

The Trial of Thomas Lubanga Dyilo at the ICC

MARCH 2012

THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT in The Hague will release its judgment in the case against Thomas Lubanga Dyilo on Wednesday, March 14, 2012. This briefing paper summarizes the main issues in the case, which is the first ICC case to reach a judgment, with hyperlinks to relevant portions of our trial monitoring website www.lubangatrial.org.

The Charges

Thomas Lubanga is the alleged former president of the Union of Congolese Patriots (UPC), which was a party to the conflict in the DRC. He is charged with committing war crimes between July 2002 and December 2003. The specific counts against Lubanga are:

- Conscripting children under the age of 15 years into armed groups
- Enlisting children into armed groups
- Using children to participate actively in armed conflict.

Lubanga's was the first trial to be launched by the ICC, and is likely to be the first completed by the world's only permanent court mandated to try war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. It is the only trial to date conducted by the ICC that is solely related to the use of child soldiers.

The Legal Issues

On April 15, 2011, the Trial Chamber judges [identified seven issues that need to be addressed](#) in order to make a judgment on the charges. The seven issues are:

1. Did an armed conflict exist in Ituri, DRC, between September 1, 2002 and August 13, 2003?
2. If there was an armed conflict, is there a connection between the conflict and the alleged crimes?
3. Was the armed conflict international or non-international? Different provisions of the Rome Statute (which set up the ICC) are invoked for international and non-international armed conflicts, though both criminalize the same conduct.
4. If the chamber concludes the conflict was not of an international character, what factors should be taken into account if the judges consider modifying the legal characterization of the facts for the period from September 2002 to June 2, 2003?

The judges at the pre-trial stage found that the armed conflict in question was of an international nature due to the role of Uganda. However, depending on the trial judges' interpretation of the evidence and the law, they potentially may legally re-characterize the conflict and find that it was non-international. This would depend on the interpretation of

Regulation 55, which was already at issue in the case when the Appeals Chamber ruled that it would not be possible to re-characterize the facts to admit sexual violence charges.

5. What does the prosecution need to establish to prove individual criminal responsibility under Article 25(3)(a) of the Rome Statute that provides a person shall be criminally responsible for a crime within the jurisdiction of the Court, if that person “commits such a crime, whether as an individual, jointly with another or through another person, regardless of whether that other person is criminally responsible?”
6. What is the meaning of “conscripting” or “enlisting” children under the age of fifteen years into the national armed forces, into armed forces or armed groups or “using them to actively participate in hostilities?”
7. What does the Prosecution need to establish to prove the mental element, also known as *mens rea*, of the crimes? The Trial Chamber refers to Article 30 of the Rome Statute, which provides that a person can only be held liable for a crime within the Court’s jurisdiction if the “material elements are committed with intent and knowledge.” Thus, the parties will have to address whether Lubanga knowingly and intentionally conscripted or enlisted children less than fifteen years of age into his armed forces, and knowingly and intentionally used them to participate actively in hostilities.

Why the Trial Stalled Twice

In June 2008, the ICC’s Trial Chamber suspended Lubanga’s trial before it opened due to concerns that he would not receive a fair hearing. The Office of the Prosecutor, headed by Luis Moreno-Ocampo, was found to have failed to disclose a portion of potentially exculpatory information in their possession due to the fact it had been collected through providing assurances that it would remain confidential. Exculpatory information can facilitate the defense in countering the prosecution case, and it is required to be disclosed in order to maintain fair trial standards.

The Office of the Prosecutor initially refused to disclose more than 200 documents that had been collected with the help of other organizations, including the United Nations and nongovernment organizations, claiming that they needed permission from those organizations in order to disclose the materials to third parties, including the defense. Eventually, this permission was obtained and the materials were disclosed. In November 2008, the judges ruled that the prosecutor has taken the necessary steps to ensure Lubanga’s fair trial rights were respected, allowing the trial to proceed.

A second stay of proceedings was ordered in July 2010, [and the judges ordered](#)

[that Lubanga be released from ICC detention](#) when prosecutors refused to honor an order by trial judges to disclose to the defense the identity of an intermediary, who had helped prosecution investigators contact witnesses. The order was prompted by defense claims that prosecution intermediaries bribed and coached witnesses to provide false evidence.

The prosecution immediately appealed while also securing the agreement of the intermediary in question to be identified to the defense, accompanied by witness protection measures. In October 2010, the Appeals [Chamber ruled that the Trial Chamber erred](#) in immediately staying proceedings without first applying less drastic measures, such as imposing sanctions against the prosecutor following his failure to comply with the Trial Chamber's orders. The trial resumed less than three weeks later. No sanctions were imposed on the prosecutor.

The Prosecution

During the trial, the prosecution claimed that Thomas Lubanga contributed to a common plan of assuming military control in Ituri. To achieve this goal he was involved in recruiting child soldiers, ensuring they were trained, and deployed in the inter-ethnic conflict. As the alleged leader of the UPC, the Prosecution claimed Lubanga visited military training camps, oversaw the conduct of the military, secured financing for the UPC, and negotiated the provision of their weapons and other military equipment.

Deputy Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda [stated in her closing arguments](#) that the evidence presented proved beyond a reasonable doubt that Lubanga is guilty of the war crimes charged, and the chamber should convict him to send a message that there will be no impunity for those who recruit child soldiers. Bensouda noted the type of harm child soldiers faced, particularly girl soldiers who the prosecution said were raped and served as sex slaves.

Trial lawyers for the prosecution went on to summarize the evidence presented in the case against Lubanga. They argued that the recruitment of children was part of a deliberate plan. Furthermore, the prosecution defended the credibility of their witnesses stating that a broad range of witnesses could describe in detail that the UPC had a plan to recruit minors to serve in the military. It was also claimed that Lubanga had *de facto* control over the military wing of the UPC and that the recruitment, enlistment, and use of child soldiers was committed with his knowledge. Trial lawyers for the prosecution showed a video of Lubanga at a military training camp with minors present, which they said gives more evidence of his knowledge and approval of the use of child soldiers.

Special Advisor to the Prosecutor on International Humanitarian Law, Tim McCormack, argued in closing that the conflict in Ituri is properly described as a non-international armed conflict. The pre-trial chamber initially confirmed charges against Lubanga for crimes in both international and non-international armed conflict, but the prosecution claimed it was an error and it should be re-characterized. Lastly, former Nuremburg Prosecutor Benjamin Ferencz noted the historical significance of the trial and that these crimes against children are among the most offensive to the international community.

The Defense

Thomas Lubanga has pleaded not guilty to all charges. Responding to prosecution allegations, Lubanga claimed he was not the overall leader of the UPC, and that his activities were restricted to political matters and as such he played no active role in the military wing of the UPC.

The defense [focused their closing statements](#) on the reliability of evidence against Lubanga and argued that there was an abuse of process by the prosecution. Lead defense counsel Catherine Mabilie claimed that all of the witnesses who testified as former child soldiers lied to the chamber and that intermediaries working for the prosecution prepared witnesses to provide false testimony. She claimed there was evidence that the prosecution has been used by the Congolese government and those whom the Office of the Prosecutor worked with had close connections to President Joseph Kabila.

Defense counsel Jean-Marie Biju-Duval argued that it was inappropriate to charge Lubanga as a co-perpetrator and that Lubanga's only essential contribution was to act as a political leader. The defense claimed Lubanga was not aware of the fact that minors were being enlisted into the FPLC, and Lubanga did everything he could to prevent the recruitment of minors. Lubanga himself also made a brief, unsworn statement in which he said his actions were not those detailed by the prosecution but rather he only took measures to protect Congolese citizens and save lives.

Legal Representatives of Victims

Also making closing statements were six Legal Representatives of Victims, including Principal Counsel of the Office of Public Counsel for Victims Paolina Massidda. Each stressed upon the harm caused to children during the conflict and abuses they faced in military training camps. Some of the representatives noted that the chamber should reject the defense’s portrayal of Lubanga as a mere accomplice to these the crimes charged and went even further, stating Lubanga should be found guilty as a direct perpetrator in addition to the co-perpetrator liability requested by the prosecution.

Witnesses for the Prosecution

The prosecution in the Lubanga case called 28 witnesses including three expert witnesses. Three of the 123 victims were sworn in as witnesses to give evidence which broadly supported the prosecution case.

Selected Testimony Describing the Alleged Crimes

- **[Christina Peduto](#)**: A child protection specialist, who worked for the United Nations Mission to Congo (MONUC), testified that she referred former child soldiers to reintegration centers after they had been demobilized. Among the children she worked with was an 11 year-old boy who was recruited into UPC at age 10 and worked as a body guard for FPLC chief-of-staff Floribert Kisembo. Another child Ms. Peduto worked with told her that Lubanga, in the company of six soldiers, kidnapped him.
- **Witness 10**: A girl former child soldier testified that she was conscripted at the age of 13 and was repeatedly sexually assaulted by her commanders. Other testimony heard at the trial showed that some of the young girls fell pregnant and were forced to abort and use local herbs for treatment.

Selected Evidence Linking Lubanga to the Alleged Crimes

- **Video Evidence**: Lubanga is depicted visiting a UPC training camp and delivering a speech to a large group of soldiers and recruits, some of whom appear to be children. In one portion of the video footage, Lubanga

was shown mentioning the large number of children stating, “We went to your homes to ask you for help to create the army.”

- **Witness 17:** Served as head of the military wing of the UPC. While describing the structure and hierarchy of the UPC, he told the court that Lubanga was the direct superior of the chief-of-staff of the UPC’s military. He confirmed the presence of child soldiers among UPC recruits and Lubanga’s personal guards.
- **Witness 55:** Served as a UPC platoon controller. He also confirmed the presence of child soldiers among UPC recruits and Lubanga’s personal guard.

Witnesses for the Defense

The defense called 19 witnesses, some of who claimed that certain prosecution intermediaries allegedly coached witnesses and that prosecution witnesses lied regarding their testimony that they were former child soldiers in the UPC.

Selected Testimony on Credibility of Prosecution Witnesses

- **Witness 02:** The first defense witness to testify stated that his son, who had earlier testified for the prosecution, was never a soldier in the UPC and had stayed at home with his father throughout the conflict. He said an organization that has promised to find a job and a scholarship for his son, started passing him off as a child soldier.
- **Maki Dera Joseph:** He testified that an ICC prosecution intermediary paid him \$200 to convince his nephew to give false testimony before the court and that his nephew subsequently testified as a prosecution witness claiming to be a former child soldier. Dera Joseph also stated that at the bidding of the OTP intermediary, he lied to court officials that he knew Lubanga and that he was aware there were child soldiers in UPC.
- **[Claude Nyéki Django](#):** This witness testified that he and a group of other young boys were falsely paraded before some unnamed people as child soldiers.
- **[Dieudonné Tonyfwa Urochi and Jean Paul Bejijjo Chong](#):** Witnesses 229 and 225 both recounted how they were abducted, tortured during training, and were forced to take part in battles. The defense argued that these witnesses had stolen the identities of two defense witnesses who

were presented to the court claiming that they were the true witnesses 229 and 225 the testimony presented by the prosecution witnesses 229 and 225 was false.

Testimony Disconnecting Lubanga from Crimes Involving Child Soldiers

- **[Bede Djokaba Lambi Longa](#)**: A senior UPC official testified that Lubanga, as president of the UPC and secretary of national defense, issued a decision to demobilize all soldiers under 18 years of age. The witness stated that Lubanga issued the order twice more - in November 2002 and January 2003 - because the military had not fully implemented it. He said there were never any cases of forced conscription and that he never saw minors in Lubanga's personal guard.
- **[Michel Angayika Baba](#)**: Lubanga's former private secretary told the trial that once appointed the head of the UPC, Lubanga declared that he was against the recruitment of child soldiers. He said while Lubanga ordered the demobilization of child soldiers, the order was resisted by military commanders and community elders.

Case Timeline

All links to our trial monitoring site www.lubangatrial.org

February 10, 2006: An ICC arrest warrant is issued for Thomas Lubanga after two years of investigations by the ICC's prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo into the conflict in the Ituri region of the Democratic Republic of Congo. Lubanga is handed over to the ICC on March 17.

June 13, 2008: Ten days before the trial is due to start before the ICC's Trial Chamber I, the judges halt the proceedings. The court rules it is impossible for Lubanga to receive a fair trial after it learns the prosecutor withheld potentially exculpatory evidence from the defense.

July 2, 2008: The court orders Lubanga's unconditional release from detention.

October 21, 2008: The ICC Appeals Chamber reverses the release order, but maintains the stay of proceedings. It returns the case to the trial chamber, which subsequently determines that the necessary information has been handed over, and sets a trial date.

January 28, 2009: [The trial begins.](#)

May 22, 2009: Victims participating in the trial file an application claiming existing evidence warranted the additional charges of sexual slavery and cruel and inhuman treatment.

July 14, 2009: [The prosecution closes its case](#). The Trial Chamber judges rule in favor of the victims' application to add new charges based on both fresh and existing evidence.

December 8, 2009: After months of delay, the Appeals [Chamber reverses the Trial Chamber decision to allow additional charges](#).

July 8, 2010: The court [stays the case a second time](#), after the prosecution refuses to obey an order to disclose the identity of an intermediary used by the prosecution to contact witnesses. It also again orders Lubanga's release from detention. The defense had claimed this intermediary had coached and bribed witnesses. The court [issued a formal warning](#) to the ICC prosecutors for refusing to implement the chamber's orders.

October 8, 2010: [The stay of proceedings is reversed](#) by the Appeals Chamber which says the Trial Chamber erred when it stayed the proceedings without first considering less drastic measures.

April 15, 2011: [Final defense witness concludes his testimony](#).

May 20, 2011: The official [close of the evidence phase](#) of the trial.

August 25-26, 2011: [Closing statements](#).

March 14, 2012: Judgment due

To speak to our trial monitor in The Hague, Alpha Sesay, or one of our other experts at the Open Society Justice Initiative, contact:

jbirchall@justiceinitiative.org

wcohen@sorosny.org

Tel: +1 212 547 6958

**E-mail: info@justiceinitiative.org
www.justiceinitiative.org**



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