

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
50TH MEETING**

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Liberia

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Introduction and Summary

This background document contains information about the humanitarian situation in Liberia as observed and assessed by the UN Country Team and partners. Observations, findings and recommendations formulated here are derived from discussions held at relevant humanitarian coordination forums including the sectoral committees or working groups on Health, IDPs, Food Aid, Water & Sanitation and Protection which in addition to the UN include Government representatives, NGO partners as well as the ICRC.

Liberia faces a serious humanitarian crisis, which has been deepening during the last few months. The continued deterioration of the condition of the IDPs as well as the Liberian population as a whole is an increasing concern of the humanitarian community.

Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties continue to be the theatre of fighting between the state's military and security apparatus and the rebel Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), particularly around Bopulu, Voinjama and Kolahun. This has resulted in a new wave of internally displaced people some of who are seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. While data about the number of internally displaced persons in the country are scarce, it is estimated that about 150,000 IDPs are in camps in the country. This figure includes some 36,000 IDPs who are residing in and around refugee camps, mixed with Sierra Leonean refugees. In addition, some 70,000 Liberians have fled to neighbouring countries including, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana in 2002 bringing the total number of Liberian refugees in neighbouring countries to about 220,000. Of crucial concern is also the increasing hardship faced by the growing population of Monrovia, who are hosting a large number of IDPs seeking assistance from relatives and friends. This population is experiencing poor healthcare, food insecurity, lacks adequate water supply and sanitation. Of major concern also is the lack of safe and unhindered access, by the humanitarian community, to thousands more people inside the conflict zones in Liberia. Presently about 30% of the country is not accessible by the humanitarian organizations.

Liberia is now at the heart of a cycle of instability that threatens the Mano River Union countries and Côte d'Ivoire. The situation in Monrovia, the nation's capital, remains calm but tense with a significantly increased presence of armed elements of the various government security forces; who have erected multiple check points throughout the city. This has been attributed to the

national peace and reconciliation conference, inaugurated on 24 August in Monrovia and expected to run for one month.

The Rabat process, which enabled the three Heads of State of the Mano River Union Countries to meet for the first time on 27 February 2002, has since stalled. The prospect of it serving as a framework to advance the regional peace process is questionable. Since February, a flurry of almost unrelated reconciliation conferences have also been held in Abuja, Ouagadougou and Monrovia without the participation of all key players. The urgency of restarting this process cannot be overstated; as failure to address conclusively the political and socio-economic issues would exacerbate the already major humanitarian challenges in the sub-region.

Following weeks of intense negotiations, five Liberian nurses abducted by Liberian rebels were handed over to UNHCR on September 2 on the Guinea-Liberia border. The nurses were abducted by the LURD rebels from Sinje refugee camp on June 20. This incident highlights the precarious security situation in Liberia for civilians, including relief workers. Key challenges

Safe and unhindered access for assessments and the provision of humanitarian assistance

The humanitarian community in Liberia continues to monitor closely security conditions in the country, particularly in Lofa and in Bomi, Bopulu and Grand Cape Mount Counties. In light of the fluid security situation in newly accessible areas, the consolidation of assured security conditions is vital for the provision of humanitarian assistance.

Critical security concerns for the humanitarian community include the safety of: (a) civilian populations in communities affected by or close to fighting, (b) Liberians attempting to seek asylum in neighbouring countries, and (c) relief workers. These concerns are expected to remain valid until the end of the year. The UNCT would appreciate the support of the IASC in (a) reinforcing the security network for the UN and partners in Liberia including the deployment of an additional security personnel; (b) advocating for the safety of civilians and relief workers (c) encouraging donors support to improve the security environment and the provision of resources to meet the humanitarian challenge.

Proposed Action /Decision by the IASC-WG:

The IASC WG should encourage the efforts of the UNCT in reinforcing the security network, including the deployment of additional security personnel.

The IASC WG should support the UNCT efforts to encourage donors to provide resources for the improved security arrangements and humanitarian response.

The IASC should support the efforts of the humanitarian community to encourage the parties to the conflict, with the support of the Government of Guinea and Sierra Leone, to allow the humanitarian organizations to provide assistance in areas beyond the conflict zones.

Improved access to Health, Water supply & Sanitation and Education for displaced persons in camps

At present IDPs in camps as well as local population have limited access to preventive and curative health services. Agencies involved in the health sector are faced with limited resources to cope with the rapidly growing needs in the existing health centres in towns and cities including Monrovia. This is compounded by weak co-ordination among specialised agencies and government entities working in this sector. Regarding coordination, the UN (OCHA, WHO, UNICEF) has initiated consultations with the Ministry of Health, to revitalize the health coordination mechanism at the national level so as to ensure that all health actors have a platform to agree on appropriate responses to the enormous challenges in this sector. These include:

- ❖ the reinforcement of epidemiological surveillance
- ❖ the reinforcement of routine immunization
- ❖ the identification and retraining of local professional health workers currently among the displaced population.

Poor access to safe water and sanitation facilities is being addressed as a critical preventive step to reduce health risks; particularly in light of the protection issues arising from women's inadequate access to them. Hygiene promotion and the need to increase the sanitation facilities is becoming a concern in the camps that are receiving a continuing influx of IDPs.

Access to education for Internally Displaced Children need to be addressed in the camps. The capacity of local community schools to absorb is limited and overcrowding is anticipated when the schools reopen. There is need to consider establishing emergency education structures in the camps to alleviate the need for space and train local teachers among the IDPs.

Proposed Action /Decision by the IASC-WG:

The IASC WG should encourage the effort of the UN and partners to reinforce their capacity to address critical gaps in access to health, water & sanitation and education facilities.

The IASC WG should advocate for enough financial and human resources to enable the UN and partners to meet the minimum standards in responding to humanitarian needs in Liberia.

The identification and registration of IDPs in camps

Over the last six months, successive displacement and uprooting of the local population from areas of conflict has overwhelmed the existing camps around Monrovia and in Bong County. There are no reliable numbers of IDPs in camps and outside them; making it difficult to protect and assist them. The Government body, the LRRRC, lacks the capacity to carry out proper camp management as well as establish and maintain a credible registration and identification system.

With the support of UN Agencies, the humanitarian community in Liberia will be able to commence shortly the inter-agency identification and registration of IDPs, including those in and around refugee camps. However, this exercise is the first step of a process that will eventually be sustained by a common humanitarian information centre with GIS capacity. The mobilization of resources for this purpose is of the utmost importance considering the importance of the

identification and registration of IDPs for more effective common planning and monitoring of the humanitarian response.

Proposed Action /Decision by the IASC-WG:

The IASC WG should encourage the effort of the UNCT and partners to improve the registration and identification of beneficiaries and advocate for better camp management. The IASC WG should support efforts to mobilize more donor support for the establishment of a common humanitarian information centre that would ensure reliable and real-time data management (gathering, processing and mapping).

The relocation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The continued multiple displacement of vulnerable persons within Liberia has led many IDPs temporarily to seek refuge in public buildings. This trend has significant implications for the humanitarian community and local authorities as this generates a need to decide on the feasibility of establishing additional sites in a country where resources to attend those in existing camps is already limited. In some instances, this is further aggravated by the IDPs' refusal to return to established IDP camps from which they fled after armed attacks. Fortunately, LRRRC and government officials concur with relief agencies on the need to ensure the voluntary nature of any relocation exercise.

Ganta [Nimba County] is an example where according to the LRRRC, on 22 August some 8,000 IDPs originally from Lofa began to move from school buildings to the auditorium belonging to the Methodist Church and a government-owned warehouse. This is a temporary arrangement until sites are designated for the establishment of a camp. Efforts to relocate them to existing camps in Bong failed when IDPs petitioned the move. The Humanitarian Coordinator a.i. has written to government officials encouraging them to respond to the IDPs' plea for a site in the Ganta area. This group is already benefiting from some relief aid.

Proposed Action /Decision by the IASC-WG:

The IASC WG should encourage the effort of the UNCT in reinforcing protection measures. While care should be taken not to create numerous IDP camps in the country, IDPs should be located and supported in areas where they feel safe.

Enhanced protection of beneficiaries;

Violation of human rights and humanitarian principles is of increasing concern to all humanitarian actors in Liberia. Until now there has been no suitable forum within which protection concerns could be discussed or corrected. Government capacity and awareness to address protection issues is severely limited.

The UNCT has developed a comprehensive plan of action to address Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and other forms of exploitation and abuse. This has been shared with the humanitarian community and is being implemented. A related Code of Conduct for UN workers has been also developed. A core group of protection professionals from the humanitarian

community has established an Inter-Agency Protection Working Group. This group is developing an integrated framework to address the protection issues of beneficiaries of humanitarian aid in Liberia, including SGBV. In addition, UNDP as a contribution towards the overall protection programme for Liberia has provided funding for a capacity building and human right awareness project to enhance the protection of civilians with special focus on IDPs. This project will act to spearhead wider protection programmes to be implemented.

The priority concern of UNHCR in its current operations is the repatriation of Sierra Leone refugees in the country as well as activities related to prevention and response to SGBV and sexual exploitation. UNHCR is also providing limited assistance to an estimated 36,000 IDPs in and around refugee camps.

Proposed Action /Decision by the IASC-WG:

The IASC WG should encourage its members with protection professionals in Liberia to support actively the Inter-Agency Protection Working Group.

The IASC WG should support the efforts of the Inter-Agency Protection Working Group in Liberia by ensuring the support of the its Task Force on Sexual Abuse & Exploitation co-chaired by OCHA and UNICEF in New York as well as the Protection Coalition operating in Geneva.

The IASC WG should encourage its members to advocate more forcefully for the respect of civilians and relief workers.

Funding

Low, tardy and inequitable funding remains one of the key constraints that humanitarian agencies face in their efforts to address the humanitarian situation. As of 24 August Liberia has received 41% of the revised Consolidated Appeal 2002 (15,261,568), of this amount 78% is for UNHCR to repatriate and assist refugees, which in itself is not adequate compared to their appeal. Despite the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation and the expectations of increased needs from population in newly accessible areas, limited contributions have been made for food aid, shelter, education and water and sanitation, all vital sectors. This low funding further exacerbates the disparities between assistance to refugees on the one hand and IDPs on the other. Only 22% of the needs of IDPs have been addressed through the CAP. Funding outside the CAP, through NGOs, is still very low compared to the vital and basic needs. Assistance is inevitably poor qualitatively and quantitatively.

Proposed Action /Decision by the IASC-WG:

The IASC WG should support resource mobilization efforts by the UNCT by encouraging public information professionals working for its members to work with the UNCT and the OCHA Regional Support Office for West Africa.

Co-ordination

With the appointment of the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator and the opening of a small OCHA presence, formal coordination mechanisms have been improved. Some require further strengthening. At present the Humanitarian Coordination Group is co-chaired by the HC and the Liberian Minister of Planning with active participation of the LRRRC donor, NGO and UN representatives. In addition, sectoral committees are now co-chaired by the UN and the respective line Ministry or government entity. Further, inter-agency assessment missions are now regularly undertaken; while attempts to monitor specialised assessments of locations continue. The exchange of information on needs, gaps and response is gradually improving. As part of ongoing preparations for the CAP, these structures are being strengthened in order to ensure that they provide strategic vision in their respective areas.

Important steps have been taken to improve strategic coordination, support resource mobilization, and improve information on the humanitarian situation and to provide leadership for a common approach to protection issues. However, these gains are at risk due to the skeletal composition of the OCHA-Liberia team. Reinforcing them with human as well as material resources will enable them to continue to work with UNCT members, NGOs, the Red Cross and others to improve the assessment of and the response to humanitarian needs in Liberia.

Proposed Action /Decision by the IASC-WG:

The IASC-WG is invited to endorse the current approach and support the strengthening of the OCHA-Liberia.