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Britain Backs Request to Move Liberian's Trial to The Hague

By [WARREN HOGE](#)

UNITED NATIONS, March 31 — Britain circulated a draft resolution to Security Council members on Friday that would transfer the war crimes trial of Charles G. Taylor, the former Liberian president, to the Netherlands because of what it said was a threat to regional peace posed by his continued presence in West Africa.

Under its terms, Mr. Taylor would be tried in the International Criminal Court complex in The Hague under the auspices of the United Nations-backed court that was established in Sierra Leone to try people suspected of responsibility for atrocities during the country's civil war, from 1991 to 2002.

Mr. Taylor was indicted by that court in March 2003, while still president of Liberia, on 17 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity. He had been living in exile in Nigeria from August 2003 until Wednesday, when he was arrested while trying to flee to Cameroon and flown to Sierra Leone.

Mr. Taylor is accused of backing rebels who, in a civil war that killed 50,000 people, gained grisly notoriety for raping victims and maiming and killing people by chopping off their arms, legs, hands, ears and lips.

The draft resolution said Mr. Taylor's presence in West Africa constituted "an impediment to stability and a threat to the peace of Liberia and of Sierra Leone, and to international peace and security in the region."

The plan to move the proceedings to The Hague came at the request of the Sierra Leone court.

Mr. Taylor, 58, a warlord turned president, has many loyalists in the region and was able to maintain contact with them while in Nigeria.

His arrest and detention in Sierra Leone were put into motion two weeks ago when Liberia's new president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, formally asked President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria to extradite him.

The resolution asks the Netherlands to allow unrestricted access to the court for witnesses and others required for the trial. It also would exempt Mr. Taylor from the travel ban that currently blocks his passage to Europe.

Asked about the transfer plan, Secretary General Kofi Annan told reporters, "I think everybody agrees it to be wiser to do that."

At the State Department, Adam Ereli, the deputy spokesman, said the United States backed the action as "frankly, in the interests of the court and the defendants and those connected with the trial." He said, "It is a move that reinforces, I think, justice, transparency and fairness."

A statement from the tribunal in Sierra Leone on Friday said Mr. Taylor would make his first public appearance in court there on Monday.

On Thursday, lawyers from the court's defense office met with Mr. Taylor and said he had been cooperative as they explained his rights to him and "addressed personal matters as well as detention-related issues," according to the statement. It also said, "Mr. Taylor is in fairly good health and is in good spirits."

British officials said they expected the resolution to be formally considered early next week.

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