

**INTER – AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE – WORKING GROUP
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In Depth Country Review-Liberia: Background Note (Revised)

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Introduction and Summary

This background document contains information about the humanitarian situation in Liberia as observed and assessed during the recent West Africa Mission undertaken by the Assistant Emergency Relief Coordinator. Observations, findings and recommendations formulated here are derived from discussions held with relevant humanitarian actors including the Government representatives, NGO partners as well as the ICRC.

In the course of the last year, very substantial progress had been made in Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d' Ivoire in reducing conflict and instability. Liberia continues to remain the exception in the Mano River Union. The fighting, which has haunted Lofa County since last year, has now reportedly spread further south west towards Tubmanburg, Klay and to Heindi and Bong mines. The role of LURD, ULIMO (K), the AFL and other security forces in this remains unclear but it is feared that the fighting could reach Monrovia, where by now some 35,000 IDPs have found an interim refuge as reported in the recent joint inter agency registration exercise. It should however be noted that the registered IDP caseload for Monrovia is rather high and will have to be verified when IDPs move to more stable Government designated camps.

The three Heads of State of the Mano River Union Countries have for the first time met in Rabat/ Morocco on 27 February 2002 in order to advance the regional peace process. All three Presidents have publicly committed themselves to the peace process and their Foreign Ministers have met in Freetown on March 4, 2002 as a follow up. In addition, it has also been reported that the Heads of State have decided to meet again in Rabat in a month's time. This development is commendable and needs to be sustained in order to ensure a political solution so that the current humanitarian crisis does not deteriorate further, but is halted and reversed.

The total number of IDPs in the country is estimated at about 80,000 with 36,000 in Bong County and 35,000 in the greater Monrovia area. As a result of seemingly specific attacks on IDP encampments, people have already been forced into displacement three to four times and are in a deteriorating physical condition and often without even the most basic possessions. While the cause of the attacks in the camps is unclear, the existence and the difficulties IDPs are facing are very real.

It is estimated that some 37,000 Sierra Leonean refugees are in Liberia. Voluntary repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees at Sinje with a caseload of 16,000 started on 12th February while repatriation of refugees in Monteserrado camps like VOA, Banjor, Zuana Town and Samukai town started on 25th February using EU trucks. It is reported that the new caseload of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone is now estimated to be 20,000 , as 10,000 new arrivals have been received since early February , while some 200 new arrivals have been reported for Cote d' Ivoire, bringing the total caseload to 120,000.

Protection of IDPs

In representations to Government the mission focussed on the plight of the IDPs and in particular their need for protection, emphasizing the responsibility of the Government in this regard. During the meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs the Government of Liberia expressed its awareness of its obligation to protect all its citizens but acknowledged its lacks the requisite capacity. The UNHCR assistance to LRRRC has to be acknowledged and commended as it supports the authority in its important functions relative to Internally Displaced Persons.

The government authorities were requested to officially designate one or two sites where IDPs might settle without fear of being harassed or asked to move outside the greater Monrovia area. That request was granted and government has now approved four sites including Blama Cee, Jartondo, Wilson Town and Rick's Institute as designated camp locations for IDPs around Monrovia. OCHA facilitated a meeting with key NGO partners to develop a matrix of sectoral interventions for the new sites.

Proposed Action /Decision:

The IASC WG should encourage the effort of the UNCT in reinforcing protection measures.

Funding

Basic supplies and services need to be provided to IDPs in camps. It would appear too difficult at this stage to seek to support those within host families. Beyond protection, shelter, NFIs and food are the greatest needs. While WFP and other humanitarian organisations are making emergency food supplies available in the sites around Monrovia, broader distribution needs to await establishment of a more permanent site so that other facilities can also be installed. In the short term, relief stocks including NFIs to hand in Monrovia are adequate. However, the current WFP pipeline, if not replenished will not last beyond July 2002.

Funding for Liberian humanitarian programmes has been extremely poor, not just through the CAP to UN agencies, but also to non-governmental partners. No response has yet been received to the 2002 CAP seeking 17 million USD. Clearly, donor antipathy to the Taylor regime and the existence of Security Council sanctions has discouraged the more usual generosity for humanitarian programmes for a population that is clearly very much in need. Efforts must be made to de-link these needs from the political debate that surrounds Liberia. The reference to the need for humanitarian assistance in the last discussion of Liberia in the Security Council was welcome and needs to be converted into solid contributions. (It should be noted that Liberia

ranks as number 161 on the UNDP Human Development Index, with only Sierra Leone below it.) The number of IDPs catered for in the CAP was some 60,000 and the scenario foreseen is largely that currently developing on the ground. The strategy and the financial needs for the humanitarian programme has to be reviewed while recognising that fundraising for Liberia is likely to continue to prove to be a challenge.

Proposed Action /Decision:

The IASC WG should request assistance of DPI and UN agencies in designing a common inter-agency fundraising strategy.

Information Campaign /Safety and Security of Humanitarian Workers

The campaign of the Liberian Government against the UN sanctions and arms embargo has sought to blame all difficulties faced by the population on the sanctions and therefore on the UN. It is regrettable that greater efforts have not been made earlier to highlight or at least clarify the work of UN humanitarian and development agencies as well as NGO partners. This is not only a matter of public understanding - it becomes an issue of security with many staff concerned that frustrated, ill-informed security forces could turn on UN property and personnel. To that end, an information strategy is being formulated by the UN Country Team to publicize the work of UN agencies and partners using both local newspapers, handouts and the various radio stations. The UN CT has requested the DPI to strengthen the newly established UNIC by assigning an information officer to Liberia. Members of the Country Team also agreed to hold press briefings on rotational basis and during the week ending 1st March 2002, the UNICEF representative held one such briefing to highlight UNICEF activities in Liberia. This was in addition to a press conference held sometime back to highlight UN activities and programmes and to emphasize the substantial work that the UN system is doing to help the people of Liberia.

Government support to publicly acknowledge the role of UN agencies in the country has been requested and the Minister of Foreign Affairs publicly distinguished between the sanctions imposed by the Security Council and the work of the humanitarian agencies when addressing the issue of sanctions. More, however, needs to be done.

The country is in Security Phase IV but it is now well understood that additional humanitarian staff need to come into the country and continue to move around. Evacuation possibilities, with UNAMSIL helicopter assets in Sierra Leone, should not be a problem and several NGOs have expressed interest in benefiting from such a contingency arrangement.

Proposed Action /Decision:

The IASC-WG should consider to assist in the formulation of an inter-agency information strategy that is being developed by providing staff to assist the UN CT.

Contingency Plan

A major effort is now underway to establish an agreed inter-agency contingency plan in order to be adequately prepared for a degenerating situation. The model employed in Macedonia and Afghanistan is being utilised whereby the scenarios are elaborated in Liberia with the Country

Team, NGO representatives and (at least informally) the ICRC. The Country Team agreed to establish such a working group and two scenarios are being analysed, the worst of which foresees massive unrest and looting in Monrovia. Once the scenarios and thresholds have been established, they will be shared with neighbouring Country Teams and in particular the Humanitarian Coordinators and UNHCR Representatives.

Proposed Action /Decision:

The IASC WG may wish to endorse the scenarios developed and support the request to the UN Country Teams in Sierra Leone and Cote d' Ivoire to further elaborate their own measures to deal with an eventual spill-over effect from Liberia.

Coordination

The formal coordination structure is linked to the Liberian LRRRC, a body that has been provided with some logistics by UNHCR but which has little authority in the Government structure. While such links need to be maintained, it is imperative that the key agencies take effective charge of the sectoral committees to ensure that practical solutions to problems are developed. Assigning UN/NGO responsibility in relation to overall camp management is another important aspect to be followed up. There is also need to improve strategic coordination between the UN, NGOs and ICRC. Currently, no formal mechanism exists for this and the geographical split between the UN in Riverview and others in Monrovia CBD (16 kilometres away) makes informal meetings difficult. The National Humanitarian Task Force chaired by the First Lady is fairly new and arrangements are underway to establish a secretariat and related operational structures.

Efforts are also currently underway to establish IASC structures at the local level in order to further enhance information exchange and the overall humanitarian response. In respect to information exchange between donors and the UN humanitarian organisations, the ongoing Sierra Leone "Test Case" on improved information sharing between donors and the United Nations needs to be closely monitored for future replication in Liberia.

Proposed Action /Decision:

The IASC-WG is invited to endorse the current approach and support the nomination of the new Resident Coordinator as Humanitarian Coordinator.