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**LIBERIA
CAN PEACE BE CONSOLIDATED?**

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1. Introduction

It is now nearly two years since Liberia emerged from a seven-year brutal and destructive war to peace with the holding of democratic elections in July 1997. The process transformed former warlord Charles Taylor into an elected president with a commanding 76 per cent of the votes cast by 22.90 per cent of the eligible voters. Twelve other contesting political parties were left with a mere 24 per cent of the total 472,863 votes in a country with an estimated pre-war population of 2.8 million.¹ (These figures indicate, among others, the failure to repatriate and register thousands of refugees clustered in camps around West Africa.) Thus in the legislature, Taylor's National Patriotic Party (NPP) controls 21 of the 26 seats in the upper house and 49 of the 64 in the lower house.² This imbalance annuls hopes for checks and balances so needed for consensus building and democratization. The virtual absence of an effective opposition is further reflected in the structure of the judiciary. All judges of superior and lower courts are appointees of the President, and although the Liberian Constitution protects them against arbitrary dismissal, this has not been respected since the elections.³ Therefore, contrary to expectations that some form of power sharing would lead to reconciliation in uniting the country, the election results fostered a one-party system feared by many who have experienced Liberia's past one-party rule and its attendant problems of corruption and repression.

But the elections in themselves were hailed as free and fair for a country unaccustomed to credible elections in its 152-year history as Africa's oldest republic, founded in 1847 by freed American slaves. Opinions on the results vary, as do the factors responsible for Taylor's massive victory. Prominent among these factors was the electorate's fear of a possible return to violence if Taylor lost.⁴ Then there was Taylor's unmatched financial strength, stemming in part from the looting of the country and control of its resources for several years.⁵

However, the consensus, endorsed by international election observers, is that the verdict was fair, and that Taylor had genuine popular backing. Dave Peterson, writing in *The Washington Quarterly*, concludes that "although the international community found [Taylor] repugnant due to the lengthy record of human rights abuses attributed to his undisciplined troops, he was genuinely popular at the grassroots and had won the elections freely and fairly".⁶

With the end of hostilities, the prime concern has been uniting a brutalized and divided people after a conflict that wiped out most socio-economic institutions now difficult to replace. Although the political question has been apparently settled, the

¹ Carter Center, *Observing the 1997 Special Elections Process in Liberia* (Atlanta GA, 1997), p. 6; Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Emerging from the Destruction: Human Rights Challenges Facing the New Liberian Government* (New York: November 1997), p. 13

² Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Emerging from the Destruction*, p. 12

³ United States, Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1998: Liberia*, (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 26 February 1999), p. 1

⁴ Carter Center, p. 12

⁵ Africa Confidential [London], "Frequent Flyers", 5 February 1999. See also Human Rights Watch, *Emerging from the Destruction*, p. 13

⁶ Dave Peterson, "Finding African Solutions to African Problems", *The Washington Quarterly*, Summer 1998, pp. 156-7

much required and expected environment for repatriation and resettlement of refugees and the displaced is yet distant.

Some progress has been made in revamping paralysed state institutions, but there are pronounced problems in governance and security - problems that continue to hinder a mass return of refugees, thus impeding resettlement programmes which, as will be shown, are almost entirely pursued by non-governmental organizations.

As a step towards reconciliation, a number of rivals were included in the Government, but concrete moves for reconciliation, important for putting the past behind in a country so divided, are largely absent. Despite many official pronouncements on the need for reconciliation, a policy of confrontation has been pursued. In July 1998, a National Conference on Liberia's Future, organized by American civil rights leader the Rev. Jesse Jackson, was held in Monrovia. Dubbed "Vision 2024", the gathering brought together a cross section of Liberians to begin discussing peace-building and reconstruction.⁷

The bloodletting from which the country is now striving to recover began on 24 December 1989, when Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded the country from Côte d'Ivoire with the expressed objective of overthrowing military dictator Samuel Doe, who had seized power in a 1980 *coup d'état* which ended decades of Americo-Liberian rule. Doe himself was captured and killed in September 1990, but the conflict soon degenerated into indiscriminate killings and ethnic vendettas, thus producing a plethora of armed factions with no distinguishable political doctrines.⁸ The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) was dominated by Doe's Krahn tribe. Krahns and Mandingoes, targeted by the NPFL, formed the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), which later split into two rival factions, ULIMO-Krahn and ULIMO-Mandingo, led by Roosevelt Johnson and Alhaji Kromah respectively. Other armed groups soon sprang up in the power contest and for the spoils of war. They included another Krahn-dominated group, the Liberia Peace Council (LPC), and the NPFL-Central Revolutionary Committee (NPFL-CRC) led by dissatisfied Taylor associates. The Lofa Defense Force (LDF) was another grouping, which would later merge with the LPC and NPFL-CRC to form the Coalition Forces. With the presence of the West African peacekeeping force ECOMOG (Economic Community Cease-fire Monitoring Group), military victory became inconceivable. But the conflict led to an unparalleled level of destruction and a humanitarian disaster that would capture world attention. About 750,000 people became refugees; 1.4 million were displaced and about 200,000 killed.⁹ Out of an estimated 60,000 combatants, between 15,000 and 20,000 were child soldiers.¹⁰ By 1997, this tiny West African country ranked sixth globally in terms of refugee numbers.¹¹

⁷ *New African* [London], Baffour Ankomah, "Knives Out for Taylor", September 1998.

⁸ Stephen Ellis, "Liberia: Heart of a West African Struggle", *Nordiska Afrikainstitutet*, January 1998, p. 3

⁹ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997: Liberia* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 30 January 1998), p.1

¹⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998* (New York, 1999), p. 49

¹¹ *The Providence Journal*, "The Orphans of Liberia's War: A.R.I. Group Comes to Aid of Children of Refugees in Ghana", 16 May 1999

Elections as a way out of the conflict therefore generated high hopes for peace-building. Prospects for reconciliation, now that the war had weakened everyone, were brighter, particularly after the National Conference. Regrettably, hopes for burying the past and moving forward soon faded a few weeks after the conference when government security forces, overwhelmingly composed of former NPFL fighters, attacked the former Krahn leader of ULIMO, Roosevelt Johnson, and his loyalists in Monrovia with artillery, automatic weapons and mortars on 18 September 1998.

As many as 300 persons were killed. The UNHCR announced that 4,000 persons, mostly Krahns, fled to Côte d'Ivoire.¹² The Government issued a denial and contended that some international organizations were making claims in order to justify their continued stay and operations in the country. But the Krahns were embattled as the clampdown continued, with the U.S. State Department reporting that as many as 9,000 had fled.¹³ UNHCR later estimated that a total of 18,000, mostly Krahns, had fled.¹⁴ Prominent Krahn leaders were arrested, charged with treason, and subsequently convicted and given 10-year sentences.¹⁵ Roosevelt Johnson, the only former armed faction leader left in the country after the elections, was flown out by the Americans as reports of arbitrary arrests and disappearances of Krahns became widespread.¹⁶ The Government adopted a triumphant posture, with the President declaring that the operation was a "surgical strike" and that "only a few" persons, about 52, had been killed.¹⁷

Further setbacks to peace consolidation followed in April 1999, when the border town of Voinjama was attacked. Neighbouring Guinea and another rival ethnic group, the Mandingoes, were blamed and targeted. Hundreds of frightened residents, mostly Mandingoes, fled from border towns as rumours of an impending attack spread.¹⁸ Many Mandingoes were arrested on suspicion of backing the alleged dissidents.¹⁹ More indications of the deteriorating security situation came in May 1999 when the President announced that ECOMOG was training dissidents to attack the capital, Monrovia. He proceeded to deploy soldiers at the former ECOMOG barracks where thousands of weapons collected during disarmament are kept, presumably for eventual UN disposal.²⁰

These internal ethnic and security problems were complicated by allegations that Liberia was backing the Sierra Leone Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels' ongoing military offensive to seize power. The accusations have not only isolated Liberia with serious internal economic consequences, but have led to military threats from ECOMOG and legal warnings against the Government by Nigeria, the main

¹² *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 27 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹³ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 3

¹⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Country Updates: Great Lakes and Western Africa*, 14 April 1999

¹⁵ *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], "Coup Plotters Get 10 Years: Judge Says No Hard Labor, Harassment, Intimidation", 12 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 51

¹⁷ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 22 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁸ *The News* [Monrovia], "Hundreds Flee Ganta as Fear of Attack Heightens", 26 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁹ *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], "Gbarnga-Based Group Threatens to Sue Govt.", 30 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

²⁰ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 18 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

actor in the resolution of the Liberian crisis.²¹ Thus, almost two years after the election, the process of building on the gains of the transition has been marred by uncertainties.

The euphoria of high expectations that coloured the first year of elections seems to be fading away in clouds of disappointments, a fact noted by Catholic bishops when they issued a pastoral letter in May 1999 expressing dismay over the failure to implement recommended reforms on human rights and accountability in government.²²

2. Returnees and Repatriation

The war caused a staggering level of death, destruction, and displacement. By September 1997, the number of Liberian refugees in neighbouring West African countries was put at 480,000. The UNHCR estimated that 160,000 of these were in Côte d'Ivoire and 235,000 in Guinea Conakry, 17,000 in Ghana, and 14,000 in Sierra Leone.²³ Since the beginning of repatriation in late 1997, 100,000 have been repatriated through the UN refugee agency's voluntary repatriation programme, while another 160,000 returned on their own. Around 70,000 came from Guinea, 24,700 from Côte d'Ivoire, 3,200 from Ghana and 1,200 from Nigeria.²⁴

Recent developments indicate that state repatriation policy has been largely characterized by public pronouncements devoid of solid commitments. This apparent disinterest is also reflected in the Government's failure to create a more humane and dignifying environment for returnees by failing to halt rising security harassment. Further indication of low prioritization is the under-funding of the Liberian Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration Commission (LRRRC), the state institution responsible for shaping and implementing programmes for refugees and the internally displaced.²⁵

In February 1999, the Speaker of the House of Representatives appealed to refugees in Côte d'Ivoire to return home, but warned that they should not expect support from the Government due to its financial problems.²⁶ The state repatriation chief also followed this theme during a UN conference when he asked for the transfer of NGO-sponsored micro-economics programmes in countries of asylum to Liberia where, he said, freedom of movement was now unhindered. He put the total cost of the Government's repatriation plan at US\$ 3.5 million, which he asked the EU to fund.²⁷ But the claim of unhindered movement, and the rationale for the transfer of programmes, contradicted his earlier worries about security harassment of returnees at various points of entry.²⁸ In October 1998, signs of frustration were evident within the LRRRC. The agency expressed disappointment over government non-prioritization of

²¹ *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], "ECOMOG Threatens Attacks", 12 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

²² Pan African News Agency, "Catholic Bishops Worry over Liberia's International Image", 24 May 1999

²³ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 51.

²⁴ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Country Updates: Great Lakes and West Africa*, 10 March 1999

²⁵ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Emerging from the Destruction*, p. 6

²⁶ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 1 February 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

²⁷ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 19 March 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²⁸ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 51

repatriation after requesting US\$ 500,000 to resettle about 220,000 displaced persons.²⁹

President Taylor reinforced the impression of incapacity during a November 1998 nation-wide tour when he told rural peasants to rely on God for pressing solutions to the problems of lack of infrastructure and other needs.³⁰

Thus, the burden has fallen on IGOs and NGOs, themselves plagued with donor apathy, as shown by the fact that only half of the US\$ 39 million requested by the UNHCR in 1998 for repatriation and resettlement programmes was available from donors.³¹ Nevertheless, the UN agency announced improved donor contributions in mid October 1998, leading to optimism that the bulk of the 480,000 Liberians would return home by the end of 1999.³²

If the lack of funding is the main factor obstructing state sponsored repatriation, the security environment poses another set of debilitating problems that rob individuals of their basic dignity. Six months into office, the outcry against the Government's security forces intensified, reinforcing refugees' fear of insecurity upon return. The wave of intimidation and harassment led lawyers at a UN-sponsored workshop to warn about the consequences of the spread of "jungle justice".³³ Legal practitioners, frustrated over rising numbers of abuses, mounted protests against security men serving as judges while arresting and intimidating residents without cause. This wave of harassment spread to rural areas where many returnees were expected. In Lofa County, frightened inhabitants told election workers in April 1998 that harassment and extortion by state security men were discouraging returnees and creating many resettlement problems in the county.³⁴ Despite the presence of state security men in Lofa County, residents complained of constant harassment in May 1999, pleading for help from the local security. They said matters could get worse if nothing was done to contain the persistent seizure of their belongings by unknown armed men.³⁵

These developments sent the signals necessary for reconsidering mass repatriation, contributing to the U.S. Government's renewal of its Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for 20,000 Liberians in that country since the war.³⁶ In May 1999, thousands of Liberians demonstrated in the U.S. pleading for permanent residency.³⁷ In Ghana, refugees in the Budumbura Camp on the outskirts of Accra, where a school that started with 50 students now holds 300, said returning home was inconceivable due to the security problems.³⁸ Speculations that the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, had stopped its Liberian resettlement programme led to an official denial from the embassy and concerns within the Nairobi-based Lutheran Immigration Service which

²⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 29 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet).

³⁰ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 20 November 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

³¹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 6 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

³² Pan African News Agency, "More Funds to Boost UNHCR Operations", 16 October 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

³³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 18 March 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

³⁴ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 25 April 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

³⁵ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 24 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

³⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 54

³⁷ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 20 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

³⁸ *The Providence Journal*, 16 May 1999

said that about 4,000 Liberians in Côte d'Ivoire awaiting resettlement in the United States would be affected.³⁹ Ghanaian officials, in September 1998, said response to voluntary repatriation among Liberian refugees was discouraging.

They, therefore, announced that Liberian refugees wishing to remain in the country indefinitely must regularize their immigration papers, thus eventually losing their refugee status.⁴⁰ A UNHCR representative based in Accra, in April 1999 urged Liberian refugees to consider returning home because of “donor fatigue” with the Liberian programme.⁴¹ But an organization of citizens of the countries of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States), the ECOWAS Citizens Union, in January 1999 appealed against forcible repatriation of Liberians due to the uncertain situation in the country.⁴²

An improved and humane security environment was unlikely as the Government adopted a policy of dispatching soldiers to rural areas without compensation.⁴³ Humanitarian organizations operating in the country were encountering increasing security problems. This led to a meeting with Taylor in September 1998 and a passionate appeal from NGOs for the training and reorientation of the security forces. Calling for the dismantling of makeshift checkpoints in the country, they repeated the now regular theme of training and orientation for members of the security forces, which they said, would help them to “fully participate in the peace-building and reconstruction programmes” and “to protect the humanitarian dignity of citizens”.⁴⁴ The degree of insecurity was noted in October 1998 when the UNHCR declared in Conakry, Guinea, that it would not repatriate refugees whose destination was rural Liberia until security conditions there were ascertained.⁴⁵ By the end of 1998, Human Rights Watch/Africa noted: “The increased security risks, and the growing volatility within the country, led to serious questions by year’s end as to whether the repatriation program should continue as scheduled and for the need for neighboring governments to remain prepared to host Liberian refugees in the following year.”⁴⁶ Little progress was expected, and in May 1999 the aid agencies finally announced they were considering new measures to protect their personnel and operations in the country in view of continued harassment of civilians and looting of property.⁴⁷

In April 1999, the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs enumerated several abuses committed by the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), including the looting of a village near the Sierra Leone border on 22 March 1999.⁴⁸

³⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 21 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁴⁰ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 16 September 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁴¹ *The Independent* [Accra], “Liberian Refugees Urged to Go Home”, 27 April 1999

⁴² *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 19 January 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁴³ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 4

⁴⁴ Pan African News Agency, “NGOs Call for Restructuring of Security Forces”, 17 September 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

⁴⁵ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 1 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁴⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p.52

⁴⁷ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 9 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁴⁸ United Nations, Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa, *Liberia: Fledgling Army Dogged by Indiscipline* (8 April 1999)

The Catholic Justice and Peace Commission concluded after a tour of some areas:

Security personnel assigned at the various entry points with Guinea and Ivory Coast subject Liberian refugees returning from exile in neighbouring countries to harassment, molestation, and extortion....
... Findings of our One-Day Fact Finding Mission revealed that many of the returnees are required to pay huge sums before they can be permitted to cross the border into Liberia. When they are permitted to cross, some of their meagre belongings are also taken away from them by security personnel assigned at the borders. These security personnel also accuse, and in some instances detain, some returnees on suspicion of being involved in subversive activities.⁴⁹

Compounding the security problems is the fact that the Government is yet to fully establish its authority throughout the country.⁵⁰ UNHCR High Commissioner Sadako Ogata, following discussions with government officials and a tour of the country in March 1999, expressed doubts about the regime's capability to inspire confidence. She advocated direct assistance to the population, fearing that assistance through the Government would not reach the needy.⁵¹ But attracting officials to rural areas has been difficult due, in part, to the lack of incentives and the unstable security situation. This led a disappointed Taylor to issue a never implemented dismissal ultimatum for government appointees failing to take up rural assignments.⁵² The absence of confidence-building government structures is further made evident by the fact that more than two months after the April 1999 Voinjama fighting, key local government officials, including the county superintendent (governor) and the city major, have not returned since fleeing the city. The acting chair of the National Reconciliation and Reunification Commission, Sheikh Kafumba Konneh, following a tour of the county and Guinea, reported that many of the town's residents, Lormas and Mandingoes now in Guinea, are refusing to return for fear of reprisals and the uncertain security environment. He said Mandingoes have issued undisclosed preconditions for their return.⁵³

The lack of physical infrastructure remains a biting problem and many foreigners travelling around the country are amazed at the level of devastation. "They have a hell of a long way to go", says the American envoy to Liberia, Donald Peterson.⁵⁴ The uncertainty of life after the war in its emptiness awaits many refugees. Only burnt and looted remains now remind one of what were once self-sufficient and vibrant rural communities. Farmers were driven off the land into refugee and displaced camps, forced to rely on relief organizations when they once looked after themselves, and as noted by Human Rights Watch in its 1997 report: "Some returnees are coming back to find that fighters and other displaced persons have occupied their homes. In other cases, people remain unwilling to come back, either because of lack of material assistance required to help them rebuild their homes or farms or their fear of

⁴⁹ Justice and Peace Commission, National Catholic Secretariat, *A Test of Conviction: Report of a One-day Fact-finding Mission to Gbarnga* (Monrovia, 24 February 1998)

⁵⁰ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 11 September 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁵¹ *Los Angeles Times*, "Tech School Shines Rays of Hope over War Devastated Liberia", 4 April 1999

⁵² *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 1 December 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁵³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 5 and 6 July 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁵⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 April 1999

persecution”.⁵⁵ The state of lawlessness, fostered by the war and the empowerment of individuals responsible for the abuses, make seeking redress difficult.

Some 800 returnees, in February 1997, soon discovered how powerless they were to evict squatters occupying their homes in Nimba County.⁵⁶ Except for Monrovia, where some courts are functioning, most areas, especially rural ones, are without courts, a development that has led to the use of “sassywood”, an outlawed traditional form of torture used to obtain confessions from accused persons.⁵⁷

Where courts exist, rural inhabitants are forced to pay exorbitant legal fees, which in Nimba County resulted in protest by inhabitants who called for the Supreme Court to intervene.⁵⁸ The paralysis of the court system continued through April 1999 with judges declaring their inability to function after allowances had remained unpaid for five months.⁵⁹

Although the Government’s dwindling financial resources may be a constraint on the funding of socially relevant state institutions, the level of priority given to personal luxuries, such as the President’s Rolls Royce, present a different picture. The President’s lavish life-style has become a matter of concern in the midst of economic difficulties which he helped to create. General expenditure on luxury items by state functionaries in a situation of grinding poverty everywhere, while at the same time seeking funding from donors, indicates a lack of commitment to the strengthening of institutions vital for implementing programmes and reform. In the words of the American Chief of Mission to the country, Donald Peterson: “There are disparities in wealth in every country in the world, but in a country where so many people have so little, those who have it shouldn’t flaunt it. The President has an image of an African leader that I don’t share”.⁶⁰

This political-security environment has helped to reinforce donors’ tendency to delay the commitment of funds. Moreover, there is scepticism deriving from Liberia’s chaotic and corrupt history, added to the all-important fact that unlike a country like Mozambique, Liberia is simply not a “glamour operation”.⁶¹ For instance, of the US\$ 71.6 million requested by the UN’s World Food Organization (WFO) for its Liberia programme, a mere US\$ 500,000 was received.⁶² That farmers in Lofa County were compelled to abandon traditional rice farming in May 1999, due to lack of seed rice, was therefore not surprising.⁶³ But dwindling funds for Liberia are not uncommon. At the height of the crisis in 1993, rations were halved and by 1995, only the “vulnerable” received food aid.⁶⁴

⁵⁵ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Emerging from Destruction*, p. 14

⁵⁶ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 19 February 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁵⁷ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 4

⁵⁸ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 24 April 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁵⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 5 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁶⁰ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 April 1999

⁶¹ *Refugees Magazine* [UNHCR], “Liberia: The Year of Return”, No. 112, 1998

⁶² *Los Angeles Times*, “Relief Camps for Africans, Kosovors Worlds Apart”, 21 May 1999

⁶³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 21 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁶⁴ *Refugees Magazine* [UNHCR], “1996 in Review/The Way of Life in Peacetown/Liberia Shaking Off Bad Memories”, No. 106, 1996

This reluctance, both on the part of donors to commit funds and for refugees to return, can also be attributed to the periodic outbursts of violence after a period of calm that have characterized the Liberian conflict. This is indicated by events like the April 1996 fighting which left 3,000 dead, 80,000 displaced and hundreds fleeing in leaking boats.⁶⁵ Thus, stability and progress are key factors for funding. UNHCR's *Refugees Magazine* observed: "Donors are watching closely for signs of stability. Refugees in turn are watching the Government as well as waiting for international aid before committing themselves wholeheartedly to going back. And in this vicious cycle, Taylor's chances of assuring stability depends on the refugees voting with their feet coming."⁶⁶

2.1 Obstacles to Reintegration

As with repatriation, little emphasis has been placed on reintegration programmes. There is a marked absence of state reintegration plans, and the Government's main strategy centres around coercing the internally displaced into returning to rural areas where infrastructure is non-existent and life uncertain. Displaced centres have been dismantled because the Government contends that they breed laziness and serve as disincentives against farming.⁶⁷ As will be indicated further, reconciliation as a cornerstone for reintegration has been overshadowed by a policy of confrontation, while recruitment of ex-fighters into various security structures remains the prime policy for the reintegration of ex-combatants.

A trademark of the Liberian conflict is the extent to which basic socio-economic entities were targeted and destroyed. With key employment establishments shut down or severely paralysed, reintegrating the traumatized population becomes a nightmare, and the Government, since 1997, has shown few signs of capability to handle this enormous challenge. One year into office, the President admitted in July 1998 that he had failed, but blamed the international community for conspiring to ensure his failure by withholding funding.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, very little has been done to attract much needed foreign capital, as key donors, such as the United States, adopt a hands-off policy in protest against the Government's human rights record and its interference in Sierra Leone.⁶⁹

The economy remains stagnant with little prospect for immediate recovery. In 1988, import-export figures stood at US\$ 707 million, which fell to US\$ 239 million in 1997, slumping to US\$ 119 million since the transition.⁷⁰ The 1998 fiscal budget was US\$ 65m.⁷¹ This was an improvement from the 1998 budget of US\$ 41 million.⁷² Foreign debts stand at US\$ 2 billion, domestic ones at US\$ 230 million.⁷³

⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Emerging from the Destruction*, p. 12

⁶⁶ *Refugees Magazine* [UNHCR], No. 112, 1998

⁶⁷ Pan African News Agency, "Hundreds of Internally Displaced Persons Return Home", 4 January 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

⁶⁸ *New African* [London], September 1998

⁶⁹ *Dallas Morning News*, "Aid Cuts Leave War-torn Liberians with Little Hope for Rebuilding Lives", 20 February 1999

⁷⁰ *Africa Confidential* [London], "Taylorland under Siege", 15 February 1999

⁷¹ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 April 1999

At a 1997 donor's conference, a total of US\$ 230 million was pledged, with most of the money understandably geared towards humanitarian relief.⁷⁴ The effects of the continued downward trend in the economy can be felt everywhere. Two years after the elections, Monrovia, the capital, is without water or electricity, and the Government has indicated it is simply incapable of providing these basic services. Wages, if and when paid, remain depressed, with the average monthly salary of a cabinet minister at US\$ 20.⁷⁵ Unemployment stands at 85 per cent.⁷⁶

Thus, among the major concerns of refugees is this harsh economic environment awaiting them. Richmond Draper, chair of the local NGO the New African Research and Development Agency (NARDA), says NGO-sponsored micro-economic projects in countries of asylum provide now irreplaceable means of living for refugees. "They are not likely to leave certainty for uncertainty", he says. During a 1998 tour of some rural areas, Draper said they discovered that many families wanted to return home, but were unprepared to uproot their children from schools in countries of asylum in the absence of educational facilities in Liberia. But he observed that the number of returnees in Grand Gedeh, for example, had increased significantly between 1996 and 1998. However, he also noted that government assistance to returnees was grossly inadequate, and feared that with UNHCR assistance to end by this year, returnees' problems will mount.⁷⁷ Of the 1,225 refugees that returned in March 1999, the UNHCR said 590 were ethnic Krahn returning to their homes in Grand Gedeh.⁷⁸

The inherent dangers in the lack of opportunities are evident at all levels of society. Extortion has become "widespread". Government officials are engaged in exploiting natural resources for their personal benefit. The drawback of such policies is the diversion of funds from socio-economic programmes. This has led to mass disenchantment amongst an estimated 60,000 ex-combatants and other war-affected youths awaiting reintegration.⁷⁹ In April 1999, 200 former NPFL combatants, who had suffered limb amputations, occupied the Catholic theological seminary in Gbarnga and demanded US\$ 25,000 from the Church as a resettlement package. Organized under the "Veteran Assistance Program", they claimed that "because of our present condition, we have no where to go and cannot even afford to rent houses".⁸⁰

⁷² *New African* [London], September 1998

⁷³ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1997*, p. 1

⁷⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 52

⁷⁵ *Dallas Morning News*

⁷⁶ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 1

⁷⁷ Richmond Draper, Chair of NARDA, Monrovia. Personal interview, 14 May 1999

⁷⁸ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Country Updates: Great Lakes and West Africa*, 14 April 1999

⁷⁹ *New African* [London], "Taylor's Honeymoon is Over", June 1998, p. 21

⁸⁰ *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], "Ex-Fighters Refuse to Vacate Catholic Premises Unless...". 14 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

This lack of a practical reintegration plan, both for ex-fighters, refugees and the displaced, remains a source of uncertainty and future upheavals. In September 1998, international NGOs urged the Government to adopt an integration scheme for ex-combatants which, they advised, should include a youth package.⁸¹

In November 1998, Taylor announced a National Work Plan for youths and ex-combatants, which he said, would facilitate the employment of 300 youths, with the Government funding the programme for only three months. He appealed to the European Union to fund the scheme thereafter.⁸²

Recruitment into security organizations without attendant payment of benefits is proving to be less of an integration option. In March 1999, units of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) assigned in the town of Robertsport near the border with Sierra Leone went on a looting spree and there were reports of rape. Soldiers in Monrovia looted their own barracks after they were ordered relocated, with the Government giving orders to shoot on sight.⁸³ Voinjama was extensively looted by state security men in April 1999.⁸⁴

Integration through reconciliation is less of a priority, although Taylor announced in 1997 that this would be his preoccupation. Apart from periodically wooing the political opposition to create the perception of an harmonious atmosphere needed for donor confidence, no significant reconciliatory steps have been taken.⁸⁵ In May 1999, a team of opposition politicians was sent to Washington on a lobbying mission, and when around the same time cabinet ministers were dismissed *en masse* for failing to attend a prayer service with the President this led to speculation that key opposition leaders would be recruited to the Government.⁸⁶ Such a policy would be based on the assumption that reconciliation is a precondition for aid. In July 1998, President Clinton urged the Government to adopt reconciliation as a key policy.⁸⁷ But this was not to be. Signs of trouble came in early September when Taylor announced that wartime rivals and some opposition politicians were plotting to overthrow his government. A number of rivals still in the country fled.⁸⁸ Charges of plotting a *coup d'état* were soon brought against others outside the country such as Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of the Unity Party, although the charge was later dropped following her protest.⁸⁹ Other opponents were also implicated in the alleged plot and this forestalled any possibility of their return home.⁹⁰

⁸¹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 17 September 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁸² *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 24 November 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁸³ United Nations. Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa, 8 April 1999

⁸⁴ *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], "What Really Happened in Voinjama ... Rescued UN Official Explains as Fighting Continues Outside City", 23 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁸⁵ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 49

⁸⁶ *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], "Opposition Secures UN Commitment for Liberia ... Meets State Dept. Officials Soon", 19 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁸⁷ Pan African News Agency, "Clinton Urges Liberians to Heal Wounds of the Past", 22 July 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

⁸⁸ Pan African News Agency, "Taylor Charges Plot to Overthrow Government", 1 September 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

⁸⁹ *West Africa* [London], "I Am Innocent", 21 December 1998-10 January 1999

⁹⁰ Pan African News Agency, "Exiled Liberian Faction Leader Seeks ECOWAS Intervention", 10 December 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

Moreover, the execution of opposition politician Samuel Dokie and three members of his family was a reminder in political circles that witch-hunting and recriminations had begun, sending shock waves into a society recovering from a brutal war.

As reports on harassment by the new security forces became almost a daily affair, the newly created state agency responsible for reconciliation remained largely inactive.⁹¹

2.2 Some Prospects for Reintegration

In the absence of concrete government reintegration programmes and commitment, a number of aid agencies are filling the void, although much more is needed. One year after the war's end, over one million Liberians were still dependent on food aid.⁹² Taylor has however been waging a relentless campaign to dissuade the population from depending on international organizations, but government alternatives are lacking.⁹³ In February 1999, he promised that Liberia would attain food self-sufficiency within 10 years.⁹⁴

But much more has to be done in the face of current economic problems. Perhaps efforts of organizations such as the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), which launched a US\$ 70 million appeal for the revitalization of agriculture and the restoration of basic services, if fruitful, could begin to give hope to a population in dire need. OCHA said that despite normalization of the situation, 1.4 million persons remain affected by the war and that the requested funds were intended for the internally displaced, refugees, ex-combatants, child soldiers and other "vulnerable groups".⁹⁵ Some counselling for an estimated 25,000 women raped during the war has been undertaken, along with UNICEF assistance for 30,000 orphans.⁹⁶

But filling the void would require new strategies, such as curtailing other forms of refugee assistance and channeling funds into income generating activities, with the aim of attracting refugees back from neighbouring camps and enhancing their prospects of self-reliance. For example, with funding available, UNHCR has announced plans to initiate a number of income generating activities, among them vocational training and other "Quick Impact Projects" for enhancing reintegration in collaboration with the Government.⁹⁷ It said projects for the empowerment of women and promotion of their self-sufficiency are also being considered. However, the Government's lack of a comprehensive reintegration plan to supplement NGO and IGO activities can be seen through the discrepancies in the state budget for restoration of damaged infrastructure.

⁹¹ *Africa Confidential* [London], 15 February 1999

⁹² Pan African News Agency, "Over 1 Million Liberians Received Food Aid in 1998", 7 April 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

⁹³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 1 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁹⁴ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 6 February 1999

⁹⁵ Pan African News Agency, "UN Appeals for US\$ 70 Million for Liberian Refugees", 12 February 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

⁹⁶ Inter Press Service, "Liberia: Human Rights - Picking Up the Pieces after the War", 28 July 1998 (electronic format: Senet).

⁹⁷ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Repatriation and Reintegration of Liberian Refugees", in *1999 Global Appeal* (Geneva, 1998)

The state agency responsible for repairing destroyed facilities, the Ministry of Public Works, said it needed US\$ 2 million within a 10-year span for refurbishing damaged or looted infrastructure.⁹⁸

But Taylor has given a much more realistic amount, “between US\$ 5 to 10 billion”. He said restoring electricity and water facilities will cost between US\$ 100 million and US\$ 120 million and, ironically, he expected the international community to provide the money.⁹⁹

Despite the odds, international organizations have had notable successes in a number of areas. In April 1999, figures detailing their activities were released, which included food aid to one million Liberians in 1998 and the distribution of 3,178 metric tons of seed rice. Some 140,000 persons in school communities, towns, and villages received food incentives while undertaking the cultivation of 124 hectares for seed production. Seventy-three schools and a teacher training institute were rehabilitated. Four thousand students received scholarships.¹⁰⁰ Despite these efforts, President Taylor threatened, in January 1999, to expel international organizations since, he said, they were no longer needed and the period of relief was over.¹⁰¹ This assertion came after the World Food Organization released figures showing that Liberia is among 17 countries in the world with severe food shortages.¹⁰²

3. Ecomog’s Departure: Security Vacuum and Alternatives

Multiple security structures have emerged to replace the West African peacekeeping force, ECOMOG, which finally left the country in January 1999, leaving only a token presence with no peacekeeping duties.¹⁰³ Numbering some 14,000, members of these security forces, as mentioned earlier, are drawn from within the ranks of the NPFL.¹⁰⁴ But whether these structures can sustain peace after ECOMOG remains one of the principal concerns. Indications are that this is difficult without fundamental changes in command, control, and training.¹⁰⁵

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the Liberia National Police (LNP) were the standing, conventional security establishments, but this has changed since the elections. The latter is commanded by the President’s cousin, known to have directed and participated in the April 1996 looting of Monrovia.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 4 August 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

⁹⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 2 March 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁰⁰ Pan African News Agency, 7 April 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁰¹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 15 January 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁰² *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 25 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁰³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 16 January 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁰⁴ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 50

¹⁰⁵ Justice and Peace Commission, National Catholic Secretariat, *Human Rights: The Case of Liberia* (Monrovia, December 1997)

¹⁰⁶ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1997*, p. 1

Three new armed units patrol Monrovia and the countryside. One of these is the Special Security Unit (SSU) which is directly controlled by the President.¹⁰⁷ The others are the Counter Force and the Special Operations Division (SOD), commanded by the President's son.¹⁰⁸

Other armed groups include the Alert Force, the Republican Guards, and the Special Security Service. Ex-fighters have been permitted to form private security firms for hire by businesses and others.¹⁰⁹ Government ministries and agencies similarly have their own security structures with ill-defined responsibilities.¹¹⁰

Various security administrative agencies with overlapping functions co-ordinate national security, which was given priority in the Government's 1999 budget.¹¹¹ They include the National Security Council, chaired by the President. The secret police agency, the National Security Agency, is buttressed by the newly activated National Bureau of Investigation (NIB), dismantled in 1980 when the military seized power. The "Joint Security" is made up of various security heads and is responsible for co-ordinating national security, while there is also a Ministry of National Security with identical responsibilities. The responsibilities of these agencies are also poorly defined.

Lingering uncertainties characterized ECOMOG's departure and the subsequent replacement. Civic leaders and diplomats opposed the troops' early departure, contending that it was premature in view of the fluid security environment. This prevailing fear was articulated by the Catholic Archbishop of Monrovia, Michael Francis, testifying before the Senate: "The majority of the People of Liberia do not trust/have confidence in the present Security Forces.

They have implicit confidence in ECOMOG."¹¹² The Inter-Faith Mediation Committee (consisting of Christian and Muslim leaders) pleaded against early departure without a competent replacement and disagreed with the Government's contention that ECOMOG's departure was overdue.¹¹³ U.S. President Bill Clinton joined the campaign by urging the Government to maintain the peacekeeping force as a guarantee for stability.¹¹⁴ This request was preceded by the revelation that the U.S. envoy to the country, William Milam, had informed the State Department of possible troubles after ECOMOG's pullout.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁷ *Africa Confidential* [London], 15 February 1999

¹⁰⁸ *The International Herald Tribune* [Paris], "Stagnant and Scared: Liberia's Troubled Transition", 15 January 1999

¹⁰⁹ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 50

¹¹⁰ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1997*, p. 1

¹¹¹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 11 January 1999 (electronic format: Libnet). See also *Dallas Morning News*

¹¹² Michael K. Francis, "Peace: A Response to an Invitation of the Senate on the Prevailing Security Situation in the Country", Monrovia, 6 April 1998

¹¹³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 11 April 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹¹⁴ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 24 March 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹¹⁵ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 2 March 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

These fears were temporarily allayed in December 1997, when Nigeria declared that the troops would remain due to the uncertain security conditions in neighbouring countries.¹¹⁶ But long standing disagreements and suspicions between Taylor and the Nigerians, among them ECOMOG's encouragement of anti-NPFL factions, made the troops' departure certain once Taylor was elected. Taylor's underlying fear was living with an army he did not trust. To ensure this trust he suggested a number of options, including joint operations between ECOMOG and his newly formed army.

And when this was rejected by Victor Malu, the Nigerian general commanding the troops, an angry exchange of words followed: "No officer of any nation or any force in Liberia will share power with the President of this Republic or challenge the sovereignty of this government The mission of ECOMOG must and will change as of February 2 [1998]". "I don't understand what is [the] parallel authority. I command the ECOMOG forces and nothing else and in this process of carrying out that job, I don't propose to share that command with nobody", replied General Malu.¹¹⁷ It became clear the troops would leave and thousands of Liberians staged a farewell march in Monrovia for the soldiers.¹¹⁸ Liberian security in waiting swiftly took over their functions.

The effects of the replacement were soon felt. Feared and distrusted state security men, manning checkpoints previously manned by ECOMOG soldiers, rekindled memories of the war. As one observer noted: "The thugs who had ravaged Liberia became the foot soldiers in Taylor's new state security police. They are often accused of flogging, intimidating and kidnapping civilians."¹¹⁹ In Monrovia, where hundreds of armed ex-rebels now paraded the streets as policemen, soldiers, etc., fear and insecurity spread, leading to charges against the new security forces of killings, disappearances and indiscriminate arrests.¹²⁰

A rapid deterioration of individual liberties ensued, as reports of harassment at these checkpoints became a daily affair.¹²¹ The activities of the new security forces led some observers to predict a threat to peace. Tensions escalated throughout the year, with more accusations against the security forces of extra-judicial killings.¹²² Another observer notes:

At checkpoints or on major roads, men in black, blue or camouflage uniforms carry automatic rifles on behalf of agencies known mainly by initials such as SSS, SSU, and SOD. The men have had little training since their guerrilla days. A man draws basic pay the equivalent of \$5 a month Mr. Taylor's son, Charles Taylor Jr. - who is in his twenties and uses the nickname "Chuckie" - heads a secret military unit of perhaps 600 fighters, Liberians and foreign sources said. The unit, named SWAP, includes men from Gambia, Guinea and Burkina Faso...¹²³

¹¹⁶ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 20 December 1997 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹¹⁷ Inter Press Service, "Politics-West Africa: Whither Peacekeeping in Liberia", 30 November 1997

¹¹⁸ Pan African News Agency, "Liberians Give ECOMOG Peacekeepers Farewell", 25 January 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

¹¹⁹ *Dallas Morning News*

¹²⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 50

¹²¹ See United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, pp. 1-7

¹²² Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 51

¹²³ *The International Herald Tribune*

But in reality ECOMOG's post-elections presence did little to curtail the numerous abuses. The troops adopted a new posture, collaborating with the new security forces in a number of instances. For example, ECOMOG troops joined the new security forces in violently putting down a demonstration staged by workers of the Firestone Plantations Company demanding promised benefits.¹²⁴ Other abuses attributed to ECOMOG, including summary executions, followed.

And even as ECOMOG troops were patrolling the streets, executions, disappearances, intimidation and arbitrary arrests rose sharply between 1997 and 1998.¹²⁵ This open collaboration with state security forces organized and armed in defiance of the Abuja Agreement led some former warlords to claim a pro-Taylor complicity in ECOMOG's new role, as was the case when an ECOMOG soldier shot and killed a disarmed loyalist of Roosevelt Johnson prior to the fighting on 18 September 1998.¹²⁶ But in spite of these shortcomings, many saw the Nigerian led force as a stabilizing factor against feared rebels, who had terrorized the country for over seven years, and who were now expected to provide and ensure security as policemen. Throughout most of 1998, fear prevailed, with continued reports of killings and abductions linked to the security forces.¹²⁷

3.1 Unfinished Business: The Abuja Agreement and the Reorganization of the Army and Security Structures

After a series of peace agreements, the Abuja Agreement was signed on 1 September 1995. It paved the way for a final resolution of the conflict with the disarmament of 21,315 fighters out of an estimated 33,000. This number included 4,306 child soldiers. About 10,000 weapons and 1.2 million pieces of ammunition were collected.¹²⁸

The agreement centred on demobilization of fighters, reorganization of a new army screened and trained by ECOMOG, and elections scheduled for May 1997 (postponed to July 1997).¹²⁹ This breakthrough, made possible after a meeting between Taylor and the late Nigerian military leader Sani Abacha, convinced a sceptical Taylor that Nigeria would not oppose his presidency once he honoured its interests.¹³⁰ A council of state, comprising the major warlords and some civilians, was formed. But problems soon emerged, culminating in the April 1996 fighting in Monrovia which left the city shattered, producing scores of refugees and displacing thousands. The fighting prompted West African leaders to reconvene in Abuja in August 1996 and this meeting led to the revision of the Abuja Agreement.

¹²⁴ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1997*, p. 12

¹²⁵ *Idem*, p. 2

¹²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 51

¹²⁷ Pan African News Agency, "Monrovia Terrorized by Killings", 1 December 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

¹²⁸ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Emerging from the Destruction*, p. 12

¹²⁹ Carter Center, p. 17

¹³⁰ Ellis, p. 4

The result was Abuja Two, with a council of state as an interim government. As stipulated in the agreement, the chief protagonists in the conflict - Charles Taylor, Alhaji Kromah, George Boley - subsequently resigned from the council and transformed their war machines into political parties. Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) became the National Patriotic Party (NPP); Kromah's ULIMO became the All Liberian Coalition Party (ALCOP), while George Boley lined up behind the late President Doe's (his kinsman) National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL).¹³¹

To ensure a smooth security environment after ECOMOG's departure, the agreement stipulated a restructuring exercise of the army and paramilitary forces commencing before the elections and ending six months after.¹³² This meant that any elected president would have inherited an ECOWAS trained and restructured army. However, in the rush for elections, along with poor planning, and lack of resources, a number of steps specified in the agreement were not implemented.¹³³ For example, although the agreement called for the encampment of all fighters, disarmed fighters were simply registered and not encamped, leaving their control and command structures intact.¹³⁴ Hence, failure to abide by the agreement's timetable meant that there would be no serious discussions on the restructuring exercise until Taylor (or whoever won the elections) was sworn into office. The stage was set for expected misinterpretations of the agreement.

The logic of the restructuring clause was to address the fear of reprisals against losers in the elections and to establish security structures resilient enough for peace-building. But this soon became an unfulfilled dream. In the words of a frustrated General Malu, who was expected to commence the training: "Prior to the elections, we had eight factions and they were transformed into political parties. The idea was to form an army acceptable to all the people and not just a section, a clan, or tribe. This is necessary to ensure confidence in the elected government". On the contrary, Taylor saw this as a threat to his authority since the constitution, made him, as an elected president, "Commander-in-Chief" of the Armed Forces. He reminded the ECOMOG authorities that: "There will be no parallel authority in this republic".¹³⁵ What followed, as mentioned earlier, was the transformation of the AFL to address Taylor's fears and wishes. His arch rivals and civil society protested, contending that the agreement was now null and void.¹³⁶ Roosevelt Johnson, then Minister of rural development within the Government, predicted problems.¹³⁷ Civic leaders protested and called on ECOWAS to reject Taylor's interpretation.

¹³¹ Carter Center, p. 17

¹³² Inter Press Service, 30 November 1997

¹³³ Human Rights Watch/Africa, *Emerging from the Destruction*, p. 12.

¹³⁴ Carter Center, p. 17.

¹³⁵ Inter Press Service, 30 November 1997

¹³⁶ *The New Horizon Journal* [Boston], Johannes Z. Zlahn, "Is the Abuja Accord Which Produced the July 19, 1997 General Elections a Binding and Enforceable Contract?", January/February/March 1999, p. 4

¹³⁷ Pan African News Agency, "Former Warlord Insists On ECOMOG Restructuring of Army", 16 February 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

European Union officials indicated that any significant donor activity in the country without ECOMOG was unlikely.¹³⁸ But this was now a quarrel after the fact. Heavily armed men began to parade the streets and the countryside as weapons multiplied. Worried over this proliferation of weapons, ECOMOG called on the international community to maintain its arms embargo on the Government because the weapons were in the “wrong hands”.¹³⁹

General Malu, who had been credited with the peaceful conduct of the elections, left a disappointed man, warning that Taylor’s failure to abide by the Abuja Agreement on restructuring the army was a source of future conflict and that contrary to expectations, disarmament was incomplete.¹⁴⁰

3.2 The Sierra Leone Entanglement and Its Implications for Repatriation and Resettlement of Refugees

The Sierra Leone war presents a greater threat to peace consolidation and regional stability. Close historical links between the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone and the NPFL, coupled with the intensification of the rebels’ offensive since Taylor’s election, warrant concern that Liberia is becoming an incubator for destabilization in West Africa. Moreover, many Sierra Leoneans have concluded that their war is an extension of the Liberian conflict.¹⁴¹

The alliance between Taylor and the Sierra Leone rebels dates back to the formative days of the Liberian crisis and the earlier convergence of Taylor and Foday Sankoh, the RUF leader, among others, in Libya.¹⁴² Sankoh is also known to have played a pivotal role in the Liberian conflict as a key tactician and military adviser to the NPFL, and Taylor has never denied the ties.¹⁴³ The result has been Liberia’s growing international isolation with implications for internal stability and setbacks for post-war socio-economic programmes.

Whatever the benefits of the ties, it is becoming clear that Sierra Leone could present serious obstacles to Liberia’s fragile stability. This possibility was hinted at by Taylor himself in April 1999, during a meeting with Sierra Leone’s religious leaders, when he admitted that Liberia’s stability was linked to peace in Sierra Leone, and that the war in that country has contributed to his growing international isolation.¹⁴⁴

But he has also warned that like himself, his RUF allies had opted for the gun to seize power, and that the Kabbah government ought to address their demands.¹⁴⁵ This was, in effect, a suggestion for a power sharing formula between the Sierra Leone Government and the RUF rebels. This overt pro-RUF stance has reinforced allegations that the Government is indeed backing the RUF and their Armed Forces

¹³⁸ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 14 November 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹³⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 21 March 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁴⁰ Pan African News Agency, “Malu Regrets Leaving Without Restructuring Liberian Army”, 9 January 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁴¹ Pan African News Agency, “External Factors in Sierra Leone Conflict - Jonah”, 30 January 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁴² Ellis, p. 2

¹⁴³ NPFL fighters. Personal interview, 15 December 1996

¹⁴⁴ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 17 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁴⁵ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 15 December 1998 (electronic format: Libnet).

Revolutionary Council (AFRC) military allies, with the EU condemning the alleged flow of arms from Liberia to the rebels.¹⁴⁶

In April 1999, the ECOMOG Commander announced that he had confirmed reports of arms shipment from Liberia and Burkina Faso to the rebels, and threatened: “I therefore want to make it categorically clear that we will no longer watch this mischief by supposed leaders ... in view of the danger it poses to us and the whole sub region.”¹⁴⁷

The Washington-based organization Refugee International, fearing the spread of the war to Guinea, called for the strengthening of ECOMOG and Sierra Leone’s civil defence force, the Kamajors, to arrest the accelerating humanitarian crisis caused by rebel atrocities.¹⁴⁸ Guinea was increasingly becoming vulnerable. In May 1999, RUF rebels attacked a village in Guinea, near the Sierra Leone border. Two villagers were killed and a number of cattle stolen.¹⁴⁹

This was a dramatic turn of events, and expectations that ECOMOG’s success in Liberia would lead to sub regional stability were now in doubt. Signaling further actions against Taylor, Nigeria’s foreign minister, Ignatius Odisemeka, told diplomats that a policy was in the pipeline to “contain” Taylor: “We are fashioning a policy to contain him [Taylor]. We are fashioning a policy to contain the countries from where they get arms to kill innocent peacekeeping troops in Sierra Leone”.¹⁵⁰ The policy was never specified, but the announcement pointed to the growing isolation of Liberia and moves to counter what many saw as sub regional destabilization plots emanating from Monrovia. A formal Nigerian warning, stating the “nefarious role being played by Liberia and some other countries in and outside the sub region in Sierra Leone”, was delivered to Taylor. More indications of Nigeria’s anger and frustration came with a threat to seek redress and war reparations from Liberia for men and property lost in the Sierra Leone war.¹⁵¹ The Ghanaians, believed to have been more sympathetic to Taylor prior to the RUF/AFRC offensive, joined in what was now a unanimous condemnation of Liberia by calling for the repatriation of Liberian refugees still in Ghana because, a furious President Jerry Rawlings contended, the Liberian Government was capable of caring for its citizens if it had the resources to sponsor wars.¹⁵² But it was not only the West Africans that were worried over Taylor’s adventure in Sierra Leone. The UN Security Council accused the country of using its territory to infiltrate arms into Sierra Leone.¹⁵³ In February 1999, a EU humanitarian official, following a visit to the region, warned of the risks of regional disintegration due to international arms conflicts.¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁶ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 15 January 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁴⁷ Reuter, “West African Force Warns Liberia, Burkina on S. Leone”, 8 April 1999

¹⁴⁸ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 6 November 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁴⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 15 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁵⁰ Pan African News Agency, “Nigeria Fumes over Taylor’s Alleged Role in Sierra Leone”, 1 February 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁵¹ Pan African News Agency, “Nigeria Warns Rebel Backers” 14 January 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁵² Pan African News Agency, “Rawlings Tells Liberia to Stop Supplying RUF Rebels”, 13 January 1999

¹⁵³ Pan African News Agency, “Calls for Inquiry into Arms Supplies to Sierra Leone Rebels”, 8 January 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁵⁴ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 16 February 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

Denials from Liberia were leading nowhere, and Taylor came nearer to the truth when he admitted that 3,000 Liberians were fighting in Sierra Leone for all sides.¹⁵⁵ The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Susan E. Rice, claiming “clear evidence of Liberian involvement with RUF” and reports of Libyan and Burkinabe collaboration with the rebels, warned Taylor to end his backing of the RUF.¹⁵⁶

The Government continued its denial, but its links with the RUF were difficult to conceal. *Africa Confidential* noted the close links between Taylor and key RUF commanders in Monrovia.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, a humanitarian crisis, similar in many respects to that of Liberia, was surfacing in Sierra Leone. By December 1998, the war had created 500,000 refugees. About one-fifth of the country’s 4.5 million population became displaced, while 150,000 were left homeless.¹⁵⁸ The January 1999 Freetown fighting left 5,000 dead. Looting of relief warehouses and mass destruction of businesses brought hunger for more than one million people trapped in their homes in January 1999.¹⁵⁹ By May 1999, it was reported that half of the population was displaced and 20,000 dead.¹⁶⁰ The fate of thousands of Liberian refugees living on the outskirts of the Sierra Leonean capital was unknown.¹⁶¹ Many Liberian refugees would relive the atrocities that had kept them away from home as rebels instituted summary executions and gruesome campaigns of limb amputation.¹⁶² About 250,000 refugees crossed into Liberia and Guinea.¹⁶³ This upsurge of refugees crossing into Liberia prompted a worried Taylor to question why Sierra Leoneans were fleeing into Liberia while many Liberian refugees still in that country were refusing to return home.¹⁶⁴ In Liberia itself, there were several reported cases of arbitrary arrests and detentions of Sierra Leonean refugees.¹⁶⁵ Cases of abuse persisted, and in May 1999 the Government rejected a request from the Sierra Leone ambassador in Monrovia to visit displaced persons centres holding Sierra Leoneans.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁵ Pan African News Agency, “Liberians Fighting in Sierra Leone Told to Return Home”, 4 February 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁵⁶ Susan E. Rice, “Prospects for Peace in Sierra Leone: Statement Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on International Relations Subcommittee of Africa, Washington DC, 23 March 1999” (unpublished document)

¹⁵⁷ *Africa Confidential* [London], 15 February 1999

¹⁵⁸ Rice

¹⁵⁹ Pan African News Agency, “WFP Calls for End of Hostilities in Freetown”, 15 January 1999 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁶⁰ United States Agency for International Development, Office of United States Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), *Sierra Leone: Complex Emergency: Fact Sheet #16, Fiscal Year (FY) 1999* (18 May 1999)

¹⁶¹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 10 February 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁶² *The New York Times*, Norimitsu Onishi, “Brutal War’s Machetes Maim Sierra Leone”, 26 January 1999

¹⁶³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 6 November 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁶⁴ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 9 January 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁶⁵ Pan African News Agency, “Sierra Leone Refugees Decry Harassment”, 24 December 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁶⁶ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 13 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

It is difficult to see the political advantages of Liberia's entanglement in Sierra Leone, but a number of factors seem to be at work, among them Taylor's fear of a political formula in Freetown without the RUF, his guarantee against a possible re-grouping of rivals to once again challenge him.¹⁶⁷ President Ahmed Tijan Kabbah's December 1998 decision to alert Taylor about a possible *coup d'état* allegedly planned by Liberians in Sierra Leone did not avert this fear. A few weeks after Taylor was alerted, the war entered Freetown with alleged Liberian support.¹⁶⁸

3.3 Human Rights: 1997 to the Present

Liberia's human rights record since 1997 has been aptly described as "poor".¹⁶⁹ Almost two years after the transition, the verdict was reinforced by the country's Catholic bishops, in a pastoral letter issued in late May 1999 decrying "increasing human rights violations".¹⁷⁰

The overwhelming concern within the human rights community after the elections was the fear that abuses would resume once the shield provided by the international community was removed with the departure of its observers.¹⁷¹ As events proved, this has been the case. Abuses have persisted despite promises of steering away from the "wrongs of the past", and the Government's claims that its human rights record is better than previous years since no journalists or human rights activists are in prison.¹⁷²

The brief period of lessening abuses, that is the period before and immediately after the July 1997 polls, was attributed to the mass deployment of ECOMOG troops throughout the country. This was to suddenly change when the Government rearmed and deployed its former fighters with police duties.¹⁷³ This policy has led to the heightening of the level of abuses from September 1997 up to mid 1999, with almost weekly reports of abuses by security forces.¹⁷⁴ The high level of abuses led the Taylor dominated Senate, in November 1998, to join other civic institutions in expressing concern over brutalities committed by security forces.¹⁷⁵ In December 1998, Taylor admitted a slide into the past as abuses rose.¹⁷⁶

With the average monthly salary of a security officer as low as US \$7, predatory activities are not unusual.¹⁷⁷ Although some efforts were made in investigating alleged abuses, the U.S. Department of State concluded in its 1998 Human Rights

¹⁶⁷ *Daily News Briefs and Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service National News Summaries*, 11 November 1998 (electronic format: Sierra Leone Web)

¹⁶⁸ *Idem*, 12 November 1998

¹⁶⁹ See United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ...* [1997 and 1998], pp. 1 and 2 respectively

¹⁷⁰ Pan African News Agency, 24 May 1999

¹⁷¹ Carter Center, p. 12

¹⁷² *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 6 December 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁷³ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 50

¹⁷⁴ *The International Herald Tribune*

¹⁷⁵ Pan African News Agency, "Liberian Senate Concerned about Pervasive Harassment", 16 November 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁷⁶ Pan African News Agency, "Taylor Warns about Civil War Related Vices", 9 December 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

¹⁷⁷ Pan African News Agency, "High Unemployment, Low Salaries Affect Liberians", 23 April 1998 (electronic format: Senet)

Report that those security officers charged with abuses were “either treated leniently or exonerated”.¹⁷⁸ Journalists and human rights campaigners have been prime targets, with the President declaring in May 1999 that he was losing patience with an “unpatriotic” press.¹⁷⁹ Arbitrary arrests and detentions, shutdowns of newspapers and radio stations, floggings of journalists became common between 1997 and 1998.¹⁸⁰

The leader of the upper house, the Senate, Charles Brumskine, citing threats on his life, fled the country after disagreements with the President.¹⁸¹ One of the country’s leading human rights campaigners, Kofi Woods, also fled after threats on his life.¹⁸² A state Human Rights Commissioner, ordered flogged in April 1998 by the police director, went into exile. An inquiry was ordered, but the President refused to release the findings, contending that they were for his private information.¹⁸³

A number of instances have led to a charge of impunity against the Government, among them the discovery of the mutilated bodies of opposition politician Samuel Dokie and three members of his family on 4 December 1997. Even before investigations could commence, the President announced that members of his bodyguard unit who arrested the family had escaped from detention.¹⁸⁴ Those state security men charged were later tried and acquitted. The commander of the presidential bodyguard force, who admitted ordering the arrest, was never questioned.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, state security men arrested in connection with the murder of a market woman and outspoken critic of the Government, Madam Nowai Flomo, were released.¹⁸⁶ The Government’s September onslaught against the Krahns, according to the U.S. State Department, was marred by arbitrary arrests and summary executions: “Scores of victims ... and persons subsequently killed during house to house searches were buried secretly by the security forces, leaving their next of kin in doubt as to their whereabouts”.¹⁸⁷ Government security forces were accused of turning away from hospitals “virtually all Krahns who sought treatment for wounds received during the September fighting”.¹⁸⁸

Wounded patients were hauled from *Medécins Sans Frontières* (MSF) and UNHCR ambulances to an unknown fate.¹⁸⁹ Nine AFL officers, the majority of them Krahns, were still being tried in May 1999 by a special court-martial board.¹⁹⁰ Fewer and fewer were exempt, as demonstrated in May 1999, when ministers dismissed for

¹⁷⁸ United States, Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 1

¹⁷⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 19 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁸⁰ See both Committee to Protect Journalists, *Attacks on the Press in 1997: A Worldwide Survey* (New York, 1998), pp. 135-7 and International Press Institute, *1998 World Press Freedom Review* (Vienna, December 1998), p. 32

¹⁸¹ *The Perspective* [Smyrna GA], “Liberia: Back to Square One”, January/March 1999

¹⁸² Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 54

¹⁸³ *Idem*, p. 52

¹⁸⁴ Justice and Peace Commission, National Catholic Secretariat, *Situation Report on Liberia for the Period August 1997-January 1998* (Monrovia, 1998)

¹⁸⁵ United States, Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 3

¹⁸⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 50

¹⁸⁷ United States, Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 3

¹⁸⁸ *Idem*, p. 11

¹⁸⁹ Medécins Sans Frontières, “Casualty Report of MSF for Monrovia”, 24 September 1998 (letter to Liberia’s Chief Medical Officer)

¹⁹⁰ *Liberian News Bulletin*, 19 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

failing to attend a prayer ceremony with the President became targets of harassment.¹⁹¹

This cycle of abuses can be attributed to the failure in bringing to justice those responsible for abuses during the war and the sidelining of human rights issues in the peace agreements that ended the conflict.¹⁹²

Following local and international concerns that there should be concrete steps to curb abuses, a proposal for setting up a National Human Rights Commission was accepted, but two of the Commission's most vocal members were rejected by the Senate, and the body remains inactive with no resources.¹⁹³

With the judicial system plagued by corruption, under-funded, and politically manipulated, seeking redress is made more difficult. The country's Chief Justice revealed that private and competent lawyers were unwilling to accept state judicial appointments due to poor benefits, and that this has led to the recruitment of untrained persons in the judicial system. About 140 court vacancies could not be filled in 1998 due to the shortage of trained persons.¹⁹⁴ But lawyers contend that political interference with judicial matters hinders their performance and this is evidenced by the President's appointment of a judge amidst protests from lawyers.¹⁹⁵ The Government's overbearing posture in judicial matters became glaring when, in March 1999, soldiers disrupted court proceedings during the treason trial of a group of defendants who were mostly members of the Krahn ethnic group, an incident that led jurors to flee.¹⁹⁶ Lawyers defending the accused had already pleaded for state protection against reprisals.¹⁹⁷ This trend was continued through May 1999 when a member of the Senate dismissed a number of judicial officials in defiance of established laws.¹⁹⁸ This level of abuses has led to failed expectations of a departure from the past. Archbishop Francis observed:

Today, our nation has very sinful and unjust structures that create and breathe corruption. For example, our Security Forces are underpaid and highly traumatized. Are we surprised that they harass peaceful citizens and extort things from them? We all agree that our nation has been deeply traumatized.

By re-arming former fighters in such a short period, without the appropriate de-traumatizing approach, fosters a continuum of loyalty to individuals rather than to nation, and a continuum of factional arrogance and arbitrariness but importantly, the sanctioning of impunity for abuses, affirms this assertion.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹¹ *The Inquirer* [Monrovia], "Dismissed Ministers Comply...Turn in Properties; Veep Dogolea Warns Security Officers; Beddell Effects Changes", 20 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁹² Amnesty International, *Liberia: Time to Take Human Rights Seriously: Placing Human Rights on the National Agenda* (London, 1 October 1997), p. 4

¹⁹³ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 52

¹⁹⁴ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 24 April 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁹⁵ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 11 December 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁹⁶ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 24 March 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁹⁷ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 10 November 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁹⁸ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 13 May 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

¹⁹⁹ Francis

Suggestions that a Truth Commission along South African lines would have led to lessened abuses are less likely to be accepted since many of the alleged abusers, now in power, would have to agree. Moreover, various peace agreements and the granting of a general amnesty for crimes committed in actual combat create obstacles for redress because, as Human Rights Watch notes, “those responsible for committing some of the most unimaginable atrocities during the war were neither punished for their actions nor effectively demobilized. Former faction fighters, particularly those of Taylor’s faction, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), continued to act with impunity ...”.²⁰⁰

Current human rights abuses must therefore be viewed against the culture of unmitigated and indiscriminate violence perpetrated by the armed factions as noted by the American Jon Lee Anderson who spent some childhood years in Liberia: “Taylor commanded one of the most vicious armies of modern times. Many [of his fighters] engaged in cannibalism, eating the hearts and genitals of their slain enemies in order to enhance their ‘power’..”.²⁰¹

3.4 The Current Ethnic Divide: The Plight of Mandingoes and Krahns

Ethnic rivalries and suspicions have resurfaced, posing serious threats to peace-building. Earlier stages of Liberian history recorded ethnic divisions, as Americo-Liberians consolidated their grip on the country, monopolizing political power, and economic opportunities. But tribalism has never been such a violent and destructive force as it was transformed into during the war.²⁰² The absence of concrete policies aimed at addressing the fears of Krahns and Mandingoes, bruised by the conflict, carry explosive implications. Reprisals against members of these tribes continue to hinder their resettlement.

Mandingoes constituted a rather wealthy commercial and land-owning class in a Gio-Mano enclave of Nimba County, where they are viewed as intruders from neighbouring Guinea. Mandingo alliance with the Krahns during the beginning of the war turned this latent rivalry into bloody reprisals against this predominantly Muslim tribe, now that Gios and Manos formed the overwhelming majority in the NPFL. This cycle of ethnically inspired violence escalated as Mandingoes, under the umbrella of ULIMO-Mandingo, got the military edge in some parts of the country and proceeded to institute a systematic campaign of revenge (including forced labour and desecration of non-Muslim shrines) against tribes accused of siding with the NPFL. Although overt reprisals against Mandingoes have lessened, a number of developments, such as the post-election mass dismissal of Mandingoes from state jobs, point to uncertain days ahead. Official statements against Mandingoes, including Taylor’s allegations that they were fighting for the Sierra Leone Government, have led to threats against members of the tribe.²⁰³

A deep suspicion within the Government of Mandingoes as supporters of ULIMO prevails and in April 1999 a representative of the Government claimed he saw Mandingoes in battle during the Voinjama fighting. He told a gathering of Lofa

²⁰⁰ Human Rights Watch, *Annual Report 1998*, p. 50

²⁰¹ *New Yorker Magazine*, Jon Lee Anderson, “The Devil They Know”, 27 July 1998, p. 36

²⁰² Richard Carver, *Liberia: The Prospects for Peace: Update December 1994 - September 1996* (WRITENET for UNHCR/CDR, October 1996), p.10 (UNHCR/CDR REF WORLD Databases)

²⁰³ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 11

citizens in Monrovia that thousands of Mandingoes in Guinea were training for renewed military offensive, and that non-Mandingo tribes would be their main targets. These allegations, among many others, led the president of the Senate to call for the formation of vigilante groups outside government control for combating the alleged Mandingo threat.²⁰⁴ Several Mandingoes were arrested, prompting a local human rights group to threaten legal action against the state.²⁰⁵ Mandingo students at the University of Liberia protested the arrest of 200 Mandingoes following the fighting by vigilantes and appealed for their release.²⁰⁶

This clampdown led to a Mandingo stampede out of border towns as rumours of an impending attack circulated.²⁰⁷ The UNHCR reported that as many as 6,000, mostly recent returnees, had fled back into Guinea.²⁰⁸ Prior to this, a number of Mandingo mosques were burnt, and a government committee set-up to investigate the incidents recommended punishment for those responsible but no one was arrested or questioned.²⁰⁹

Constant harassment forced Mandingoes in Nimba and Lofa counties to appeal for the intervention of the Inter-Faith Mediation Committee, a body comprising Muslim and Christian national leaders,²¹⁰ which had already said that obstacles against resettlement of Mandingoes were “potentially explosive”.²¹¹ But Mandingoes believe they have become “victims of collective guilt” and have warned that their continued victimization poses a danger.²¹² Although Taylor has promised to discourage attacks on Mandingoes, more convincing state actions are needed to arrest future problems. The primary problem is the lack of competent security forces and a fully functioning judiciary in these areas, which prevent many Mandingoes from seeking redress.

As events have shown, the worst reprisals have so far been against members of the Krahn tribe who, in May 1998, circulated a letter to ECOWAS and foreign embassies accusing a former NPFL general of rearming 200 fighters who were allegedly maltreating residents.²¹³ Eleven mostly Krahn officers of the AFL were arrested, tortured, and shot following the fighting on 18 September. The Government claimed they were killed in a gun battle after attempting to escape from prison, a charge disputed by the U.S. State Department.²¹⁴

Krahns, clustered in Monrovia’s displaced persons centres and abandoned homes, complained during part of 1998 of constant harassment from security forces and appealed to their leaders in government to facilitate their repatriation out of the city.²¹⁵ In March 1999, Krahns further appealed for the arrest of four AFL men who, they

²⁰⁴ *The Inquirer*, “I Was There”, 26 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

²⁰⁵ *The Inquirer*, 30 April 1999

²⁰⁶ United Nations. Integrated Regional Information Network for West Africa, *West Africa Update*, 24 May 1999

²⁰⁷ *The Inquirer*, 30 April 1999

²⁰⁸ *The News* [Monrovia], “6,000 Flee to Guinea”, 30 April 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

²⁰⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 4 August 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹⁰ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 12 December 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹¹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 19 April 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹² *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 11 April 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹³ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 25 May 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹⁴ United States. Department of State, *Country Reports ... 1998*, p. 3

²¹⁵ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 7 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

said, had burnt down four villages in their area.²¹⁶ Krahn refugees who fled to Côte d'Ivoire told visiting Liberian Government officials they would not return for fear of persecution.²¹⁷ The superintendent of Grand Gedeh County, home of the Krahns, notified the Government of continued security harassment, pointing out that activities of security men were discouraging refugees from returning.²¹⁸ In February 1998, persistent intimidation of Krahns in Nimba County had led to protests and calls for justice. But the Government again denied the claims, contending that such allegations were intended to discourage the return of Krahns.²¹⁹

4. Conclusion

Liberia's shaky transition has created a framework within which peace can be consolidated, reconstruction pursued. But the prevailing security and political environment points to an uncertain future regarding peace-building. So far, the signals coming from the Government for reconciliation are discouraging. As indicated, constant human rights abuses, the lack of transparency in governance, and eroding confidence in state institutions, place a damper on reconstruction with adverse implications for repatriation and reintegration programmes.

Election as a formula for conflict resolution in developing societies may have its merits, but also pitfalls which emerge when democratization ends on polling day. The fact that Liberia has never had a history of credible elections and democratic institutions remains a source of concern as the Government again adopts the strong-arm measures of the past in dealing with opposition, seeing every criticism as a threat. Current vendettas against Mandingoes and Krahns could lead to a backlash similar to what we have witnessed with the Gios and Manos against the Krahns if steps are not taken to address their fears and concerns.

Taylor may have grossly underestimated the challenges involved in instilling confidence in state institutions and reconciling a nation so deeply divided after a divisive war. Among these challenges is meeting the expectations of an uprooted and impoverished population. A popular saying during the elections was that "Taylor spoilt it; let him fix it". "Fixing it" requires replacing the looted or destroyed infrastructure, resettling the population and bringing the economy back on its feet. This is a nightmare because all foreign exchange and major job providing establishments were looted or destroyed.

With a worsening economic conditions and the continued demand by donors for transparency and human rights as preconditions for aid, the prospects for immediate international assistance are bleak. Fighters must now learn to move away from a culture of violence, but there are very few opportunities for reintegrating them into civil society. With a virtually collapsed economy and the Government's lack of a clear economic or reconstruction agenda, the future ahead is shaky and the challenges complex, as noted by former President Jimmy Carter, who led a team of international observers at the July 1997 elections: "Liberia has come a long way, but much remains to be done. Scars of the war are deep and will be hard to erase. To meet the

²¹⁶ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 10 March 1999 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹⁷ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 7 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹⁸ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 29 October 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

²¹⁹ *Liberian Daily News Bulletin*, 23 February 1998 (electronic format: Libnet)

formidable challenges of peace-building and democratization, the new Government must build confidence that a new political order has replaced the old one of violence, human rights abuses and war...²²⁰ The prime actors in the Liberian tragedy were all influential members of a military regime that laid the foundations for the anarchy that ensued. Whether there will be a departure from the past buried in the politics of greed and suppression remains to be seen. However, the alternative is more social upheavals in the contest for power that threatens peace-building.

²²⁰ Carter Center, p. 6

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