



Dismissal motion in epic Taylor war crimes case

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THE HAGUE (AFP) - Lawyers for former Liberia president Charles Taylor sought his acquittal Monday on war crimes charges at The Hague's Special Court for Sierra Leone where he has been on trial since June 2007.

"The evidence presented to date, viewed in an objective manner, is not sufficient for or capable of supporting a conviction," Taylor's lawyer Morris Anyah told the court during a special session to hear the defence motion.

"Terrible things happened in Sierra Leone. The citizens in Sierra Leone faced atrocities in unimaginable proportions. We never denied that," Anyah added, referring to witness testimony about murder, mutilation and rape.

However, the defence had to "focus primarily on the linkage evidence, on the absence thereof," he argued.

"There is no evidence of many of the individual elements of the modes of liability that have been presented. That forms the base of our application."

The prosecution case against Taylor, a warlord-turned president who played a leading role in 14 years of back-to-back wars in Liberia, wound up in January. He is accused of having been a key instigator of the 10-year civil war in neighbouring Sierra Leone.

Rule 98 of the tribunal's rules of procedure allows for an acquittal at the close of the prosecution case -- and before the start of the defence -- if the judges are convinced there is no evidence to support a conviction.

If the motion is denied, Taylor will be offered as the first witness on the stand when his defence argument starts this summer, his lawyer told reporters in Freetown in February.

"I can anticipate he will be in the witness box for a couple of months," another of his four-man legal team, Courtenay Griffiths, said then.

"He cannot wait for the opportunity to put the record straight."

Taylor is charged with 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, stemming from the 1991-2001 civil war in the West African country.

Some 120,000 people were killed in the conflict, with rebels mutilating thousands more -- cutting off arms, legs, ears or noses.

He is accused of having armed, trained and controlled Sierra Leone's notorious Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels and of involvement in the "blood diamonds" to finance the conflict.

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