

Geneva, Switzerland, December 2 (Infosplusgabon) - The trial of a former Liberian rebel leader arrested in Switzerland for alleged war crimes during Liberia's first civil war is an important step forward for victims, Human Rights Watch said on Tuesday.

On Thursday, 3 December, a criminal court in the city of Bellinzona, Switzerland, will convene the trial of Alieu Kosiah, a former commander of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy armed group, known as ULIMO.

Human Rights Watch said in a statement that Kosiah is the first person to be tried for war crimes in a non-military criminal court in Switzerland and is the first Liberian to be put on trial for alleged crimes committed during the first Liberian civil war, from 1989 to 1996.

“The rebel leader Alieu Kosiah’s trial for alleged war crimes committed decades ago, during Liberia’s first civil war, is a powerful message to would-be perpetrators that justice may be slow but it never forgets,” said Balkees Jarrah, associate international justice director at Human Rights Watch. “Swiss authorities should ramp up their efforts to pursue additional atrocity cases against other suspects in Switzerland where there is credible evidence.”

Human Rights Watch said the authorities arrested Kosiah on 10 November, 2014 in Switzerland, where he had been living since 1999, for his alleged role in war crimes committed between 1993 and 1995 in Lofa County, northwest Liberia.

The arrest followed criminal complaints against him by seven Liberian victims who are now formal parties to the proceeding, called "private plaintiffs". Two lawyers from the Swiss nongovernmental group Civitas Maxima, including its director Alain Werner, represent four of them. The organization has worked with the Global Justice and Research Project in Liberia since 2012 to document crimes committed during the country's civil wars.

Human Rights Watch said after a nearly five-year investigation, the Swiss attorney general's office filed an indictment against Kosiah in March 2019. Swiss prosecutors accuse him of various crimes, including ordering the murder and cruel treatment of civilians, rape, and pillage.

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