

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
4 June 1996, Washington, D.C.**

**COUNTRY SPECIFIC ISSUES
Liberia**

Introduction

1. Fighting continues in Monrovia. The prospects for a negotiated peace are poor. While the recent ECOWAS meeting in Accra resulted in an ambitious consensus on the steps required to end the fighting and resuscitate the Abuja agreement, it did not offer any new incentives for the parties to the conflict to stop fighting and accept a non-military settlement. It is likely, therefore, that outbreaks for violence in and around Monrovia will continue for the immediate future.
2. In this context, a humanitarian assistance programme has begun to take shape. The international relief personnel who remained in Liberia throughout the fighting have been joined by a small number of UN agency, NGO and donor colleagues. These advance groups have expanded on the life-saving interventions that began on 10 April and are developing a three-month contingency plan for continued delivery of relief assistance. The operating environment, however, continues to be precarious.

Points for Discussion

- a) International aid organizations provided the majority of services in Liberia prior to the outbreak of fighting on 6 April. Many of these services have ceased, as offices up-country have been emptied of staff. UN agencies and NGOs with long experience in cross-border activities in the region have begun considering how best to resume these operations, mindful of the security situation.
- b) At a 10 May inter-agency meeting, general agreement was reached that the humanitarian imperative required continued relief work. It was also agreed that, until minimum operating conditions are restored by the authorities, this relief work would be limited to life-saving interventions, requiring minimal capital investment.
- c) Negotiations with authorities on the establishment of required operating conditions should proceed in a coordinated fashion. To date, this has been the case, as reflected in

the relief community's response to the proposals made by the recently constituted "Special Coordinating Committee for Humanitarian Services".

- d) Reliable and sustained security guarantees do not exist in Monrovia. Those security arrangements that are entered into for the delivery of relief assistance are ad hoc. Expanding operations beyond life-saving activities in such an environment is likely to put relief staff at risk. In this regard, the flow of relief personnel back into Monrovia should be thoughtful, to avoid all ill-advised and ineffective escalation in activities.
- e) While planning is made challenging by the fluidity of events, field-based staff have begun a more systematic identification of needs. This exercise, once compiled, is expected to form one element of a short-term contingency plan and a related resource mobilization initiative.