

Nigeria Pressed by U.N. Court to Arrest Liberia's Ex-Leader

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FREETOWN, Sierra Leone, March 26 — Pressure mounted Sunday on Nigeria to arrest Charles G. Taylor, the former president of [Liberia](#) who is under indictment for war crimes in connection with his role in the brutal, decade-long civil war here.

Mr. Taylor apparently remains in Nigeria, where he has been living since 2003, when a deal brokered by Nigeria's president, [Olusegun Obasanjo](#), sent him into exile. But security around the compound where he is living has been lax, according to local news reports and Human Rights Watch, leading to fears that Mr. Taylor may try to flee.

Desmond de Silva, the chief prosecutor of the [United Nations](#) special court set up to try those accused of atrocities in Sierra Leone's civil war, which ended in 2002, called upon Nigeria to arrest Mr. Taylor immediately. "Until the indicted war criminal [Charles Taylor](#) is in the hands of Liberian authorities, to whom Nigeria is making Taylor available for collection, the spotlight of the international community will be upon Nigeria," Mr. de Silva said Sunday in a statement.

"In particular, the watching world will wish to see Taylor held in Nigerian detention to avoid the possibility of him using his wealth and associates to slip away, with grave consequences to the stability of the region," he said.

If Mr. Taylor is brought to Sierra Leone, he will be the first African head of state to face international prosecution for war crimes, a precedent that will surely resonate on a continent where a fraternity of presidents has traditionally protected its own, no matter how grave their alleged crimes, with comfortable exile rather than the jail cell that awaits Mr. Taylor here.

Mr. Taylor had been living in a seaside villa in Calabar, a resort town on the eastern edge of Nigeria's coastline, with dozens of relatives and close associates — an exile supplemented by money he is suspected of having stolen from the Liberian treasury while he ruled the country, from 1997 until his ouster in 2003.

That wealth, with his long history of wiggling out of seemingly impossible jams, only increases the need to secure his arrest immediately, said Corinne Dufka, a researcher for Human Rights Watch in Dakar, Senegal.

"There is an international arrest warrant for Taylor, so we are asking Nigeria to honor the arrest warrant," Ms. Dufka said.

In 1985, Mr. Taylor escaped a Massachusetts jail, where he was awaiting extradition on charges he embezzled at least \$1 million from the Liberian government. The circumstances of his escape have never been fully explained.

Backed by Libya and other regional powers, Mr. Taylor unleashed a cycle of civil war in Liberia and its neighbors during the 1990's. He was indicted by the court in Sierra Leone in 2003 on 17 charges in connection with his role in this country's war, which killed 50,000 people, displaced millions and left thousands maimed.

Nigeria has been under pressure, particularly from the United States, to turn Mr. Taylor over to Liberia. Although he is not under indictment in that country, the United Nations has authorized his transfer to Sierra Leone. Mr. Obasanjo had said he would comply only with a request from an elected Liberian government.

During a visit to the United States this month, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia's newly elected president, requested that Mr. Taylor be turned over, and on Saturday, Nigeria's government indicated that it would comply. Mr. Obasanjo is due to visit the United States this week.