

**INTER-AGENCY STANDING COMMITTEE WORKING GROUP
53rd MEETING**

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West Africa: Background Note

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I. West Africa Humanitarian Review Process

The deterioration of the security situation in Liberia and the fragmentation of the Cote d'Ivoire conflict require the UN and its partners to reinforce its role in early warning, preventive diplomacy, culture of peace, human security, preparedness, and stronger sub-regional integration between humanitarian, political and security endeavors.

The Regional Humanitarian Meeting in Abidjan in April 2003 established that the Mano River Union and Cote d'Ivoire were suffering from a protection crisis and a crisis in humanitarian response. There is a growing awareness among humanitarian actors that humanitarian practices in the West Africa context do not take into account the full range of needs and do not address the dignity of the human condition. In West Africa, the mechanisms for the resolution of political conflicts are under stress, and ensuing armed conflicts disrupt an already vulnerable social order, resulting in a massive crisis of protection. At the same time, despite a long history of humanitarian work in the sub-region, the effort remains largely unsuccessful in achieving its core objectives.

In response, the Humanitarian Community in West Africa has agreed to undertake a comprehensive review process, reach a common understanding of the most appropriate response strategies, and build a new partnership in West Africa, notably with donors and national authorities, towards principled action. This process will be undertaken in three phases: (1) a field review aimed at developing a regional humanitarian strategy; (2) an alignment of the humanitarian strategy with the political analyses; and (3) an in-depth evaluation of humanitarian response over the longer term. For this to be successful, the overall process must be supported by and actively involve all relevant UN Agencies, NGOs, International Organizations, and Donors, in close consultation with national authorities.

The first phase of this review process constitutes the Joint Humanitarian Field Review mission, which is currently undertaken to Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire from 22 June to 2 July 2003. Following recent developments in Liberia, the mission will meet with the Liberia Country Team en route. The aim of the mission is to devise a regional response strategy, which will form the basis of the 2004 funding appeals. A regional humanitarian meeting will be

convened on 17 to 18 July 2003 under the chairmanship of the Humanitarian Envoy for the Cote d'Ivoire Crisis to consider and finalize the regional strategy drafted by the Review Mission.

II. Protection of Civilians Workshop

Furthermore, on 19 to 21 May 2003, OCHA, together with the African Security Dialogue and Research, and the Institute for Security Studies, conducted a Protection of Civilian workshop in Accra, Ghana. The conference aimed to familiarize and inform participants of humanitarian challenges, protection tools and the "Aide Memore" checklist, and to identify strategies for mainstreaming acquired knowledge within domestic and regional decision-making structures. The workshop provided an opportunity to identify and discuss protection challenges in Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia, and the effects of these conflicts in the sub-region. Its key recommendations are summarized below.

Access to civilian populations in need of protection:

1. ECOWAS should facilitate a meeting on neutral ground between the governments of Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea and rebel groups, LURD, MODEL, MJP and MPIGO on practical modalities to allow humanitarian access to populations in need by agencies in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. For this purpose, relevant agencies and partners should develop a 'Human Cost of Conflict' document as a tool for advocacy.

Protection of people in transit – refugees, IDPs and migrant workers:

2. The International Labour Organization, in collaboration with the High Commissioner on Human Rights, should develop a set of principles for the protection of migrant workers affected by conflicts in the region.
3. The United Nations should provide a forum, in which the African Union and ECOWAS should negotiate a comprehensive ban on the recruitment of refugees and child soldiers by rebels and government forces.
4. Donor support should be mobilized for the screening and separation of combatants and non-combatants, and for the internment of combatants.
5. Refugee camps should be located in secure locations, away from borders.

Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants:

6. UN mandates should recommend that UN peacekeepers should not only disarm armed combatants, but mechanisms for general disarmament need to be found such as periodic amnesties.
7. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) strategies and programmes in the region should be reviewed based on lessons learned, and regional DDR programmes should be considered.
8. It should be ensured that former combatants receive skills and vocational training appropriate to the local market, and that there is sufficient funding for such programmes.

Illegal flow of small arms and light weapons:

9. Legislation on arms control should be harmonized in the region, and laws on the local production of small arms and light weapons should be reviewed, in line with the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Import, Export and Manufacture of Light Weapons in West Africa.
10. The collection and destruction of small arms and light weapons in the region should be strengthened by involving local communities in disarmament programmes.
11. Regional arms embargoes and/or sanctions for those who violate legislations should be considered.

Strengthening regional and sub-regional mechanisms for protection:

12. OCHA should work with regional and sub-regional organizations to support and assist work in this area, in collaboration with the African Union's Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution (and the Peace and Security Council when it is established), and the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution and Security.
13. OCHA should encourage the NEPAD Heads of States Implementation Committee to incorporate protection criteria into the indicators of the African Peer Review Mechanism.
14. The UN should promote the role of the International Criminal Court and other models, such as the special tribunal in Sierra Leone, as a deterrent for warning combatants that they will be held accountable for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.
15. The human rights monitoring capacities in the region should be enhanced.
16. Governments should develop appeal mechanisms at national and regional level for the redress of grievances relating to failures to protect civilians in armed conflict.

Further investigation, information sharing and co-ordination between actors responsible for protection in the region:

17. The United Nations Security Council Mission to West Africa should incorporate a focus on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in the region, as part of its broader investigation.
18. UN information should be fed into the regional early warning systems of civil society and regional organizations, for example through OCHA's Integrated Regional Information Network (IRIN).
19. Further co-ordination between humanitarian assistance programming and protection should be developed, under the leadership of OCHA.
20. The Panel on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources should further investigate the role of international corporations that are profiting from conflicts in the region.
21. Human rights and IHL monitoring and reporting should be built into any early warning mechanism and rapid response forces.
22. Within the UN Security Council and other fora, attention should be drawn to the interference of governments in conflicts in neighbouring countries, which should be further investigated by these bodies.

Public education and training:

23. Conflict resolution and peace education centers should be established at local level within communities.
24. A Code of Conduct on human rights and IHL should be incorporated into the training of all armed forces in the region, including standby peacekeeping troops, such as ECOFORCE and the envisaged sub-regional standby brigade of the African Union.

III. Key Issues for Discussion

- IASC members should review the above recommendations of the Protection of Civilian workshop, as well as the preliminary findings of the Joint Regional Humanitarian Review Mission, which will be presented by the mission's co-leader, Mark Bowden.
- IASC members should further discuss these recommendations within the proposed larger review process for West Africa vis-a-vis the practical implications, which these will entail for IASC members.
- In addition to the proposed recommendations, IASC members should discuss concrete ways, in which a new humanitarian partnership in West Africa can be forged to tackle the protection crisis and the crisis in humanitarian response.

Expected Decisions/Action Points by IASC-WG:

- Endorsement by IASC members of the specific recommendations made and commitment to their implementation, where applicable to IASC members.
- Endorsement of and commitment to the proposed overall Joint Humanitarian Review Process for West Africa, including participation in the upcoming regional humanitarian meeting in Dakar on 17 to 18 July.
- Commitment to jointly establish a new humanitarian partnership for West Africa, particularly with donors and national authorities.

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