylor's surrender. She has acknowledged that international pressure was a major factor in motivating her to make the [request](#) during her presidency.

Taylor has been indicted by the court for war crimes and crimes against humanity for supporting rebel forces guilty of killings, mutilations, sexual violence, and the recruitment of child soldiers during Sierra Leone's brutal war. His arrest is enormously significant for the victims of his crimes, who have long awaited justice. It is a milestone for promoting the rule of law in West Africa, which has been devastated by violence. And it heralds a strengthened commitment by the international community to international justice—to holding the perpetrators of the world's most heinous crimes accountable for their actions. Human Rights Watch will continue to work to ensure that Taylor's trial is fair and effective. We will also press the international community to provide adequate financial support to the court in Sierra Leone, which has suffered consistent financial shortfalls. Read more at <http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=africa&c=liberi>



Charles Taylor is charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity for supporting Sierra Leonean rebel forces that committed horrific abuses during the war. Here, a young man waits for medical attention after rebels from the Revolutionary United Front used a knife to mark both his chest and back with the initials RUF. © 1999 Corinne Dufka/Human Rights Watch

United Nations: New, Improved Human Rights Council

On March 15, in a landmark step toward ensuring that abusive governments are held accountable for human rights violations, the United Nations General Assembly voted by an overwhelming majority to create the Human Rights Council, which will replace the discredited U.N. Commission on Human Rights. Human Rights Watch played a pioneering role in [advocating](#) to replace the now-defunct U.N. Commission, which had a history of electing abusive governments as members and failing to criticize the actions of serious human rights offenders like Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and Zimbabwe. In the lead-up to Council membership elections on May 9, we will push governments to design a universal review procedure that will thoroughly and fairly examine the human rights records of all countries. Read more at http://hrw.org/doc/?t=united_nations

Libya: HRW Report Helps in Pardon of Political Prisoners

On March 2, the Libyan government, following a direct request by Human Rights Watch, released 132 political prisoners, many of whom had been unfairly tried and detained for more than seven years. The prisoners were pardoned five weeks after Human Rights Watch issued a [report](#) calling for their release and documenting how the Libyan government, despite making progress on human rights reforms in recent years, continues to commit abuses. Last year, in our first-ever mission to the country, we documented serious rights violations, including the mistreatment of migrants, severe restrictions on free speech and association, and the detention in “[social rehabilitation](#)” facilities of women who are socially ostracized, including women who had been raped. Human Rights Watch will continue to publish more of our findings on Libya in the coming year. Read more at <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/02/libya12750.htm>

Syria: Detained Activist Freed after HRW Protests

Syrian human rights activist Ammar Qurabi was released a day after Human Rights Watch issued a [press release](#) to protest his unjust detention. Qurabi, a spokesperson for the Arab Organization for Human Rights in Syria, was arrested upon his return to Damascus following his participation in two conferences in Paris and Washington that addressed democratic reform and human rights in Syria. Our March 14 press statement calling for Qurabi's release was instantly picked up by international newswires and was featured in a story in the Washington Post on March 15. Syrian officials released Qurabi that same day. Going forward, Human Rights Watch will continue to report on the detention of human rights and political activists and denounce abuses against Syria's suppressed dissidents. Read more at <http://www.hrw.org/doc?t=mideast&c=syria>

IN THE NEWS

Milosevic's Trial Set Precedent for Justice

International Justice Program Director Richard Dicker argues in the [International Herald Tribune](#) that although former Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic's death may have pre-empted a verdict in his trial before the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Milosevic did not escape justice. Read more at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/13/yugosl12885.htm>.

Incompetence and Injustice at Guantanamo

In the [Los Angeles Times](#), Tom Malinowski, Washington Advocacy Director, exposes evidence that very few Guantanamo prisoners are actually high-value Al Qaeda operatives with any knowledge of terrorist activities. Read more at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/16/usdom13015.htm>

Nepal's Civilians Bear the Brunt of Bloodshed

Emergencies Researcher Anna Neistat, in the [Nepali Times](#), tells the international community that it's not too late to protect civilians—the group hardest hit by the conflict between Maoist rebels and the Nepali government. Read more at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/24/nepal13071.htm>.

Latin American Lessons on Abortion

In the [Los Angeles Times](#), Women's Rights Advocacy Director Marianne Möllman denounces new restrictions on abortion in South Dakota that deny women their rights, just as they have in Latin America. Read more at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/24/mexico13072.htm>

Sri Lankan Tamil Tigers Make Overseas Threats

In the [Guardian](#), Children's Rights Advocacy Director Jo Becker condemns the extortion and intimidation by the Sri Lankan armed opposition group, the Tamil Tigers (also known as the LTTE), of Tamil communities living in Canada and the United Kingdom. Read more at <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2006/03/16/slanka13011.htm>

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