

Udlændinge



Styrelsen

SIERRA LEONE (44)

Asylafdelingen

Udlændingestyrelsen 1996 HJ 1713-00035

Akt. nr.:

11 m. Fin.sekr. 19 j.nr 97/7511-62

26 JUNI 1998 LS

Dato: 27. april 1998
Kontor: Dokumentationskontoret
Sagsbehandler: Jakob Gundersen
Telefon: 35306583
Journ.Nr. 1996 HJ 1713-00035

(situationnotat vedrørende Sierra Leone 2001)

Antal bilag

Akt nr.

4

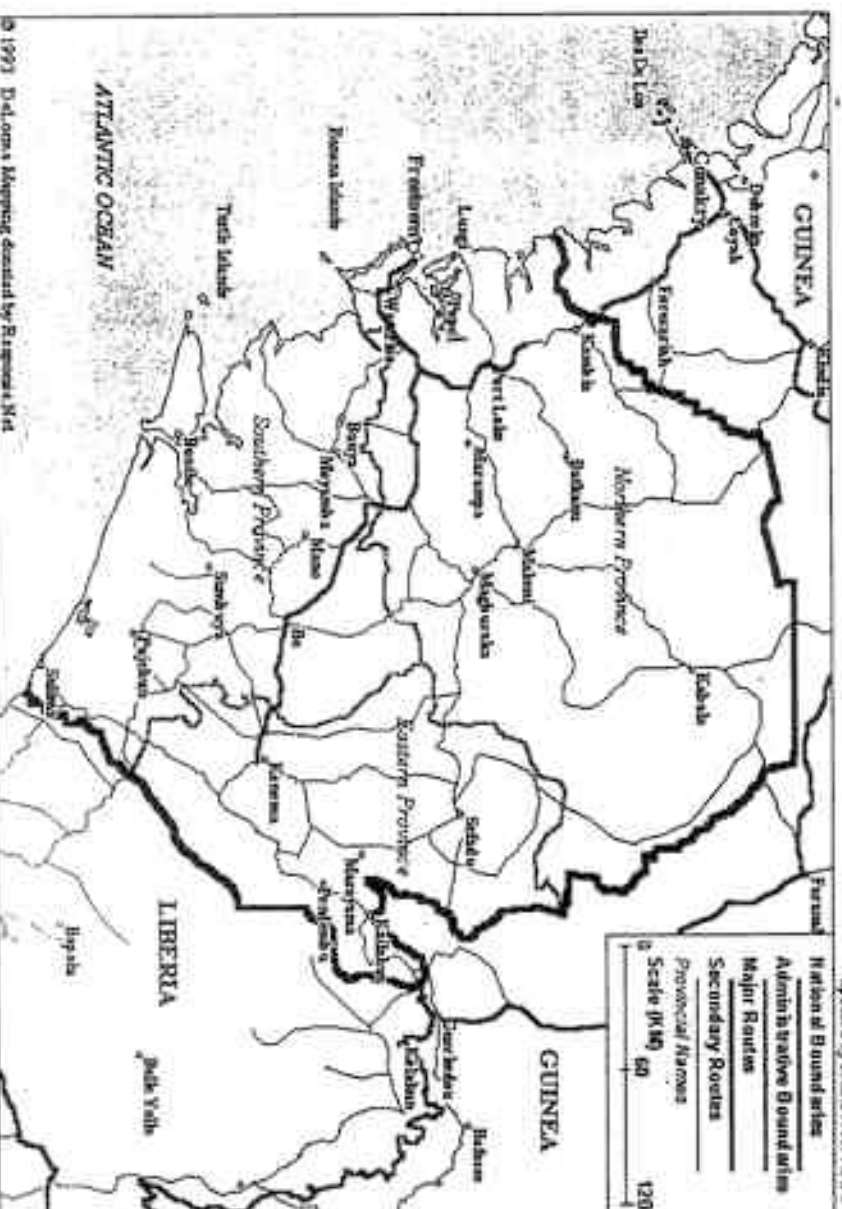
Situationsnotat vedrørende Sierra Leone

Formålet med det følgende notat er at give et billede af den aktuelle situation i Sierra Leone. Der er tale om en ny situation i Sierra Leone efter at juntaen, der kom til magten ved et militærkup den 25. maj 1997, blev sendt på flugt af nigerianske tropper under den vestafrikanske "fredsbevarende" styrke, ECOMOG, den 12. februar 1998. Notatet dækker således perioden fra februar – april 1998.

Det skal bemærkes, at notatet udelukkende hviler på sekundært kildemateriale, som forarbejdede artikler, nyhedstelegrammer og lignende hentet fra Internettet. Endvidere bliver der henvist til udtalelser og situationstrapporter fra forskellige organer under De Forenede Nationer. Det har ikke været muligt at krydschecke oplysningerne. Det kildemateriale der henvises til er vedlagt situationsnotatet i kopi.

SIERRA LEONE - Major and Secondary Roads

updated by RudeWeb, 7.6.98





Baggrund for den aktuelle situation

Efter flere års militærstyrke og borgerkrig fik Sierra Leone en civil regering på baggrund af et internationalt anerkendt demokratisk valg den 26-27. februar 1996. Leder af partiet SLPP (Sierra Leone People's Party), Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, blev valgt til præsident. Valget havde dog ikke deltagelse af oprørsbevægelsen RUF (Revolutionary United Front) under ledelse af Foday Sankoh.

Efter fejlslagene fredsforhandlinger med RUF og stigende udlfredshed i regeringshæren blev Præsident Kabbah styret ved et militærkup den 25. maj 1997. Præsident Kabbah flygtede til nabolandet Guinea. En ny militærjunta, kaldet AFRC (Armed Forces Ruling Council), blev etableret under ledelse af Major Paul Korrma. AFRC fik hurtigt støtte af RUF, som rykkede ind i hovedstaden Freetown og deltog i militærjuntaen.¹

Efter militærkuppet blev menneskerets- og sikkerhedssituationen i Sierra Leone alvorligt forværret. Situationen blev således af Udenrigsministeriets kilder betegnet som kaotiske med vilkårlige drab og overfald på civilbefolkningen og hyppige brud på menneskerettighederne.²

Den 8. oktober vedtog FN's Sikkerhedsråd en embargo imod Sierra Leone med det formål at presse militærjuntaen til at indgå en aftale om tilbagelevering af regeringsmagten til Præsident Kabbah.

Den 24. oktober 1997 blev der indgået en fredsaftale mellem militærjuntaen og ECOWAS, som skulle føre til gensættelsen af Præsident Kabbah. Betingelserne i denne aftale blev imidlertid ikke overholdt.

Ifølge den nigerianske regering blev ECOMOG styrkerne, der holdt et brohoved i nærheden af Freetown, udsat for gentagne angreb. Dette var den konkrete anledning til at ECOMOG gik i offensiven. Den 13. februar var Freetown blevet indtaget af ECOMOG styrkerne efter voldsomme kampe.³ AFRC/RUF juntaen blev sendt på flugt ind i landet.

Herefter fortsatte ECOMOG med at indtage mere af Sierra Leone i samarbejde med militia-gruppen kendt som "Kamajors", der hele tiden har været loyale mod Præsident Kabbah. Den efterfølgende "mopping-up operation," (udrensningsaktion) har været meget voldsom.⁴ Dette skyldes dels de flygtende AFRC/RUF gruppers militære modstand og hævnaktioner mod befolkningen, dels en voldsom

¹ Se NOTAT fra Udenrigsministeriet af den. 12 december 1997 samt *Sierra Leone-Profile of Asylum Claims & Country Conditions - Addendum*, United States Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor Department, September 1997.

² NOTAT fra Udenrigsministeriet af den. 12 december 1997.

³ Se Africa Research Bulletin, Vol.35, No.2, March 20th 1998.

⁴ Se Africa Research Bulletin, Vol.35, No.2, March 20th 1998.

(se bilag 42)



fremfærd af de nigerianske tropper under ECOMOG. Som følge af denne offensiv har der været store flygtningestrømme ind i både Liberia og Guinea.⁵

Den 10. marts 1998 vendte President Kabbah tilbage til Freetown og blev genindsat som Sierra Leones President.⁶

Den aktuelle situation

Sikkerheds- og menneskeretsituationen

Den aktuelle menneskerets- og sikkerhedssituation i Sierra Leone er i skrivende stund, til trods for en antagelig væsentlig forbedring i Freetown, vanskelig at vurdere konkret. Men udrensningsaktionen mod AFRC/RUF milits'er og tilhængere er stadig i gang, hvilket må antages at gøre sikkerhedssituationen og menneskerets-situationen uklare.

At situationen er uklare understreges af rapporter om bl.a., at op imod 59 personer nu står overfor anklager om forræderi, hvilket kan medføre dødsstraf.⁷ Det er i denne forbindelse ikke klart om retssikkerheden er i orden, eller om nogle grupper forfølges alene på grund af etnisk tilhørsforhold eller lignende.

Endvidere har den Sierra Leonske regering indført censur på reportager fra kam-pene i det østlige Sierra Leone.⁸

Endvidere står der følgende i FN's generalsekretærs rapport af den 18. marts 1998 om sikkerhedssituationen i Sierra Leone:⁹

"19. Freetown is now fully under the control of ECOMOG and is increasingly secure. ...

20. Nevertheless, the fact that many of the senior junta leaders, including the former Chairman of the AFRC, Johnny Paul Koroma, have not thus far been apprehended, as well as the continuing violence inflicting on civilians during their retreat from ECOMOG forces by RUF and other armed elements, indicate that the security situation in Sierra Leone is still a source of concern. Though ECOMOG has begun to collect weapons in Freetown, a major disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exercise will be needed to ensure security."

⁵ *See New outflow from Sierra Leone complicates Liberian Repatriation*, in Refugees International, April 3rd 1998, ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int.

⁶ *See New African*, April 1998, s.14.

⁷ *IRIN-WA Update 192 of Events in West Africa*, April 22nd 1998, ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int.

⁸ *IRIN-WA Update 193 of Events in West Africa*, April 23rd 1998, ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int.

⁹ Fourth Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Sierra Leone, S/1998/249, 18 March 1998, downloaded from www.sierra-leone.org/unscc/10.html.



Den humanitære situation

Den humanitære situation er ganske givet forbedret, flygtninge vender i dag tilbage til Freetown, og regeringen opfordrer til, at statsansatte vender tilbage til deres arbejde.¹⁰

Men der er stadig flygtningebewægelser ind i Liberia fra Sierra Leone som følge af kampene i det østlige og nordøstlige Sierra Leone mellem ECOMOG og Kajanjors på den ene side og AFRC/RUF på den anden side.¹¹

Situationen omkring Freetown er således i bedring, mens der meldes om en mulig humanitær krise i det østlige Sierra Leone.¹²

¹⁰ ICRC *restumes work up-country*, ICRC News 14, ICRC April 8th 1998, ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int, UNHCR: Country Updates – Liberia & Sierra Leone, April 22nd 1998, ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int.

¹¹ UNHCR: Briefing Notes 21 Apr 1998: Sierra Leone, April 21st 1998, ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int.

¹² IRIN-WA Update 191 of Events in West Africa, April 21st 1998, ReliefWeb: www.reliefweb.int.

Bureau of Democracy,
Human Rights and Labor
September 1997

SIERRA LEONE--PROFILE OF ASYLUM CLAIMS & COUNTRY CONDITIONS

ADDENDUM

The currently chaotic conditions prevailing in Sierra Leone and the closing of our Embassy in Freetown have made it impossible to prepare a new or revised country profile at this time. Pending revision of the attached profile, we have the following update:

On May 25, 1997, mutinous soldiers now called the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) overthrew the democratically-elected government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, the leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party. President Kabbah, along with thousands of other Sierra Leoneans, fled across the border into neighboring Guinea. The AFRC quickly invited Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels into Freetown, and it now appears that the RUF, rather than the AFRC, may actually be in control. The RUF has been notorious for amputation and other brutal atrocities during the six-year civil war. They have continued this kind of behavior in Freetown after they were invited into the city by AFRC leaders, thereby lending credence to the long-held suspicions of many that some members of the military were actually in league with the RUF during the civil war.

The AFRC/RUF junta has been isolated by the international community, and at the request of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) developed a three phase strategy for the return of the elected government. The three phases agreed upon by ECOWAS and briefed to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in July were negotiations, sanctions and ultimately military intervention. In June and July, ECOWAS foreign ministers (C-4) conducted two unsuccessful negotiating sessions with the AFRC/RUF for the return of the elected government.

At the ECOWAS summit in Abuja, Nigeria at the end of August, the ECOWAS countries agreed to continued negotiations, extensive sanctions/enforced embargo, and a cease-fire. The C-5 (Liberia is now included) will visit the UN shortly to brief the UNSC on the sanctions regime and to request UNSC endorsement of the sanctions.

In early September forces from the Economic Community of West African States' Military Group (ECOMOG)--largely Nigerian, already in Sierra Leone under a defense pact with President Kabbah's government--began enforcing the sanctions authorized in Abuja. On September 4 shelling in Freetown killed 30-50 civilians. It is unclear whether ECOMOG forces enforcing sanctions or AFRC/RUF forces firing at ECOMOG elements were responsible for the casualties.

The AFRC/RUF have used force to break up student demonstrations against the regime. Two students reportedly were killed, fourteen had hands chopped off and many were beaten and raped.

Sierra Leone/2,

Journalists have been beaten and jailed in steel containers. An unknown number of civilians have been imprisoned. No courts are in operation.

Freetown is an extremely dangerous place. Any person can be picked up at any time, on any charge, and detained for any length of time. Any person not actively and publicly supporting the military regime is suspect by the AFRC/RUF. Nighttime shooting and looting and robberies at evacuated homes and buildings continue unabated. UN sources indicate that electricity is limited to military barracks in and around Freetown and describe the humanitarian situation as grave, with the army and RUF often looting NGO supplies. Some 30,000 Sierra Leoneans have fled and registered as refugees in neighboring countries.

SIERRA LEONE - PROFILE OF ASYLUM CLAIMS & COUNTRY CONDITIONS

Table of Contents	
	Page
I. Introduction	2
II. Overview and Recent Developments	2
A. Political System	2
B. Security Forces Forces	3
C. Human Rights Situation	3
III. Claims and Relevant Country Conditions	3
A. Claims Based on Race	4
B. Claims Based on Religion	4
C. Claims Based on Nationality	4
D. Claims Based on Social Group Membership	4
E. Claims Based on Political Opinion	4
F. Claims Based on Fear of Violence and Civil Unrest	5
IV. Other Considerations for Adjudicators	5
Introduction	

This profile is provided by the State Department's Office of Asylum Affairs for use by the Executive Office of Immigration Review and the Immigration and Naturalization Service in assessing asylum claims. By regulation, the Department of State may provide information on country conditions to help adjudicators assess the accuracy of asylum applicants' assertions about country conditions and their own experiences; likely treatment were the applicants to return; whether persons similarly situated are known to be persecuted; whether grounds for denial are known to exist; and other information relevant to determining the status of a refugee under the grounds specified in section 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

Country conditions profiles are produced by the Office of Asylum Affairs under the supervision of the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL), formerly the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs. They are written by experienced Foreign Service Officers with expertise and service in the relevant area and are circulated for comment within the Department, including to overseas missions, and with other agencies if appropriate. They are based on a review of asylum applications, reports from US missions abroad and other information available to the Department of State. Other relevant information published by the Department, incorporated herewith by reference, includes the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and periodic country-specific Background Notes. The Country Reports, which adjudicators should consult to provide context for these comments, are designed to report annually on the status of internationally recognized human rights. These profiles, which are updated regularly, provide additional and current information useful in adjudicating asylum applications to the specific standards set forth in the INA.

II. Overview of Recent Developments

A. Political System

After 29 years of one party or military rule and five years of ongoing civil war, a new chapter in Sierra Leone's history was opened by massive public participation in the successful February 26-27 election. The multiparty election succeeded in the face of persistent concerns about possible military interference and the declared intention of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh to disrupt it. A runoff election was necessary, and it too was successful and resulted in the election on March 15 of Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party, as the new president. Both domestic and outside observers judged the election to be procedurally correct and essentially free and fair. There were some irregularities in the electoral process, but the observers reported that they did not affect the ultimate outcome of the election. In the parliamentary election, five political parties achieved the necessary five percent of votes to gain seats. The elections were generally peaceful and voter turnout was high, despite some incidents of violence in different parts of the country.

In an extraordinary moment for Sierra Leone and for Africa, the Chairman of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), Brigadier Julius Maada Bio, handed over power to President-Elect Kabbah in a March 29 ceremony marking the culmination of the long struggle by the people of Sierra Leone to restore democracy against numerous obstacles. In his speech, Chairman Bio asserted that the NPRC had met its commitment to return the country to civilian, democratic rule of its own volition and announced that he had begun preliminary negotiations with the RUF culminating in his meeting with Foday Sankoh on March 25 and 27. President Kabbah in return lauded the Chairman, the army, and the Sierra Leonean people for participating so enthusiastically in the elections and facilitating the return to democracy. He also pledged to continue the negotiations with the RUF and to meet with Foday Sankoh at the earliest opportunity in the pursuit of peace. He asserted that ending the five year insurgency would be his top priority.

B. Security Forces

The Sierra Leone Military Forces (RSLMF), supported by Western Area Security Patrols (WASPS) and the regular police force, are responsible for both external and internal security. The RSLMF, supported by some Nigerian and Guinean troops and a private South African mercenary firm called "Executive Outcomes," continued active operations throughout the year against RUF rebel forces. The RUF claimed to seek the overthrow of the previous NPRC government. The Government has acknowledged that in addition to its operations against the RUF, it must also contend with renegade

RSLMF soldiers and some civilians.

While it made significant progress in operations against the RUF, it sustained casualties in numerous bloody attacks on villages in the Eastern and Southern provinces, and in some areas of the Northern province. During the first half of the year, rebel forces unsuccessfully attacked villages on the outskirts of Freetown. In October the RSLMF briefly retook Kailahun district in the east, but lost it in an RUF counterattack after less than two weeks occupation.

There were reported human rights abuses by all parties to the internal conflict, including summary executions and torture. Some members of the police and military also committed human rights abuses outside the war zone. A number of RSLMF personnel, including some officers, were court-martialed for offenses ranging from theft to murder.

At the end of April, the Government and the RUF agreed to an indefinite cease-fire.

C. Human Rights Situation

The Government's human rights record improved somewhat in 1995, a trend that is likely to be continued by the new civilian government. One of the new civilian government's first official acts was to release all political prisoners. However, serious problems remain to be tackled by the new government. Most abuses in 1995, including extrajudicial killings by RSLMF and rebel units, were committed chiefly, though not exclusively, in the areas of armed conflict. Even after the NPRC lifted its ban on political parties it continued to maintain control over government, social affairs, and the judiciary. Authorities continued to restrict freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association, but to a lesser degree than previously. There were reports of disappearances and security forces abuse of suspects during arrest and interrogation. There were prolonged pretrial detentions and delays in trials.

It is reasonable to assume that there will be dramatic improvements in the human rights situation under the new civilian government of President Kabbah; its first act upon assuming power was to release the last three remaining political prisoners, as well as 60 other people who had been charged for various criminal offenses and had been awaiting hearings for extended periods. It is still too soon to make a definitive judgment, but the extraordinary outpouring of enthusiasm and support for the new government indicates that the people of Sierra Leone anticipate a dramatic improvement in the human rights situation.

III. Claims and Relevant Country Conditions

A. Claims Based on Race

We have seen few recent claims based on race or ethnicity, and the government does not approve of discrimination among people of different ethnic groups. Nevertheless, ethnic loyalty remains an important factor in government, military, and business. Our Embassy has reported that there appears to have been little ethnically motivated violence in the hostilities to date. Although the RUF members are largely of the Mende and Kissy ethnic groups, other members of those groups have not been immune from RUF aggression.

Residents of non-African descent face institutionalized political restrictions. Current law restricts citizenship to people of Negro-African descent following a patrilineal pattern, effectively denying citizenship to many persons, notably in the Lebanese community, the largest affected minority.

B. Claims Based on Religion

A few Sierra Leoneans base their claims on religion--usually Christians claiming mistreatment by the country's 60% Muslim majority. However, freedom of religion is guaranteed by the 1991 constitution, and Sierra Leoneans have historically displayed religious tolerance. Christians, animists, and adherents of other faiths practice their faith freely, and Christian missionaries are numerous. We have no information that Christians are being harassed or otherwise mistreated in Sierra Leone.

Every public event in Sierra Leone begins with the Christian and Islamic prayers. Unlike some countries with large Muslim populations, intermarriage between Christians and Muslims occurs, and it is not uncommon to find Christian and Muslim members of the same family. Christian and Muslim families live side by side, bound by traditional West African beliefs which have a dominating influence in peoples' lives.

C. Claims Based on Nationality

We have seen no claims from Sierra Leoneans based on nationality..

D. Claims Based on Membership in a Social Group

We have seen a few cases from Sierra Leonean women who claim they are members of a particular social group consisting of women who are subject to female genital mutilation (FGM). This practice, which is condemned by international health experts as damaging to both physical and psychological health, is widely practiced in Sierra Leone on girls at a young age, especially in traditional ethnic groups and among the less educated. While one independent expert in the field estimates the percentage of females who have undergone this procedure may be as high as 80 percent, local groups believe that this figure is overstated. Membership in female secret societies which practice FGM in their initiation rites has been declining..

E. Claims Based on Political Opinion

We have in recent years seen a number of claims based either on the applicants' association with the previous APC party or government, or the possibility that the NPRC government may associate them with the rebels. Some senior officials of the APC government--most of them charged with corruption--were jailed by the NPRC when it assumed power in 1992. They were released in April, 1993, and as noted above, the last three remaining political prisoners were released by the new civilian government in April, 1996 as its first order of business.

We have no information to indicate that those who could be seen merely as supporters of the APC, or who have family relationships to those who had been held, would now be subjected to legal or extra-legal actions on those grounds. Similarly, because of the recent renewal of the amnesty offered by former Chairman Strasser, and particularly because of the new civilian government now in power, even persons previously suspected of rebel activities or sympathies now appear able to return without difficulty.

Some claims are based on a fear of the NPRC government itself and the military officials within it. Now, however, with the advent of the new, freely-elected civilian government and the willing surrender of power by Chairman Bio to the new president, adjudicators may wish to examine such cases with even more care.

F. Claims Based on Fear of Violence and Civil Unrest

Most frequently cited by Sierra Leonean asylum applicants are fears for their safety because of the violence and civil unrest caused by the war. Going into its fifth year until the recent ceasefire, the war in Sierra Leone had become largely an operation of hit and run attacks on undefended or lightly defended targets. The attacks were sporadic, random and scattered about the country. Many applicants for asylum cite their residence in the war zones, but it appears that most displaced persons should be able to find refuge in other, less afflicted areas of the country--especially in urban centers.

Freetown does not seem to be directly threatened, and our Embassy notes that the conflict has for the most part been confined to the countryside. Principal urban areas have been relatively unaffected except for an influx of internally displaced refugees from remote rural villages. Most Sierra Leoneans who can afford to travel to the U.S. will probably come from Freetown or one of the main provincial towns (Bo, Kenema, Makeni, Kabaia or Kambui). While rebel activity interdicted road travel between Freetown and up-country areas in November and December, 1995 and parts of January 1996, food convoys have been able to travel up-country without hindrance since mid-January 1996. As noted above, negotiations between the government and the rebel leader were initiated by former Chairman Bio and are being continued by President Kabbah. In short, the war currently poses no significant threat to people residing in any of the main population centers.

The conflict in Sierra Leone, which may be nearing its end, does not appear to be based on ethnic, territorial or political factors. Attacks against small villages seemed to be for the main purpose of looting. Thus, no particular group appears to be singled out. In any case, our understanding of the law is that anarchy or civil strife may not, per se, establish grounds for asylum.

Other Factors Influencing Migration

As noted above, Sierra Leone is an extremely poor country, despite its minerals production. In addition to the civil unrest afflicting the country, the harsh economic conditions and abject poverty of many Sierra Leoneans have caused many of them to flee. Even well-educated Sierra Leoneans are drawn to the U.S. by the greater professional opportunities here--as well as the fairly large Sierra Leonean community living here.

Africa Research Bulletin

Political,
Social and
Cultural Series

Volume 35 Number 2

February 1st-28th 1998

Published March 20th 1998

SIERRA LEONE

Nigerian Troops Take Freetown

Nigerian troops from the West African "peace-keeping" force, ECOMOG, "are in firm control of Freetown as well as most of Sierra Leone", the Nigerian presidency indicated on February 13th. This was achieved with a "minimal loss of human lives".

In its communique the Nigerian presidency called on "the remaining junta forces (led by Paul Koroma), most of whose fighters are fleeing, to cooperate fully with ECOMOG to help it accomplish its mandate which will lead to the complete re-establishment of the legitimate government of President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, in conformity with the peace plan of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)". It also called for urgent humanitarian aid for the people of Sierra Leone and said that ECOMOG was now taking measures to set up security zones and safe corridors to disburse humanitarian aid. The communique further called on the United Nations and the Security Council in particular to facilitate the deployment of a mission of UN military

observers to the country "now that their safety can be guaranteed".

The Nigerian presidency claimed that the offensive by ECOMOG forces which led to the seizure of Freetown was the direct consequence of incessant attacks by junta forces against ECOMOG troops who were thus forced to attack in order to ensure their defence. The Nigerian presidency also congratulated the new ECOMOG commander in chief, Nigerian General Timothy Shepfield as well as Colonel Maxwell Kobe and his men for their courage and valour in carrying out their mission. Colonel Kobe led the assault on Freetown.

Nigeria was undoubtedly pleased at the outcome of its operation, confirming, as it does, its power in the region. But the UN expressed anxiety about the situation of civilians in the midst of the armed conflict and had earlier called for peace but was ignored. The assistant UN General Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs, Sergio Vieira de Mello, recalled the appeal made on February 11th by UN Secretary General Kofi Annan to the warring parties to spare



(L.M. 13/2)

In this issue . . .

Morocco	
Yousoufi for P.M.	12998
Nigeria	
Will He, Won't He?	13002
South Africa	
Racial Quotas?	13001
State of Parties	13006
SANDF	13022
DR Congo	
Tshisekedi Banned	13004
Zimbabwe	
Defiant Stance	13007
Burundi	
Hutu Warning	13011

Contents

1 Continental Alignments	12994
2 Internal Developments	12997
3 National Security	13010
4 Overseas Relations	13020
5 Social and Cultural	13024
Rates	13025
Index	13026

Published monthly since 1964

ISSN 0001 9844

February 5th. Chabes took out to the east of Freetown between Nigerian troops from the West African Peace-Keeping Force. ECOMOG and Sierra Leone military junta troops violating the cease-fire continued in the October accord. At least 10 civilians are killed and both sides blame the other—Nigeria claiming that junta troops carried out an attack involving a land mine.

6th: Freetown residents wanted to stay indoors by a clandestine radio station that supports ousted President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah "become Ecomog had decided to get rid of the junta for good". It said the towns of Waterloo and Cabbah near the Jui military base where many Ecomog troops were stationed, had been captured. 12 people were reported killed in the shelling. Junta leader Li-Coi Johnny Paul Karamba warned against any attempt to impose ceasefire before the date agreed in the October accord. He said another Boussa. Junta imposed "junta" another Boussa. Junta imposed "junta" to dawn coffee. Karamba militiamen were reported to have had steps to the diamond-rich Kono district after launching an all-out offensive on junta positions in the area on the 5th.

7th: The military junta extends coffee across the country to 12 hours a day.

8th: Heavy fighting continued in Wellington with civilian casualties according to junta sources. Doctors in Freetown said many civilians brought in were suffering from bullet and shrapnel wounds. Shops and schools closed. Reports from Kenema, 240km east of Freetown, said militia groups loyal to Kabbah were approaching the town and residents were fleeing. The groups were said to be in control of the strategic Mbea River Bridge to Liberia to allowing ECOMOG troops based in Liberia to cross the border with heavy weapons. The mayor of Freetown, Wilshire Johnson, made a televised appeal for hostilities to end.

9th: ECOMOG forces capture mountain village of Karamba south of the capital where Sabel Charles Church, one of the oldest stone churches in West Africa, was said to have been burnt down when hit by shells.

9th: Nigerian troops approaching Freetown on three fronts. Commander Timothy Shephard said they were determined to take Freetown. Alpha jet bombed a hill outside Freetown. Director of military health services, Brig James Kama said 13 junta soldiers had been killed and civilian casualties were rising.

11th: Five bombs fell on Freetown overnight and the town sides traded military fire for three hours before dawn. Thousands of people were said to have fled the capital. Nigerian defence HQ denied junta claims that their troops were killing innocent civilians in a statement issued in Lagos. Col. Anthony Ujio said it was "a defensive offensive" with peace as the ultimate aim. Two Nigerian soldiers captured by junta forces told journalists that the Nigerian assault

Sierra Leone-Countdown to Takeover

on Freetown was planned well in advance. Ecomog takes the port and ferry terminal. 50 people fleeing the fighting and heading for Guinea drowned after their boat capsized.

12th: After a week of fighting Nigerian troops take Freetown as junta commanders flee but continue to fight rear-guard action.

13th: Chabes in the south of the country between combined junta forces, soldiers and ex-Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels on the one hand and Nigerian troops supported by Karamba on the other hand. Nigerian troops "are in firm control of Freetown as well as most of the country" the Nigerian presidency said in a communique. Nigerian troops take control of State House and other strategic positions. The UN expresses anxiety about the fate of civilians and asks both sides to help humanitarian organisations while the Red Cross said there are too many refugees in the country, there is no food or medicine in the hospitals. The UNHCR was preparing to house refugees in Guinea but the limited number of boats as well as fighting in the dock area of Freetown was hindering departures. Fighting was continuing around Bo in the interior of the country. 25 junta officials and their families intercepted in Liberian air space and arrested.

14th: Ousted President Kabbah, in exile in Guinea, thanks Nigeria and ECOMOG. The Liberian embassy in Conakry formally denies providing political asylum to Johnny Karamba. Shephard says more senior junta officials had been arrested, some of them surrendering to Ecomog. Mopping up operations continued in Freetown and the radio and television stations are taken without resistance. Sources in Guinea said 10 ministers and five senior junta officials arrested south of Conakry. Karamba, speaking to the BBC by phone allegedly from a hill to the east of Freetown, denounced "foreign aggression" and said he would fight on. International Aid agencies put the death toll in Freetown at several hundred. Reuters reported. Seven Westerners, mainly missionaries, abducted in the south of the country—no group claimed responsibility and no demand was made.

15th: 100-odd leaders of the junta surrender to Ecomog and are sent to Freetown high-security prison. Many soldiers also surrender. Food situation said to be critical and Ecomog warns that hostilities will be short.

16th: Ecomog urges Freetown residents to return to work and calls for arms and ammunition to be handed over by the 22nd when house-to-house searches will begin. Karamba, speaking from a hideout by radio, offers to renounce the Abuacha regime, opposition to disavow the junta regime. Karamba urges up security along the border with Sierra Leone as refugees continue to pour in. About 50 suspected junta members arrested at the border. Liberian President Taylor calls for an extraordinary ECOMOG summit. Karamba's (AFP 5, 6, 7, 8, 9/2, Sierra Leone News, R.

take the diamond town of Koidu in the east with a dozen deaths.

17th: Doctors without Borders say two workers have disappeared while delivering relief supplies in the west allegedly abducted by the RUF. Makeni, the fourth largest town, 140km northwest of Freetown, said to be under attack by rebel forces. Ousted junta spokesman, Alhaji Karamba, in detention in Jui, tries to disassociate himself from the military regime saying it was high time for a return to constitutional rule. The OAU continues support for ECOMOG and Ecomog.

18th: Forces loyal to the junta said to be terrorizing civilians in the west of the country, attacking villages, torching houses and stealing livestock. Bo and Karamba are the scenes of heavy fighting. Bo was recaptured by junta forces on the 17th after being taken by the 7th. Karamba on the 14th. Both towns are strongholds of the RUF. Nigerian Foreign Minister Tom Iliu arrives for assessment visit as does the UN special envoy, Ugeux. Committee of Five foreign ministers from ECOMOG, announced by Nigeria on the 16th, fails to take place.

19th: Three senior junta officials—Chief of Army Staff Colonel Samuel Williams, ex-minister of Works Colonel Saaba Karama and Lt Faria—arrived on Guinean border. 20th: Nigeria Defence Ministry says RUF ousted from Karamba and junta troops have surrounded at Makeni. However other troops were allegedly "sighted infiltrating Sierra Leone from a neighbouring country". This was the second time the Nigerian military authorities had mentioned infiltration from over the border. On February 10th they said seven troops of NPFL (National Patriotic Front of Liberia) soldiers had been seen heading for Freetown. A battalion of Guinean Ecomog forces arrived in Freetown from Conakry to and soldiers from Lungi garrison surrendered to junta members and followers have been detained by Ecomog local radio said. There was no word of Karamba's whereabouts.

22nd: Ecomog troops arrive in Bo to help the Karamba. The entire civilian population of the Makeni said to have fled as junta and rebels had to wait in the town.

23rd: Ecomog lifts ban on commercial ships docking in Freetown. Kabbah arrives in Abuja for a working visit.

24th: Red Cross begins distributing 760 tonnes of relief food—cereal, vegetable oil, sugar and high protein biscuits—shipped from Monrovia by the UN World Food Programme and sufficient to feed 70,000 people for a month.

25th: Ecomog recaptures Bo and fires trapped missionaries.

Kufiruf, R.F. R. Lagos, Feb: BBC Mon., TT 26/2)

A

B

C

civilians and protect humanitarian organisation's staff.

Free town was finally brought under "ECOMOG" control on the evening of February 12th after bringing the fighting into the heart of the capital. Doctors without borders (MSF) had called for a cease-fire while the international Committee of the Red Cross, in whose headquarters many women, children, old people and wounded had taken refuge, demanded that a humanitarian corridor be opened to evacuate civilians.

Liberian Criticism

Liberia was the only West African country officially to criticise the offensive against Free town and on February 14th President Charles Taylor called on ECOMOG to hand over Sierra Leonean dignitaries arrested the previous day while flying over Liberian air space in two helicopters. He stated that Liberia was a sovereign state with the responsibility for infractions over its territory. The twenty-old Sierra Leonean dignitaries were intercepted by ECOMOG in Liberian air space on board two helicopters. "The Liberian government has nothing against ECOMOG soldiers individually nor against ECOMOG itself" said Mr. Taylor. "But the time has come for the military to give a chance to politicians by accepting their orders. You helped me build my house, do not spoil that". The Liberian President also criticised the flight over Monrovia on February 13th by several Nigerian alpha-jets, calling it "a provocation that could lead to a blood bath". The low level flight over the presidency and the presidential convoy was interpreted by Mr. Taylor as a threat. He also called for the withdrawal of ECOMOG armoured cars from Monrovia, its suburbs and the road to the airport as they were impeding trade. Mr. Taylor has complained officially about ECOMOG behaviour to the UN, the OAU and ECOWAS. He recalled the Liberian ambassador to Nigeria for consultations on February 13th. Meanwhile, on February 17th, the Liberian government called for international humanitarian aid after over 100,000 Sierra Leonean refugees arrived in the country. Information Minister Joe Muhah said the number was growing each day and the refugees were "in poor condition. They are badly nourished, visibly weakened because some of them have not had a real meal for two weeks". He said the Liberian government was doing what it could in terms of rice and bedding but did not have adequate means to provide the refugees with their needs. International humanitarian organisations based in Monrovia said they had

sent evaluation teams to the regions bordering Sierra Leone. (AFP 14, 17/2)

Kabbah Grateful

The exiled Sierra Leonean president, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, meanwhile, thanked Nigeria for capturing Free town. In a broadcast message Mr. Kabbah said the defeat of the military junta was "a victory for the people against tyranny and against evil".

It emerged on February 15th that nearly a 100 people had been killed and 1,000 wounded in the fighting. The international Committee of the Red Cross said that the town of Bo (Sierra Leone's second city, 170km east of Free town) in the east had been taken by the traditional hunters, the Kamajors though there were also conflicting reports. Bo was subsequently said to have been recaptured by junta soldiers. They were later reported to have taken the diamond town of Koidu in the east as well where a dozen junta soldiers were killed in the fighting according to witnesses. The BBC reported that the town of Kenema, 240km east of Free town had fallen to supporters of the junta. Free town was relatively calm by the 15th but the same could not be said for the rest of the country where violence and looting continued and ordinary people continued to flee.

On February 17th national radio announced that the government had set up a "special supervision committee" of eleven people including vice-president Joe Denby and the commander of the ECOMOG forces on the ground, the Nigerian Colonel Maxwell Kobe. "The committee is the only institution authorised by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah to act in the name of the government until his return", the radio said. The committee also includes Julius Spencer, the director of a clandestine radio station which broadcast information favourable to the exiled regime and hostile to the junta and its allies. No date had yet been fixed for the return of Kabbah who nevertheless unannounced from Guinea that he would ask the members of his government to resign in the two weeks following his return to Free town so as to form a smaller government team.

In an initial meeting with international donors on February 18th, Kabbah was promised food, medicine and, most crucially, mine-clearing expertise.

But, to ensure continued stability, donors must also assist in the re-training and possible restructuring of the army and the police. Germany has already promised patrol vehicles for the Sierra Leone police. But the national army will need more assistance if it is to succeed in weeding out the

remnants of the ousted junior officers who have now taken to the bush with their allies, the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

The UNHCR said on February 24th that 1,000 refugees a day were still fleeing on foot into Liberia. They were trying to escape fighting in Bo and Kenema in particular. About 14,000 Sierra Leonean refugees arrived in Liberia by February 24th. (AFP 14, 15, 17/2 AA 20/2, GD 25/2)

Victory For Democracy?

Presented at the outset as a common front by countries of the sub-region against the military coup of May 25th 1997 the ECOWAS initiatives in Sierra Leone are looking increasingly like a strictly Nigerian operation, said AFP. Whilst Abuja had announced on the 16th that a "committee of five" ECOWAS foreign ministers would visit, in fact only the Nigerian one, Tom Ikimi, came although he was accompanied by the executive secretary of ECOWAS, the Guinean Lansana Kouyate (based in Abuja). The other member was the Nigerian General Timothy Shelpidi, commander in chief of ECOMOG, which is theoretically mandated by ECOMOG but is in fact totally dominated by Nigeria.

The committee of five (Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria) were to evaluate the situation on the ground and fix a date for the return of Kabbah. Despite the fact that only Liberia openly criticised the Nigerian offensive, many diplomats, in the sub-region had complained privately about Nigeria. The *Independent* (UK) commented: "when forces acting in the name of democracy overthrow dictatorships, the international community is supposed to applaud" but on this occasion the world had responded with only a polite murmur. It pointed out that while Koroma's regime had "earned a reputation for brutality, corruption and theft... the trouble is, the same things are often said of Nigeria". The paper went on to say that many diplomats now believe the Sierra Leone operation could be part of a move to strengthen Nigeria's strategic position and the expansion of Nigeria's military presence in Sierra Leone comes at a time when it is reducing its peace-keeping force in Liberia. According to *The Independent*, foreign observers believe the military offensive could have been intended to achieve several goals. Apart from securing a continued Nigerian presence in the western tip of Africa, it reinforced Nigeria's standing as the big player in ECOWAS. It handed a rare, if muted, public relations victory to the military government in Nigeria and won Nig-

eria intense popularity with the inhabitants of Freetown. It may also have guaranteed Nigeria's military elite a say in the future exploitation of Sierra Leone's mineral wealth.

The *Weekly Review* (Nairobi) also commented that ousting the junta could not boost Nigeria's stature "for the dictatorial Sani Abacha's regime shows no sign of loosening its grip ... continues to hold opponents in detention".

West Africa, however, said that ECOMOG had "scored again for democracy ... With mission accomplished, ECOMOG stands today as probably the world's best peace-keeping model. Credit must go to Nigeria, the leading partner. For its part the international community ought to acknowledge this success. After all, it had roundly condemned the overthrow of democracy in Sierra Leone. Downplaying ECOMOG's achievement only reinforces Africa's position that it is being marginalised. It is also a reminder that sections of the Western press had openly aired the view that the West was happy to allow Nigeria to do the dirty work for the world.

"The lesson of Sierra Leone, which is bound to endure, is that democracy must

always prevail. The junta in Freetown had its fun while the show lasted. But it is all over now. Military establishments elsewhere in West Africa at least must now be placed on notice that military coups are things of the past. It is inconceivable that an officer or groups of officers in this sub-region will in the foreseeable future wake up one day and decide to overthrow a democratically elected government, however unpopular that government may be. The right to remove an elected government rests with the voter, not the soldier. The soldier's sworn duty is to defend the sovereignty of his country not undermine it. If temptation should ever get in the way, he should remember ECOMOG.

"Still, as the peacekeeping force basks in its latest achievement, perhaps the leaders of ECOWAS should sit back and consider ECOMOG as a permanent feature. That will make the force always available for deployment at short notice if the need ever arises again. If this is done, however, there ought to be a provision that all ECOWAS member countries should pull their weight. It is not fair on Nigeria that it should carry a disproportionate share of the burden all the time." *West Africa* concluded.

1 Continental Alignments

CONFERENCES

SAHARA-SAHTEL STATES

New Community

Eight African countries on February 5th signed a treaty in Tripoli (Libya) on the creation of a "group of countries in the Sahara and the Sahel", said the official agency *Jana*. This treaty was signed at the end of a meeting in Tripoli of heads of state or representatives from Arab and African countries in the Sahel and Sahara, destined to strengthen multi-lateral co-operation. The grouping is to be called the Sahara-Sahelian Community States Rally (RCCS).

This summit brought together the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi, the presidents Omar al-Bashir of Sudan, Idriss Deby of Chad, Ibrahim Bore Maïnassara of Niger, and Alpha Oumar of Mali. The Egyptian Minister of Manpower and Emigration Affairs Ahmed al-Amawi, the Tunisian Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs Al-

Sadek Fayyala, and the Burkina Faso Minister of State in charge of Water and the Environment, Saif Diallo, represented their countries at the meeting.

The meeting was organised on the initiative of Col. Gaddafi, and was destined to "study problems affecting countries in the region in order to strengthen their co-operation and ensure the unity of the African continent as it confronts various challenges", said Libyan television, without specifying what these challenges were. Gaddafi was elected president of the current session of the new grouping. The Libyan ambassador to Burkina Faso, Mr. Almadani al-Azhar, was designated secretary general of the group. The general secretary will be based in Tripoli. The plan for this group had been drafted in mid-September 1997 during a ministerial session bringing together the countries that were signatories to the treaty.

Nigeria was invited to join but did not attend, nor did Algeria, Senegal, Mauritania or Morocco which border the Sahara

Meanwhile, Mr. Idriss announced that Guinea was to send two battalions to Sierra Leone and that other countries such as Ghana and Niger were going to contribute to ECOMOG. "We feel it important that there is peace and legitimate governments in the countries of our sub-region", he added. Nigeria itself has been led by a military junta since 1993. During an initial visit to Freetown on February 16th General Shepell attributed the absence of other ECOWAS troops from the ECOMOG contingent in Sierra Leone to "logistical reasons" alone.

Moreover, Guinea Foreign Minister Lamine Karama commented on reports of a "so-called feeling of uneasiness" in the Committee of Five saying there had not been a plan to convene a foreign ministers meeting in Freetown. Deputy ECOMOG commander, Brigadier Joseph Kwame from Ghana denied that the whole operation had been a wholly Nigerian affair and said it was a joint ECOWAS effort and Niger's government issued a statement congratulating Ecomog and expressing its support. (AFP 19/2, R. Nnamy, CBC Feb. BBC Mon, Feb 23, WR 20/2, WA 22/2) Last reference p. 12980

or are members of the Sahel region. (MTM 13/2, AA 23/2)

WAR CRIMES

International Court Plan

African government ministers, representative of human rights organisations and legal experts meeting in Dakar (Senegal) on February 6th threw their support behind plans to set up a permanent international war crimes court.

In a final declaration, the conference participants called for the new court's statutes to be adopted on June 15th, when negotiations are planned in Rome.

The Dakar gathering of ministers and experts from some 20 African countries was called to mobilize African interest in eradicating such a body, and was sponsored by European Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid Emma Bonino along with several non-governmental organizations and human rights organizations.

In the "Dakar Declaration", the conference participants called for the court to be "independent, impartial, fair and effective". The court should be allowed to prosecute when national courts prove ineffective and "thus threaten to leave some

ReliefWeb

<http://www.reliefweb.org>

Source: Refugees International

Date: 03 Apr 1998

New outflow from Sierra Leone complicates Liberian Repatriation

Contact: Nanaa Scott

Refugees International (RI) recently completed a three-week assessment mission to West Africa which focused on the flight of Sierra Leonean refugees to neighboring Guinea and Liberia and the repatriation of Liberian refugees from Guinea. As fighting between forces loyal to democratically-elected President Kabbah and those supporting the AFRC/RUF junta shifted to the countryside in the wake of the forcible reinstatement last month of Mr. Kabbah in Freetown, tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans fled into an area already burdened with large numbers of Liberian refugees awaiting repatriation.

Sierra Leonean refugee arrivals in Guinea

Since the return of Mr. Kabbah, international attention has largely been focused on the situation inside Sierra Leone. Meanwhile an estimated 85,000 Sierra Leonean refugees have fled into the forest region of Guinea, near Gueckedou. In interviews with newly arrived refugees, RI heard numerous allegations of unrestrained violence perpetrated against the civilian population by both parties to the conflict.

Guinea, ranked among the poorest countries of the world, has hosted large numbers of refugees for eight years. In the past two years, however, international assistance has been scaled back. For example, in December 1996, the World Food Program (WFP) switched from a distribution of food to the general population to a more restrictive approach targeting only the most vulnerable refugee population.

The UNHCR field team on the spot was already responsible for the maintenance of the existing caseload of refugees from Sierra Leone as well as the ongoing repatriation of Liberian refugees. It now faces the additional challenge of responding to this new wave of refugees from Sierra Leone. Without a significant, immediate increase in staff and resources, the UNHCR and its implementing partners will be overwhelmed by competing demands.

Refugees International recommends that:

- the Government of Sierra Leone accelerate the reconciliation process and begin negotiations with all political parties (AFRC and RUF included) to address the situation in the eastern part of the country;
- UNHCR send a special taskforce to manage the Sierra Leonean new arrivals situation so that this latest crisis doesn't undercut current efforts to facilitate the repatriation process;
- the Government of Sierra Leone quickly put in place a mechanism to hold perpetrators of crimes and violent acts against the civilian population accountable for their actions;
- WFP continue its food assistance during the rainy season (May to October) and enhance the quantities to the level advised by WHO.

Sierra Leonean refugee arrivals in Liberia

Beginning in February, as many as 1,800 Sierra Leonean refugees a day poured into the Vahun area of Liberia, adjacent to the eastern border of Sierra Leone. Although that number decreased by March, according to different estimates between 15,000 and 26,000 refugees (mainly women and children) have crossed the border into Liberia. At the outset, the condition of the refugees was good. This is expected to change, however, due to poor sanitation and the lack of clean drinking water. Male children between the ages of 7 to 15 are conspicuously absent among the refugee population, as are adult men in general. Refugees allege that junta forces pull male civilians out of groups attempting to cross the border. Security on the Liberian side of the border remains unstable, and the protection of refugees is a growing concern. UNHCR's implementing partners have proposed a plan to move the refugees further from the border. The most vulnerable could be transported immediately if enough trucks were available. Prompt action is vital, as the Vahun region is a remote area and the rainy season will render roads impassable.

Refugees International recommends that:

- the Sierra Leonean new arrivals be moved deeper into Liberia and further from the Sierra Leone border, to

- deny the junta the opportunity to militarize the refugee camps;
- a system of disarming the refugees be implemented by ECOMOG or other military authorities to avoid a replay of the eastern Zaire camps, where intimidators gained control;
- donor governments assign experienced individuals to the UNHCR to help monitor the situation as protection officers.

Repatriation to Liberia

Liberia has been devastated by a seven-year long civil war. Lofa County, bordering Sierra Leone and Guinea, has been especially heavily damaged, and 106,000 Liberian refugees are expected to return there. The landscape is a succession of ghost villages and scorched vehicles along the side of the road. There is hardly any infrastructure, and the roads are in terrible condition.

Three months ago, the government of Guinea closed its border with Liberia in response to security incidents, bringing a temporary halt to the repatriation of Liberian refugees. The border has just been reopened and the repatriation process is set to begin again. Meanwhile, inside Liberia, budget cuts have stalled the implementation of worthwhile community-based projects, which are critical to the success of the repatriation. Logistics problems further complicate the repatriation process. Out of 125 trucks donated by EU, 60 have been stuck at the port for three months awaiting parts from Europe needed to repair them.

There are also issues that must be addressed in the camps in Guinea. Refugees are promised seed and tools upon return to Liberia, but supplies have already been exhausted assisting the local population and a small number of spontaneous returnees. Many Liberian refugees hesitate to return, afraid of what might await them back home. Additionally current policy is to provide transportation for only the most vulnerable refugees and those whose homes are more than 25 kilometers from the border. Others must find a way on their own to transport their belongings and food rations.

The emergency situation of Sierra Leone has resulted in a shift of staff and funds from the repatriation operation, and a balance should be reestablished.

Refugees International recommends that:

- UNHCR arrange regular cross-border visits by refugees in Guinea so that they may judge for themselves whether it is safe to return to their home villages;
- UNHCR offer a small cash allowance to refugee returnees (not provided transport under current policy) to cover the cost of the trip home;
- donor governments earmark additional funds to quickly lease locally 50 more trucks in the Gueckedou area to assist in the repatriation of Liberian refugees; they could also be used to transport new arrivals from the border, and to deliver food and non-food items;
- EU provide an additional supply of seed and tools -- perhaps air-lifted to remote areas -- before the imminent rainy season;
- donor governments immediately respond to UNHCR's appeal for Liberia (the UNHCR has received only \$1.32 million of the \$38.2 million it sought) and ensure there is sufficient funding for road and bridge repair ahead of the rainy season, and for micro-development projects for returnees, IDPUs and locals.

Refugees International -- 2639 Conn. Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20008
Phone: 202-828-0110 Fax: 202-828-0819 www: <http://www.refintl.org>

Return to: [TOPI] [Home Page] [1996 documents]
Email: ReliefWeb@refintl.org

Kabbah to Eritrea



President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah has returned home to 'crisis country'. Sierra Leone remains in turmoil since the civil war that shattered the lives of thousands, bankrupted the economy and disrupted the foundations of good government. Our correspondents look at the tragedy as yet another African country struggles to recover from years of chaos.

The ousting of the AFRC junta by Nigerian ECOMOG troops has cleared the way for the return of ousted President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah from exile in the neighbouring Republic of Guinea — nine months after the coup that expelled him from power.

Preparations for his arrival were overseen by an eleven-man Task Force led by the Attorney General Solomon Berewa who promised to mount an in-depth investigation to bring AFRC RUF and suspected collaborators to book and take steps to prevent a recurrence of the events of the past nine months.

A Committee of Management was also set up under Nigerian ECOMOG Commander

JUSTICE



defence lines on the third day of the battle in the east end of the city and on the hills from the direction of Fourth Bay College, the Nigerians had a virtual walkover as they combed their way through the narrow winding streets of central Freetown, flushing out the remnants of the fighters of the Peoples Army.

Reports say life in the city is almost back to normal. A dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed soon after the city's capture by ECOMOG troops was relaxed to run from midnight to 6 am. The Lungi International Airport that served as ECOMOG's main base in the country has been reopened to commercial flights, according to ECOMOG Chief of Staff Brigadier-General Abdul One-Mohammed.

"ECOMOG has kicked out the militias and so there is no risk," he said. His statement was welcomed by aid agencies that had been frustrated by stringent and obstructive ECO-MOG procedures for the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

As part of the process of its mopping up of the city, ECOMOG had empowered the local police to search and recover looted properties from homes, parts and docks, and even on the high seas. Over 1,400 officials and alleged collaborators have been detained at Freetown's Pademba Road Prison, and at detention camps at Lungi and Jui, west of the city where Nigerian troops also have a base.

War in the bush

The sudden collapse of the AFRC/RUF resistance in Freetown could have been the result of a tactical decision to retreat into the countryside and take the war back into the provinces. This is probably true of the RUF for whom this could simply mean getting back to business as usual because, prior to the coup, their operations were largely confined to the countryside. If they were going to make a last stand then it would surely have to be on their own territory.

For this reason, once the capture and securing of Freetown and its environs had been completed, the Nigerians commenced the deployment of a large number of troops at strategic towns in the provinces.

The number of Nigerian troops has been estimated at around 12,000. During the fighting, extra troops were flown in from Nigeria, on one occasion 400 arrived from Kano. Others poured across with armoured cars, tanks and heavy artillery from the Ecomog base in Liberia into south-eastern Sierra Leone. More troops were dispatched from bases at Lungi and Jui to the cities of Bo in the south and Kenema in the east for a showdown with junta forces that had taken control there.

In addition Ecomog could count on President Kabbah's loyal Kamajors militia who were



Foreign Minister Shirley Chubama faces new problems

marshalling on the outskirts of both cities. They numbered altogether about 5,000.

The column of Nigerian troops from Liberia headed for the city of Kenema which is close to the diamond mining town of Tongo where, only a week or so before the all-out Nigerian offensive, fierce battles in which hundreds were killed and properties were destroyed had been fought between the local Kamajor militia and forces of the AFRC Peoples Army.

Kamajors v RUF

Junta forces were in control of most parts of the city although they were being fiercely confronted by the Kamajors. Scores of civilians were killed in the crossfire and tens of thousands fled to nearby bush and local towns.

ECOMOG troops, whose progress had been impeded by obstacles placed on the road by Kamajors to block the earlier advance of junta forces, finally arrived and captured the town the next day. The core of junta fighters had already left the town, which was left in ruins. One report said that as ECOMOG troops rolled into Kenema, thousands of citizens who had fled came out of hiding and walked behind the column.

In Bo, the country's second largest city, AFRC/RUF forces were vying for control with Kamajors who made several attempts to dislodge them. The situation became so desperate and confusing that the civilian population made plans for ECOMOG troops to come to their rescue. The fact was that nearly four days of bitter fighting had left the city in paralytic, with control changing from the Kamajors to junta forces and vice versa on at least three occasions. Even with the arrival of ECOMOG forces, the battle for Bo was fierce and lasted for more than two days. Eventually the Nigerians succeeded in securing total con-

General Maxwell Kibbe and Vice President De Alister Dumbo to run the affairs of the country until the return of Kabbah.

In a symbolic gesture before his return Kabbah visited Nigeria's leader General Sani Abacha in Abuja to express his gratitude to the Nigerian for restoring his government to power.

Fall of Freetown

The fall of Freetown came rather quickly, so the delight of its beleaguered and war-weary inhabitants and the shock relief of their Nigerian liberators who had expected stiffer resistance by the junta.

Once they had broken through the junta's

troop, beating the junta forces into a hasty retreat out of town.

For several days during and after the fighting, over 120 corpses lay festering in the streets with scavenging dogs feeding on them. Three commercial banks were looted. The telephone exchange and power station were also destroyed.

The defeated junta forces that had fanned out into the bush and towns nearby regrouped and launched two further attempts to retake the city but they were beaten back by the Nigerians.

In the aftermath of the fighting, Ecomog drew public and international attention to the potentially disastrous humanitarian situation facing the populations in both the southern and eastern regions. Food and medical supplies had either been exhausted or plundered.

The progressive deployment of Nigerian ECOMOG troops meant that as junta forces were being pushed from one town, they were able to regroup and attack towns and villages along their escape routes. One group was doing just that in towns in the North such as Lunsar, Kabbala and Port Loko.

Guinean troops in action

A Guinean contingent at Port Loko was accused by President Kabbah's supporters of being indifferent to AFRC's rampages in the region. In fact the Guineans were involved in clashes with junta forces and had even supervised the surrender of over 500 junta soldiers with their arms and ammunition.

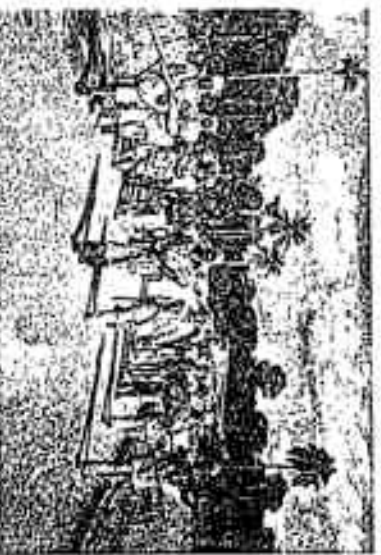
ECOMOG captured Lunsar without much fighting as junta forces had left the town after looting and destroying the hospital and the conference centre, which were rased to the ground.

The Nigerians then headed for the main northern city of Makeni where a large contingent of loyal AFRC/RUF forces, including key junta personnel, such as AFRC Chairman Johnny Paul Koroma, had taken refuge after setting control of the town. According to some reports, they then engaged in an orgy of looting and violence, forcing a mass exodus of the inhabitants. When the Nigerian troops arrived, there was a brief battle but most of the junta forces had by then left the town. They took away 25 Western hostages including nuns and priests, and aid workers including two MSF workers. They were released two weeks later following pleas from the Roman Catholic Bishop of Makeni Bishop George Biguzzi. A Dutch journalist, Teun Voeten, captured at the same time was still missing.

There had been some speculation that

Nigerian troops, unfamiliar with the Sierra Leonean terrain, might find it tough outside Freetown. Now it seems that their superior equipment, mobility and firepower especially from the air has made their task much easier than they could have expected.

But there are still bigger prizes to fight for, including the diamond mining Kono District which, with or without a rebel war, has always been a no-man's land and a hotbed of violence and intense rivalry between street wise gangs.



The Kamajors are still fighting in the bush

Finally, there is still the Kailahun District which ranks as the RUF's longest held territory. Although there has been no action there, the speed at which ECOMOG forces have been deployed in hot pursuit means that any time now, the guns will start roaring in this eastern corner of Sierra Leone.

In the last three weeks, thousands of RUF fighters have returned to the area, which is also the home of their largest base — Zogoda. Their second largest near Moyamba was overrun by the Kamajors some weeks ago.

The fall out from the AFRC's rout will be hard to assess until the dust settles. In the meantime certain issues will need to be addressed such as the return and rehabilitation of the latest batch of refugees that fled following the AFRC coup last year, and the plight of those recently, and even now being, displaced following the current bout of fighting.

Relations with Liberia whose President Charles Taylor was accused of being sympathetic to the junta remain strained and will need mending for the sake of peaceful coexistence between both countries.

The Liberians have accused Kabbah's Kamajors and dissident Liberian groups fighting alongside them of planning to disrupt the new peace enjoyed in their country. Taylor has threatened reprisals if any attempt is made to destabilise his country from Sierra Leone. In late February, Liberian troops were sent to the Sierra Leone border to prevent a possible

spillover. Relations with Guinea on the other hand remain extremely cordial.

For the moment, questions are being asked which will require answers. One disturbing development has been the inability of ECOMOG to pre-empt and forestall the revenge attacks and killings that have been taking place in Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Shk-en and other towns following their liberation from junta forces. Also, the sudden emergence of Issa (other than that approved by the UN Security Council) of persons named as collaborators of the AFRC, some of whom have been set upon by vengeful mobs, resulting in at least three deaths and the failure to publish the full list of those who have been detained by ECOMOG which would assure their families about their whereabouts and where responsibility for their safety or otherwise lies.

How long will the Nigerians stay?

But perhaps the most challenging of all the questions that will be asked is how long will Nigerian troops be staying in Sierra Leone? It has already been suggested that as long as it is necessary. If so, how will they be maintained and who will pay for it?

Even now questions are being asked about how ECOMOG's Nigerian "successful" expedition has been paid for and whether or how they intend to recoup their expenditure. Also, what kind of army will they be handing over to Kabbah? Would it be an entirely Kamajor-based army or would there be insistence on prior disarmament of all militias before recruitment into the new army can start?

And lastly, what indeed is there in it for General Sanj Abacha?

As for the political fallout, there is no doubt that President Kabbah has returned a far more ravaged political landscape than before the coup. He had problems then but now they have become bigger. Even more worrying for him is the likelihood that the fragile political alliances created by the enforced period of mutual accommodation between the various political parties during this crisis, will break up soon after the emphasis over his return has died down. It will then be interesting to see whether the democracy that has been restored flourishes to allow full-scale political debate and criticism of his government and its policies.

For now, Sierra Leoneans have to accept that in all but name they are again effectively under one-party state rule — this time backed by the military might of big brother — Nigeria.

MA

How the West won in Sierra Leone

The role of Nigeria's military government in securing the return to power of President Kabbah in Sierra Leone is obvious. Nigeria wanted to expand its hegemony in the region and demonstrate its leadership. But what is not so clear is that Nigeria had the backing of Britain and the US. They wanted to return Sierra Leone to their sphere of influence. Our special correspondent reveals a complex power struggle.

A West African diplomat assessing the significance of Nigeria's unilateral intervention in Sierra Leone to restore President Kabbah to power in the name of ECOMOG, made the curious comment that "they were quick to do their master's bidding."

The diplomat meant that the US had given the green light for Nigeria to move on the military junta in Sierra Leone. Without the material and moral support of the US and Britain, Nigeria would not have had the backbone to shoot its way into Freetown.

Western interests

Despite the appalling human rights record of the military establishment in Nigeria and the doubts the US and Britain express about Nigeria's willingness to return to constitutional rule, Britain and Nigeria backed by the US, have found common ground in their policies over Liberia and Sierra Leone.

It has been a remarkable coincidence of interests which ignored domestic politics in Nigeria and the fact that General Sani Abacha is generally considered to be an international outcast.

For Nigeria is not anyone's poodle. Nigeria stakes its national interest in the success of its operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone in order to break the international isolation which continues to hamper the political objectives of General Abacha. In Abacha's eagerness to seek international support or understanding for his democratisation programme, he has inversely isolated Nigeria from most of West Africa. He could not carry his colleagues with him in his pursuit of the military option in Sierra Leone in order to "restore democracy."

Abacha's gamble

The motives of Abacha have therefore been thought into question and it remains to be seen if he has scored the real victory he yearns for. But here, the adage that no one has any



Kemajors at Camp Sekatua

use for you after you have allowed yourself to be used may be apt.

It will be recalled that the decision to intervene in June 1997, as soon as the military ousted President Kabbah on 25 May 1997, nearly divided the military establishment in Nigeria. Those who advocated a military solution argued that it would get the US and Britain to change their stance on the domestic politics of Nigeria. They were wrong.

Yet still the victory in Sierra Leone may produce the same convulsive anger that eats at the vitals of every Nigerian since the soldiers started to interfere in the political and economic order.

Despite Nigeria's generosity with its oil and the provision of special credit facilities for its neighbours, it is still not accorded the leadership and dignity of office it feels it deserves in the region.

Even after its success in Sierra Leone, Nigeria is getting little international acclaim. It is this singular factor of benign neglect and the feeling of being used that could choke the Abacha regime should the expected pay-off not yield results domestically.

Nigeria's domestic interests

Nigeria's domestic interests of late have come to shape the politics of West Africa as represented by ECOMOG. As the US has sought to use the UN in its own national interest, Nigeria has almost succeeded in using ECOMOG as a tool for its national interest despite the

chagrin of Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso and Togo.

Vulnerable countries like Cameroon, Niger, Benin and The Gambia are alarmed at what appears to be a carte blanche for the military in Nigeria to do what it wants in the region just as it does with impunity at home.

It is this fear of Nigeria's sense of impunity that has worried Liberia despite a job well done there. Abacha shows ingratitude to Liberians when President Taylor asks ECOMOG to leave or transform itself into a capacity building machine.

Control of ECOMOG

It was the fear of the unintended consequences of the dominant role of Nigeria in the formation of ECOMOG that brokered the compromise role of Ghana to provide the field commander. After the capture from ECOMOG of Samuel Doe and his subsequent murder, Nigeria took over the role of ECOMOG field commander and thus the military leadership.

The political leadership was in the hands of Cote d'Ivoire and it later shifted to Benin and then Ghana between 1990 and 1995. Abacha seized power in late 1993 and by the middle of 1994 his consolidation process noticed the "international" importance of assuring supreme control of both the political and military leadership of ECOMOG in order to bring coherence in the mission of the ECOMOG Authority in Liberia. The US and Britain put their ambivalence over the military establishment in Nigeria aside and provided the backbone of moral and material support to this consolidated thrust.

Through the preventive diplomacy initiatives of former US president, Jimmy Carter and the former Special Envoy of International Alert, Akyaba Addai-Sebo, Abacha and Taylor met in Abuja in August 1995.

It was the smoking of the peace pipe between Abacha and Taylor that gave credence and vitality to the Abuja Accord and consolidated the entire Liberia peace process in the hands of Nigeria. It was this factor that gave the international reprieve Abacha needed for locking up Chief Moshood Abiola, the winner of "the fairest" democratic elections in Nigeria, and later for executing Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni leadership.

Here again, Liberia's misfortunes proved to be Abacha's fortune as his intervention in Liberia gave him a measure of international reprieve which inversely strengthened his

SORRY STORY OF SIERRA LEONE

1 August 1985: Siaka Stevens hands over to Maj-Gen Joseph Momoh

19 April 1992: Military coup by Captain Valentine Strasser

16 January 1996: Coup: Brig Julius Maada Bio ousts Strasser

29 March 1998: Ahmed Tejan Kabbah becomes president after elections

25 May 1997: Coup: Maj Johnny Koroma ousts Kabbah

14 February 1998: ECOMOG troops capture Freetown

10 March 1998: Kabbah is restored

hands domestically and his ability to act with impunity regardless of international opinion.

Anglophones v Francophones

Abacha's ability to shape foreign policy for domestic purposes was facilitated by the historic anglophone and francophone hegemonic divide and interest in the sub-region. The role of Core d'Ivoire in the peace process in Liberia was seen as an extension of French ambitions in West Africa because also of the alleged relations between the son of the late President Mitterrand and the then leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, Charles Taylor.

Britain, by way of Nigeria, helped the US not to lose its only direct sphere of influence in West Africa. The US returned this favour in the case of Sierra Leone where Britain needed US help, again by way of Nigeria, to destroy the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUF) and the diabolical army in order to remove the faintest possibility of Taylor's influence in Sierra Leone on behalf of France.

The political leadership of the Sierra Leone peace process fell into the lap of Core d'Ivoire again by a coincidence of interest between the then Head of State of Sierra Leone, Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio and the leader of the RUF Corporal Foday Sarfana Sankoh. Both leaders had come to suspect and mistrust the intentions of the US, Britain and Nigeria. Maada was dishevelled by what he saw as arrogant interference in the domestic affairs of Sierra Leone. Britain and the US insisted on "elections before peace" and added the moral authority of the Commonwealth and UN. The OAU sought to remain neutral here but not for long.

Foday Sankoh, a veteran of the Congo crisis saw how Lumumba and the Congo was destroyed by the British and the Americans even at the expense of the life of Dag Hammarskjöld, the then UN Secretary General. Foday Sankoh was also mistrustful of ECOMOG. AS under the thumb of the Nigerian military establishment.

It was this coincidence of interests that drew Core d'Ivoire to the centre stage of the Sierra Leone peace process. Nigeria had offered to host the talks but Freetown had yielded the option of the choice of a venue to the RUF.

The negotiation process was directed by Core d'Ivoire with support from the UN, OAU, Commonwealth and the International Alert, Ghana, Burkina Faso and especially Aler, Ghana. Britain felt left out. Britain was irritated by what it saw as an interference in its sphere of influence. When the OAU became accepted by Maada Bio and Foday Sankoh as a more neutral hand, it is alleged that the OAU Secretary General was asked to stand off by Britain and the US as in their opinion, the UN could not "play second fiddle" to the OAU.

This fact was reinforced by President Kabbah who accused both the OAU and International Alert of being too close to the RUF and elements within the Sierra Leonean army. Despite the clash of interests and the interplay of forces, a peace agreement was duly signed and named Abidjan Accord on 29 November 1996.

Use of mercenaries

The military establishment in Nigeria is alleged not to have been happy with the provision in the accord which effectively called for the removal of all foreign troops including the mercenary group, Executive Outcomes. Here it is important to note that Britain has consistently backed the hire and use of mercenaries in Sierra Leone and justified it by "extraordinary circumstances". British-reduced dogs of war, the Chumbas, Executive Outcomes and Sandline have all been engaged in Sierra Leone. And for the first time, the World Bank allowed President Kabbah to use some of its money to pay Executive Outcomes in 1996.

Interestingly, neither the UN nor the OAU nor the Commonwealth has criticised this practice of the hire and use of mercenaries in Sierra Leone. The stipulation by the Abidjan Accord for the removal of all foreign troops within a specific time frame was seen as directed at Nigeria and also to pave way for the eventual take over of Sierra Leone by the RUF in alliance with segments of the Sierra Leone army.

Leadership struggle in UN

The period leading to the signing of the Abidjan Accord was a turbulent one in the international community. The leadership struggle in the UN was in full swing. Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali's leadership was being challenged by the US against the perceived interests of France.

Coincidentally, key personalities in the Sierra Leone peace process were candidates to succeed Boutros-Ghali. Dr Salim Ahmed Salim, the OAU Secretary General, Amara Essy, the Foreign Minister of Core d'Ivoire and Ould Abdallah, the Chief Executive of the Global Coalition for Africa, who was also a trustee of International Alert, were all interested in the post of the UN Secretary-General and their names had been put forward along with that of Kofi Annan. Each candidate knew the strength of will of the US and Britain and the importance of winning their votes. This coincidence of interest also came to shape and dictate the pace and tempo of the peace process in Sierra Leone. The filling here was the two feet astride tactics of Salim who was also keen on getting a third term as the OAU Secretary General. Salim got President Kabbah to nominate him and also the support of Abacha.

At that juncture, the coincidence of interests had coalesced with the US and Britain using Nigeria and Guinea to sideline Core d'Ivoire as Sankoh, with himself to blame, got himself arrested and locked up in Nigeria at the pleasure of President Kabbah. At the same time a Guinean senior UN officer, Laminas Kouyate, had taken over as the Executive Secretary of ECOMOG based in Abuja, the Nigerian capital.

Meanwhile in Britain, the Conservative Party was on its way out but it was a continuation of policy as the Labour Party took over. In Sierra Leone, Britain had a perfect opportunity to restore to power the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP), the very organisation that Britain had groomed to rule Sierra Leone as the post colonial establishment party. The SLPP's dreams had been usurped by the upstarts of the All Peoples' Congress (APC). The irony here is that in Nigeria the north-erners were used by the system of indirect rule to dominate and control the south to date and in Sierra Leone the south has been helped out of their years in the political wilderness by the northern military oligarchy of Nigeria to restore the British order of things.

Britain's policy justification in Sierra Leone was anchored in the firm belief by both the politicians and civil servants that, "You do not appease terrorists and dictators." A military solution was therefore the preferred option in Sierra Leone.

ReliefWeb

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

Source: UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa (IRIN-WA)

Date: 21 Apr 1998

IRIN-WA Update 191 of Events in West Africa

UNITED NATIONS

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Integrated Regional Information Network
for West Africa

Tel: +225 21-73-54

Fax: +225 21-63-35

e-mail: irin-wa@africaonline.co.ci

IRIN-WA Update 191 of Events in West Africa, (Tuesday) 21 April 1998

SIERRA LEONE: UNHCR tells of ousted junta atrocities

At a press briefing in Geneva on Tuesday, UNHCR accused the ousted junta of committing atrocities against civilians in northeastern Sierra Leone. UNHCR spokesperson Judith Kunin said refugees arriving in Guinea reported terrible atrocities by the ousted Armed Force Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) against perceived enemies. The flow of refugees into Guinea was now estimated at between 300 to 1,000 arrivals per day, while tens of thousands were blocked at the border with nowhere to go. UNHCR and NGOs would be providing water and medicines, and launching a vaccination campaign. Some 20,000 Sierra Leonean refugees are currently living in three Guinean border villages - Forokoma, Kobikoro, Heremakono. UNHCR said many refugees were suffering from malaria, respiratory diseases, diarrhoea and malnutrition. It said the onset of the rainy season in May would hamper the relocation of Sierra Leonean refugees.

Of the 250,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea, 50,000 arrived since the beginning of this year, Reuters reported. 55,000 refugees arrived in Liberia over the same period.

Warnings of humanitarian crisis in east

Meanwhile, Reuters quoted aid workers in the eastern diamond town of Koidu as predicting a "big humanitarian situation" once the fighting subsided. A local humanitarian source told IRIN that only one international NGO had staff in Koidu and was trying to evacuate them. Another source said he had received eyewitness accounts confirming reports of "horrific" scenes of mutilations and killings by AFRC and RUF fighters. The NGO Merlin, in Freetown, told IRIN the situation in the Koidu area was unclear. It said malnutrition centres for children had expanded greatly in Kenema district hospital, which received many casualties from the Kallahun area. Another local source said between 130-150 war-wounded were receiving treatment at Kenema government hospital.

ECOMOG says Liberian fighters destabilising Sierra Leone

The Nigerian commander of the West African intervention force in Sierra Leone, ECOMOG, Maxwell Kobo, reiterated that factional fighters from neighbouring Liberia were embroiled in the Sierra Leone fighting, AFP reported on Tuesday. In a radio interview quoted by AFP, Kobo said there was "abundant evidence" of the involvement of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and ULIMO-K, a wing of the United Liberation Movement. However, Kobo stopped short of accusing Liberian President Charles Taylor and his government of supporting the remnants of the ousted junta. He called on the ousted junta to surrender.

NPFL and ULIMO-K were disbanded and transformed into political parties in 1997.

NIGERIA: Referendum to replace presidential polls

The Nigerian government on Monday announced it would cancel presidential elections slated for August 1998 and hold a referendum instead, news agencies reported. Wada Nas, special adviser to Nigerian leader General Sani Abacha, quoted by AP, said it would amount to "a waste of time and resources" to organise elections since the five political parties had endorsed Abacha as their presidential candidate. In the referendum to be held on 1 August, Nigerians would vote for or against Abacha.

International reaction

British Foreign Minister Tony Lloyd said it was difficult to see how an election in which only a single candidate was put forward by all five registered and government-sponsored parties could be judged "free, fair and inclusive", the BBC reported. US State Department spokesman James Rubin accused the Nigerian government of manipulating the transition to democracy to secure Abacha's nomination. Rubin called on "Abacha to live up to his promise to his fellow Nigerians and the entire world and to refuse the nomination." He added that the US would continue to encourage reform and democratic principles in Nigeria.

Nigerian opposition calls for mass action

The chairman of the main opposition movement, the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), Abraham Adesanya, called on Nigerians to defy Abacha's administration and force him to quit power. AFP reported on Tuesday. Speaking at a press conference in Lagos, Adesanya said the political parties which had endorsed Abacha as their consensus presidential candidate had shown "an unacceptable misuse of state powers, resources and influence" and used "crude manipulation" to enforce a "wicked and pernicious agenda" on Nigeria. Adesanya called on Nigerians to resist through organised civil, constitutional and democratic options ranging from "work stoppage" to "sit-at-home" protest, market closures and rallies. He did not rule out legal action by NADECO and other pro-democracy groups to challenge the adoption of Abacha as the sole candidate in the poll.

The United Action for Democracy (UAD), a coalition of 26 pro-democracy groups, called on Monday for "mass action".

23/06
T

Stocks fall

Meanwhile, the Nigerian bourse index fell sharply on Monday as investors took a dim view of Abacha's endorsement as the sole presidential candidate, Reuters reported. According to the report, analysts said the development meant an extension to Nigeria's lingering political crisis and warned that possible sanctions by Western countries unhappy at the lack of democracy could hurt investment prospects.

Coup trial verdict postponed to next week

The Nigerian defence ministry on Monday announced that the special military tribunal trying Abacha's former deputy, General Oladipo Diya, and 25 others on treason charges, would announce its verdict on 28 April at its closing session, according to news agencies. An initial date of 22 April had been announced earlier. State radio also announced 10-soldiers and six civilians, whose names were not on the original charge sheet and whose trial had not been announced, had been cleared of charges. They were expected to report immediately for duty.

Tension high in north

The BBC reported that at least one man was shot dead on Sunday during protests in the northern city of Kaduna by supporters of a jailed Shia Muslim preacher, Sheikh Ibrahim Zak-Zaky. Parts of the city were cordoned off by security forces and there were reports of further clashes. According to a police spokesman, one man was killed when demonstrators were protesting against the arrest of the Sheikh's wife and children on Friday. A spokesman for the protesters said five people were killed. There have been frequent protests against delays in the trial of the preacher, who was arrested in September 1996.

NIGER: Three opposition leaders arrested

The government of Niger on Monday announced that three regional opposition leaders were arrested after a weekend of political violence, according to news organisations. Addressing a news conference, Minister of Interior Souley Abdoulaye said security forces were hunting four other opposition figures after protesters demanded the resignation of Nigerian President Ibrahim Bare Mainassara. He told reporters the government refused to be dragged into a "cycle of permanent agitation", according to Reuters. Abdoulaye said those arrested would stand trial on charges of inciting violence, assault, arson and damaging public and private property.

In a related development, unidentified individuals fired on the home of Ali Sabo, a leading member of the opposition Mouvement national pour la société de développement (MNSD) in the capital, Niamey. AFP reported on Tuesday. An opposition statement said Sabo's car was damaged but there were no casualties.

Meanwhile, a local human rights NGO, the Association du Niger pour la défense des droits de l'homme, denounced acts of violence by opposition activists. Reuters reported on Monday. The NGO called for an inquiry.

CHAD: US Peace Corps withdraws from country

The United States on Monday withdrew all 34 Peace Corps volunteers from Chad because of violence and civil unrest, a Peace Corps statement said. It announced it was "suspending" its programme in Chad and many of the volunteers were now in Cameroon pending redeployment. Peace Corps Director Mark Gearan said no volunteers had been injured but the clashes between the army and rebel forces were a reason for "concern".

LIBERIA: Reconciliation and investment essential for recovery

Reconciliation and Liberia's economic recovery were at the centre of discussions on Sunday hosted by Reverend Jesse Jackson's Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, in Chicago, according to USIS. Liberian Finance Minister Elias Sateby said private investors were "desperately needed" because the country was not "creditworthy" in the international market. The conference attracted high-ranking US officials, including Susan Rice, US assistant secretary of state for Africa, who said the US was ready to assist but it was ultimately up to Liberians to rebuild the country.

Liberia's first lady, Jewel Howard Taylor, pledged her husband's commitment to supporting peace and human rights. The American movement, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, sponsored the two-day conference.

Abidjan, 21 April 1998, 19:15 gmt

[ends]

[The material contained in this communication comes to you via IRIN West Africa, a UN humanitarian information unit, but may not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its agencies. UN IRIN-WA Tel: +225 21 73 66 Fax: +225 21 63 35 e-mail: irin-wa@africaonline.co.ci for more information or subscription. If you re-print, copy, archive or re-post this report, please retain this credit and disclaimer. Quotations or extracts should include attribution to the original sources. IRIN reports are archived on the Web at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/> or can be retrieved automatically by sending e-mail to archive@dha.unon.org. Mailing list: irin-wa-updates]

Return to: [TOP] [Home Page] [1996 documents]

Email ReliefWeb at: comments@reliefweb.int

10

11

12

13

14

15

16

17

18

19

20

21



ReliefWeb

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

Source: UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa (IRIN-WA)

Date: 22 Apr 1998

IRIN-WA Update 192 of Events in West Africa

UNITED NATIONS

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Integrated Regional Information Network
for West Africa

Tel: +225 21-73-54

Fax: +225 21-63-35

e-mail: irin-wa@africaonline.co.ci

IRIN-WA Update 192 of Events in West Africa, (Wednesday) 22 April 1998

SIERRA LEONE: 23 charged with treason, accounts frozen

Twenty-three more people were charged with treason Tuesday for allegedly collaborating with the former military government, news organisations reported. The new indictments bring to 59 the number of defendants facing treason charges. Treason is punishable by death.

In another development, Attorney General Solomon Berewa Tuesday ordered banks to freeze the accounts of 93 people, mainly businessmen, the media reported. The list includes Lebanese, Indian, western and African nationals as well as Sierra Leoneans who allegedly collaborated with the junta. Quoting bank sources, Reuters said the sums frozen amounted to millions of US dollars. The agency noted that over 20 foreign nationals had already been expelled for collaboration and defrauding the state.

Retrained soldiers jailed for atrocities

Some 250 Sierra Leonean soldiers, "retrained" to help fight remnants of the ousted junta, have been jailed after civilians accused them of atrocities, AFP reported Wednesday, quoting ECOMOG chief Colonel Maxwell Kibo. As the soldiers passed through the southern city of Bo last week, angry citizens claimed they had murdered, raped and maimed residents during the nine months of army rule, Kibo said. Those now detained in Freetown were among a first batch of former soldiers who had been deployed alongside the ECOMOG intervention force after surrendering to it when it ousted the junta from the capital in February.

SENEGAL: Eleven die in Casamance clash

Ten rebels of the Mouvement des Forces Democratiques de Casamance (MFDC) and one government soldier were killed Tuesday in a clash in Senegal's troubled southern province, AFP reported. The clash took place in the village of Sanoun, some 70 km east of Ziguinchor, following a rebel attack. AFP added the situation in the southern province has been confused since MFDC leader Augustin Diamacoune launched a new peace appeal in early January, because hardliners in his movement are increasingly opposed to any talks with the Dakar government. Fighting has diminished in the region, but armed attacks by separatists or bandits have been frequent against villagers and travellers, the report said.

Rebel warning over election

Also Tuesday, MFDC spokesman Mamadou N'Krumah Sane told AFP the rebel movement "was not and would never be concerned" by Senegal's forthcoming general election. Those Casamance people willing to cast their vote on 24 May would be free to do so, but MFDC forces would stand up against the Senegalese army if the latter tried to force people into voting, the spokesman warned.

IMF grants US\$ 144 million facility

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) Tuesday approved a US\$ 144 million, three-year loan to help Senegal carry out economic reform, news agencies reported. The loan, the second such to Senegal, is offered under the Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF) of concessionary credits to developing countries. The programme includes raising educational standards and assumes growth rates of 5.3 per cent in 1998, to 6.5 per cent in 1999 and 6.0 per cent in 2000. The IMF said Senegal's economy remained impeded by deep-seated structural rigidities, was vulnerable

to external shocks, and continued to experience widespread poverty.

LIBERIA: New Health Minister

Liberian President Charles Taylor Tuesday appointed the nation's former chief physician, Dr Peter Coleman, as minister of Health and Social Welfare, PANA reported. Coleman will be replacing Fahn-boah Dakinah, an opposition politician who will now co-chair a newly created presidential task force for the productive engagement of manpower. The 15-member task force was set up by Taylor on Monday to "ensure the development of multiple work opportunities at the community level and the implementation of sustainable income-generating turn-key projects." It is headed by the director of the cabinet, Blamo Nelson.

Star Radio quoted Taylor as saying the US\$ one million of a three million Taiwanese grant the government has already received for ex-combatants would be used for agriculture, health and education programmes supervised by the task force. Ex-combatants will repair schools and clinics and participate in agricultural and public works programmes, said Taylor.

Controversy over Rights Commissioner

Police Director Joseph Tate Tuesday failed to appear before the National Human Rights Commission over allegations he ordered the flogging of a member of the commission, Star Radio reported. Kromah Bryemah said he was arrested, beaten and detained by police on Tate's orders as he tried to by-pass an accident scene Sunday evening in Monrovia. The Commission described the assault as unlawful and a breach of rights. Police spokesman Singbe Johnson denied the assault and said Bryemah had only been invited for questioning for excessive speed. The radio said Bryemah was to appear in court on charges of failing to comply with police instructions, reckless driving, and driving without a license.

WEST AFRICA: Drugs meeting in Nigeria

The heads of drugs law enforcement agencies from throughout Africa are holding a four-day conference in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, to discuss ways to combat drug trafficking, the BBC reported Tuesday. Money laundering is one of the biggest problems under consideration by the delegates, who targeted bankers and lawyers to assume greater responsibility in preventing the movement of illegal funds. According to the BBC, Nigerian trafficking organisations alone control an estimated 50 per cent of all the illegal heroin in the world.

NIGERIA: AI concerns on arrest of detainees' relatives

Nine women and 16 children arrested in northern Nigeria, could suffer ill-treatment in detention because of their relationship to four political prisoners, London-based human rights NGO Amnesty International (AI) said Tuesday. The women and children were arrested on 19 April 1998 and detained without any reason given. They include Zenab Ibrahim, wife of the jailed Shia Muslim preacher, Ibrahim Zak-Zaky. Zak-Zaky is a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist opposition group in northern Nigeria, and is currently on trial with three others in Kaduna on charges of inciting public disaffection and sedition. Their trial, which started in October 1997, has been repeatedly adjourned, AI added.

At least one person was killed Sunday in Kaduna in protests against the arrests of the women and children, the BBC reported.

Fresh raid on publisher

Forty-six heavily armed State Security Service (SSS) agents on Monday stormed offices of 'The News' and 'Tempo' magazines and the daily 'P.M. News' in Ikeja-Lagos state, the New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) said. The agents arrested senior writer Austin Ugawwa and senior project writer B. Osoba. Ten other employees were also arrested. None has been released. According to the report, the agents had a list of senior editorial staff earmarked for arrest but none of them were on the premises at the time of the raid.

The SSS agents also went to the premises of the company's printers in Ikeja, where they stopped the printing of Monday's edition of 'P.M. News'.

EQUATORIAL GUINEA: Over 200 arrested

More than 200 opposition activists were arrested in a police crackdown in mainland Equatorial Guinea, AFP quoted an opposition spokesman as telling Spanish external radio Tuesday. Popular Union (UP) spokesman Baltasar Abaga said the arrests last week, in the areas of Nsork-Nsomo, Micomiseng, and Anisork, followed their refusal to join forces with the ruling Democratic Party of Equatorial Guinea (PDGE). Abaga said police were also harassing

fishermen in Malabo by attacking them and extorting money during ship inspections.

UN Commission calls over human rights

The UN Commission on Human Rights Tuesday called for continuing and expanded efforts to protect human rights in Equatorial Guinea. In a resolution, the commission encouraged the Malabo government to pursue efforts to integrate women into the process of socio-economic, cultural and political development. The commission also called upon the government to take appropriate measures to avoid any form of discrimination against ethnic groups, and encouraged it to take necessary measures to avoid acts of torture.

BENIN: Amnesty law founders again

For the second time the Constitutional Court Wednesday rejected a law to amnesty people convicted of politically-motivated crimes under former president Nicéphore Soglo, AFP reported. The court reprimanded the parliament for having violated a procedural rule. The original amnesty law was promulgated in September 1997 by President Mathieu Kérékou, then rejected by the court on procedural grounds. AFP said more than 30 people would have benefited from the amnesty, mostly soldiers from the north of the country, now all out of jail.

CHAD: Students on strike over grants

N'Djamena university's 2,000 students Wednesday went on strike over six months' grant arrears, AFP reported. They occupied the university compound and said they would remain on strike until authorities met their demands.

Abidjan, 22 April 1998, 18:45 gmt

[ends]

[The material contained in this communication comes to you via IRIN West Africa, a UN humanitarian information unit, but may not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its agencies. UN IRIN-WA Tel: +225 21 73 66 Fax: +225 21 63 35 e-mail: irin-wa@africaonline.co.ci for more information or subscription. If you re-print, copy, archive or re-post this report, please retain this credit and disclaimer. Quotations or extracts should include attribution to the original sources. IRIN reports are archived on the Web at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/> or can be retrieved automatically by sending e-mail to archive@dha.unon.org. Mailing list: irin-wa-updates]

Return to: [TOP] [Home Page] [1996 documents]
 Email ReliefWeb at: comments@reliefweb.int

ReliefWeb

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

Source: UN OCHA Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa (IRIN-WA)

Date: 23 Apr 1998

IRIN-WA Update 193 of Events in West Africa

UNITED NATIONS

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
Integrated Regional Information Network
for West Africa

Tel: +225 21-73-54

Fax: +225 21-63-35

e-mail: irin-wa@africaonline.co.ci

IRIN-WA Update 193 of Events in West Africa. (Thursday) 23 April 1998

NIGERIA: Boycott call, warnings ahead of poll

Ahead of Saturday's national assembly polls, Nigeria's opposition coalition Thursday called for a boycott while authorities deployed thousands of riot police, AFP reported. The United Action for Democracy (UAD) called for a "massive boycott" of the parliamentary polls as participation could only help Nigerian military ruler Sani Abacha carry out his plan to become president. By endorsing Abacha as sole candidate for August's presidential poll, the five registered parties and Abacha "had declared war on the Nigerian people", the UAD said. It would disclose its action plan within the forthcoming week, it added.

Meanwhile 18,542 policemen and civil servants Wednesday were deployed inside and outside polling stations throughout the country in an effort to guarantee a smooth and orderly vote, AFP added. According to media reports quoted by the agency, police said they were informed of plans by unidentified politicians and opponents to the government to cause trouble on election day. These would not be tolerated, the police pledged. AFP said the police had issued a severe warning to those planning a civil disobedience campaign against Abacha's presidential candidacy. AFP noted that Mohammad Dikko Yusufu, former head of police under General Olusegun Obasanjo, was reported as saying earlier this week he was ready to mobilise people, including civil servants and trade union members, in favour of civil disobedience in protest over Abacha's candidacy. A police spokesman branded Yusufu's remarks as "vacuous boasting" and warned he might be arrested if he carried out his threats, AFP added.

Lagos blast kills three

An explosion Wednesday in Nigeria's main commercial city, Lagos, left at least three people dead, the BBC reported. Eyewitnesses said many more people were injured in the evening blast in Ebute-Meta, a busy district usually crowded with street vendors and the scene of recent anti-government demonstrations. Police have cordoned off the area and are investigating the cause of the explosion, the BBC added.

SIERRA LEONE: Government slaps ban on war reports

The government has introduced military censorship on reporting on the war in the east of the country unless the stories are cleared by the ECOMOG press officer, the BBC reported. The ban announced by Information Minister Julius Spencer followed reports of the flying home of 20 bodies of Nigerian ECOMOG soldiers. Spencer said censorship was quite normal in a country at war.

According to Star Radio in Monrovia, the government accused the press of being unpatriotic with the casualty reports. The radio added a few reporters were briefly detained and released with warning.

EU to help fight corruption

The European Union (EU) will provide Sierra Leone with financial experts to fill key government positions and help fight rampant corruption, AFP quoted Finance Minister James Jonah as saying Thursday. An EU technical assistance team is due in Freetown soon "to help set up a sound fiscal management," he added. "The stench of corruption has spread across all levels of the fabric of society, and a maximum effort must now be made to tackle it," Jonah told reporters. As part of a "radical reform exercise" the EU is to provide an accountant general and a financial secretary, Jonah said. Both posts were previously held by Sierra Leoneans. Jonah said he advocated setting up independent authorities to monitor internal revenue and customs and excise.

AFP also quoted Jonah as saying the World Bank was to send a team to assess the "enormous damage" to industries, infrastructure and businesses during the nine months the junta was in power. During last May's coup, both the Treasury and the central bank were burnt down, destroying huge quantities of payroll accounts and other vital documents. Prior to the seizure of power by the military junta, there was enough evidence that the civilian government was making appreciable progress in meeting the provisions set by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Jonah said. Jonah also admitted that the Ministry of Finance, Development and Economic Planning was overstuffed, especially in the accounts department which has over 400 employees, and predicted that job cuts would soon be made.

LIBERIA: Taylor orders probe over Rights Commissioner

President Charles Taylor Tuesday ordered an investigation into allegations that a member of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) had been beaten, *Star Radio* reported. Taylor's National Security Advisor Charles Desfield will head the probe and shall report within 10 days. Acting Information Minister J. Milton Teahjay said government would not relent in investigating and punishing any human rights violation proven by law. He promised Taylor would take the necessary action consistent with international protocols on human rights following the investigation. NHRC member Kromah Bryemah said he was beaten by police. He accused Police Director Joe Talle of ordering the beating without an investigation, but police denied the claims.

NIGER: Student violence over arrears

A dozen people were wounded Wednesday in Niamey as student protests over grant arrears became violent, news organisations reported. The BBC said police used tear gas to disperse the protesters, who set fire to cars and attempted to block roads. According to Reuters, students set a bus on fire, although it was not clear whether any of the wounded were linked to this incident. The protesters are demanding the payment of some 20 months' grant arrears and the re-opening of the university campus, which was closed after violence on 27 February. High school and college students on Wednesday gave the government 24 hours to resolve the arrears problem or extend the academic year because of frequent course disruptions during a prolonged crisis, student leaders said.

Government denies attacking opponent

The government Wednesday denied being behind a gun attack on the home of opposition leader Ali Sabo, the BBC reported. Interior Minister Souley Abdoulaye challenged the opposition coalition, the *Front pour la restauration et la defense de la democratie* (FRDD), to produce evidence to support its allegations of government involvement. He said the authorities were investigating Tuesday's incident in which unidentified gunmen fired on Sabo's house in Niamey. Sabo was not injured.

IMF loans US\$ 110 million

Meanwhile, Finance Minister Ide Gnandou Thursday said the country was about to receive a 7.5 billion CFA Francs (US\$ 110 million) loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), AFP reported. The release was conditional on Niger meeting the performance standards laid out in a 1996 Enhanced Structural Adjustment Facility (ESAF).

WEST AFRICA: Benin, Senegal denied debt relief

Benin and Senegal will not benefit from the World Bank's debt relief initiative for Heavily Indebted Poor countries (HIPC), PANA news agency reported Wednesday. Axel van Trotsenburg, head of the bank's HIPC implementation team, told reporters the existing debt relief mechanisms can deal with the two countries' debt burdens. Debt relief under the initiative is restricted to countries that are eligible to borrow from the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's soft-loan facility, and have a track record of sustained economic reform. Eligible countries must also have unsustainable debt burdens even after traditional debt relief mechanisms are applied. Unsustainability of a country's debt is assessed on the basis of its debt level compared to export earnings. Van Trotsenburg said Benin and Senegal will benefit from debt relief from the Paris Club of official creditors. Already, Senegal, with the help of the World Bank, has benefited from a commercial debt buy-back amounting to US\$ 100 million. He said the bank is currently working on debt sustainability analysis for Mauritania and Togo, with Chad expected to come on the line later in the year.

Burkina Faso defends water, energy policies

Burkina Faso Tuesday denied the construction of dams in the country had contributed to the low level of water in Ghana's Akosombo dam, Ghanaian Joy FM Online reported. In a statement issued by its embassy in Accra, the Burkina Faso government said the cause was rather the low level of rainfall in the sub-region over the last two decades, and 1997 in particular, when exceptionally low rainfall figures were recorded. The government said it had complied

with the principles of international law on the management of common resources in the construction of all the dams. This was why international donors had committed themselves to financing these projects. The statement stressed the need to promote a co-ordinated tapping of resources in the sub-region and the formation of an Inter-State Commission, as proposed by the Burkinabes, to ensure integrated management of water resources in the Volta basin.

Abidjan, 23 April 1998, 17:30 gmt

[ends]

[The material contained in this communication comes to you via IRIN West Africa, a UN humanitarian information unit, but may not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its agencies. UN IRIN-WA Tel: +225 21 73 66 Fax: +225 21 63 35 e-mail: irin-wa@africaonline.co.ci for more information or subscription. If you re-print, copy, archive or re-post this report, please retain this credit and disclaimer. Quotations or extracts should include attribution to the original sources. IRIN reports are archived on the Web at: <http://www.reliefweb.int/> or can be retrieved automatically by sending e-mail to archive@dha.unna.org. Mailing list: irin-wa-updates]

Return to: [TOP] [Home Page] [1996 documents]
Email ReliefWeb at: comments@reliefweb.int

S/1998/249

18 March 1998

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

FOURTH REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL ON THE SITUATION

IN SIERRA LEONE

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to the presidential statement issued by the Security Council on 26 February 1998 (S/PRST/1998/5), by which the Council requested me to submit detailed proposals concerning the role of the United Nations and its future presence in Sierra Leone. It covers the developments in Sierra Leone since the issuance of my third report on 5 February 1998 (S/1998/103).

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1132 (1997)

Action taken by the Economic Community of West African States and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group

2. On 5 February 1998, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Committee of Five on Sierra Leone came to New York to brief the members of the Security Council and myself on the situation in Sierra Leone. The Chairman of the Committee of Five, the Foreign Minister of Nigeria, Chief Tom Ikimi, said an impasse had been reached in the implementation of the Conakry Agreement. He pointed out that the junta had raised three issues which, in his view, stood in the way of the implementation of the Agreement, namely, the release of Corporal Foday Sankoh, the proposed exemption of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces from the disarmament process and the composition of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) which consisted primarily of Nigerian troops.

3. Minister Ikimi noted that because of this impasse, ECOMOG had been unable to deploy in Sierra Leone to carry out the disarmament and demobilization of the Sierra Leonean combatants, and it had therefore not been possible to deploy United Nations military observers alongside ECOMOG.

4. Minister Ikimi requested my support in launching a high-level effort to support ECOWAS through the establishment of a group of friends of Sierra Leone, and expressed the view that the Security Council should endorse the 22 April 1998 deadline for the restoration of constitutional authority and the full implementation of the Conakry Agreement of 23 October 1997.

5. I reaffirmed to the Committee of Five the desire of the United Nations for close cooperation between the United Nations and ECOWAS, and stated that ECOMOG needed to develop a concept of operations on the basis of which the United Nations could finalize its own deployment plan. ECOMOG should also compile a statement of its own logistical requirements in order to attract the necessary support from potential donors.

6. On the same day, responding to an attack by junta forces on their position at Lungi, ECOMOG launched a military attack on the junta, which culminated approximately one week later in the collapse of the junta and its expulsion by force from Freetown after heavy fighting. The fall of the city on 13 February, which was accompanied by widespread looting and some reprisal killings, led to the flight or capture of many soldiers and leaders of the junta. ECOWAS has assured me that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been allowed to visit prisoners detained by ECOMOG in Freetown. However, some of the former leaders of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), including its Chairman, Johnny Paul Koroma, are believed to be still at large. Acting in concert with the local Kamajors and other traditional hunter militia (known as the Civil Defence Unit), ECOMOG has subsequently taken control of the towns of Bo, Kenema and Zimmi in the south of the country, and Lunsar, Makeni and Kabala in the north. ECOMOG has also reported the capture of Daru, which would mean that the remnants of the junta have now been dislodged from every major town except for Kailahun. Following scattered fighting in the latter part of February, the country now appears to be quiet. A number of foreign aid workers and missionaries taken hostage by armed elements in February were later released unharmed. However, press reports in mid-March indicated that Revolutionary United Front (RUF) members in Kono had murdered civilians and taken 200 hostages, reportedly including foreign nationals.

7. On 18 February, accompanied by the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, Mr. Lansana Kouyaté, Minister Ikimi visited Sierra Leone to assess the situation on the ground. They interviewed some former junta soldiers now detained by ECOMOG and visited the State House complex and the Parliament buildings. Many of the government buildings

were found to have been looted and were in poor condition, and a number of unexploded bombs were scattered about. However, the ECOWAS team, which was enthusiastically greeted by crowds, found that in many respects life had returned to normal in the capital. As noted below, my Special Envoy also visited Freetown on the same day.

8. From 25 to 27 February 1998, the Committee of Five met in the margins of the meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) Council of Ministers held in Addis Ababa to review the situation in Sierra Leone. The Committee issued a communiqué, which was subsequently circulated as document S/1998/170.

9. On 4 March 1998, the members of the Committee of Five returned to New York and met again with members of the Security Council and with me. Chief Ikimi briefed me on his visit to Freetown on 18 February and his subsequent meeting with President Tejan Kabbah in Conakry. Following this meeting, it was announced that President Kabbah would return to his country on 10 March 1998.

10. ECOMOG has also prepared a detailed list of logistical requirements for its operations in Sierra Leone. During the visit to New York of the Committee of Five, Chief Ikimi requested the assistance of the United Nations and the international community in ensuring that these requirements could be met. That request was reaffirmed by the Chairman of ECOWAS, General Sani Abacha, in his statement at the ceremony held to mark the return of President Kabbah to Freetown on 10 March.

Action taken by the United Nations

11. On 18 February 1998, a few days after ECOMOG had established control over most of the city of Freetown, my Special Envoy, Mr. Francis G. Okelo, led a security and humanitarian assessment mission to the capital and to Lungi comprising United Nations and non-governmental organization officials. The mission determined the most immediate needs of the population. Mr. Okelo handed over a quantity of medicines donated by the World Health Organization (WHO) to local hospitals and began preparations for the re-establishment of a United Nations presence in Freetown. A few days later, the World Food Programme (WFP) delivered 857 metric tons of food to Freetown by ship.

12. Early in February, pursuant to a request by members of the Security Council for a technical assessment of the humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone since the ~~comp~~ *comp* *détail* of 25 May 1997, an inter-agency mission travelled to the subregion. Its report is contained in document S/1998/155. Further information on the humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone can be found in section III of the present report.

13. Pursuant to the statement issued by the President of the Security Council on 26 February, I have initiated the necessary action to establish a Trust Fund for Sierra Leone. Contributions would help finance logistical assistance to ECOMOG, rehabilitation assistance to the Government of Sierra Leone and activities, including disarmament, demobilization and human rights.

14. On 7 March 1998, my Special Envoy reopened the United Nations office in Freetown, which had been closed shortly after the 25 May 1997 ~~comp~~ *comp* *détail* and was temporarily relocated in Conakry, Guinea. The office is now being strengthened to comprise civilian political and humanitarian officers, a military adviser and, in due course, human rights and civilian police advisers and public information personnel. The function of the office is to liaise with the Government of Sierra Leone, ECOWAS, ECOMOG and the United Nations and its agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, and to act as the overall authority for all United Nations activities in the country. My proposals for deploying military liaison personnel as part of the United Nations presence on the ground can be found in section IV of the present report. My Special Envoy will also temporarily retain a small office in Conakry, but he expects to be fully established in Freetown by the end of March, thus paving the way for the return of all United Nations agencies to Sierra Leone.

Action taken by the Government of Sierra Leone

15. On 13 February 1998, President Kabbah called a meeting in Conakry of potential donors, including the European Union, Germany, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United Nations, to discuss his Government's priorities; the nature of the assistance the international community could provide; and the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance. The President announced that he had created a task force to prepare the ground for the resumption of work by his Government, to assess damage to the infrastructure and to prepare for the resumption of education. President Kabbah identified the immediate priorities of his Government as the provision of humanitarian supplies and petroleum products, the reactivation of international aid programmes and the disarmament and demobilization of former combatants. Three other areas that required special attention have been identified as the training and restructuring of the police force, the creation of job opportunities for young people and the construction of low-cost housing. President Kabbah also indicated that he intended to streamline his administration and appoint technical experts to cabinet positions.

16. Following the removal by ECOMOG of the military junta from power, President Kabbah issued a statement announcing his intention to submit proposals to Parliament concerning the rebuilding of his country. The President also spoke out against the reprisal killings, which, in some cases, had accompanied the seizure of control from the junta.

17. On 10 March 1998, accompanied by General Sani Abacha, Chairman of ECOWAS and Head of State of Nigeria, as well as the Heads of State of Guinea, Mali and Niger, President Lansana Conté, President Alpha Oumar Konaré and President Ibrahim Bare Maïnassara, and the Vice-President of Gambia, President Tejan Kabbah returned to Freetown to resume his office as Head of State of Sierra Leone. He was greeted by large and enthusiastic crowds. Mr. Ibrahim Fall, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, delivered on my behalf a message of congratulations to the President stating that his return represented the accomplishment of a major objective not only of the people of Sierra Leone, but also of ECOWAS, OAU, the United Nations and the entire international community. I expressed my deep regret at the violence, loss of life and property and immense suffering undergone by the people of Sierra Leone since the coup d'état and extended my condolences to the families of those who lost their lives in opposing it. Furthermore, I informed the President that the United Nations looked forward to working closely with him in helping his Government to reassert its authority and strengthen its capacity throughout the country.

18. In a statement made at the ceremony marking his return to Sierra Leone, President Kabbah declared his intention to embark on the process of national reconciliation and reconstruction of the country, to form a broad-based Government and to appoint a policy advisory committee. In his first meeting with my Special Envoy after his return, President Kabbah stressed the need for an early deployment of United Nations military personnel, the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance and the prompt establishment of the Trust Fund for Sierra Leone.

Military and security situation in Sierra Leone

19. Freetown is now fully under the control of ECOMOG and is increasingly secure. Some unexploded ordnance and landmines have been found, but these are not a threat to security. The peninsula on which the capital stands has also been secured. With the capture of almost every other major town in the country, and through its deployment further into the countryside in the north, south and east, ECOMOG has established itself successfully across most of the country.

20. Nevertheless, the fact that many of the senior junta leaders, including the former Chairman of the AFRC, Johnny Paul Koroma, have not thus far been apprehended, as well as the continuing violence inflicted on civilians during their retreat from ECOMOG forces by RUF and other armed elements, indicate that the security situation in Sierra Leone is still a source of concern. Though ECOMOG has begun to collect weapons in Freetown, a major disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exercise will be needed to ensure security.

21. ECOMOG has also developed a concept of operations for its deployment throughout Sierra Leone that sets out the preliminary planning for the disarmament and demobilization of Sierra Leonean combatants. In summary, the tasks ECOMOG has set for itself include:

- (a) Deployment throughout Sierra Leone;
- (b) Manning of selected entry points by land, sea or air in order to ensure that no arms, ammunition or war matériel are brought into the country;
- (c) Disarmament of ex-combatants at designated sites;
- (d) Establishment of road blocks to check the movement of arms and ammunition and to assist in extending protection to refugees and internally displaced persons;
- (e) Conducting patrols to create an atmosphere conducive to freedom of movement and the restoration of established authority;
- (f) Providing security for key individuals, United Nations personnel, including military personnel, and non-governmental organizations.

22. The plan calls for the deployment of 15,000 troops in four sectors: western, northern, southern and eastern. The western sector, comprising Freetown and the airports of Lungi and Hastings, is further subdivided, and would support the deployment of seven battalions, an air force detachment and an artillery brigade. This appears to be an ample level of force for the protection of the capital and its airport.

23. In the northern sector, ECOMOG would deploy a brigade headquartered at Makeni, with battalions located at Port Loko, Magburaka and Kabala. In the south, ECOMOG will locate its brigade headquarters at Bo and deploy

battalions at Moyamba, Pujehun and Kenema. Naval assets would also be required. The eastern sector is described as strategic in view of its mineral resources, the presence of heavy RUF and Kamajor concentration, and the border with Liberia. ECOMOG therefore considers that operations in the east could prove difficult and risky and demand a robust approach, alertness and deployment in strength. Battalions would be located at Yengema, Zimmi and Kailahun.

24. ECOMOG would also establish a disarmament committee which would be charged, *inter alia*, with selecting disarmament sites; setting standards and guidelines for disarmament; conducting the disarmament, coordination of resources and cooperation with other organizations; classifying and transporting recovered weapons and ammunition; disseminating information about the process and providing security for all participants. A ceasefire violations committee and a humanitarian services committee would also be created.

25. My Special Envoy and his staff are actively discussing with the Government and with ECOMOG the further elaboration and implementation of its concept of operations, which provides a suitable basis for the possible subsequent deployment of United Nations military personnel, subject to the authorization of the Security Council. I will revert to the Council with further recommendations on such deployment following a further assessment by my Special Envoy.

Other action taken pursuant to resolution 1132 (1997)

26. Since my previous report, a number of States have written to me, in compliance with paragraph 13 of resolution 1132 (1997), concerning the steps they have taken to give effect to the provisions contained in paragraphs 5 and 6 of the resolution relating to the sanctions imposed by the Council on Sierra Leone. The latest list of those States can be found in a separate report to the Security Council contained in document S/1998/112.

27. In a letter dated 9 March 1998 addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/1998/215), the *Chargé d'affaires* a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Sierra Leone to the United Nations conveyed a request from his Government for the convening of an urgent meeting of the Security Council to consider the lifting of the sanctions imposed on the importation of petroleum and petroleum products into the country in paragraph 6 of resolution 1132 (1997). On 16 March, the Council adopted resolution 1156 (1998) terminating, with immediate effect, the prohibitions on the sale or supply to Sierra Leone of petroleum and petroleum products referred to in resolution 1132 (1997).

III. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

28. A number of United Nations humanitarian assessment missions have now been undertaken to Freetown, Kambia, Bo, Keneba and Makeni. These missions determined that the current humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone remains serious. The primary health care system has been devastated by lack of supplies, looting and the exodus of medical personnel at all levels. Widespread neglect of water and sanitation facilities has increased the exposure of hundreds of thousands to disease. The normal distribution of food to vulnerable groups has been disrupted, affecting children in particular. Many children have also suffered exposure to acts of violence by being sent into battle as combatants. The public education system has collapsed; all schools have been closed since the coup d'état last May. The combination of fighting and looting has led to extensive damage to housing and infrastructure in the provincial towns. The number of internally displaced people has increased, and the welfare of some 14,000 Liberian refugees remains a matter of concern, as many fled from their camps during the recent fighting. The majority of Sierra Leoneans who took refuge in Conakry during the fighting in Freetown have returned. However, some 24,000 Sierra Leoneans have arrived in Liberia since mid-February and the influx continues, albeit at a reduced rate. A further influx of 3,000 refugees from the Kailahun area, still not under ECOMOG control, has been registered by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) at its camp in Kissidougou, Guinea.

29. United Nations agencies prepared a consolidated inter-agency flash appeal, which was launched on 3 March 1998. Through this appeal, I am seeking financial contributions from Member States in the amount of \$11.2 million to meet priority humanitarian needs in Sierra Leone over the next three months. Priority needs include support to agriculture through the provision of seeds and tools, the re-establishment of basic health and education services, the resumption of food aid distributions and the provision of assistance and protection to the most vulnerable groups affected by the current conflict. The flash appeal complements the 90-day programme of the Government of Sierra Leone, which serves as a framework for action following the restoration of democratic civilian rule in the country.

30. The full deployment of ECOMOG and the restoration of the legitimate Government is expected to provide increased opportunities for the humanitarian community to accelerate its activities in response to the humanitarian crisis in Sierra Leone, and will also encourage the return to their homes of internally displaced persons. It is hoped that the international community will contribute generously to the humanitarian programme outlined in the flash appeal, in order to provide the crucial assistance needed to sustain lives and to promote stability in Sierra Leone.

31. Medium-term tasks, such as the assisted repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees and reintegration of ex-combatants, are not covered in the flash appeal. However, United Nations agencies are already re-establishing their offices in Freetown and are eager to restart their social and economic development programmes, important components of which must be the re-building of the capacity of the Government of Sierra Leone to deliver services, stimulate economic recovery and promote national reconciliation and reconstruction.

Commencement of the repatriation of refugees

32. At the request of President Kabbah, and with the help of a donation of \$120,000 from the Government of Japan, UNHCR has begun to prepare for the repatriation from Conakry of up to 5,000 Sierra Leonean refugees, including 200 civil servants who fled Freetown after the May coup d'état and who will be engaged in the administration of the country.

33. ECOMOG control of major towns in southern Sierra Leone is also likely to encourage the early repatriation by road of Sierra Leonean refugees from Liberia. It is further expected that the removal of the junta could lead to the repatriation of the 400,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in the West African subregion.

34. Of the total caseload of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, some 2,800 have thus far been re-registered with UNHCR, about half of them requesting repatriation. UNHCR has begun making arrangements for them to be repatriated by sea.

United Nations Development Programme mission to Sierra Leone

35. A multi-unit mission to Sierra Leone dispatched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has proposed four projects for immediate implementation following their approval by the Government. These are:

- (a) A start-up project for the demobilization of various categories of combatants;
 - (b) Support for national institutions to enable a rapid return to normal functioning;
 - (c) Resettlement with emphasis on quick-impact micro-projects, reconciliation and youth development;
 - (d) Awareness-raising in order to help the country come to terms with the problems it faces and to promote national reconciliation and peace-building.
36. The mission is also assisting the Government to prepare a document for a donors' consultation proposed to be held in Brussels on 31 March 1998. UNDP plans to close its Coordination Office in Conakry by the end of March if the security situation continues to stabilize, and to return the staff of its Country Office to Freetown.

IV. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

37. The developments that have taken place in Sierra Leone since the submission of my last report should be seen as positive in the context of the wider situation in which they transpired. The removal of the junta by the action of ECOMOG has opened the way for the re-establishment not just of the legitimate Government, but also of civil order, the democratic process and the beginnings of economic and social development. The return of President Kabbah to Freetown on 10 March therefore presents the people of Sierra Leone and the international community with a challenge and an opportunity which must be grasped with a sense of urgency. We must not let slip the chance to restore Sierra Leone to the ranks of democratic nations and to help strengthen the stability of the subregion.

38. I commend the consistent diplomacy of ECOWAS and, in particular, its Committee of Five on Sierra Leone, and the contribution made by ECOMOG officers and men to the removal of the military junta. I call on ECOWAS and ECOMOG to continue their efforts to bring peace to Sierra Leone in accordance with the relevant provisions of resolution 1132 (1997) and of the Charter of the United Nations. Sierra Leoneans committed to the democratic system also played their part in maintaining a stubborn resistance to the illegal regime. These included not only the members of the Civil Defence Forces, but also countless unarmed civilians who persistently withheld their cooperation from the regime and denied it legitimacy. I salute the courage of the Sierra Leonean people and honour the memory of those who died opposing the junta.

39. I also congratulate President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah on his resumption of his responsibilities as Head of State of Sierra Leone following his return. The United Nations should give his Government every possible assistance in its efforts to promote national reconciliation among his people and to strengthen the authority and capacity of his Government.

40. As I stated in my message to the annual summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity at Harare, and in

the special message which was delivered by my Special Envoy, Mr. Ibrahim Fall, on the occasion of President Kabbah's return, Africa can no longer tolerate or accept as faits accomplis coups d'état against-elected Governments or the illegal seizure of power by military cliques.

Strengthening the office of the Special Envoy

41. In order to take full and prompt advantage of the changed situation, I wish to propose a comprehensive set of measures to assist the Government and people of Sierra Leone in both their immediate and longer-term needs. As a first step, I intend to strengthen the office of my Special Envoy in Freetown. In order to contribute to the restoration of respect for the rule of law, civil order and human rights in Sierra Leone, I have consulted with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights concerning the possible deployment of human rights observers. In the meantime, a human rights officer will be attached to the office of my Special Envoy at an early date.

42. I am also considering attaching to the office two civilian police officials to advise the Government on police training and procedures in a democratic society. An additional political officer and a military adviser would assist my Special Envoy in his consultations with ECOMOG on the development of planning for disarmament and demobilization, while a humanitarian officer would facilitate the coordination of activities of the United Nations and non-governmental organizations in Sierra Leone and advise my Special Envoy on all issues involving non-governmental organizations. The office will also require a public information programme to disseminate information among the population about its activities, in particular in connection with the disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants and their reintegration into society.

Deployment of military liaison personnel

43. I also recommend the deployment to Sierra Leone of up to 10 United Nations military liaison officers, whose functions would be as follows:

- (a) To liaise closely with ECOMOG and to report on the military situation in the country;
 - (b) To ascertain the state of and to assist in the finalization of planning by ECOMOG for future tasks such as the identification of the former combatant elements to be disarmed and the design of a disarmament plan.
44. Should the Security Council decide to authorize the deployment of these military liaison officers, as well as the military and civilian police advisers, as indicated in my third report (S/1998/103, para. 35), the costs relating thereto should be considered an expense of the Organization to be borne by Member States in accordance with Article 17, paragraph 2, of the Charter of the United Nations and the assessments to be levied on Member States should be credited to the special account to be established for Sierra Leone. The related cost estimates will be issued shortly as an addendum to the present report.
45. The military liaison team would complement the role of the military advisers who will, under the authority of my Special Envoy, continue to assist the Government of Sierra Leone to resolve issues related to the disarmament process. The military advisers will also be instrumental in assisting the Government of Sierra Leone in the development of planning for bilateral programmes to restructure and rebuild appropriate security forces for Sierra Leone in the future. In view of the importance of such retraining, I appeal to potential donors to show generosity in providing bilateral assistance.

46. The presence of United Nations military liaison officers, perhaps later supplemented by human rights observers, could also assist in the process of national reconciliation in Sierra Leone. Their close cooperation with ECOMOG in the countryside and their impartial reporting to my Special Envoy would reassure former combatants that they can surrender their weapons in safety.

Provision of humanitarian assistance

47. The provision of humanitarian assistance must also proceed expeditiously. The plight of Sierra Leoneans deprived of food, medical care and shelter by the recent fighting and the abuses of junta rule is acute, and it must be addressed as a matter of urgency with all the resources available to the aid agencies. While I remain deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation in many parts of the country, I am encouraged by news that humanitarian needs are beginning to be addressed. Food aid and emergency medical supplies have entered the country through the port of Freetown and have been delivered to some provinces by plane, helicopter and overland in a prompt and coordinated manner.

Contributions to the Trust Fund

48. I call on Member States to display generosity in contributing to the Trust Fund for Sierra Leone which, with the

encouragement of the Security Council, I have established. My appreciation goes to the Government of the United Kingdom, which has already announced its readiness to contribute 2 million, and has been actively assisting in the provision of aid to Sierra Leoneans. I also urge all Member States to provide generous assistance to ECOMOG to enable it to meet its logistical requirements and to fulfil its mandate in Sierra Leone.

49. The events that have taken place in Sierra Leone over the past year carry a warning that similar crises may arise and challenge the international community to consider how it should respond to them. Democracy in Sierra Leone may have deep roots, but it is a fragile plant and must be nurtured. The international community must maintain its vigilance and support, not least in the prompt provision of emergency bilateral and multilateral aid. Assistance for the laudable efforts of ECOWAS and the logistical requirements of ECOMOG as it continues its deployment through the countryside will also be required. I trust that such support will be forthcoming.

ReliefWeb<http://www.reliefweb.int>

Source: ICRC

Date: 08 Apr 1998

ICRC resumes work up-country

ICRC NEWS 14

Following an initial delivery of medical supplies to Kenema on 22 March, the ICRC provided the town's government hospital with a second consignment of medicines on 2 April to help treat emergency cases. The hospital reported that 40 operations had been performed on war-wounded patients since the end of February.

On 31 March, for the first time since delegates suspended their activities up-country owing to the recent fighting, an ICRC team returned to Bo, Sierra Leone's second largest town. Contacts were re-established with local authorities in order to gather information on the situation in terms of nutrition, health and water supplies. ICRC delegates also visited detainees held by ECOMOG forces and gave them blankets and items for personal hygiene.

Thanks to cooperation with the Sierra Leone Red Cross Society (SLRCS), Red Cross messages can now be delivered to areas outside Freetown, such as Bo, Moyamba, Makeni, Port Loko and Lungi, so that family members can stay in touch despite the interruption of normal channels of communication.

As the fighting died down in the northern provinces, rehabilitation work resumed last week on 55 wells in Bombali district and Port Loko town. Wells are the only source of drinking water for the inhabitants of some villages, and ICRC water and sanitation engineers together with Ministry of Health staff are working against the clock to complete the project before the start of the rainy season.

In the first three months after the fighting ended in Freetown, five primary health-care clinics receiving ICRC support gave consultations to 40,000 patients and immunized 850 children in accordance with EPI (WHO's Expanded Programme on Immunization) standards. During the same period the ICRC, working in cooperation with the SLRCS, distributed a total of 483 tonnes of food to 36,877 people in the capital.

Further information: Jean-Luc Metzker, ICRC Freetown, tel. ++232 22 241 438

Return to: [TOP] [Home Page] [1996 documents]
Email ReliefWeb at: comments@reliefweb.int

ReliefWeb<http://www.reliefweb.int>

Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Date: 22 Apr 1998

Country Updates - Liberia & Sierra Leone

At a Glance

More than 100,000 Sierra Leoneans cross into Liberia and Guinea between January and April, fleeing continued fighting between the West African Peace-Keeping force and militias.

UNHCR assists the repatriation of Sierra Leoneans to the capital Freetown, where the stable situation encourages the government to call for civil servants to return to their jobs.

Regional Director Albert-Alain Peters travels to Liberia and the countries of asylum to meet with government leaders and assess the status of UNHCR programs.

UNHCR operates the first repatriation convoys of Liberians from Tabou, Côte d'Ivoire, and N'zérékoré, Guinea, during the last week of March.

UNHCR appeals for \$39.7 million in funds for its Liberian operations during 1998.

DEVELOPMENTS

SIERRA LEONE INFLUX

Fighting that began between militias in December in the diamond-mining areas of Sierra Leone intensified in February as ECOMOG, the Nigerian-led West African Peace-Keeping force, took on the military junta in power since May 1997 in Freetown. While the AFR/CRUF alliance was toppled and democratically-elected President Tejan Kabbah returned to power in late March, the rivals have continued to battle in the Kallahun and Kono areas in the east.

Over 100,000 refugees have poured into neighboring Liberia and Guinea since the beginning of the year, pushing the total number of Sierra Leonean asylum-seekers in the area to 462,000. The new arrivals are almost evenly split between Guinea and Liberia, which were previously host to 230,000 and 127,000 respectively.

UNHCR staff in Guékédou, Guinea, have registered 50,000 new arrivals. Guinea, which almost encircles Sierra Leone, had already borne the brunt of the successive rounds of fighting next door, with an estimated 80,000 refugees arriving after the May 1997 coup.

Refugees told UNHCR that militias are forcing civilians either to take up arms or abandon the contested areas. A disproportionate number of recent arrivals are elderly or pregnant women, and many refugees are suffering from malnutrition, respiratory illnesses and diarrhea. Some of those crossing now abandoned their homes as long as four months ago, and relate walking without any food through increasingly hostile areas. Stocks from the country's most recent rice harvest are long exhausted.

UNHCR is moving Sierra Leoneans away from the difficult to reach border enclaves of Forokonia and Kobikoro. By mid-April 15,000 refugees had been transferred to camps at Boodou and Nyakéou, but staff were bracing for more arrivals as the towns are reportedly the only crossing points where the ex-junta forces and terrain allow passage.

In Liberia, the influx of refugees reached a peak of 5,000 a day during the last week of March. By mid-April, UNHCR was assisting 55,000 at Vahun, 8 kms from the border, and the number of new arrivals had dropped as ECOMOG gained the upper hand in battles on the Sierra Leone-side of Folima, the border village where UNHCR and Liberian authorities registered the flow. Most of the refugees are women and children, with a relatively small number of children there showing signs of malnutrition.

The presence of a large number of refugees at Vahun will pose an increasing problem during the June-October rainy season. Because the final 110 kms of road from Voinjama to Vahun are likely to be impassable for weeks at a time, UNHCR plans to move as many refugees as possible to another site closer to Voinjama. At the same time, several months' food and non-food assistance is being stockpiled in Vahun.

Three additional UNHCR staff members have been sent to Vahun and Voinjama to help with the emergency. A

protection officer will monitor the profile of new arrivals, as the proximity of fighting in Sierra Leone raises the possibility of combatants mixing with refugees. UNHCR Monrovia has asked the Liberian government to reactivate the national eligibility commission in order to be able to respond to this eventually.

LIBERIAN REPATRIATION

Côte d'Ivoire

In March, UNHCR carried out the first repatriation from Tabou, Côte d'Ivoire. Without bridges linking the coastal zone of Tabou with Liberia, convoys are obliged to pass through Danané, to the north, before finally crossing the border. The Sub-Office is currently negotiating the use of a ferry on Cavally river, in order to take Liberian volunteers directly back to Maryland County.

Staff in both Danané and Tabou say many Liberians are making their way home to start rebuilding before returning for other family members. Individuals trek back to Côte d'Ivoire for hard-to-find items, from construction material to shoes, or for medical care available in the refugee zones. Children are often left behind so that they can continue in free refugee schools.

Even so, NGOs have recorded a significant drop in the number of refugees attending school in Côte d'Ivoire. Of the 48,000 primary-school age children who began classes in the fall of 1997, only 33,000 were still answering roll call at the end of February. Aid workers are planning on 20,000 being around for the start of the next school year, as more families gradually re-establish themselves in Liberia.

Guinea

While 65,000 refugees have been registered for repatriation in Guéckédou and N'zéfkoré, organized returns had been on hold since security incidents near Diecke prompted the Guinean government to close the border in December. After repeated overtures at the national and local levels, authorities granted UNHCR an exception for repatriation convoys. On 30 March, 10 trucks carrying a first group of 319 returnees passed briefly at the Buala border post before rolling on to Lofa county, in northwest Liberia. Several hundred other "assisted returnees" left Guinea at the same time, receiving standard aid packages of mats, blankets, plastic sheets, jerrycans, traveling bags, farming tools and kitchen ware - but returning to border-area communities on foot rather than by truck.

Repatriation from across the vast refugee zones in two countries still depends on a relatively small number of vehicles. The 100 trucks which reached Monrovia from Europe at the beginning of this year are not yet on the road, and there are still questions as to how they will eventually be allocated. Meanwhile, the approaching rainy season and additional demands placed on the existing fleet by the Sierra Leonean crisis promises to slow the repatriation operation further.

Ghana and Nigeria

Repatriation convoys continue from Ghana's Buduburam camp, near Accra, which is home to around 14,000 Liberian refugees. That operation is expected to last until the end of 1998.

UNHCR is pursuing an offer from the Nigerian government to assist the return of Liberians who fled as far as Lagos. Talks center on the use of army aircraft to repatriate volunteers among the estimated 6,000 Liberians in Nigeria.

LIBERIANS IN SIERRA LEONE

Before last year's coup, UNHCR was caring for around 14,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone. The war scattered that population, most of whom received neither food nor assistance for eight months before NGOs and agencies were able to re-enter ECOMOG-controlled areas.

On returning to Freetown, UNHCR was approached by several hundred Liberians who wish to repatriate as soon as possible. Arrangements are being made now in Conakry for a suitable boat, and a first passage is planned for the end of April.

A UNHCR staff member traveled to the southeastern towns of Bo and Kenema during the first week of April and located over 4,000 more of the Liberian caseload. The refugees, 2,346 in Kenema and 1,926 in Bo, may be moved to the more secure Waterloo displaced site, nearer to the capital. Liberians are presently in a precarious position in Sierra Leone due to their alleged support for the defeated military junta.

By April 19, UNHCR had repatriated 21,086 Liberians from six west African countries: 7,062 from Côte d'Ivoire, 10,808 from Guinea, 2,755 from Ghana, 364 from Nigeria, 92 from Sierra Leone and five from Cameroon. These

figures include refugees who joined convoys during 1997. More significantly, as many as 70,000 Liberians are believed to have returned home spontaneously since the presidential elections last August.

DIRECTOR'S VISIT

Regional Director Albert-Alain Peters traveled through the region between 7 and 19 March. The evaluation mission took him to UNHCR offices in Liberian refugee zones in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, as well as to each of UNHCR's outposts in Liberia itself. At gatherings in Tabou, Danané and N'zérékoré, Peters met with refugee leaders, explaining UNHCR's policies and briefing them on what he had seen in Liberia. The Director also met with national and local officials, to whom he confirmed UNHCR's support for lasting solutions in the region and the need to work together to achieve a successful end to the Liberian crisis. Peters also thanked the host countries for the generosity they have extended to the hundreds of thousands of refugees.

REPATRIATION OF SIERRA LEONEANS

Soon after ECOMOG gained control of Freetown, the government of Tejan Kabbah was poised to re-enter the capital and take up its functions. Many of the country's civil servants had escaped to Guinea during the May 1997 coup, and as many as half of the estimated 20,000 Sierra Leoneans in Conakry returned in the days following the end to hostilities.

UNHCR has collaborated with the Sierra Leone embassy in Conakry to arrange bus transport for 6,500 of the remaining exiles. Additional funds are being sought in order to help the last of the group return.

FUNDING APPEAL

UNHCR is seeking \$39.7 million for its repatriation and reintegration projects in Liberia this year. Because of the scope of the exodus that began in 1989, some Liberian refugees are setting off home from as far away as Nigeria and Ghana, and transport is a major component of the budget. Other priority activities include the strengthening of UNHCR's presence in countries which expect large numbers of people back, and reintegration programs. These will target the ravaged infrastructure, especially schools and health centers, which are consistently cited by refugees as one of their major concerns.

Through 14 April there was still a very significant financial shortfall.

This document is intended for public information purposes only. It is not an official UN document.

Return to: [TOP] [Home Page] [1996 documents]
Email: ReliefWeb at: comments@reliefweb.int

ReliefWeb

<http://www.reliefweb.int>

Source: UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Date: 21 Apr 1998

Briefing Notes 21 Apr 1998: Sierra Leone

This is a summary of what was said by the UNHCR spokesperson at today's press briefing at the Palais des Nations.

UNHCR is deploying emergency staff to Faranah in Guinea, where refugees from Sierra Leone continue to arrive at a rate of several hundred per day (estimates vary from 300 to 1,000 new arrivals daily), and tens of thousands of refugees are in desperate conditions along the border.

The new arrivals are concentrated in the villages of Forokonia (est. 5,000 refugees, 2 kms from the border), Kobikoro (10,000 refugees) and Heremakono (5,000 refugees, 9 kms from the border).

A UNHCR team that was at these sites on Friday (April 17) recorded a high and increasing rate of diarrhea, malaria and respiratory tract infections, as well as many cases of severe malnutrition.

Refugees have told UNHCR of atrocities committed against civilians by the ex-junta (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and Revolutionary United Front). Refugees report that AFRC/RUF militia are "punishing" people accused of not supporting them, and speak of civilians shot or maimed and killed with machetes.

There is almost no available shelter in Forokonia and Kobikoro, and it has been raining in the area. The majority of refugees are sleeping in the open air, including pregnant women and children. Refugees are only able to get safe water in Kobikoro, where they have to pay villagers for it. UNHCR and WFP have established a community kitchen in Kobikoro, but resupply of the border area is very difficult.

The roads in the area, especially to Forokonia, are already difficult and will be impassable in the rainy season. For example, already today it takes 2 and half hours in a 4-wheel drive vehicle to travel the 23 km from Kobikoro to Forokonia. Only the most vulnerable refugees can be transferred from Forokonia to other locations.

Our priorities - with the help of partners in the area, which at present include MSF and ACF - are to bring in water bladders, set up health posts and carry out a measles vaccination programme, and of course to secure food supplies and shelter.

Figures:

The total number of Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea is 250,000, of whom 50,000 have arrived since the beginning of the year.

The number of Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia is 177,000, of whom 55,000 have arrived since the beginning of the year.

Return to: [TOP] [Home Page] [1996 documents]

Email ReliefWeb at: comments@reliefweb.int