

INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP

XIX<sup>TH</sup> MEETING

27 September 1995 FAO, Rome

SUMMARY OF INTER-AGENCY MISSION TO SIERRA LEONE AND THE SUB-REGION

BACKGROUND

1. The UN Inter-Agency Mission to Sierra Leone and the Sub-Region visited Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea during the period 28 July to 21 August 1995. The mission had two principal tasks:

- assess the status of coordination arrangements made in response to the humanitarian emergency in Sierra Leone.
- identify humanitarian assistance issues of sub-regional significance with a view towards improving regional coordination and information mechanisms and cross-border delivery of aid.

2. The mission was composed of both UN and NGO representatives. The mission had the opportunity to meet with a wide variety of UN, NGO, international organizations and government representatives as well as visit numerous relief sites.

3. Civil war and unrest in both Sierra Leone and Liberia have created a chronic humanitarian crisis with impacts on the entire sub-region. Prevailing insecurity in much of Sierra Leone and Liberia has hampered both internal relief efforts and cross-border activities. Particularly alarming is the band of need which stretches across much of Sierra Leone and Liberia containing upwards of one million people. Access to this isolated and forgotten population is either difficult or impossible. This situation is most acute in Sierra Leone where the major roads for relief supplies are frequently cut by ambushes, leaving those in the interior in desperate circumstances.

4. A massive internally displaced person and refugee flow has taken place. It is estimated there are between 1.5 and 2 million IDPs in Sierra Leone and another 830,000 within Liberia. Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea are host to 305,000 and 536,000 refugees, respectively. In this regard, the mission was impressed by the commitment and organization demonstrated by both Côte

d'Ivoire and Guinea to care for and integrate refugee populations.

5. Given the dimensions of the humanitarian crisis in the sub-region, the mission was struck by the low visibility and seeming lack of interest the situation attracts. Continued indifference to the urgent needs of many thousands of people will only prolong human suffering at best exacerbate the situation at worst. This must change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

6. With respect to humanitarian coordination arrangements within Sierra Leone, the mission noted that while a number of initiatives have recently been undertaken to strengthen humanitarian coordination, additional support to the UN Resident Coordinator is required in order to provide effective humanitarian coordination and enable the UN to exercise a leadership role. The principal recommendations of the mission include:

- Appointing the current Resident Coordinator as the Humanitarian Coordinator.
- Establishing a Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit. The Unit will have the dual function of supporting the Humanitarian Coordinator/Resident Coordinator in her overall leadership of the international relief operation and complementing the activities of NARECOM. The Unit will report to the UN Resident Coordinator. The Unit will consist of Three international staff experienced in humanitarian coordination in humanitarian emergencies. The staff will be sourced either from staff seconded from UN agencies or recruited by DHA.
- The Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit will also consolidate elements of existing proposals by UNDP to strengthen humanitarian coordination. This will result in the integration of the already planned recruitment of a national Emergency/Relief Programme Officer and 2 UNVs into the Unit.
- The Unit's responsibilities will include:
  - establishment of coordination mechanisms and agreements.
  - assessment and coordination of response to humanitarian needs.
  - humanitarian advocacy.
  - emergency information dissemination.
  - support to NARECOM.

7. Reviewing sub-regional humanitarian assistance issues, the mission noted the close linkage events in one country have upon other countries in the sub-region. Given that linkage, the effectiveness of the international humanitarian relief effort would be enhanced by a strengthening of a sub-regional approach. all agencies working on the crisis would benefit from improved information sharing, joint strategic planning and a more flexible approach at both the country and sub-regional level. This could have a particularly positive impact on cross-border operations which need further strengthening and coordination in order to maximize their effectiveness.

8. To that end, the mission made the following principal recommendations:

- The recently designated Regional Focal Point for Coordination is an important step toward improving delivery of humanitarian assistance in the sub-region. the Regional Focal Point's principal duties will be the collection, collation, analysis and dissemination of Information on sub-regional issues and chairing consultations of humanitarian actors on a sub-regional level.
- The Regional Focal Point will require the support of a small staff consisting of one Information Officer and an Assistant Information Officer (UNV).
- Country level coordination mechanisms are key to improved action at the sub-regional level. Country level coordination mechanisms in Sierra Leone should be improved as recommended above and in Liberia as delineated in the forthcoming Inter-Agency Appeal.
- The regional bureaus of UN agencies should play a more active role in sub-regional humanitarian assistance efforts.
- In order to increase the visibility of the sub-regional crisis, mobilize resources and bolster sub-region coordination efforts, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs should undertake a visit to the sub-region.