

# **Building Peace on Fragile Foundations: The Liberian Challenge**

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## Introduction

Liberia currently has one of the world's largest peacekeeping missions.<sup>2</sup> Established in September 2003 by Security Council Resolution 1509, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), has helped to restore relative calm to the country after fourteen years of civil war. However, between 28 and 31 October 2004, the first major outbreak of violence since the signing of the Accra Peace Accord on 18 August 2003 occurred. At least nineteen people were killed, 208 injured, and 200 arrested.<sup>3</sup> While the unrest had largely subsided by November 2004, peacekeepers continue to keep close watch in the country in an effort to keep the peace process on track and to avert further and intensified destruction of lives and property.

Although Liberia is currently stable, the situation remains tense as the humanitarian and socio-economic predicaments leave the country vulnerable to new waves of violence. Nearly 85% of the population is unemployed and 80% live below the poverty line.<sup>4</sup> Public and private institutions as well as infrastructure have been decimated over the years, all but eliminating foreign investment and confidence. The Transitional Government has added to the difficulties, as many quarters have accused them of mismanagement, corruption, and fiscal irresponsibility. Furthermore, the UN and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are attempting to resettle over 200,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) with little financial assistance or logistical support.<sup>5</sup> The repatriation of Liberian refugees from neighboring countries and the influx of those coming from Côte d'Ivoire also make the situation more volatile, compounding already problematic relief efforts.

Young ex-combatants have proved to be an especially problematic dimension as they remain a difficult group to reintegrate back into their communities, and fighting is often the only "marketable" skill they possess. Given the youthful demographics of the country it is unsurprising that they fueled the country's civil wars and make up the majority of ex-fighters from all factions.<sup>6</sup> Non-combatant youth have not fared much better as they also have low to non-existent educational levels and extremely limited economic prospects. Adding to the bleak situation is Charles Taylor, who remains in exile in Nigeria despite the fact he has been indicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. His continued freedom, and seeming impunity for the atrocities he committed, continues to hamper the electoral process as well as the healing and reconciliation of the nation, and indeed, the

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<sup>2</sup> For current figures see <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmil/facts.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Margaret Novicki, Special United Nations Advisor to KAITPC, Accra, Ghana, 1 February 2005.

<sup>4</sup> CIA World Factbook, *Liberia*, updated 21 April 2005.

<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/li.html>

<sup>5</sup> Before the resettlement processes started, there were approximately 450,000 Liberians who were internally displaced. An estimated 280,000 IDPs lived in 24 formal camps. An additional 20,000 lived in spontaneous settlements of informal camps, and 150,000 more were believed to be residing in host communities. Humanitarian Information Centre of Liberia, "Internally Displaced Persons."

<http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/liberia/coordination/sectoral/IDPs/index.asp>

<sup>6</sup> It is estimated that around 70% of the fighting forces in Liberia were composed of children.

<http://www.womenwarpeace.org/Liberia/Liberia.html>.

region. These factors will all be critical in determining the overall success of the upcoming elections, and ultimately in bridging the gap between short-term humanitarian relief efforts and long-term peacebuilding for the sustainable development of Liberia.

Many donor countries and political analysts have called into question whether or not the current environment in Liberia will be conducive to the holding of free and fair elections by 11 October 2005, the scheduled date. This paper provides an overview of the historic and contemporary sources of conflict in Liberia, including those surrounding the ballot box. The following sections highlight some of the specific long-term peacebuilding challenges facing the United Nations Mission in Liberia – specifically: the composition and corruption of the Transitional Government and the marginalization of civil society from the political sphere; the problem of the internally displaced; an incomplete rehabilitation and reintegration process for ex-combatants; and the issue of Charles Taylor. The authors stress the frailty of the Liberian peace process leading up to the elections, and advocate for a redoubling of international efforts and resources to address these highlighted issues.

## **The Historical Context and Evolution of Armed Conflict in Liberia**

Liberia was “founded” in 1820 by a group of freed American slaves whom were sponsored by the American Colonization Society (ACS). This group of settlers became known as the Americo-Liberians and with the aid of large European and American loans, began early on to exert political and economic dominance over the indigenous tribes. These groups did not respond well to the suppression or the foreign concepts of land ownership and a centralized government that the settlers brought with them from the United States. However, overt confrontation remained sporadic and minimal.

The Republic of Liberia declared its independence on 26 July 1847. Although originally modeled after the U.S. system, it eventually developed into a one-party state that was controlled by the privileged Americo-Liberian minority for one hundred and thirty-three years.<sup>7</sup> Out of the 21 presidents that ruled Liberia since independence, only one has come from the indigenous communities that constitute over 90% of the population. The exception was created on 12 April 1980 when Master Sergeant Samuel Kanyon Doe, an indigenous Krahn, and some junior officers in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) ousted and killed President William Tolbert in a military coup. It was a popular rebellion that was widely accepted as the emergence of the oppressed local majority into the political sphere.

Doe then formed and led the People’s Redemption Council (PRC) and later ordered the public execution of more than a dozen members of Tolbert’s cabinet. Under his leadership the government and the AFL ended the political Americo-Liberian hegemony

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<sup>7</sup> By 1938, most of the settlements combined to form one, which inhabited Monrovia and consisted of up to 20,000 individuals. The descendants of these Americo-Liberian settlers make up around 5% of the Liberian population today. U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/dwe/16337.htm>.

for the time being. Doe suspended the constitution and assumed full executive and legislative powers. The AFL, technically the official national army through most of the conflict, would eventually be responsible for some of the worst human rights abuses in Liberia's history. This essentially relegated them in the eyes of most Liberians to nothing more than another fighting faction. The relative calm of Liberia began to dissolve as the political, social, and economic institutions deteriorated under Doe's ten-year rule, which was characterized by corruption, nepotism, mismanagement, and oppression.

By 1984, Doe was coming under intense political pressure from Washington and other creditors to allow the return of opposition parties and to hold free and fair elections. Doe eventually conceded and elections were held on 15 October 1985. Unsurprisingly though, they were characterized by widespread fraud and rigging that resulted in Doe being "elected" for another term. There was an increase in human rights abuses and government corruption after the elections in an attempt to contain protests and prevent the formation of rebel groups. However, this only served to increase the ethnic divisions throughout the country as both the government and opposition forces traditionally have been drawn closely along ethnic lines.

The flawed elections led, in part, to the explosion of violence on 12 November 1985, when a former ally of Samuel Doe, General Tomas Quiwonkpa, an indigenous Gio, led an invasion from Sierra Leone in an attempt to remove Doe from power. This event proved disastrous for the Gio and Mano tribes who became victims of Doe and the AFL and their brutal repressive tactics. In the end, this benefited future President Charles Taylor who was related by marriage to Quiwonkpa and was able to successfully manipulate the divisions in his favor.

The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor and composed of members of both indigenous and Americo-Liberian ancestry ignited the civil war against the Doe regime in December of 1989. Predictably, many of the fighters were drawn from the Gio and Mano ethnic groups in Nimba County. These people were not difficult to mobilize; as they were angry and believed they had no future so long as Doe remained in power. Taylor was also able to bring disenfranchised Mandingos into his faction as well. Ethnicity continued to be an effective tool used to mobilize and divide certain groups, but was only one factor in the complex history of Liberia. The NPFL's ability to exploit Liberia's natural resources enabled the group to eventually capture and control 80% of the country. They orchestrated a wide range of human rights abuses including massacres, tortures, rapes, kidnappings, and a number of political assassinations. This weakened their claims of liberation as it soon became apparent that the group was fighting for political and economic power more than for the ideology they espoused.

From the beginning of the conflict, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) was present trying to facilitate a resolution to the country's long-standing crisis. In 1990, ECOWAS deployed its Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) to Liberia.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> The UN and the West were reluctant to intervene, partly due to the fact the UN was already engaged in the first Gulf War from 1990 to 1991. Available forces were limited and resources already stretched thin. Liberia was not seen as vital to Member States' interests so there was little desire to become involved. Even

However, ECOMOG was fraught with problems that limited its effectiveness in securing peace throughout the country.<sup>9</sup> And as the fighting raged on, three distinct parties to the conflict emerged – Doe and forces loyal to him, Charles Taylor and the NPFL, and Prince Yormie Johnson and his Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). Johnson was originally associated with the NPFL but split when he and Taylor had a dispute over policy issues.

On 9 September 1990 the conflict took an unexpected turn when President Doe ventured out of his besieged residence at the Executive Mansion, in an attempt to pay an official visit to General Quainoo, head of ECOMOG. Instead, he was captured by Prince Yormie Johnson's INPFL forces and later tortured and murdered. His execution was followed by widespread chaos, extreme violence, and a spate of summary executions.

Three months later, in December 1990, the three major forces (the AFL, NPFL, and the INPFL) met in Banjul, Gambia, agreeing to reconstitute the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU).<sup>10</sup> Charles Taylor and the NPFL, upset over the fact that ECOMOG had kept NPFL forces out of Monrovia and undermined his power, refused to cooperate. As a result, in January 1991, Taylor and the NPFL set up their own government, located in Gbarnga, which they called National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly (NPRAs).

In June 1991 another faction entered the conflict. The former AFL and Doe supporters who fled to Sierra Leone and Guinea established the United Liberation Movement of Liberia (ULIMO) to fight against the NPFL. While ULIMO grew stronger<sup>11</sup>, the INPFL's power quickly began to wane due to internal disputes that arose out of concern for their level of cooperation with the Transitional Government, ECOMOG, and the NPFL. By late 1992, the INPFL had formally disbanded and Prince Yormie Johnson fled to Nigeria.

The Abuja Accord was reluctantly signed in September 1995. Under the supervision of ECOWAS, the agreement created the Liberian Council of State, which was composed of seven warring factions, including top leaders of the NPFL, ULIMO-K, and members of civil society. And on 19 July 1997, Liberians went into an electoral process under the auspices of ECOWAS, pursuant to the Abuja Accord. Of a population of at least 2.5 million, only 750,000 were registered to vote and even less actually turned out. Charles Taylor emerged overwhelmingly victorious and the UN declared the elections, "free and

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today, peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts there are forced to compete for limited funding against such countries as Afghanistan and Iraq that receive much more attention and resources by the U.S. and Britain.

<sup>9</sup> Rasheed Draman & David Carment, *Managing Chaos in the West African Sub-Region: Assessing the Role of ECOMOG in Liberia*, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Occasional Paper No 26, 2001.

<sup>10</sup> For a more in-depth analysis of the various peace agreements and contributing factors to their failure, see Festus B Aboagye, *ECOMOG: A Sub-Regional Experience in Conflict Resolution, Management and Peacekeeping in Liberia*, Accra, Sedco Publishing, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> In 1994 ULIMO effectively split in two along ethnic lines. ULIMO-J became the Krahn dominated faction led by General Roosevelt Johnson, while ULIMO-K, led by Alhaji Kromah, was overwhelmingly Muslim/Mandingo. While ULIMO-K was relatively united under Kromah, ULIMO-J was sidelined by emerging authorities and remained internally fractious and disbanded after the 1997 disarmament program following the Abuja Accords.

fair”. However, Taylor had controlled most of the country for a number of years and insufficient time had elapsed for the formation of other strong political parties. Furthermore, he had terrorized the populace and they were understandably fearful that if he were not elected, he would resume fighting. The civilian population and the warring factions were keenly aware that a robust international intervention force was unlikely to intercede if war were to break out once again. Therefore, even though it is true that most Liberians who voted cast their ballot in favor of Taylor, it is also true that they probably did so more out of fear than any real desire to claim him as their president.

The elections were intended to have produced a government that would guarantee the safety and security of the existence of political parties in particular and the Liberian people in general.<sup>12</sup> To these ends, the first post-war government headed by Taylor was mandated to restructure the army, police, and various security agencies to reflect the neutrality of the administration. None of the parties to the peace agreement were to maintain dominance over the army or any of the security agencies. However, Taylor resisted ECOMOG efforts to oversee a process of security sector reform. This point was noted in January 1998, when the out-going commander of ECOMOG, Major General Victor Malu, warned that the departure of ECOMOG (on 2 February 1998) without a restructuring of the AFL posed a potential threat in the country's road to peace. Taylor's position was that the Abuja Accord, which mandated ECOMOG to restructure the Liberian army, expired on 2 August 1997, when he was inducted into office as head of state, and that the restructuring of the national army was his responsibility, according to provisions of the country's constitution.<sup>13</sup>

Taylor proceeded to marginalize the national army, the AFL, because he questioned their loyalty. Members of the Krahn ethnicity, against whom Taylor had been fighting since 1989, dominated the AFL and many were recruited under the late President Samuel Doe. Instead of unifying and professionalizing the security sector, Taylor created a network of competing security units and militias, headed by longstanding supporters, many of whom had been child soldiers who fought with him when he was a rebel leader. Most prominent among these was the Anti-Terrorism Unit (ATU), headed by Taylor's son, “Chucky”. Others were simply informally organized units of boys led by a slightly older boy who had been with Taylor during his days in the bush.<sup>14</sup>

## **The Second Liberian War: Regional and International Responses**

While Liberians experienced little true peace and security under Taylor's presidency, most observers trace the origins of the second civil war to April 1999, when the Liberian government first announced that the country had been attacked near the Guinea border. A few months later, in August 1999, the government claimed rebels had launched a

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<sup>12</sup> After the 1997 elections, the UN established its first peacebuilding support office in Liberia, called the UN Office in Liberia (UNOL).

<sup>13</sup> Tepitapia Sannah, *Malu Regrets Leaving Without Restructuring Liberian Army*, PANA, 9 January 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Nicole Itano, *Liberating Liberia: Charles Taylor and the rebels who unseated him*, ISS Occasional Paper No 82, November 2003.

second attack and taken five towns in the northern province of Lofa. Almost nothing was known about these new rebel forces and independent verification was almost impossible, therefore many analysts questioned whether the attacks were a ploy to force the UN to drop arms sanctions against Liberia.<sup>15</sup> However, what followed was clearly no ploy.

The conflict ‘officially’ assumed regional dimensions in September 2000, when the government of Guinea bombed parts of the Guinea Forest region in response to reports that Taylor’s forces had made inroads into the country.<sup>16</sup> Along with Taylor’s forces, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) of Sierra Leone was also regrouping in Guinea, and there was a close connection between Taylor’s forces in Liberia and Foday Sankoh’s RUF forces in Sierra Leone. The two leaders had trained together in Libya and were both backed by Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi.

The government of Guinea continued to provide considerable logistical and some military support to Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a new group created from remnants of die-hard anti-Taylor factions who operated from its territory. It also allowed LURD to use refugee camps within its borders as a base from which to recruit.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as efforts continued to consolidate peace in Sierra Leone, hundreds of former fighters in that country’s civil war crossed into Liberia to fight as mercenaries either for the Liberian government or for LURD.

The second war began in earnest in 2001, when the LURD escalated attacks against the Liberian government. This prompted Taylor to remilitarize society by mobilizing ex-combatants and permitting the proliferation of militia groups. The situation was of grave concern to ECOWAS, which engaged increasingly in diplomatic efforts to address the crisis. Renewed attention was also due to the near collapse of the Lomé peace agreement in Sierra Leone in May 2000, when UN peacekeepers were taken hostage by the RUF.<sup>18</sup> That crisis led to heightened international efforts in resolving the conflict there, and consequently neighboring Liberia. Several meetings were organized by ECOWAS during 2002 to discuss the escalating conflict. However, it was only with the creation of the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL) on 17 September 2002 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York that international attention began to focus on Liberia in a concerted manner. ECOWAS was a member of the ICGL and co-chaired the group’s activities with the European Union.<sup>19</sup> The main function of the ICGL was to find ways in which to end the conflict through a ceasefire agreement and, as co-chair, ECOWAS was tasked to begin negotiations for a renewed peace process in Liberia.<sup>20</sup> Concurrent with the ICGL initiatives, the ECOWAS Executive Secretary and the ECOWAS Parliament initiated talks with the LURD and representatives from President Taylor’s National Patriotic Party (NPP). The LURD remained adamant in not accepting a ceasefire

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Margaret Novicki, *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2003*, <http://www.hrw.org/wr2k3/africa7.html>.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Novicki, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> Other members of the ICGL included Britain, France, Ghana (which replaced Senegal in March 2003), Morocco, Nigeria, the United States, the African Union, European Union, and United Nations.

<sup>20</sup> ECOWAS, *ECOMIL After Action Review (AAR) Final Report*, African Centre for Strategic Studies, August 2004.



agreement that left President Taylor in power.<sup>21</sup> As various meetings took place to agree on a framework for peace talks, a breakaway rebel group from the LURD emerged to open a new front in Liberia's conflict. A collection of 200-700 fighters, calling themselves the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), invaded Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire and rapidly gained control of several counties in the southeast of the country.<sup>22</sup>

As renewed calls emerged from political opposition groups and rebel forces to postpone the scheduled 14 October 2003 elections, a joint United Nations, African Union (AU), and ECOWAS multidisciplinary needs assessment mission arrived in Monrovia in May 2003. Their mission was to evaluate the conditions for the holding of free and fair elections and to explore ways in which the international community could help end the conflict in Liberia. The mission concluded that the prevailing conditions in Liberia were not conducive to the holding of elections in October. Liberia's political parties indicated that an immediate and unconditional cessation of hostilities and the convening of peace negotiations were the most important steps to bring peace to the country. ECOWAS-sponsored peace talks eventually began on 4 June 2003 in Accra, Ghana.

As the peace talks opened, the Special Prosecutor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, David Crane, unsealed an indictment against President Charles Taylor for war crimes committed during Sierra Leone's 11-year civil war. Fearing his possible arrest, President Taylor hurriedly left the peace conference and returned to Monrovia. Meanwhile, the LURD saw the indictment as a license to attack Monrovia, hoping to force him out of power. LURD reached the outskirts of the capital on 5 June 2003 – the day after the indictment of Charles Taylor. The dramatic and quick-moving advance of LURD exacerbated the already dire humanitarian situation in Monrovia.<sup>23</sup>

The Security Council adopted resolution 1497 on 1 August 2003, authorizing the establishment of a multinational force in Liberia and declaring its readiness to establish a follow-up United Nations stabilization force to be deployed no later than 1 October 2003. On 4 August 2003, an ECOWAS Vanguard Force (known as the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia or ECOMIL) arrived in Monrovia acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Fighting in the capital came to an immediate halt; even before vanguard forces left the airport. President Taylor handed over power to Vice-President Moses Blah a week later, on 11 August. At the invitation of the President of Nigeria, Taylor left Liberia for Calabar, Nigeria with a rather ominous promise, "I leave you with these parting words: God willing, I will come back."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> On the origins of MODEL, see *Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm*, International Crisis Group, Africa Report No 62, 30 April 2003.

<sup>23</sup> LURD captured Bushrod Island and began shelling downtown Monrovia. The Government of Liberia was attacking from the other side, killing and trapping the civilians in between the two groups. Those not killed outright eventually ran out of food and water.

<sup>24</sup> CBS News, "Liberia's Taylor goes into Exile", 11 August 2003.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/08/12/world/main567767.shtml>

Peace talks continued in Ghana between rebel factions and the government of President Moses Blah. Both LURD and MODEL had claimed that their primary, indeed their only goal, was to remove Taylor from power. Initially, they seemed to have little idea about what would come after, and could formulate few concrete ideas about the nature of a post-Taylor government. As the peace negotiations in Accra progressed, however, and their chances of success became brighter, the leadership of both groups began making increasing demands regarding their role in the interim government.<sup>25</sup>

On 18 August 2003, the various Liberian groups finally signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra after more than two months of ECOWAS-brokered negotiations. The CPA declared an immediate end to the war and provided for the establishment of a National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), a caretaker government giving equal power to the Liberian government and each of the two rebel groups, LURD and MODEL.<sup>26</sup> The NTGL was to take over on 14 October 2003 from the interim government. Mr. Gyude Bryant, a businessman and leader of the Liberian Action Party, was nominated by the warring factions to head the NTGL. The CPA also requested the United Nations to deploy a force to Liberia under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations.

The Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1509 (2003) on 19 September 2003, authorizing the UN Mission in Liberia. The Council requested the Secretary-General to transfer authority to UNMIL from forces led by ECOWAS, which it commended for its rapid and professional deployment. As scheduled, UNMIL took over peacekeeping duties from ECOWAS forces on 1 October 2003. The West African troops who had been serving with ECOMIL were provisionally “re-hatted” as United Nations peacekeepers.

The broad mandate of UNMIL is to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process; protect United Nations staff, facilities and civilians; support humanitarian and human rights activities; as well as assist in national security reform, including national police training and the formation of a new, restructured military. Specifically, UNMIL is to assist the Transitional Government, in re-establishing national authority throughout the country, including the formation of a functioning administrative structure at both the national and local levels. Importantly, UNMIL is mandated to assist the Transitional Government, in conjunction with ECOWAS and other international partners, in preparing for national elections scheduled for no later than the end of 2005.

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<sup>25</sup> Nicole Itano, *op. cit.*

<sup>26</sup> According to Itano, this was an incredible concession to the two rebel groups, one of which was less than six months old and neither of which had any leader to speak of. Both were relatively small, loosely organized groups whose leadership and aims only became widely known during the course of 2003. Yet they managed, in a very short period of time, to bring down Taylor, one of West Africa’s most wily leaders.

## The National Transitional Government and Civil Society<sup>27</sup>

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement was to have prevented the three main factions, LURD, MODEL, and the ex-Government of Liberia, from acquiring top positions in the administration, and mandated the inclusion of political parties and civic groups in the NTGL. Competition for key posts, however, put Chairman Bryant in a difficult position as he tried to please the various sides and keep the peace process on track. He subsequently gave fifty-one of the eighty-six assistant minister positions to members of the former government and rebel groups.<sup>28</sup> The disproportionate positions given to warring factions have translated into less political power and representation as well as the increased marginalization of civil society and other groups who were not active participants in the armed conflict. Furthermore, serious accusations of corruption and poor fiscal management have been leveled at the NTGL.<sup>29</sup>

These issues compromise the NTGL's effectiveness and legitimacy throughout Liberia. Early on, MODEL had threatened the breakdown of peace talks in Accra by demanding the post of Vice-Chairman in the interim government.<sup>30</sup> The other groups, however, refused to give into demands and in the end MODEL yielded, allowing talks to resume.<sup>31</sup> Without this submission, negotiations could have potentially been delayed for months with outcomes far worse than the subsequent Peace Accords. Additionally, internal disputes within LURD in 2003 led Sekou Damate Conneh to opt out of a leadership position in the government altogether. The final signing of the Accra Agreement, however, did not mark the end of the LURD struggle for power within the NTGL and continued divisions threaten prospects for cooperation between the various parties as well as prospects for sound leadership in the government. Stability in Liberia is fragile as the various sides fight for power and jobs, while average citizens appear to have been disempowered by the whole political process that, at least in theory, should include and benefit them over the ex-warlords and their followers.

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<sup>27</sup> The terms "civil society, local Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and grassroots organizations" are used interchangeably in this paper to describe individuals, associations or groups that exist independent of the state and maintain a degree of autonomy and independence.

<sup>28</sup> Global Witness, *Liberia: Back to the Future*, May 2004.

<http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2004/gw-lbr-24may.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> UN Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), "Liberia Suffers from Dysfunctional Economy, UN Panel Says", 13 December 2004. According to a report for the UN Security Council, the five-member Panel of Experts on Liberia say that instead of spending its funds on health care, education, water, and roads, the NTGL appropriated fifty-two percent of the annual budget for personnel and fifteen percent for security. This is despite the fact that UNMIL currently bears the majority of responsibility for security. Additionally, the government has failed to account for the money allocated for the previous two budgets, revenue-generating areas have not been audited, and teachers have not been paid in twenty-four months.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Margaret Novicki, *op. cit.*

<sup>31</sup> When the Accra peace talks hit a stalemate, members from the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WiPNET), sat in front of the entrance where the talks were being held, barricading the factions inside. This very public demonstration was credited with pressuring the negotiating groups to continue the talks and not allowing them to leave without formulating an agreement.

When Bryant was chosen as Chairman of the NTGL during the signing of the peace agreement in Accra, all parties agreed to the move. However, although popular among the local population, Bryant was asked to step down in early 2004 by the rebel factions-turned-political-parties in the transitional government.<sup>32</sup> This move was just one more attempt to destabilize the situation in Liberia, allowing openings for personal gain by each side to the agreement. The action also prompted nine political parties and civil society groups to threaten to withdraw from the transitional arrangement.<sup>33</sup> Further highlighting disagreements within the parties, the request for the removal of Chairman Bryant was withdrawn, with some members of each party saying they disagreed with the original request.

Bryant is extremely dependent on the strength of UNMIL to keep Liberia under stable conditions. His lack of influence and ability to control various factions continues to challenge the road to peaceful and transparent elections. It also raises the question that if UNMIL has such limited influence over the Transitional Government, how much control will they have once a permanent, democratically-elected government is elected? What recourse is available, should they turn out to be as corrupt and ineffective as the current administration? There is strong belief within the UN system that, if circumstances remain as they are, the elections scheduled for October 2005 run the risk of holding with tradition in Liberia and eventually leading to renewed conflict and violence.<sup>34</sup> This is, in part, due to the fact that members of the Transitional Government are working against each other to further their own agendas. At this point there is little indication that they are genuinely supportive of the electoral process that will see them removed from power.<sup>35</sup> To further complicate the issue, civil society is largely left without access to policy-making levels and unsure as to what its role is with respect to ensuring good governance and transparency. Most doubt the sincerity of members in the NTGL, in holding up the terms of the CPA.

Though the Transitional Government has been faced with many demands to deliver on services, and has had limited resources to meet these demands, it must bear responsibility for its own inability to engender a sense of trust among the populace and the international community. The NTGL has made some very disingenuous moves – such as funneling more money to government salaries than to education, health care, water, and roads. The UN's reluctance to lift sanctions on Liberia is understandable under such circumstances.<sup>36</sup> The United Nations Security Council first imposed restrictions on Liberia in 2001, in response to Taylor's ongoing support of the RUF in Sierra Leone. The sanctions remained in place under resolution 1521, after Taylor left Liberia for Nigeria, owing to the lack of capacity to collect, monitor, and report on revenues on the part of the

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<sup>32</sup> IRIN News, "Liberia: Rebels factions want transitional leader replaced", 26 January 2004.

<sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group, *Rebuilding Liberia: Prospects and Perils*, 30 January 2004.

[http://www.icg.org/library/documents/africa/west\\_africa/075\\_rebuilding\\_liberia\\_prospects.pdf](http://www.icg.org/library/documents/africa/west_africa/075_rebuilding_liberia_prospects.pdf)

<sup>34</sup> This view was expressed in interviews with the authors by a number of UNMIL representatives who wish to remain anonymous.

<sup>35</sup> According to the terms of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, no member of the NTGL may stand for election.

<sup>36</sup> IRIN, "Liberia Suffers from Dysfunctional Economy, UN Panel Says", 13 December 2004, *op. cit.*

NTGL. Their further lack of transparency and accountability has added to problem, highlighting the fragility of the situation.

On 21 December 2004, under resolution 1579 (2004) the ban on arms, timber, travel, and diamonds was renewed as Liberia had not yet met the conditions for lifting them.<sup>37</sup> A five-member UN panel of experts was appointed to monitor the ban. The panel reported to the Security Council in March 2005 that the NTGL had signed a secret agreement with the West African Mining Corporation (WAMCO), a deal that gives a *de facto* monopoly to WAMCO to buy up Liberian diamonds and other minerals produced in the west of the country. The panel expressed concern that the deal was struck in an atmosphere of secrecy with a company of "unknown provenance" and cited its existence as evidence that the ban on diamond exports should be maintained.<sup>38</sup>

At the request of the Security Council and established by the Secretary-General, the mandate of the panel was extended until 21 June 2005, to assess implementation and violations of the sanctions. Recommendations by the United Nations to the NTGL include the undertaking of reforms to regain control over contentious sectors, such as the timber industry, and to implement some form of transparency until the natural resources within the country can become a legitimate source of revenue. The lifting of restrictions too early in Liberia's transformation from conflict to peace could threaten not only future prospects for Liberia but those of the sub-region.

The flip side is that these sanctions hurt those that could potentially benefit from jobs in the timber and diamond-mining industries as well as the economic growth of Liberia. Liberians, however, continue to agree with the decision of the United Nations and fear that continued corruption in the government and the misuse of natural resources could bring, yet again, another conflict. The United Nations Security Council has emphasized that "sanctions are not a long-term solution for Liberia,"<sup>39</sup> however, with members of the NTGL controlling the financial state of the country, it is imperative that leaders cooperate on how funds should be used and set out on a new path to development.

The fact that the NTGL is largely considered corrupt, and made up of ex-warlords, leaves civil society extremely out of focus, despite the fact that their inclusion and input in the political process is a necessary condition in keeping checks and balances on those in power. Moreover, the active participation of those "with clean hands" within the government and public sectors is necessary to gain the trust and support of the local

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<sup>37</sup> On 12 March 2004, the Security Council also adopted UN resolution 1532, which imposed an assets freeze against Charles Taylor and his close family and associates in order to prevent them from misappropriating funds to undermine the peace and stability in Liberia.

<sup>38</sup> The ban was originally imposed in 2001, along with an arms embargo, to prevent the government of former President Charles Taylor from using the foreign exchange earned from diamonds mined in Liberia and smuggled in from neighboring Sierra Leone to buy weapons. The UN Security Council extended its ban on exports of rough diamonds by Liberia in December 2004 for a further six months, with an undertaking to review the situation in March 2005. After receiving the report of the panel, it agreed on 30 March 2005 to keep the ban in force until June when it will come up for review again. See IRIN, UN reveals suspect diamond deal, 30 March 2005.

<sup>39</sup> United Nations Security Council (SC/8275), Security Council 5105<sup>th</sup> Meeting, 21 December 2004.

population as well as the confidence of the international community. The High-Level UN Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change specifically notes that "...the core task of peacebuilding is to build effective institutions that, through negotiations with civil society, can establish a consensual framework for governing within the rule of law" and that relatively cheap investments in "...local capacity-building for public sector service delivery can greatly benefit long-term peacebuilding."<sup>40</sup> In order to transition effectively from a purely bureaucratic approach to sustainable peace and development, civil society must be called upon to begin the transformation within their communities.

Admittedly, this is easier said than done. Charles Taylor aggravated already weak social structures by ensuring that the judiciary and legislative branches remained weak in order to consolidate his power. He labeled human rights organizations undemocratic and punished them accordingly as traitors to the state. The press was also subjected to censorship by his government and grassroots organizations and average people faced intimidation, arrest, jail time, and even torture for anything that could potentially be viewed as opposing the government.<sup>41</sup> In order to further disrupt the social fabric of society and quash potential opposition, several "civil society" organizations were created under the auspices of the government with the explicit purpose of disseminating propaganda. The existence of these organizations prevented efforts to bring civil society together as one unified force against Charles Taylor to work toward any particular goal. As "token" associations undermined the work of other human rights and peacebuilding groups, the democratization process was brought to a standstill. However, it is precisely these grassroots organizations and individuals who have the most potential to lead their country away from the corrupt politics that have plagued Liberia since independence. With this being said, there remain enormous challenges facing UNMIL and other International NGOs to include the largely uneducated civil society into the political process as both candidates and informed voters.

## The Problem of the Displaced

Since the beginning of the repatriation and resettlement process of refugees and IDPs in October and November 2004, 161,473<sup>42</sup> Liberians have been assisted back to their communities. However, looking back at the August 2004 operations plan by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), it was envisioned that 98,800 would return by January 2005, but officially the number had only reached 6,593. Clearly, the situation has not gone according to plan and months later there remain large numbers

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<sup>40</sup>United Nations General Assembly, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility: Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change*, A/59/565, 02 December 2004, Par. 229.

<sup>41</sup> International Peace Academy, *Civil Society Dialogue Report: Civil Society Perspectives from the Mano River Union*.

[http://www.ipacademy.org/PDF\\_Reports/MANO\\_RIVER\\_UNION.pdf#search='peacebuilding%20support%20office%20Liberia](http://www.ipacademy.org/PDF_Reports/MANO_RIVER_UNION.pdf#search='peacebuilding%20support%20office%20Liberia)

<sup>42</sup> This number includes 15,797 refugees and 145,676 IDPs. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Briefing Notes (24 May 2005)*, UNHCR Liberia.

of refugees and IDPs living in camps.<sup>43</sup> The slow rate of return is due to a variety of factors. Most prominent among them; the lack of resources and infrastructure – on the part of the Liberian government, the UN, and international organizations charged with carrying out the process – needed to accommodate large numbers of returnees.<sup>44</sup> And while currently fourteen of Liberia's fifteen counties have been deemed safe for return, many people remain in camps or in downtown Monrovia where health services and humanitarian aid are more readily accessible than in the outskirts of the country.<sup>45</sup> It is not that aid agencies have not attempted to address this problem. In fact, after consultations with IDPs, the UN and INGO personnel have been and continue to provide resettlement packages in the camps. However, this procedure has led to some undesirable consequences as incentives to leave the camps have been decreased rather than increased, as was originally hoped. In addition, giving resettlement packages in camps leaves women and children more vulnerable to robberies en route back home.

Further exacerbating the situation is the fact that food pipelines<sup>46</sup> will be interrupted in the coming months and most rations have already been reduced to meager levels. Due to food being diverted to other conflict regions, the nutritional value of rations (calculated in kilocalories) has also been reduced. Any pipeline break will further stall the return of IDPs and refugees to their home communities and in the months preceding the elections could have enormous negative consequences. In particular, the resettlement process may suffer as refugees, IDPs, and ex-combatants become disillusioned, posing a threat to stability in the region. It could also lead to protection issues as food becomes scarcer and families resort to violence to supplement their income. For instance, petty theft, gender-based violence, and prostitution could all increase if food scarcity continues.

The World Food Programme (WFP) further highlights the unstable situation and blames limited agricultural activity, poor infrastructure, and the lack of economic prospects available for all Liberians and the displaced in particular. A WFP report claims that less than 20% of the population has adequate food consumption and that many families are left spending their income on food at the expense of other basic needs.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, other programs in camps have been suspended due to a lack of resources. Existing funds need to be urgently directed to increase food rations before new programs are created. Another study conducted by WFP in Grand Gedeh County again states that the unstable food security situation and limited agricultural production continues to be a

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<sup>43</sup> In August 2004, UNHCR released a regional, multi-year operations plan for the repatriation and reintegration of 340,217 Liberian refugees registered in camps. Yet, approximately 100,000 Liberian refugees, according to OCHA, have spontaneously returned.

<sup>44</sup> *UNMIL Humanitarian Situation Report*, No. 4, 19-29 March 2005.

<sup>45</sup> While officially most counties have been deemed safe, the local populations are not as confident. Other international observers also feel that the IDPs are being rushed home for the elections and because of the dwindling supplies in the camps.

<sup>46</sup> A food pipeline can be described as the established and continued channels through which food aid is delivered.

<sup>47</sup> World Food Programme, *Lofa County: Food Security and Nutrition Assessment, February 2005*.

threat. As one of the most remote counties in Liberia, Grand Gedeh is suffering from an extremely high under-five mortality rate.<sup>48</sup>

The International Crisis Group (ICG) has also identified this issue and linked it to other significant threats to internal stability.<sup>49</sup> The ICG asserts that UNMIL, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and NGOs alike have placed too little emphasis on agricultural production.<sup>50</sup> Liberia has few prospects for economic growth in the service, technical or tourist sectors. ICG states that the best potential for short- and medium-term growth lies in agriculture. This is possibly the only area that can realistically be advanced for the time being.

With 400,000 to 500,000 people living in camps and a resettlement rate of 600 to 1000 people a week; there will likely be many people living in these camps through the October elections.<sup>51</sup> The obstacles to voting for those living in camps, coupled with a shortage of information which would allow refugees and the internally displaced to make informed decisions, threaten the democratic nature of the upcoming political process. Electoral information is even more inadequate in remote locations where it is critical that the population is engaged. Voter registration has officially ended with about 1.2 million registered voters out of an estimated population of 3 million<sup>52</sup> but fears surrounding lack of equipment, personnel, and capacity cloud prospects.<sup>53</sup> The National Electoral Commission (NEC) has concerns that the situation in Liberia is not entirely conducive for "free and fair" elections but more importantly, that the elections may be delayed. According to Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, the slow Liberian repatriation rate coupled with the rule that Liberians must vote in their county of origin, poses concerns about the outcome of the upcoming elections.<sup>54</sup>

The issuance of identification cards by UNHCR and the Liberian government has begun in displaced camps. The exercise will help with the electoral process as well as facilitate an information flow on refugees and IDPs.<sup>55</sup> Registration commenced on 25 April 2005, but fears remain as ex-soldiers have disrupted the process, demanding the remains of

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<sup>48</sup> World Food Programme, *News Release: WFP Cautions Grand Gedeh Food Instability Leading to High Child Mortality*. 27 April 2005.

<sup>49</sup> International Crisis Group (ICG), *Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States*, *Africa Report* N°87, 8 December 2004.

[http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west\\_africa/087\\_liberia\\_and\\_sierra\\_leone\\_rebuilding\\_failed\\_states.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/africa/west_africa/087_liberia_and_sierra_leone_rebuilding_failed_states.pdf)

<sup>50</sup> According to the ICG report, UNMIL officials claim to have planned an information campaign to highlight the importance of agriculture and farming within the country. However, with the end of the disarmament program, only 3.7 ex-combatants chose agriculture reintegration packages.

<sup>51</sup> Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, Executive Secretary of ECOWAS. "The ECOWAS/NEPAD Agenda: Promoting Good Governance and Regional Economic Integration in West Africa," Ambassador Andrew Young Lecture Series on Africa, U.S. Embassy of Ghana, 14 April 2005.

<sup>52</sup> The actual Liberian population is difficult to gauge. The last census took place in 1984 and counted around 2.5 million persons.

<sup>53</sup> These fears increased as money coming from UNDP for voter registration was withheld, delaying the preparation process.

<sup>54</sup> Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas, *op cit*.

<sup>55</sup> A new effort to create a common global database will help with the easy accessibility of information on refugees and those otherwise displaced.



their benefits packages first.<sup>56</sup> If these benefits are not paid, the disenfranchised ex-combatants could perpetuate attacks in Liberia or become vulnerable to recruitment in the conflicts in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Already many Liberians, mainly those from the Mandingo tribe, are choosing to stay in Guinea. However, many currently reside and continue to suffer in poorly resourced camps within the Guinean borders.

UNDP and UNHCR have signed a Memorandum of Understanding to coordinate efforts in an attempt to improve the repatriation of ex-combatants, refugees and the internally displaced. However, serious problems remain as many counties have never been surveyed due to poor infrastructure, roads, and security concerns.<sup>57</sup> These counties still suffer from a lack of basic health precautions, such as latrines and clean water, as well as schools, and income generating activities, especially for women and young girls. These factors make life in camps better than if refugees and IDPs were to return to their county of origin. If displaced people decide to remain in their current situations within camps throughout West Africa and within Liberia's borders, participation in the electoral process could be low and the elections may prove to be less democratic than originally envisioned.

## **Challenges in Rehabilitating and Reintegrating Ex-Combatants**

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programs are considered one of the most vital components of contemporary peace support operations.<sup>58</sup> A poorly constructed or timed program can threaten the breakdown of a peace process and compromise national security.<sup>59</sup> UNMIL was tasked to develop, preferably within 30 days of the adoption of resolution 1509, in co-operation with relevant international financial institutions, international development organizations, and donor nations, an action plan for the overall implementation of a Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDRR) program for all armed parties. The UN force was also mandated to carry out the actual voluntary disarmament and to collect and destroy the weapons and ammunition as one part of the organized DDRR program. With disarmament officially over, the process has now moved onto the rehabilitation and reintegration phases.

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<sup>56</sup> To prevent disruption in the future, UNMIL has an immediate target of deploying 1,800 additional police officers throughout the country for the presidential and parliamentary elections in October 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Refugees continue to face many obstacles to returning home, including bad roads. The rainy season starts in April in Liberia and movement during and directly after this time is extremely difficult.

<sup>58</sup> Depending on the mission, this process may use different terminology such as Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR); Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDRR); or Disarmament, Demobilization, Reinsertion, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DDRRR). Although UNMIL uses DDRR, the acronyms are used interchangeably in the paper for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>59</sup> This actually did occur in Liberia when the DDRR program got off to a false start in Dec 2003. More combatants arrived at disarmament sites than could be accommodated. UNMIL did not have the necessary funds to reimburse them for the weapons they turned in. There was also confusion regarding how much the pay off would actually be. As ex-fighters overwhelmed these sites, they began firing their weapons and threatening to resume fighting. Consequently, the program was halted until a few months later, after UNMIL and the International NGOs had a chance to regroup.

Programs in the demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration stages are covered by UN agencies, local and international NGOs, line ministries, and community-based structures in cooperation with UNMIL. All of these activities provide an actual, as well as symbolic, break between combatant and civilian life. In doing so, old skills (fighting) are replaced with new ones (carpentry, tailoring, etc.) through various education and skills training projects. The ultimate goal is to reintegrate combatants into society and transform them into productive, law-abiding citizens. These continuing initiatives are expected to enhance the willingness and ability of former fighters to assimilate into society, hence determining the overall efficacy of a DDRR program. Success or failure is therefore heavily reliant upon whether or not sufficient provisions and resources for rehabilitation and reintegration activities exist.<sup>60</sup>

While UNMIL has indeed taken the lead in the DDRR program, it works closely with Liberia's National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (NCDDRR). It was originally estimated that between 38,000-58,000 combatants would go through the process; however, over 100,000 were eventually disarmed and demobilized.<sup>61</sup> This is due to the fact that when the program was originally initiated, a "combatant" was defined as a fighter and in order to be eligible for the DDRR program an individual was required to turn in a weapon as proof. However, the term "combatant" evolved early in the process and the definition was extended to include those "associated with the fighting forces."<sup>62</sup> This was partially due to pressure from the UNMIL Office of the Gender Advisor, International NGOs, and UN agencies, specifically the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to honor the Cape Town Principles and Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) and expand the definition of combatant to include more women and children into the process.<sup>63</sup> Many view this development as a victory for gender equality and female and child combatants who might otherwise be left out of the process.<sup>64</sup> Others, however, view it as a lax guideline, which allowed non-combatants to take advantage of the DDRR program as well as for allowing numerous weapons to slip through the cracks.<sup>65</sup>

Either way, the new guidelines have led to a severe funding shortage as twice as many individuals have qualified for programs than originally planned for. In October 2004, Gyude Bryant was forced to make a second appeal to the international community for additional funding of US\$44 million in order to finance the rest of the DDRR program.<sup>66</sup> This suggests that while rehabilitation and reintegration efforts are ongoing, the critical resources needed to genuinely reform former combatants and are simply not there.

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<sup>60</sup> *Threats, Challenges and Change, op. cit.* Par. 228.

<sup>61</sup> International Crisis Group, *Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States, op. cit.*

<sup>62</sup> A combatant under this new definition could either turn in a weapon or 150 rounds of ammunition to be eligible for official DDRR programs and benefit packages.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Sari Nurro, UNMIL DDRR Officer, Monrovia, 16 November 2004 and Margaret Novicki. *Op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> The UNMIL Gender Unit is now focused on ensuring reintegration programs for some 22,000 women associated with the fighting forces.

<sup>65</sup> Some 25,000 weapons were collected – one for every four combatants who were 'disarmed' and demobilized.

<sup>66</sup> IRIN, "Liberia: Lack of funds to retrain ex-fighters poses security threat", 7 October 2004.

Currently there are thousands of former fighters who congregate in Monrovia waiting for promised education or skills training that may never be forthcoming due to funding constraints. The inability to absorb these demobilized combatants into some form of training institution has resulted in increased rioting and violence, and clearly exacerbated the unrest of October 2004.

This problem lies not only in the realm of occupational skills training, but also in the capacity to provide basic education to former combatants. For example, on 13 January 2005 over 500 former combatants were expelled from school due to failure of the NCDDRR to pay their school fees. According to an official of the NCDDRR, the commission expects "...that about 4,000 ex-combatants [will] be thrown out of classes for this academic year since [the commission] cannot afford their school bills..."<sup>67</sup> It should be recognized that UNMIL was the first mission where money for DD was actually included in the regular peacekeeping budget, and that money for the DD and RR generally comes from outside donors such as the World Bank. Regardless of the funding sources however, the fact remains there are not enough resources coming from donors or the UN to carry the RR processes forward effectively.

Although many of these specific issues have since been resolved by the UN and the NCDDRR, they seem to only have been replaced by new ones. Another round of rioting by ex-combatants broke out in the second week of May 2005. There remain 100,000 ex-combatants who have been disarmed but have not received their reintegration packages or other promised benefits.<sup>68</sup> This also makes them vulnerable to mercenary recruiters from Côte d'Ivoire. Nimba, Lofa, and Maryland counties, being the areas hardest hit by the war and are home to many ex-combatants, are the most susceptible to this form of conscription.

In addition to a shortage of money and resources, the Liberian DDRR process has been problematic in a number of other ways that also threatens the security of the country and confidence in the political process. The cash payments involved in the DDRR process have led it to be transformed into a politically charged affair and in doing so has given the commanders a certain degree of power by gaining support not through goodwill, but on favors such as being placed on the commanders' lists and subsequently qualifying for benefit packages provided by UNMIL and the NCDDRR, regardless of their combatant status.<sup>69</sup> In Liberia, the faction commanders were responsible for creating and presenting the lists of those under their command that were eligible for DDRR. This is common practice within the UN and currently there are few realistic alternatives. In Sierra Leone the commanders of the RUF were able to provide clear and accurate lists of the fighters and the locations of their forces and the process has been hailed a success.<sup>70</sup> However,

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<sup>67</sup> IRIN, "Liberia: Former combatants expelled from school after failure to pay fees", 13 January 2005.

<sup>68</sup> IRIN, "Liberia: No Money for Former Fighters Training Causes Riots", 13 January 2005.

<sup>69</sup> Sarah Meek and Mark Malan (eds.), *Identifying Lessons Learned from DDR Experiences in Africa*, ISS Monograph No 106, October 2004.

<sup>70</sup> Although in many respects the Sierra Leone DDR program can be considered successful, it had at least one very large shortcoming, which was that it failed to meet the needs of female ex-combatants and the other women associated with fighting forces. Dyan Mazurana and Kristopher Carlson, *From Combat to Community: Women and Girls in Sierra Leone*, Women Waging Peace, January 2004.

the process has been considerably less organized partially due to the immaturity and nature of the MODEL and LURD forces. In fact the early disorganization of the Liberian DDRR program is probably more a reflection of the fighting factions than of UNMIL. They had very informal command structures, a factor which hampered the compilation of an accurate register of the combatants supposedly under their control.

The process in Liberia has also been criticized for not ensuring that some of the ‘hard core’ combatants, including several of Charles Taylor’s bodyguards, entered the DDR program. It has been argued that the failure to include all ‘hard core’ combatants was a major factor in the failure of the last Liberian peace process.<sup>71</sup> Compounding these security concerns are the remaining uncollected weapons in Liberia, and those that may be smuggled in from the country’s troubled neighbors, Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea, and elsewhere.<sup>72</sup>

On the other hand, just as those combatants who are demobilized into civil society need to be demilitarized and taught socially useful skills, those that are remobilized into the military need to be taught useful military skills and attitudes that are appropriate to a post-conflict society. In UN peace operations, the former process enjoys the lion’s share of attention and resources – even if the resources for DDR are woefully inadequate to the task, as is the case of Liberia. The point to make is that the longer-term security of Liberia will depend heavily on the development of reliable, competent, and professional security services. While UNMIL is assisting with the reform of the Liberian police (and, to a degree, the justice and corrections departments), the reconstitution of Liberia’s armed forces has been left to bilateral assistance programs. In particular, the United States is assisting with the training and equipping of a new army, to consist of two battalions of soldiers (approximately 1,400).<sup>73</sup> Given the speed with which sizable rebel armies have been mobilized in Liberia’s recent past, and the AFL’s own inglorious history, this seems to be a rather modest arrangement.<sup>74</sup> The timing of defense sector transformation is also lagging. As Deputy Defense Minister for Administration Joe Wylie has warned, “there can be no credible elections until the AFL and other state security institutions are restructured and reflect geographical balance.”<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, there is little public knowledge or debate about the future size and shape of Liberia’s armed forces, and this may be a critical missing link in the current peace process. General Malu’s warning on the dangers of ignoring Liberian defense transformation, given in January 1998, proved a sound one, and it has significant resonance for the current situation. Because the military is among the most visible state

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Although UNMIL claims to have secured the borders surrounding Liberia, the porosity of West African borders makes such assurances unrealistic.

<sup>73</sup> DynCorp International, a private U.S.-based company, will carry out the restructuring of a 4,000-strong new national Liberian army. The Americans will provide the bulk of the funding but there remains a need to pay the pensions and severance packages of former soldiers before new soldiers are recruited and trained.

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Mark Malan, KAIPTC, Accra, Ghana. 24 January 2005.

<sup>75</sup> James West, “Armed Forces of Liberia Training to Begin Soon”, *Liberian Observer* (Monrovia), 16 May 2005.

institutions, its composition will provide vital clues to the citizenry as to exactly whom the state means to represent and protect, and just whom the state considers threatening or untrustworthy. Whether or not the ethnic bases of the Liberian conflicts continue to be ignored, the ethnic image and reality of the army is likely to determine how various social and ethnic groups will relate to each other and to the central government.

Finally, the grand architect of Liberia's misery is still at large. The Special Court of Sierra Leone has indicted Charles Taylor on 17 counts of crimes against humanity. Given amnesty in Nigeria, Taylor continues to pose a threat to the stability of the West African sub-region. Unless Taylor is turned over to the Special Court, there is a good chance he may never be brought to justice for crimes committed during the civil wars in Sierra Leone or Liberia. The court has limited funding and its mandate is set to expire by the end of the year. If Nigeria is not pressured to turn Taylor over now, his influence may affect the outcome and success of the October elections in Liberia.<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

The heritage, human diversity, and natural resources of Liberia should be a source of pride and an asset to the country. Instead, Liberia had endured some 15 years of atrocities and wars that have left over 150,000 dead and more than a million internally and externally displaced. Minority rule and the fight for power and wealth have led to the disruption of the traditional societal relations. These past grievances continue to influence Liberian affairs today. The October 2004 rioting was largely portrayed by the media as unrest caused by religious tension, focusing on the burning of mosques and churches. Some have even speculated that religion has become a "new dimension" to the conflict. The insecurity, however, stems from something much deeper; relations that have been fragile between various ethnic and age demographics, resulting from long-standing political and socioeconomic inequalities, authoritarian rule, and official corruption and nepotism based on tribal affiliations and class distinctions. In short, Liberia's civil war was complex and played on various divisions throughout the society while also bringing neighboring countries into the conflict.

There are strong indications that many of the deeply-rooted issues that originally fueled the country's civil wars remain largely unresolved today. While the UN and other actors involved have been relatively successful in meeting the country's short-term security and humanitarian needs, it is widely recognized that an intervention focusing solely on these priorities will be unsuccessful in achieving the ultimate objective of sustainable peace.

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<sup>76</sup> President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo has promised to turn Taylor over only if Liberia requests it, and not to the Special Court of Sierra Leone. Taylor has already broken the terms of his asylum agreement which stipulated that he not be allowed to participate in "active communications with anyone engaged in political, illegal or governmental activities in Liberia." Yet, Taylor has been repeatedly accused of intruding in Liberia's electoral process through phone, e-mail and fax as well as by providing cash payments to certain parties. The *Financial Times* claims that Taylor was also supporting an assassination attempt of Guinea President, Lansana Conte. See Douglas Farah, "A Protected Friend of Terrorism," *Washington Post*, 25 April 2005; and Dino Mahtani, "Taylor accused over attempt to kill Guinea leader," *Financial Times*, 27 April 2005..

The UN report on Threats, Challenges and Change highlighted this fact and reiterated that, “Deploying peace enforcement and peacekeeping forces may be essential in terminating conflicts but are not sufficient for long-term recovery. Serious attention to the longer-term process of peacebuilding in all its multiple dimensions is critical; failure to invest adequately in peacebuilding increases the odds that a country will relapse into conflict.”<sup>77</sup> Without underplaying the multidimensionality or complexity of the Liberian transition from war to peace, the challenges can be presented in the form of a few clear priorities.

First, there is an obvious need to strengthen the National Transitional Government of Liberia and/or pressure them into better governance practices ahead of the 2005 elections. This may indeed include elements of support and ‘capacity-building’, but should also include a firm brake on injudicious state expenditures and other forms of corruption. Admittedly, with their limited time remaining in office, the extent to which the UN or donor countries can meaningfully influence the Transitional Government is likely to be rather limited.

There are currently more than fifty presidential candidates, all representing different platforms. While in some respects this may be considered a positive development, the numerous contenders also complicate the process of raising public awareness about the different parties, their candidates, and the issues they stand for. The sheer number of presidential hopefuls would be confusing to voters in countries that have long histories of democracy and extensive experience with election politics. Needless to say, the average Liberian, who has little access to media and even less experience with truly democratic procedures, is bound to be confounded by the choices.

Facilitating more meaningful inclusion of civil society in the peacebuilding process in general, and in the political sphere in particular, would help to keep the NTGL and future elected government aware of the needs, demands, and rights of the electorate. Moreover, open and transparent leadership is a necessary precondition for gaining internal and international confidence, and this will be required before the sanctions are lifted. Transparency and openness is certainly essential to providing any kind of democratic substance to the elections.

Another vital area of concern is the IDP situation. As a critical element of civil society, and probably the most visibly brutalized Liberians, IDPs must be afforded more attention than they currently receive. Regrettably, only 5% of the displaced have registered to vote.<sup>78</sup> Out of those who have registered, 70% must be resettled in their home communities in order to cast their ballot.<sup>79</sup> For this reason, clear timelines and plans are needed if refugees and IDPs are to be resettled and involved in the elections.<sup>80</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>77</sup> *Threats, Challenges and Change*, *op. cit.*, par. 224.

<sup>78</sup> IRIN, “Liberia: Voter Registration Ends with Disappointing Turnout Among IDPs,” 24 May 2005. <http://www.liberianonline.com/liberia-news422html>

<sup>79</sup> The remaining 30% will either vote in the camps or at a nearby polling station. *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> Although registration is now closed for IDPs, Liberian refugees returning from neighboring countries have until 4 June 2005, providing they have a valid repatriation form.

confusion over the process and protocol of voter participation may prevent many of the eligible displaced from actually casting their ballot. Long-term, detailed plans on the behalf of one lead organization would help to ensure accountability and coordination through the elections and beyond. The extreme voter apathy exhibited by the displaced is largely due to past experiences with politicians and their current living predicaments. As one IDP succinctly put it, “When we were suffering, running from bullets, none of them even assisted us. They didn’t spend a day in the camp to see how we were doing. They do not care for us and we do not care to vote.”<sup>81</sup> This disconnect between the government and civil society must be considered a priority area in need of immediate attention.

Greater international commitment to supporting rehabilitation and reintegration programs for ex-combatants (especially those from the LURD), to enable them to return to their communities as civilians, is both part of the democratic challenge and a security imperative. Although this paper may seem critical of a ‘security first’ approach to peacebuilding, security can never be taken for granted in a country like Liberia. The major challenge is in converting the earlier fixation with regime security to a commitment by government to human security, something that will never be achieved without a serious effort at security sector reform and the professionalization of the armed forces.

Finally, if Charles Taylor is not extradited to the Special Court for Sierra Leone to be put on trial, this will leave open the possibility of Taylor interfering in the electoral process – or worse, of him returning to power. He has repeatedly violated the amnesty agreement and there is no legal or logical reason why Nigeria or any other country should shield him from prosecution. Beyond the security threat he poses, his freedom is an impediment to the long-term healing and reconciliation of the country and an affront to International Humanitarian Law, human rights law, and the purposes and principles spelled out in the UN Charter.

While few would argue that the factors outlined above do not deserve the urgent attention of UNMIL and other key stakeholders, the fact is that there is less than five months to deal with the issues ahead of the scheduled elections. An obvious recommendation would be to postpone the elections, but this does not appear to be a feasible option. First, the additional funding required for such a postponement and the resultant prolongation of the UN mission is not likely to be forthcoming. Secondly, few individuals beyond the NGTL and their supports would like to keep the interim government in power any longer than absolutely necessary. Lastly, Liberians as a whole are ready to vote and denying them that opportunity, even temporarily, would be demoralizing, unfair, and probably have few real benefits in the long-run.

Post-conflict election standards have proved to be very elastic in Africa, and barring a major security crisis and overt coercion or obstruction at the polls, the Liberian election will no doubt be declared more or less “free and fair”. However, simply muddling through with a ‘successful’ election can in no way substitute for the development of a serious, coordinated, adequately funded, long-term peacebuilding strategy in Liberia.

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<sup>81</sup> IRIN, “Liberia: Voter Registration Ends with Disappointing Turnout Among IDPs”, *op. cit.*

Unfortunately, as the UN Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change observes, there is currently “... no place in the United Nations system explicitly designed to avoid State collapse and the slide to war or to assist countries in their transition from war to peace.”<sup>82</sup> The Panel went on to recommend that the Security Council establish a Peacebuilding Commission, which should, as a core function, assist in the planning for transitions between conflict and post-conflict peacebuilding and, in particular, be responsible for marshalling and sustaining the efforts of the international community in post-conflict peacebuilding over whatever period may be necessary.<sup>83</sup> The Panel also recommended the establishment of a permanent Peacebuilding Support Office at the UN Secretariat, to assist the proposed Peacebuilding Commission in the implementation of its work. If these recommendations are accepted, and the Commission and Support Office established, Liberia should feature very high on their order of business.

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<sup>82</sup> *Threats, Challenges and Change, op cit*, par. 261.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, par. 263-264.



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