



Transcript of Press Conference Announcing Indictment of Roy Belfast Jr. aka Chuckie Taylor on Torture Charges

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MS. FISHER: Good afternoon. My name is Alice Fisher, the Assistant Attorney General of the Criminal Division. I am joined today by Alex Acosta, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Florida, Miami, Art Cummings, Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI, and Julie Myers, Assistant Secretary of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Service, ICE.

Today a federal grand jury in Miami, Florida, has indicted Roy Belfast, Jr., also known as Charles Taylor, Jr., for participating in the July 2002 torture of a victim in Monrovia, Liberia. Taylor, age 29, faces one count of torture, one count of conspiracy to commit torture, and possession of a firearm during the commission of a violent crime.

This marks the first time the Department of Justice has indicted an individual with torture charges. The torture and conspiracy charges each carry a sentence of up to 20 years, and the possession of a firearm charge carries a sentence of seven years to life imprisonment.

I note that the indictment is merely an allegation and a defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

As alleged in the indictment, July 24th, 2002, Taylor was a member of the Liberian regime working for his father, then-President of Liberia Charles Taylor. As alleged in the indictment, on or about July 24th, 2002, the victim was abducted from his home. He was then transported to various locations, ending up at the residence of then-President of Liberia Charles Taylor. While at the residence, defendant Charles Taylor, Jr. watched the victim being interrogated. The victim was then taken from that residence and transported to the residence of a co-conspirator. That co-conspirator was a member of the Liberian Special Security Service.

At that residence, Charles Taylor, Jr. and his co-conspirator interrogated the victim in order to obtain information about the actual, perceived or potential information about opponents of then-President Charles Taylor.

As alleged in the indictment, during this interrogation, Charles Taylor, Jr. and his co-conspirator committed torture by repeatedly burning the victim with a hot iron on various parts of his body, causing burning and scarring; by pouring scalding hot water onto the victim; by holding a gun pointed at the victim while forcing the victim to hold scalding water in his hands; by repeatedly electrically shocking the victim's genital areas and other parts of his body; and then by rubbing salt into the victim's wounds.

These crimes are heinous, and they are torture as alleged in the indictment today. I want to thank the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Service for their very hard work investigating this case, the Federal Bureau of Investigation for their very hard work, and the prosecutors from the Southern District of Florida as well as the Domestic Security Section from the Criminal Division.

And I'll now turn it over to the U.S. Attorney from Florida, Alex Acosta.

MR. ACOSTA: Good afternoon. Earlier today, a Miami-based federal grand jury charged Roy Belfast, also known as Charles Taylor, Jr., with committing and conspiring to commit acts of torture. As alleged in the indictment, Charles Taylor, Jr. and his co-conspirator engaged in acts of torture that included pouring scalding water on the victim's hands and the victim's body, applying a hot iron to the victim's flesh in several locations, causing the flesh to burn and to scar, and applying electric shocks to the victim's genitalia and to other sensitive parts of the victim's body. Acts such as these constitute torture. They are criminal, they are heinous, and they must be prosecuted.

An indictment like today's is the result of the dedicated work of a team of agents and prosecutors. And I just want to take a minute to thank each and every one of them. I want to thank the agents from ICE and from the FBI who worked on this indictment, and in particular I want to thank Miami Assistant United States Attorney Karen Rockland and trial attorneys John Cox and Brenda Sue Thornton for their work, for their relentless and their dedicated work investigating and prosecuting this case.

Thank you.

MS. MYERS: Good afternoon. Today's indictment of Charles "Chucky" Taylor is a historic case. This is the first time anyone has been charged under the U.S. torture statutes. The case also stands as a tribute to the men and women who worked swiftly and diligently to bring Charles Taylor, Jr. to justice.

ICE would like to acknowledge all of their efforts, particularly all of those efforts with the folks represented here today, as well as the efforts of the Department of State's Diplomatic Security Service investigators, who supported the case.

Reports of the atrocities that incurred in Liberia and what has been charged in the indictment, it's nothing short of horrific. And unfortunately, incidents like these are not isolated. The United States has always been a place of refuge and freedom from oppression for millions. We must never deny safe haven to those with a genuine and legitimate fear of persecution. But we must also ensure that those who come here seeking freedom and the rule of law do not have to fear that their oppressor may become their neighbor.

This is a core value for ICE. That's why back in the summer of 2003 one of the first actions of newly created agency was the creation of the Human Rights Violators and Public Safety Unit and its legal counterpart, the Human Rights Law Division. The Human Rights Violators and Public Safety Unit oversees the investigations of individuals alleged to have committed crimes such as torture, suppression of religious freedom, persecution and genocide. The Human Rights Law Division is responsible for providing legal advice to agents and litigators, ICE field attorneys, in potential persecutor and human rights abusers cases.

There's no question that the case against Charles Taylor, Jr. is historic, but is only one of numerous criminal investigations of suspected human rights violators in the United States where ICE agents are working closely with the Department of Justice on a variety of charges.

In addition, ICE attorneys are currently litigating more than 800 cases and deportation proceedings involving human rights from more than 85 countries.

We are determined through our work in these units to ensure that the United States will not serve as a safe haven for individuals who engage in human rights abuses. And the investigation, prosecution and removal of these individuals is a top priority for the Department of Homeland Security.

Taylor's indictment sends a clear message to those who would prey upon the weak and the helpless. America will not be your safe haven, and we will work together to bring you to justice.

Thank you.

MS. FISHER: Thanks. Does anybody have any questions? Yeah?

QUESTION: If cases like this have -- this isn't the first incidence of such horrific torture -- why was this case decided to be the first one in how many years you said that -- where torture charges were brought?

MS. FISHER: Well, we brought this case because it was a good case that we could prove, and these cases are hard cases. In this case alone, we had agents from, you heard it, three different agencies, flying all over the world to get evidence from people that might not live in cities, from people outside of cities, and they've got to compile that.

This was a very thorough investigation and this indictment is one that was ready to bring forward at this time.

QUESTION: And, Alice, related to that, what is the history of this particular statute? When precisely did this torture statute go on the books, and why do you suppose it wasn't used before?

MS. FISHER: Well, this statute was part -- was implemented after the convention against torture, which the U.S. was a signatory to, and I believe the statute was passed in 1994 and it has been amended on a couple of times since that time.

QUESTION: If I can ask you or the FBI, what, if you can give us more information how you tracked down these alleged victims, how you persuaded them to testify, if they feared reprisals? Are they out of the U.S. or have they been brought here for what is expected to be very compelling testimony, I would imagine?

MS. FISHER: I think that these victims, as any victims of such abuse are very brave, and it is very difficult for them to come forward for obvious reasons to talk about the crimes that have been committed against them. For obvious reasons of privacy, it's our policy not to talk about specifics about the victim in this particular case at this time. But we have agents both from the Bureau and from ICE that are very well trained in this area to try to solicit information from victims so we can bring prosecutions like this forward.

I don't know, Julie, if you had anything you wanted to add?

MS. MYERS: No. I think you've really covered that.

MS. FISHER: Okay. Art? Okay. Yes?

QUESTION: What's the status of the defendant?

MS. FISHER: The status of the defendant. This defendant was flying through the U.S. in March of this year and was detained there on passport fraud charges. He has pled guilty to those charges in Miami and is currently detained in prison.

QUESTION: In Miami?

MS. FISHER: In Miami.

QUESTION: What was his sentence on the passport charges?

MS. FISHER: He has not been sentenced yet. That sentencing will take place tomorrow.

QUESTION: And how many victims are we talking about, one?

MS. FISHER: One victim is part of this indictment that we bring here today.

QUESTION: Are there more?

MS. FISHER: There's one victim charged as part of this conspiracy today.

QUESTION: Do you happen to know if the new government of Liberia has its own charges out on him for anything?

MS. FISHER: Well, we do know that there are charges outstanding on his father, former president of Liberia. Those charges I think were brought in 2003 in Sierra Leone, and former President Taylor is being detained on charges with regard to that. I am not aware of other charges brought against Charles Taylor, Jr. elsewhere.

QUESTION: Okay. And there's no request by the current Liberian government for Chuckie Taylor?

MS. FISHER: I'm not aware.

QUESTION: So the victim in this case is alive?

MS. FISHER: You know, for reasons of privacy, I don't want to talk about any details about the victim here, but I can tell you that we believe that our evidence in this case is strong, and that's why we brought this indictment.

QUESTION: On a different subject, the Iraq Study Group came out today and for the recommendations related to the Justice Department to have the Department essentially oversee the Ministry of the Interior and to have more U.S. police forces go on, more Justice Department personnel take over the training of the Iraqi police. Is that something that you've been consulted on? And just any of your reaction to the recommendations.

MS. FISHER: Well, I think the President said this morning that the Administration is going to go through all the recommendations, and I believe that the Department of Justice will certainly look at the recommendations that are made with regard to what we're doing in Iraq.

I traveled to Iraq this past summer and was able to meet with the Department of Justice representatives and many representatives from the U.S. government when I was over there, and I can just say I'm so thankful for their courageous work over there every day.

But we're certainly going to study the recommendations.

QUESTION: Just a follow-up on why this statute has not been employed before. I mean, there have been a number, as was mentioned before, of horrendous incidents here. I mean, hate crimes, people being, you know, you could characterize it as torture, people being dragged through the streets, that sort of thing. Why again has it not been used in those particular cases?

MS. FISHER: Well, I'm happy to say that we are using it and this indictment demonstrates that we're committed to enforcing that statute when we can. There's jurisdictional elements to this statute. It applies to U.S. citizens or those present in the U.S. For this particular defendant, he was born in the U.S. and he was present in the U.S. as of March when he tried to fly through the United States.

There are issues with regard to evidence. Again, agents in this case had to fly across the world to try to get the evidence and try to talk to victims and things like that. So, they're hard cases. And we need

to make sure that the facts fit the statute, and we need to make sure that we investigate it.

I'm very thankful that these agencies standing behind me were able to put the resources behind this that were necessary to conduct a very intensive investigation in order to bring us where we are today.

MODERATOR: Do we have a last question?

(No response.)

MS. FISHER: Thanks. Have a good day.

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