UPROOTED LIBERIANS:
CASUALTIES OF A BRUTAL WAR
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The civil war in Liberia has been a wretched tragedy. It has fanned ethnic hatred, uprooted half the country's population, left tens of thousands dead, injured, or orphaned, derailed an already ailing economy, and destroyed schools, hospitals, and other infrastructure. The country's collective psyche has been permanently scarred by the ferocity of the violence and the atrocities committed during and after the war.

Although a cease-fire declared in November 1990 ended the fighting, there is still much insecurity, and no real resolution to the conflict. Liberia remains a divided country. Monrovia, the capital, is controlled by an interim government installed by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and protected by an ECOWAS peacekeeping force known as ECOMOG. The rest of the country is at least nominally controlled by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), the rebel group whose campaign to oust the much criticized government of the late President Samuel Doe triggered the war. The remnants of Doe's Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), accused of perpetrating some of the worst atrocities of the war, maintains a base near Monrovia, as does a splinter rebel group, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). In mid-1991, a new armed Liberian faction based in Sierra Leone entered the fray, leading to renewed fighting in border areas.

ECOWAS has made limited progress (at least on paper) towards resolving the political impasse. It has reached an agreement with the head of the NPFL, Charles Taylor, and with the president of the interim government in Monrovia, Dr. Amos Sawyer, to disarm and encamp the armed factions under ECOMOG supervision, and then hold internationally monitored elections. But the agreement has resulted in little concrete action.

Some Liberians express guarded optimism about the prospects for peace and reconciliation. Others worry that the peace process will collapse, resulting in renewed fighting. Most of the more than 663,000 Liberian refugees in neighboring countries want to return home, but are reluctant to do so until they see definite action to resolve the conflict. Inside Liberia, more than 500,000 people are displaced, many separated from their families. They and many other Liberians endure severe hardship, and many still live in fear. In NPFL-controlled areas, undisciplined boy-soldiers harass the civilian population. While the NPFL leadership has sought to curb their abuses, it apparently lacks control over its fighters in some remote areas of the country.

Though Monrovia is generally safe, there are still reports of sporadic looting and other abuses, particularly by AFL soldiers. Since the cease-fire, it has experienced a tremendous population explosion.

Although there is an apparent return to normalcy in Monrovia, one does not have to scratch very deep below the surface to find that it is false. Some shops and businesses have reopened, but relatively few people have jobs. Most depend on continuing free food distributions and on financial help from relatives in the United States. Among both young and old there is still fear, shock, anger, and a desire for revenge.

In neighboring Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, the much-heralded hospitality of the local people, who welcomed the refugees into their homes and shared their food with them until international aid arrived, is wearing thin. For many refugees, this "cohabitation" (the expression used in
the region for locals and refugees living together continues to work well, but for others, the honeymoon is over.

Besides its effect on political dynamics within West Africa, the Liberian civil war has also sharply affected relations between the United States and Liberia, whose ties stretch back more than a hundred years, to the "founding" of Liberia, by freed black American slaves.

Though the United States has been the single largest contributor of emergency aid to Liberia and Liberian refugees since the fighting broke out, the U.S. government has largely remained on the sidelines. At the height of the war, the political and/or military intervention that many Liberians expected from the United States to stop the bloodshed never came.

Political and economic realities are such that Liberia will have to turn to the United States for help in rebuilding the country when that becomes possible. With the Administration's attention fixed on other countries also seeking to rebuild after historic upheavals (particularly the former Soviet republics), advocates for aid to Liberia face an uphill struggle.

USCR staff made site visits to Liberia and neighboring countries in November 1990 and August 1991 to assess the situation of the civilian victims of the Liberian conflict. This paper, based in part on these visits, will address the causes of Liberian refugees' flight, the conditions of internally displaced and other war-affected Liberians in Monrovia and NPFL-held areas, the current situation of refugees in the countries of asylum, and the impact of the spill-over of the Liberian war into Sierra Leone. It will also analyze the prospects for peace and reconstruction, and make recommendations to the United States and the international community to assist Liberian refugees and Liberia as a whole.

THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT* 

The Settlers and the American Colonization Society

The history of Liberia is often reduced to a few brief lines that recount Liberia's settlement in 1822 by emancipated slaves from the United States, its becoming the first independent republic in Africa in 1847, its subsequent domination by the settlers' descendants, often referred to as the Americo-Liberians, the bloody coup that brought Samuel Doe to power, and the 1985 election that he rigged to stay in office.

But there is much in Liberia's history to which we can trace the roots of the present conflict. It is a history filled with ironies and inequities, lofty ideals and base realities.

The first permanent black American settlement in what is now Liberia was established in 1822, sponsored by the American Colonization Society (ACS), whose members included a number of prominent Americans. The settlers' first years were difficult. Many died of disease. Local chiefs, angered by the ACS's attempts to block the slave trade in the region, attacked the settlers.

By 1828, the settlement, named Monrovia, was home to some 1,200 American blacks and a small number of "Congoes", Africans who had been freed from slave ships bound for the United States and set free in Monrovia. During the next decade, new settlements sprouted along the Liberian coast, and the settler population doubled. In 1847, after the ACS dramatically reduced aid to the settlement, Liberia declared its independence, becoming the first republic on the African continent. Great Britain and other European countries recognized Liberia's independence. But the United States, despite its critical role in Liberia's formation, witheld recognition until 1862, reportedly to avoid the presence of a black ambassador in Washington.

Ironies and Inequities Despite the lofty sentiments expressed in Liberia's motto, "The Love of Liberty Brought Us Here," the emancipated slaves who settled in Liberia quickly adopted the ways of their former oppressors. From the outset, Americo-Liberians held themselves apart from the indigenous Africans, whom they regarded as inferior and uncivilized.

Although they represented only 5 percent of the residents of Liberia, the Americo-Liberians absolutely controlled the country's economic, political, and social life. Their superior status eventually extended to the growing number of Congoes, who integrated with them. By 1860, the numbers of Americo-Liberians and Congoes were

* Primary sources for this historical section include: Liberia: A Country Study, American University Foreign Area Studies, 1984; and Liberia: A Promise Betrayed, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986.
roughly equal (approximately 5,000 each).

For the better part of the next 100 years, indigenous Africans remained second class citizens. Most lived in the interior, in regions largely unexplored until the early 1900s. Little attention was paid to their needs, and the gulf—both economic and social—between Americo-Liberians and locals widened. Some became integrated into the Americo-Liberian community through intermarriage or through the ward system, in which indigenous
children were taken into Americo-Liberian households, sometimes remaining servants but often becoming integrated with the family. Over time, as more Congoes and locals integrated with Americo-Liberians, a new urban elite, predominantly but not exclusively Americo-Liberian, emerged.

During the 1920s, the economically strapped Liberian government raised funds by providing "contract laborers," usually forcibly recruited from among the indigenous population, to plantation owners in Spanish-held islands off the coast of Africa. In 1930, the League of Nations found the Liberian government guilty of, in effect, complicity in promoting a form of slavery. A League report described Liberia as a republic of 12,000 citizens with 1,000,000 subjects, and condemned the Liberian government for making no effort to improve the lot of the indigenous population.

**Tubman and the "Unification Policy"** William V.S. Tubman, often called the "Maker of Modern Liberia", was Liberia's president for 27 years, beginning in 1944. Tubman implemented a "Unification Policy," aimed at bringing Liberia's indigenous people into the social and political mainstream (without necessarily weakening the Americo-Liberians' dominant role). Although the Americo-Liberian oligarchy remained firmly in control, the situation of indigenous Liberians improved.

Tubman died in 1971 and was succeeded by William R. Tolbert, whose years in power were characterized by corruption and poverty, but also by a maturing political opposition. Growing social unrest exploded on April 14, 1979, in the so-called "rice riots." Tolbert's government proposed an increase in the price of rice that would ostensibly aid farmers, but which many viewed as benefitting Tolbert and his agriculture minister, both of whom had large rice farms. A demonstration by some 2,000 opponents of the proposed price increase became violent when a crowd of some 10,000 other people--mostly from Monrovia's mushrooming underclass of young, unemployed migrants from the interior--began looting stores and rice warehouses. During the ensuing melee, more than 40 people were reportedly killed and 500 injured.

A year after the rice riots, on April 12, 1980, Tolbert was overthrown in a coup led by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe and 16 other noncommissioned officers. Tolbert and 27 members of his security guard were killed and their bodies dumped in a mass grave. More than 200 other people were killed during the 3 days following the coup. A week later, 13 other top government officials were executed in Monrovia. Their execution was shown on Liberian television. The U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs termed the public execution "one of the most shocking spectacles in recent memory." Nevertheless, U.S. aid to Liberia increased dramatically after Doe came to power.

**Doe's Decade in Power** Whatever hopes Liberians may have had for a fairer distribution of wealth and power were soon dashed. Doe suspended the constitution and declared martial law. He concentrated power in the military, which was dominated by his own ethnic group, the Krahn, who represented no more than 4 percent of Liberia's population. According to a 1986 Lawyers Committee for Human Rights report,

> Almost from the moment they seized power, soldiers of the Liberian Armed Forces have been a law unto themselves. Looting, arson, flogging, arbitrary arrests, persistent reports of rape—all of these abuses have been attributed on a wide scale to soldiers loyal to President Doe. Reports of summary executions, meanwhile, have been colored by credible eyewitness descriptions of horrific brutality, including castration and disembemberment.

In 1984, Doe announced that he planned to return Liberia to civilian rule. He lifted the ban on political activities and scheduled elections for the following year.

The elections, another infamous landmark in Liberia's history, took place on October 15, 1985. When early results indicated that Doe would lose heavily, Doe's supporters cast aside the established vote counting process and substituted their own procedure. They declared Doe the winner with 50.9 percent of the vote. International observers monitoring the election, including representatives of the U.S. Congress, complained that the elections had been rigged. The Los Angeles Times labeled them "one of the most blatant frauds in recent African history."

On November 12, 1985, a month after the elections, there was a coup attempt against Doe.
The coup leaders' radio announcement that they had overthrown Doe led to widespread celebrations in the streets of Monrovia. But it was premature; Doe prevailed.

In the wake of the attempted coup, inter-ethnic tensions among Liberia's indigenous population, which had been escalating since Doe came to power, exploded. The leader of the attempted coup, Thomas Quinonkpa, was a member of the Gio, a group living primarily in Nimba County. Krahn soldiers rounded up hundreds of Gios and Manos (who are closely related to Gios) in Monrovia and subjected them to what eye-witnesses described as "blood-curdling brutality" before killing them. Truckloads of corpses were dumped into mass graves near the beach. Killings also reportedly occurred in Nimba County. Opposition leaders were detained for months without charge. The Lawyers Committee report, written the year after the attempted coup, said, "Liberia is rife with talk of revenge. The possibility of massive reprisals against the Krahn if President Doe is violently removed from power is conceded by all sides."

**The United States and the Doe Regime** During the first five years Doe was in power, the United States provided his regime with $400 million in economic aid and a further $52 million in military aid. Prior to Doe, U.S. economic aid to Liberia had never exceeded $20 million per year. The U.S. government justified the dramatic increase by saying that it hoped to influence Doe to move toward democratization (and away from Soviet or Libyan influence). U.S. pressure helped bring about the 1985 elections, but to many Liberians the U.S. government undermined the democratization process by validating election results that were repudiated by virtually all others in the international community. Although U.S. aid to Doe's regime diminished considerably between 1986 and 1989, many Liberians continued to perceive the United States as Doe's patron. The Lawyers Committee report concluded, "Many Liberians believe that the United States, far from promoting stability, is sowing the seeds of further conflict."

**A BRUTAL WAR**

**Rebel Incursion Marks Start of War** The Liberian civil war began in December 1989, when a rebel group calling itself the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) attacked AFL positions in Nimba County. The NPFL initially consisted of only a few hundred men under the leadership of Charles Taylor (who while serving in the Doe government several years earlier had been accused of embezzling nearly a million dollars). Taylor and his men were said to be backed by Libya.

The AFL retaliated against the mostly Gio and Mano civilian population of Nimba County. AFL soldiers razed whole villages. They stole, shot, and killed at will. The viciousness of their response, and the fact that it was directed primarily against civilians, set the tone for the war. The NPFL's ranks grew quickly as other Gios and Manos in Nimba joined the group. The NPFL also attacked civilians, primarily members of the Krahn and Mandingo ethnic groups (Doe and many AFL leaders and soldiers were Krahn; Mandingos, mostly traders who had migrated to Liberia from Guinea during the past few decades, were viewed as supporting the Doe regime).

What began as a campaign to oust Doe from power became very quickly an all out, ethnically based civil war.

The war spread rapidly. NPFL forces, though comprised mostly of poorly trained young recruits (including a high percentage of boys in their early to mid-teens), gained control first of most of Nimba, and then large areas of surrounding counties. As the fighting spread, tens of thousands of Liberians poured across the borders into Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. By early February 1990, 120,000 Liberian refugees had fled.

**A Reign of Terror** From its onset, the war was characterized by victimization of civilians by all of the armed factions. Survivors describe not just physical abuse, rape, and wanton killing, but also mutilations, people forced to eat their own body parts, the sick and elderly burned alive in their huts, and pregnant women's stomachs torn open with bayonets and their unborn babies ripped from their wombs. Men, women, and children were forced to watch the torture and execution of their loved ones. Anyone who protested or even cried out risked being killed.

As the fighting approached Monrovia, hundreds of thousands of the capital's residents fled. Most headed for the Sierra Leonean border, though
The Liberian civil war resulted in countless civilian casualties. Many thousands were killed or injured in the fighting, others were tortured, mutilated, or forced to watch the killing of their loved ones. Hunger felled others still. This severely malnourished woman was being taken to Monrovia in a wheelbarrow by her husband, who hoped to find food and medical care for her there.

USCR/H. Ruiz

some sought refuge in Liberia's interior. As AFL forces became increasingly cornered in Monrovia, they went on a rampage of looting and killing. Many of the victims were Gios and Manos, but no one was safe. Seeking safety in numbers, civilians gathered in churches and other buildings. On May 30, AFL soldiers attacked the United Nations compound, one such refuge. They entered the compound, beat the men, women, and children gathered there, and abducted more than 40 people, many of whom they reportedly shot in a nearby field.

USCR interviewed a survivor of the attack on the UN compound:

When the soldiers jumped over the fence, they killed three people on the spot. They grabbed people and held them at gunpoint. They raped two women in front of everyone. They beat the people who were in the yard. People were trying to run away, shouting and crying. The soldiers were just shooting.

Uprooted Liberians
By June, NPFL forces were on the outskirts of Monrovia. So too were the forces of a second rebel group, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), which had split off from the NPFL in February. Although observers believed that the rebels would capture the city fairly quickly, that did not happen. There were major skirmishes—including indiscriminate shelling of the city—among the various groups, but a decisive battle never came. Instead, throughout July and August, in what has been described as a reign of terror, AFL, NPFL, and INPFL “troops” brutalized the remaining civilian population.

Rebels, often bizarrely dressed in wigs and dresses and wearing masks, executed anyone suspected of being a Krahn or a Doe supporter. Prince Johnson, the INPFL’s leader, was photographed personally executing civilians, including a Liberian Red Cross worker who was handcuffed to a French relief worker. AFL soldiers similarly shot Gios and Manos—and anyone else who crossed their path.

The Massacre at St. Peter’s Church On July 30, AFL soldiers perpetrated the worst atrocity of the war. At about 2:00 a.m., some 30 AFL soldiers entered St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, a designated Red Cross shelter where an estimated 2,000 people, mostly Gios and Manos, had taken refuge. The soldiers opened fire on the defenseless civilians, killing 200 to 300 people and injuring hundreds of others. After the attack, many of the survivors, including many wounded, fled to the nearby U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S. AID) compound, which by then was vacant save for the caretaker. AFL soldiers later burst into the compound, captured more than 350 people, and reportedly shot them on a nearby beach. Altogether, some 600 men, women, and children were massacred that day.

The total number of Liberians killed during the war is not known. Estimates range from 10,000 (U.S. State Department), to 50,000 (relief worker), to more than 100,000 (member of interim government in Monrovia).

The United States Steers Clear: West Africa Intervenes As the fighting escalated, there were calls for the United States to intervene, either to end the fighting, or at least to provide a safe haven for civilians. The Washington Post said that one of the last foreigners to leave Monrovia, a relief worker with a French medical group, “criticized the U.S. government...[for] shirking a humanitarian responsibility to protect civilian lives by refusing to intervene in the Liberian conflict.” But the United States opted not to intervene militarily. A U.S. official told the Post, “The bottom line is, it’s not in the United States’ interest to get in the middle of this fight.... It is not something we would put U.S. boys on the line for.”

In June, the Administration deployed 2,100 Marines on four ships off the coast of Liberia, but they remained offshore. On August 6, after Johnson threatened foreigners in Monrovia, U.S. helicopters based on the ships evacuated the Americans who remained internally (a skeleton staff, guarded by Marines, remained at the embassy).

In the absence of any U.S. or UN action, the 16-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) decided to send a peace-keeping force to Liberia. There had been dissent among its members—particularly between French and English-speaking member countries—as to what role ECOWAS should play in the crisis, particularly militarily. Some French-speaking countries supported Taylor and were against military intervention. Nigeria, an English-speaking country that has sought to expand its influence in the region, opposed Taylor.

In mid-August, ECOWAS began deploying a five-nation (Nigeria, Ghana, Guinea, Gambia, and Sierra Leone) peace-keeping force known as ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) to Monrovia. Initially, ECOMOG had little impact on the security situation. By early September, however, it established control over a small area of the city near the port on Bushrod Island.

A year later, in an August 1991 interview with the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR), the U.S. Ambassador to Liberia, Peter De Vos, said, “Early on in the crisis, President Bush made a decision—I think a wise one—not to send Americans in to either kill Liberians or to be killed by them.” De Vos added, “From day one [of the war], we were telling Doe to stop what he was doing in Nimba. We tried to get the groups together. We had [Deputy Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman] Cohen in the area. But we do feel that it
is a Liberian problem, and they need to resolve it.”

For many Liberians, the U.S. decision not to intervene came as a shock. A member of the Interim Government of Liberia put it this way: “Where was our oldest friend when we were going through this nightmare? Many people flocked to Monrovia thinking that the Marines would land and stop the massacre.” Despite “appeal upon appeal upon appeal,” he said, that did not happen.

Ambassador de Vos rejected Liberians’ criticisms that the United States should have done more and emphasized the Administration’s attempts through diplomatic channels to stop the fighting. He said, “I disagree that the United States discarded Liberia. Did we prevent war? No. But did we try? Yes, we tried damned hard...but the Liberians wouldn’t cooperate.”

**Doe Killed: ECOMOG Goes on the Offensive**

On September 10, 1990, Prince Johnson and his men captured Doe outside ECOMOG’s headquarters. They tortured and killed him, and put his mutilated body on public display. INPFL cameras filmed the entire event.

Doe’s death marked a turning point in the dynamics of the conflict. ECOMOG, which according to a *New York Times* report was originally sent to “curb anarchy...and restore a measure of order,” launched a military offensive against the NPFL. At times fighting alongside INPFL and AFL troops, by mid-October ECOMOG had pushed the NPFL out of Monrovia. When ECOMOG captured the Fendell campus of the University of Liberia, a few miles outside Monrovia, they freed tens of thousands of civilians who had been forced to leave Monrovia by the NPFL forces. (The NPFL had also kidnapped thousands of West Africans, including diplomats and journalists, whom they detained until late 1991.)

For the first time in months, there was no fighting in Monrovia. But looting and harassment of civilians continued, especially at the hands of remaining AFL soldiers, who remained holed up on the grounds of the late President’s Executive Mansion along with more than 2,000 of their relatives and other Krahn civilians. INPFL and, reportedly, even some ECOMOG soldiers also participated in the looting. As Monrovians and other displaced Liberians poured into the city, thousands of nationals of other African countries who had been trapped in Monrovia during the war converged on the port, hoping to leave on one of the ECOMOG ships that ferried supplies and troops to the city.

Shortly after ECOMOG secured most of Monrovia, and only one day after the first shipment of food in months reached Monrovia, USCR arrived in the beleaguered Liberian capital, accompanying staff of the U.S. Aid Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

A team from the medical relief group *Médecins sans frontières* (MSF-Belgium) was already in Monrovia, as was a representative of the U.S.-based Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which also had a team helping to distribute rice in NPFL-held areas. With most hospitals and clinics destroyed, no water or electricity in the city, malnutrition rampant, and no food in sight, MSF concentrated on restoring some water supply, organizing transportation for the little food aid available, and feeding the most severely malnourished children.

USCR found a city, and a people, devastated by war. In testimony before the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs on November 27, 1990, shortly after returning from Monrovia, USCR staff said:

> Mr. Chairman, while in Monrovia, I saw the battered buildings, burned-out cars, and camps for displaced people that now characterize that city. I witnessed the widespread human suffering: people scooping up grains of rice; emaciated children (though fortunately not as many as I’d feared); thousands of men, women, and children lining up for...rations; orphans and children separated from their families and now left alone to survive as best they can. I drove through the deserted streets of the Sinkor neighborhood of central Monrovia. No one goes to Sinkor because it is still the preying ground of the Armed Forces of Liberia...and most Monrovians are afraid to go anywhere near the AFL.

> I had the numbing experience of going to St. Peter’s Lutheran Church, site of the AFL’s worst atrocity.... Dozens of decomposing bodies—men, women, and children—remained heaped one upon the other. The smell of death pervaded the area. In the darkness, I nearly stepped on what was left of a girl’s body....
Monrovia, November 2, 1990. Thousands of people wait for 8 cups of rice each. For months, as fighting raged in and around the capital, no food reached the city’s residents. Water and electricity were cut off, and the city’s hospitals and clinics were abandoned and ransacked. After ECOMOG, a West African peace-keeping force, restored calm to Monrovia in October 1990, tens of thousands of displaced people poured into the city, and the first international food aid arrived. Local people organized a relief group, SELF, which distributed the food. In early 1992, conditions in Monrovia are much improved, but most of the city’s residents are still dependent on food aid.

The city’s population has swelled as displaced people who had been living in areas controlled by Taylor moved into Monrovia... Thousands are still living in centers for displaced people.

The one bright spot was the resilience displayed by Liberians who had lived through the war. Among them were Dorothea Diggs and Blamoh Nelson, two energetic and committed people who founded a local relief group called Special Emergency Life Food (SELF), which recruited more than 1,000 volunteers to help distribute food in the city. One U.S. relief official described SELF as “the best indigenous start-up organization” that he had seen in 23 years of relief work.

A Divided Country On November 27, 1990, all of the parties involved in the conflict sat down to talk for the first time. The initial outcome was positive: they declared a cease-fire. That cease-fire has held, but the parties have failed to find a political solution to the conflict. In the interim, a new group has joined the fray: the Sierra Leone-based United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), made up mostly of Krahns (many of whom are former AFL soldiers) and Mandingos who fled to Sierra Leone and Guinea during the war.

In early 1992, Liberia remains a divided country. Monrovia is under the administration of
the Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), headed by Interim President Amos Sawyer, a former professor at the University of Liberia and well-known opposition figure during Doe's years in power. Sawyer was first selected as interim president at an ECOWAS-convened meeting in Banjul, the Gambia, in August 1990. According to the terms of the agreement reached between ECOWAS and meeting participants, Sawyer is barred from running for president when national elections are eventually held.

In March 1991, at a peace conference in Monrovia at which all Liberian political parties, including the NPFL, were to select a new interim government, Sawyer was re-elected interim president. By the time that vote was taken, however, the NPFL representatives to the conference had walked out. Taylor himself, citing security concerns, did not attend.

Although the interim government administers the capital, ECOMOG remains by far the most powerful entity there. ECOMOG provides security, and the presence of its 8,000 troops is a boon to the fledgling economy.

The AFL continues to exist. Its troops are confined to barracks on the outskirts of Monrovia and are not supposed to enter the city armed. But they reportedly do, looting and harassing civilians under cover of night.

The INPFL, which has participated in the interim government on and off, has been assigned an area east of the capital where its armed men are supposed to remain. According to an October 1991 Africa Watch report, Johnson, who served in the Liberian military in the early 1980s and participated in the failed coup attempt against Doe in 1985, is now often described as "erratic, mentally unstable, and psychotic." Between July and October 1991, he personally executed more than half a dozen people, mostly his own officers. In January 1992, Johnson reportedly executed three more of his officers. Africa Watch says, "Prince Johnson is not accountable to any authority; there are no procedures in place for bringing him to justice."

The rest of Liberia--more than 95 percent of the country's territory--is controlled by the NPFL, which does not recognize the legitimacy of the interim government in Monrovia. It has set up an alternate Liberian government, the National Patriotic Reconstruction Assembly (NPRA), based in Gbarnga and headed by Taylor. Some critics claim that Taylor is using his position as president of the NPRA government to enrich himself.

According to a December 1991 report from the SMA Fathers, a missionary group doing relief work in Liberia and among Liberian refugees, "Liberia is definitely two different worlds now.... In the feeling of some church persons, the division is still quite serious and reflects a sense that the war should not yet be regarded as totally completed."

Monrovia: A False Normalcy USCR returned to Monrovia in August 1991 and found a considerably changed city. The population had mushroomed to more than 600,000. Some of the damaged buildings had been repaired, and although checkpoints remained at key intersections, there was no longer the sense of being in a war zone.

The most dramatic change was the number of people and the level of activity in the streets. Bars and nightclubs had reopened (they were among the first businesses to do so). According to Mike Yuknis, a relief worker with Catholic Relief Services, "They tapped a need that people had: to get their minds off all that had happened." Street markets, shops, cinemas, even some restaurants and hotels had also reopened. Taxis and buses operated. Some flights had resumed into Spriggs-Payne Airport, which had been deserted on USCR's 1990 visit.

But the sense of normalcy that USCR found in August 1991 (and which still prevails) was false. A relief worker who has lived in Liberia for many years says, "When you visit Monrovia and see all the activity, you get the feeling that everything is back to normal--but it's only on the surface." Francis Junod, former head of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) delegation in Liberia, adds, "It's a sort of auto-hypnosis. People have a sense of euphoria that's totally artificial."

There is little real economic activity. Few people have paying jobs. The only industrial plant to reopen is the brewery. The luckiest are those who work for the UN system, which despite a slow start has established a large presence, or for one of the many private relief groups now operating in the city and environs. Government workers, including doctors, nurses, teachers, police, etc., are paid "incentives" as and when the government can afford them. However, the government has few
sources of income. Many people in Monrovia (as well as Liberians in the interior and refugees in neighboring countries) rely on financial remittances from relatives in the United States.

Many of the more than 500,000 displaced people in Liberia are in Monrovia, having fled their home areas for the greater security that the capital affords. The centers for displaced people that sprang up in Monrovia during the war are gone, but the displaced continue to live in overcrowded conditions with relatives or friends who can ill afford to assist them. Every day, dozens if not hundreds of people manage to cross into Monrovia, either with NPFL permission, or by avoiding its detection. Those caught trying to leave NPFL areas clandestinely are subject to physical abuse and detention.

Thousands of returnees (former Liberian refugees, most of whom came back from Sierra Leone when the Liberian civil war spilled over into that country) also live in Monrovia in similar conditions to the displaced—and more continue to arrive from around the region. On December 1, 1991, a ship carrying 787 returnees arrived from Conakry (Guinea) and Freetown (Sierra Leone).

According to a UN report on emergency needs in Liberia, “Nearly all displaced persons...returnees live in destitution, lacking the basic necessities of life.”

Virtually all of Monrovia’s residents continue to receive free food, mostly provided by the United States. SELF, which remains responsible for food distribution, has developed a more sophisticated system. According to SELF’s Dorothea Diggs, when food first arrived in November 1990, every adult and child went to a distribution site and was given eight cups of rice. Now, food is distributed to heads of households by locally selected neighborhood relief teams in 175 neighborhood distribution centers. Each house in the city is numbered, and SELF keeps computerized records of the number of residents in each house.

There have been problems and complaints about SELF, but considering that it is now distributing food to more than 600,000 people and that it still relies primarily on volunteers, SELF is doing a remarkable job. The UN report on emergency needs in Liberia said, “The success achieved by the international community in its response to the crisis to date owes much to nongovernmental organizations, including the locally formed SELF.”

According to Ross Mountain, coordinator of UN emergency relief operations in Liberia, until the situation in Liberia stabilizes and the economy gets back on its feet, free food distribution is likely to continue. However, priority will be given to vulnerable groups and institutions, e.g. schools, hospitals, and maternal and child health clinics.

“There’s nobody starving in Monrovia, but we’re not throwing away food,” Mountain said. In 1992, the general ration is likely to be lower, with some food aid channeled into the private commercial sector to boost the economy and reduce dependency. Food-for-work programs will also be encouraged. (The World Food Program estimates that more than 1.2 million Liberians, including all of Monrovia’s residents, and displaced or otherwise war-affected civilians in NPFL areas, will need food aid in 1992.)

Although there is still a shortage of hospital beds and medicines in Monrovia, health care has improved since November 1990. Malnutrition among children, which was 35 percent in November 1990 (some reports estimated that at the height of the war malnutrition was more double that figure), was only 4.5 percent by March 1991, and 2.5 percent by October 1991. Many of the supplemental feeding centers that provided extra nourishment to those most at risk (usually children and pregnant or lactating women) have closed. In August 1991, 25 percent of the more than 5,000 people attending the feeding centers operated at that time by Action International Contre la Faim (AICF) were not children but undernourished elderly people.

The psychological impact of the war also remains strong. One relief worker interviewed said, “There is still a lot of animosity about what happened in the war, both in Monrovia and on the other side [the NPFL areas]. I get the feeling that people are waiting for the roads [between Monrovia and NPFL areas] to open to take revenge.” Many families remain separated. There is still much shock, as well as fear and anxiety about the future.

"Greater Liberia"—Still Insecure Beyond Monrovia, past the checkpoints that mark the artificial border between the two Liberias, the NPFL is in control. “Greater Liberia,” as NPFL officials sometimes refer to the area, or “the other side” as many in Monrovia call it, has received much less
attention than Monrovia. In part, that is because visitors to Liberia find it difficult to travel about in NPFL-held areas. Special permits have to be arranged, and dozens of checkpoints must be navigated. Security is tenuous. In December 1991, the UN suspended its relief operations in Grand Gedeh County after NPFL soldiers attacked one of its staff there.

Africa Watch's October 1991 report on Liberia summarized conditions in the NPFL areas:

_Civilians in NPFL territory...no longer face the atrocities of all-out war; nevertheless, they suffer the capricious actions associated with a military occupation--arbitrary arrest, physical abuse, confiscation and destruction of property, and restrictions on freedom of movement and freedom of expression. Underlying these problems is the perception that the NPFL 'fighters' are a law unto themselves, and many of these fighters are young, undisciplined, and unpaid._

Although the NPFL nominally controls all of Liberia outside of Monrovia, its leadership's ability to exert control over its commanders in the field--less yet their young, undisciplined fighters--is questionable. The level of security (or insecurity) therefore varies from region to region.

When fighting broke out in Grand Gedeh County in July 1991 between the NPFL and a remaining Krahn resistance force, refugees who fled to Côte d'Ivoire reported human rights abuses on the scale of those at the height of the war. More than 10,000 refugees, almost all of them Khrahns, fled from Grand Gedeh to the Tai region of Côte d'Ivoire in July and August 1991. A joint UNICEF/AICF team that visited Grand Gedeh in November found 11 percent malnutrition among children there.

A relief official in Côte d'Ivoire who has interviewed many refugees from Maryland, Grand Kru, and Grand Gedeh counties said, "Since July 1990 there has been a total breakdown of order in eastern Liberia. Bands of bandits rob whomever and whatever they want. Taylor has made an effort to protect people, but his troops haven't." A Liberian man who works with the Red Cross in other NPFL-held areas said that the situation is calmer now, but, "When people get used to shoot-

_Relief Groups Aid Civilians in NPFL-Held Areas_

The availability of relief and social services also varies from county to county. Various relief groups, including the ICRC, CRS, MSF Belgium, MSF Holland, AICF, GOAL Ireland, and Lutheran World Service, provide a variety of services, including food distribution, supplementary feeding, health care, and agricultural projects. But their work is concentrated in rural areas near Monrovia, along the Monrovia-Gbarnga corridor, and in areas of Nimba, Bong, Lofa, Bomi, and Grand Cape Mount counties. Even in some of those areas, particularly in Grand Cape Mount County, their ability to operate fluctuates according to the security situation. Little aid reaches most areas in southeastern Liberia, particularly Grand Gedeh, Grand Bassa, Sinoe, Grand Kru, and Maryland counties, where an estimated 213,000 people are displaced.

Health care is the major concern in many parts of the interior. That is true even in Montserrado County near Monrovia, which, because fighting lasted longer there than in other regions, was both more devastated and received help later than other counties. According to AICF director Dr. Magali Lachot, "In Kakata [only some 25 miles from Monrovia], there is almost no health structure. Throughout Montserrado County, conditions in the villages are still very difficult." Because of the proximity of areas of Montserrado County to Liberia's "internal border," and the presence of so many armed forces near that border, food distribution in the region is carried out by the ICRC, whose mandate includes assistance to civilians in conflict zones.

In some areas, those who stayed behind were able to plant crops in 1991. Some food aid has reached the areas in need, and an effort has been made to secure and distribute seed rice for future planting. A group similar to Monrovia's SELF has formed to coordinate food distribution to vulnerable populations in the NPFL areas.
Liberians United to Serve Humanity (LUSH), as the group is called, met in Gbarnga with the leaders of SELF, who offered them technical advice.

**Liberia's Children: Casualties of War**

One of the most tragic consequences of the Liberian civil war has been its effect on the country's children. Children have been both victims and innocent perpetrators of the violence that engulfed the country. Thousands are orphaned, many others are separated from their families. A prominent Liberian now living in Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire, said, “Children are now growing up with the ethnic hatred in their hearts.”

Many children who became orphaned or separated from their families made their way to Monrovia, where they lived in the streets, slept in abandoned cars or buildings, and begged or stole food to survive. “I sleep in the market, under the table,” said one six-year-old. Another child added, “I sit down and beg for food.”

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) carried out a survey of 518 street children in April 1991 and found that 17 percent had witnessed the deaths of their parents. According to a report by UNICEF consultant Dr. Esther L. Guluma, “The children's testimony revealed their exposure to, and consequent familiarity with,
hostility, direct violence, destruction, and gruesome atrocities, including rapes and torture.” Most of the children reported going hungry much of the time.

The stories that these children recounted to UNICEF speak for themselves:

- “The freedom fighters, they cut people’s throats in front of me.” (9 year old)
- “My mother and my father were killed by the government soldiers. I was there when my mother and my father were killed. (13 year old)
- “I was stabbed in the stomach in Nimba by NPFL forces after they killed my sister.” (15 year old)

After the fighting ended in Monrovia, several orphanages and shelters were set up to assist the street children, many of whom are clearly troubled. The director of one of the temporary orphanages, Jessye Duncan, said, “When the children first arrived, they were reluctant to say anything about their past. We have some who have been combatants, who have killed. One boy describes visions that people whom he killed chase him.”

Many of the separated children have now reunited with family members, and some of the temporary orphanages and shelters have closed. One “orphanage” that still operates and that concerns many relief workers in Monrovia is run by Prince Johnson and the INPFL. Some observers believe that Johnson uses the presence of the children in a building right next to his house as a “human shield,” protecting him against attack. It is widely believed that the INPFL trains youngsters at the orphanage and recruits them into its ranks. (Johnson has reportedly promised to close the orphanage, but as of January 1992 had not done so.)

In the NPFL-held areas, extended families or friends care for most orphaned and separated children. But a major problem there is the NPFL’s continued use of child soldiers. Taylor himself reportedly recognizes that this practice is not only detrimental to the children involved and the community at large, but is also damaging to his public image. Nevertheless, children still make up a significant number of the NPFL’s “forces”. Their number is declining, but slowly. One relief worker who regularly travels in NPFL-held areas said, “In April [1991], half of the “guards” at NPFL checkpoints were young boys. Now [August 1991] the number is less, but there are still many.”

A workshop sponsored by UNICEF and the Save the Children Fund (UK) in Gbarnga to train school counselors and teachers on trauma counseling was limited and basic, while the needs of Liberia’s traumatized children are vast and complex. Also, according to UNICEF’s Gulama, “The training workshop revealed that those counseling the children are in dire need of counseling themselves, especially in attempting to reconcile their war experiences and their social values.”

LIBERIAN REFUGEES

Local People Welcome Refugees: International Response Inadequate When Liberian refugees first fled to Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire, and Sierra Leone in late December 1989, local people in villages and towns opened their homes to them. Even in a continent where, despite the poverty of host countries, refugees have generally been welcomed by their neighbors, the hospitality shown to Liberian refugees was unprecedented.

All along the borders, individual families took in refugees, shared their food supplies with them, and often gave them land to farm. Schools and other public buildings became makeshift group homes. Local health services, already overstretched, were extended to the refugees. As a result, Liberian refugees, unlike most refugees worldwide, did not wind up living in refugee camps, but “cohabitating” with the local people in the asylum countries. As a relief worker in Côte d’Ivoire put it, “This was the glorious time. The Liberians were received as brothers, not as refugees.”

This generosity provided the refugees with food and shelter in a more humane environment than a refugee camp. It also helped make up for the woefully inadequate initial response of the international community— including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Without the action of the Guinean, Ivorian, and Sierra Leonean people, there could have been a major refugee tragedy in West Africa.

Several factors contributed to the poor international response. The region did not have a history of refugee flows. Therefore, the UNHCR presence there was minimal, and many of the other international and nongovernmental agencies that
often respond in emergencies were also not present. In the case of Côte d'Ivoire, the most prosperous (and best able to respond) of the three host countries, the government at first chose to handle the situation by itself, and for some time did not request UNHCR assistance.

In Guinea, which asked for UNHCR assistance almost as soon as the refugee influx began, the problem was particularly acute. Guinea had the largest refugee influx; most of the refugees were located in a remote and inaccessible region. As late as June 1990, six months into the refugee emergency, USCR warned, “Some food has reached the refugees in Guinea, but it is not enough. Shelter, medical care, and sanitation are also still inadequate.”

When food aid did arrive, it inadvertently threatened relations between refugees and locals, since officially it could go only to refugees, even though locals were also in need, having used their reserves to help the refugees.

The Honeymoon is Over Two years after refugees first fled the Liberian civil war, a comprehensive international and local relief effort is in place, though it has many glitches. Financing of the program is well below need, which means that refugees receive only basic assistance.

There are more than 663,000 Liberian refugees in exile throughout West Africa. The largest number are living in Guinea (397,000) and Côte d'Ivoire (240,000). Most of the Liberian refugees who were living in Sierra Leone fled that country too after Liberian rebels invaded in March 1991. However, 7,200 Liberians continue to be assisted in a refugee camp near Freetown, the Sierra Leonean capital, and as many as 10,000 other Liberians live unassisted in Freetown and other urban areas. There are also 8,000 Liberian refugees in Ghana, 1,000 in Nigeria, and smaller numbers in other West African countries. (As of December 20, 1991, more than 4,200 Liberians had applied for Temporary Protected Status—a category of temporary asylum—in the United States. Many had been in the United States on tourist, student, or other temporary visas when the war began. Others arrived later.)

A number of refugees have begun to return to Liberia (some estimates say some 56,000 in 1991), while others live in asylum countries but return to work on their farms in Liberia. Both trends are likely to carry on if the situation in Liberia continues to stabilize. The prospects for large-scale repatriation are discussed later in this paper.

Meanwhile, most Liberian refugees live in exile, cohabitating with their local hosts. While many involved in the relief effort believe that the arrangement is working well, a closer inspection reveals mounting tension and friction, and a growing acknowledgement that the cohabitation “honeymoon” is over.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

“Even in Families There Are Problems” Tension between refugees and locals is surprisingly pronounced in Côte d'Ivoire, even though better infrastructure and fewer logistical problems there aid the relief effort. Andrew Mayne, head of the UNHCR sub-office in Danane, the Ivorian town with the highest concentration of Liberian refugees, says, “The cohabitation is going well, but it is tending to become more strained.” The top local official there, Mr. Kone-Dibonian, concurs. While emphasizing the positive, he says, “Even in families there are problems.”

Flore Kouame, an official in the refugee section of the Ivorian Interior Ministry in Abidjan, says that she believes the effects of the refugees’ presence are not all negative. For example, water pumps have been installed, houses built, and roads improved—all of benefit to Ivorians when the refugees leave. But her colleagues in the government are increasingly negative about the refugees’ presence. She says, “Everywhere I hear, ‘When will the refugees go?’ or, ‘They are a burden.’”

The problems are least noticeable in the villages nearest the Liberian border. There, many refugees and locals, whose villages are in close proximity, are not only of the same ethnic groups, but are often related or have known each other most of their lives. In the village of Belegleu, about 45 minutes from Danane and just a few miles from the Liberian border, Kardor, a refugee in his 40s who was chief of his village in Liberia, says, “Here in this village I have never had any problem with anybody. Neither have the other refugees.” Another refugee adds, “Even though we are not at
home, we feel a little bit okay here.”

Even in the border villages, however, relations aren’t always warm. One contentious issue is food distribution. Since refugees are scattered in hundreds of villages, food can’t be distributed directly to each family. It is generally handed over to the village chief and a refugee leader, who in turn distribute it to the refugees (usually after both have taken a “commission” for themselves, according to some refugees and relief workers). The greater the tension between locals and refugees in a village, the more problems associated with the distribution.

Farther from the border, the level of kinship between locals and refugees decreases, and tensions increase. The issue of rent and farmland becomes thorny. A refugee in the town of Tai said, “There is no relationship [between refugees and locals]. When we get food, relations are okay. But when the food is finished, the relationship is finished.” Other refugees complain that when locals hire them to cut wood or work in their fields, they don’t pay as promised. Locals, on the other hand, complain that refugees take their hospitality for granted and don’t share willingly even though they depleted their own food reserves to help the refugees when they first arrived.

**Tension Highest in Danane** It is in Danane that the problems and ensuing tensions reach a peak. Many of the refugees in Danane are of urban background. They generally do not have direct links with the local people, and are not cohabitating with them. Their large number (refugees nearly outnumber locals), the fact that English rather than

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When Liberian refugees fled to neighboring countries beginning in December 1989, the relief effort was hampered not only because UNHCR’s response was slow and inadequate, but also because many of the refugees, particularly those in Guinea, were located in remote, difficult to reach areas. When the rainy season began, trucks carrying relief aid would often get stuck in muddy roads, slowing the delivery of the limited food aid that was reaching the area. The situation was saved by the generosity of the local people, who opened their homes to the refugees and shared their food with them. — USCR/H. Ruiz
French is becoming the most commonly heard language, and cultural differences between locals and refugees are all part of the problem.

One example is Ivorians' reactions to the way Liberian women dress. Ivorian women generally dress in "traditional" African style, while the style of dress of Liberian women is more akin to that in the United States—shorter skirts, jeans, and even shorts. Ivorians find the latter particularly offensive.

Increases in crime, violence, and prostitution, however, are the greatest source of friction in Danane, and draw the attention and concern of government officials as far away as Abidjan, the Ivorian capital. Ivorian officials acknowledge that none of these problems is new to Danane, but say they have increased significantly since the refugees' arrival.

A local teacher described the changes he has witnessed: "Before the refugees arrived, Danane was small, calm. Now it's not safe. Violence has increased. There is more fighting, stealing, guns, and insecurity. You can't walk the street late at night."

**Food, Education, and Health Care Also Problems**

When asked what problems they face in Côte d'Ivoire, most refugees say, "food". At the time of the U.S. Committee for Refugees' visit in August 1991, refugees were receiving only half rations of rice. In May 1991, the Ivorian government decided that the refugee population figure, 327,000, was inflated. The government scaled down the ration and also carried out a census that produced a refugee population figure, 210,581. (In December 1991, another census determined the number of refugees to be 240,000.) A relief worker involved in food distribution said that another reason for the cut in ration was that "the government saw too much rice for sale by refugees." An Ivorian government official told USCR that since the price of rice is controlled in Côte d'Ivoire, it is a problem when many refugees sell rice at a lower price. Refugees say that they have to sell some of the rice they are given to pay rent, and buy other food items or medicines.

A refugee woman said, "They cut the food ration and I don't know what to do. No one in my family has work. We don't even have money to pay the rent." The distribution of full rations was resumed in September, but, based on the recommendation of a World Food Program (WFP) assessment team, may yet be reduced again.

Education has been a sore point. For more than a year and a half after refugees began arriving in Côte d'Ivoire, the government did not allow any education programs for refugee children. Early efforts by the refugees and some relief groups to start refugee schools on their own were thwarted when the government ordered all the schools closed. In late 1991, the government agreed to allow education programs, which are due to begin in 1992.

Access to health care and medicines, which is supposed to be available without cost to both locals and refugees, also creates friction. While some refugees say that they are able to get medical attention and drugs, many others complain that this is not the case. A refugee in Tai voiced a complaint raised frequently: "If I need medical care, I can go free to the clinic, but then for medicine they give you a prescription to take to the pharmacy, where you have to pay. If you sell rice to get money to pay for medicine, later you have nothing to eat."

There is also concern about the NPFL's presence in Danane. Refugees and relief workers alike said that besides the official NPFL representatives based in Danane, there are NPFL spies in the town. USCR heard contradictory reports about links between the local police and the NPFL. One report was that the local police occasionally arrest Liberian refugees and hand them over to the NPFL. However, USCR was also told that many of the local Ivorian policemen are from the same ethnic group as Liberian Krahns, and therefore unlikely to cooperate with the mostly Gio and Mano NPFL leadership. In mid-1991, refugees became concerned when local officials confiscated a list of more than a thousand Liberians who had asked to repatriate to Monrovia and reportedly handed it over to Taylor.

According to the Regional Bureau for Africa at UNHCR's headquarters in Geneva, "Tensions between refugees and their hosts ought to be viewed in the context of a massive influx.... The situation in Côte d'Ivoire is, in our view, characterized by a surprising absence of conflicts between refugees and locals."

**Inadequate Response to New 1991 Influx**

Although the NPFL has controlled most of the Liberian countryside since mid-1990, parts of
Grand Gedeh County, the home area of Doe's Krahn tribe, remained in the hands of a small Krahn resistance group. In July 1991, the NPFL launched an offensive that gave it control of the area and resulted in the flight of more than 10,000 refugees, mostly Krahns, to the Tai region of Côte d'Ivoire.

In Ponan village, near Tai town, USCR interviewed a man who had arrived in Côte d'Ivoire only a week before. He said, "On the way, two women died in my presence. Some babies died. Some died of hunger, others had been shot. Those you see here, God blessed them."

The response of UNHCR, the local authorities, and relief groups to the new influx in Tai was also inadequate, apparently due largely to their lack of cooperation and coordination. At the time of USCR's site visit in mid-August, the influx had been underway for more than a month, but no food had been distributed to the new arrivals (the first food distribution was scheduled to take place within a few days of USCR's visit). Although the badly wounded had been taken to hospitals, new arrivals received little medical care and almost no medicines.

Because the Ivorian government does not allow foreigners to practice medicine, a medical team from a relief group based near the Tai region could not provide direct medical care to the newly arrived refugees, even though the Ivorian authorities did not assign any extra Ivorian medical personnel to the area to help. On several occasions, the local ambulance crew refused to go to Tai to transport ill refugees to the nearest hospital.

In a statement sent to the concerned authorities and the media on August 22, 1991, USCR said:

The medical situation is particularly alarming. A number of refugees told USCR that they were ill or had sick relatives, but had not received adequate medical care. One woman...said three of her children had died because of diarrhea since their arrival in Ponan. She had taken her children to the village health post, but was only given medicine for two days. When she took her children back for further treatment, she said she was told the medicines were finished. Her children later died.

**An Ivorian Backlash** Beginning in May 1991, the Ivorian government stopped granting automatic refugee status to newly arrived Liberians (an exception was made in the case of the 10,000 recent arrivals from Grand Gedeh). In August, UNHCR's Mayne said, "The government of Côte d'Ivoire does not seem to recognize prima facie refugee status for new arrivals, except for those clearly fleeing conflict.... Those arriving in Danane from NPFL areas are being considered 'tourists' or 'visitors'. That's a fairly radical change [in policy]."

Subsequently, the Ivorian government instituted a procedure for determining the individual refugee status of Liberians who had arrived after May 1991. By January 1992, the backlog of asylum applications had largely been cleared, but only 50.4 percent of the applicants were granted refugee status. UNHCR says that it has not received reports of those denied refugee status being forced to leave Côte d'Ivoire, but they receive no assistance.

By taking this position, the Ivorian government apparently intended to discourage refugee arrivals. There is a growing attitude, not only in Ivorian government circles, but also at UNHCR and the U.S. embassy, that Liberians leaving the country now are no longer fleeing because of persecution or insecurity in Liberia, but because more food and better economic opportunities exist in Côte d'Ivoire. UNHCR's Mayne said that many of those arriving now "do seem to be influenced by the assistance policy. Though people still cite the lack of security...our perception of the situation in Liberia is that there are only isolated areas subject to problems."

USCR asked several new arrivals staying in the refugee transit center in Danane about their reasons for leaving Liberia. Most cited either fear of persecution or concern about the general security situation. One of two brothers who fled together said, "The war is not over. If it were, we wouldn't be here. Soldiers come and take whatever they want." Asked if they would have come anyway if food weren't available, he responded, "Yes, because we could not stand the tension." Another refugee admitted, however, that he had come primarily to telephone relatives in the United States to ask them for money.

**GUINEA**

**A Poor State of Affairs** During the early months of the refugee crisis in Guinea, the problems created by the large influx and the remote areas into which
refugees fled were compounded by the slow and inadequate international response. As in Côte d'Ivoire, assistance from local people saved the day--and the lives of many refugees. Ibrahim Toure', the top local official in the Guinea forest region where most refugees are located, said, "This was the first time in the history of Guinea that there was a refugee situation.... The refugees were received with open arms."

On June 26, 1990, USCR wrote to then-UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Thorvald Stoltenberg, expressing concern about UNHCR's response to the crisis. USCR said, "According to a U.S. State Department report, the refugees' situation 'has become truly life-threatening.... Many factors have contributed to this poor state of affairs. However, lack of coordination and a shortage of experienced emergency UNHCR relief staff have been the most significant problems."

UNHCR cited lack of funds as part of the reason for their weak response. UNHCR's REFUGEES magazine said, "UNHCR is in the grip of an unprecedented financial crisis. It is a sad fact that the organization's response to the [Guinea] emergency has been severely constrained by a shortage of funds."

Beginning in September 1990, when UNHCR first established a permanent presence in Nzerekore, the main town in the area, the situation improved. According to Dr. Sonia Van Osch, who has been working with MSF-Belgium in the Guinea forest region since April 1990, when the new UNHCR officer arrived, he "came and asked what MSF was already doing, explained what UNHCR could do, and made a program for us to work together."

Cohabitation in Guinea Similar to That in Côte d'Ivoire  As in Côte d'Ivoire, cohabitation works best in small villages in the border areas. It works less well in the larger towns, particularly Nzerekore.

"In the villages, especially, cohabitation continues to work," Van Osch says. "In many villages, refugees are completely integrated. It's somewhat different in Nzerekore. Some have found jobs and are integrated, but others are only there because they have nowhere else to go," she adds.

In the village of Tawmundo, where both Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugees are living, a village official says, "The refugees are living in the houses of the people of the village. They eat together with us, they do everything with us."

Mohamed Sharif, editor of a newspaper published by Liberian refugees in Nzerekore, says that even in the towns, "There's been a great deal of generosity from our hosts." Sharif adds that locals have gone out of their way to provide refugees jobs.

Guinean officials have allowed refugees to set up their own education programs and to use Guinean school buildings. According to Jane Swann, who heads an International Rescue Committee (IRC) education project in the region, "Right now, roughly 20 percent of refugee children of all ages have access to educational facilities." UNHCR reports that some 26,000 refugee students are attending classes in 85 schools. Swann expects the number of refugees attending school to "increase dramatically as parents see that there is a quality...program." UNHCR and IRC plan to offer assistance to 40,000 refugee students in 1992. However, the absence of schools and teachers in many villages will still be a problem.

Some aspects of health care are also less problematic in Guinea. Unlike Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea has incorporated Liberian medical and health care personnel into the local health care system, easing language and trust problems. Refugees can use local health facilities and receive available medicines free of charge (UNHCR provides funds for drugs for the local clinics). But some refugees say that they have trouble actually getting medical attention or obtaining medicines.

Through a UNHCR agricultural project popular with refugees and the local government, more than 10,600 families have received agricultural tools and rice seed. According to the project's director, families with even a fourth of a hectare of land (many families have more than that) can harvest up to 200 kilograms of rice, roughly the amount of free rice a family of four would receive during a five month period. Local people have also been given rice seed, a move that has benefitted relations between locals and refugees.

Involvement of the refugees in the relief process has also proved helpful. UNHCR has encouraged the establishment of 40 refugee committees, corresponding roughly to the distribution points.

Food Distribution Process Remains Major Problem  Getting food to the refugees has been a major problem. According to Shelly Pitterman, the head of the distribution operation, "Involvement of the refugees in the relief process has also proved helpful. UNHCR has encouraged the establishment of 40 refugee committees, corresponding roughly to the distribution points."

Casualties of a Brutal War
Liberian refugee woman and son, Guinea; Liberian refugee woman, Côte d'Ivoire; displaced Sierra Leonean man and son, Sierra Leone. More than 663,000 Liberians are living in exile, mostly in Guinea (397,000) and Côte d'Ivoire (240,000); hundreds of thousands more are displaced within Liberia. Some 169,000 Sierra Leoneans have fled to Guinea, and more than 145,000 others are displaced in Sierra Leone.

USCR/H. Ruiz
of the UNHCR office in Nzerekore, the refugees are scattered in some 747 villages in Guinea's forest region—a fertile area, but one with very poor roads, many of which become impassable during the long rainy season. For many months after the refugees began to arrive, food was transported to the area by land from Conakry, a journey that took several days (longer if bridges along the way were washed out or if the ferries that transport trucks across the bigger rivers were inoperative).

Beginning in late 1990, arrangements were made to transport food to the refugees in Guinea through Côte d'Ivoire, which has significantly better roads. That helped considerably, but food still has to be delivered to more than 40 food distribution sites in Guinea. Staff of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which is responsible for the actual distribution, gave an example of the problems they face:

Recently, 55 food trucks were on their way to a distribution site. After 15 of them had crossed the bridge near the town, the bridge broke. We were told it would take a week to repair the bridge, so the rest of the trucks and the Red Cross staff had to turn around. Not only was distribution at that center delayed, but since the 15 trucks that had reached the village got stuck there for 10 days, other scheduled distributions were also delayed. That sort of thing happens every day.

These delays mean that refugees receive food rations not monthly, but every six weeks or two months. As of August 1991, most refugees were only getting one month's rations at every distribution. The Red Cross was planning to start distributing at least a six weeks' ration in some of the more remote sites.

Red Cross staff said, "We are very conscious of the problem, and worry about it, but it's a problem of logistics—and money. Only 55 percent of our budget has been covered." They argue that more trucks, funds to improve roads and bridges, and additional personnel to supervise the distributions are needed. According to a U.S. official familiar with the region, a high level of corruption makes close supervision necessary. (Since USCR's site visit to Guinea in August 1991, the U.S. State Department Bureau for Refugee Programs has made additional funds available to the Red Cross.)

Food could become a greater problem in Guinea in 1992. WFP plans to distribute rations for 450,000 refugees (a figure arrived at in a census taken April 1991), but UNHCR recorded a total of 566,000 refugees in Guinea as of November 1991.

Rioting in Nzerekore—Some Refugees Involved

Tensions have existed between locals and refugees in Nzerekore since the early days of the influx. According to a refugee living in Nzerekore, in November 1990, following rumors that the NPFL and Guinean dissidents might launch an attack against Guinea, "People were rounded up (both refugees and locals) and taken to the military barracks, where they were interrogated." A similar incident occurred in March 1991. But the biggest problem involving refugees in Nzerekore took place following local elections on June 9, 1991.

Voting in such elections is often along ethnic lines. When the election yielded unexpected results, given Nzerekore's ethnic composition, it was said that many refugees voted, influencing the outcome. It seems possible that refugees might have been able to register and vote, since an estimated 24 percent of the refugees who fled to Guinea from Liberia were actually born in Guinea (there has been considerable migration into northern Liberia from Guinea in recent decades, particularly by members of the Mandingo ethnic group).

Anger over the election results led to several days of rioting in Nzerekore. According to some reports, hundreds of people may have been killed. The Guinean authorities arrested a number of people, including six refugees.

On July 8, UNHCR issued a notice to refugees in Nzerekore that warned, "The Government of the Republic of Guinea calls on all refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone who have been given asylum in Guinea to respect the laws of Guinea. Under no circumstances should a refugee become involved in the internal political affairs of Guinea."

Refugees Flee Fighting in Sierra Leone, Enter Guinea

In early March 1991, a rebel force entered Sierra Leone from Liberia. The rebels quickly occupied many sections of eastern Sierra Leone, forcing more than 96,000 Sierra Leonean refugees—plus some 10,000 Liberian refugees who had been living
in Sierra Leone—to flee to Guinea. (In November 1991, UNHCR reported that the number of Sierra Leonean refugees in Guinea had grown to 169,000, but other sources consider that estimate high.)

Strained resources made assisting this new influx difficult. The refugees entered areas of Guinea even more remote and less able to accommodate them than was the case with the earlier influx. Problems with food and health care arose almost immediately, and many refugees reportedly died from an outbreak of severe diarrhea. However, according to MSF's Van Osch, while there was a problem, early intervention helped to contain it. "The number of people who died was not extraordinary for the size of the population," she says.

Although the refugees were entirely dependent on food aid during the first months after their arrival, food had only been distributed three times, and then to only some of the refugees. During USCR's visit to the Gueckedou area—where most of the new refugees were living—in mid-August 1991, no food had been distributed to the refugees in two months (a distribution was scheduled for the following week).

The number of refugees entering the Gueckedou area exceeded the number of local people. As a result, while many of the Sierra Leonean refugees did move into the homes of Guineans, others built their own temporary shelters on the outskirts of existing villages. Although UNHCR did not encourage this, they did provide them some shelter material, including blue tarpaulin for the roofs of their shelters. Now, near many Guinean villages in the Gueckedou area, rows of blue-roofed huts mark the sites of newly sprung-up "mini refugee camps."

Two refugees interviewed at a mini-camp near Nongoa town reported moving there because it was cheaper than paying rent in the town. A woman said, "Now I sleep safe, don't pay rent, and nobody can bug me because I'm under the UN."

Because it was easier to identify refugees living in the mini-camps than refugees cohabitating in villages, assistance reached them earlier. That led to a further exodus of refugees from villages into mini-camps. Some said they believed that UNHCR wanted them to move into camps so that they could better assist them. A refugee at a mini-camp near the village of Tekoulo said, "We have been told that the refugees in this area should come and build here in the camp. If they don't, they may get left out [of the distribution]."

The mini-camps, because they are unplanned, pose logistical challenges. Refugees there are likely to have greater needs and less of a security net than those cohabitating with local families. The mini-camps do not have the infrastructure, services, or administration that usually exists in official refugee camps.

SIERRA LEONE

Liberian Refugee Influx Began May 1990 The Liberian refugee influx into Sierra Leone began several months later than those into Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. It was not until late May 1990, as NPFL forces approached the outskirts of Monrovia, that refugees fled towards Sierra Leone. Many early arrivals entered Sierra Leone in cars or buses, carried money, and headed to Freetown, where they rented houses and apartments.

That pattern changed very quickly as fighting broke out in Monrovia and tens of thousands of the city's residents left suddenly for Sierra Leone. Rural people from western Liberia also began fleeing across the border. Press reports in mid-June indicated that there were already more than 20,000 Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone, with another 1,000 arriving each day. By September, UNHCR estimated that more than 125,000 Liberians had entered Sierra Leone. Most were cohabitating with locals in villages along the border or staying in public buildings in some of the larger towns in eastern Sierra Leone (UNHCR did not extend assistance to refugees in Freetown, saying that if they needed help they should return to eastern Sierra Leone).

USCR first visited Sierra Leone in November 1990 and was told by government ministers that the refugees' presence was impeding even basic services to their own people in the refugee-impacted rural areas, and was causing rents and prices of goods to rise in the capital. Other sources reported that the economic and social problems exacerbated by the refugee influx were creating grave political problems for the government.

Between August and November, a number of Liberian refugees and nationals of other West African countries arrived in Freetown aboard
overcrowded ships that had transported supplies to ECOMOG troops in Monrovia. In October, the Sierra Leonean government forbade a Nigerian vessel loaded with refugees from docking in Freetown, forcing it to remain anchored offshore. Several people died on the ship, causing an international outcry. The ship eventually proceeded to Conakry (Guinea), where the passengers were allowed to disembark.

**War Hits Sierra Leone** In early March 1991, the Liberian war spilled over into Sierra Leone. Even now, it is not clear who the rebels are or why they attacked Sierra Leone. The most commonly heard theory—one favored by the Sierra Leonean government—is that the incursion was the doing of the NPFL, motivated by a desire for revenge for Sierra Leone's participation in the ECOMOG peace-keeping force, and for the spoils to be had in what is Sierra Leone's richest and most fertile region (one of the rebels' first targets was reportedly a diamond mine at Zimmi).

Although many of the rebels were Liberians, and probably associated with the NPFL (though Taylor has repeatedly denied that he was behind the incursion), there is speculation that at least some of the rebels were Sierra Leoneans opposed to the government in Freetown. One relief worker said, “For sure there is forced involvement of Sierra Leonean youngsters by the rebels, but now there are also some Sierra Leoneans willingly fighting against the government.” According to a U.S. official familiar with the area, many of the “rebels” captured by the Sierra Leonean military once they began to gain an upper hand were in fact Sierra Leoneans.

The rebel incursion brought the horrors of the Liberian war—killings, atrocities, fear, displacement—to Sierra Leone. In September 1991, USCR visited the town of Pujehun, which Sierra Leonean government troops had just retaken from the rebels. There, Natoma, a Sierra Leonean woman who had remained in the town throughout the occupation, described her experiences:

> The rebels arrived on Saturday, April 20. I’d heard rumors about the rebels, but hadn’t thought they’d attack this town. When they did, I was engulfed in fear. A rebel entered my house.... He told my hus-

band to go outside, then shot and killed him. I saw him being shot. I saw his blood running. They didn’t allow me to bury him until the following Thursday. His body remained on the spot....

Most people fled the town. Very few remained. I heard everywhere else had also been attacked, so I decided to stay. Every day they killed people. Before they killed them they tied their hands behind their backs and paraded them around the town naked—men and women. They’d slice their ears off, put them in their mouths, and make them chew them.

**More Than 325,000 Sierra Leoneans Uprooted**

The rebel occupation of large areas of eastern Sierra Leone has uprooted several hundred thousand people. Many fled to Guinea (in August 1991, UNHCR said 97,000; in November, they said 169,000—a figure that other sources question). According to OFDA, 145,000 Sierra Leoneans have become internally displaced, and another 12,000 Sierra Leoneans who were caught behind the rebel lines were either forced to move into Liberia or fled there voluntarily.

The plight of the displaced Sierra Leoneans drew little public attention. Relief groups already in the area to assist Liberian refugees set up food distribution and health care programs, but getting funding for their work proved difficult. That was partly due to the lack of international awareness, but also to bureaucratic delays within the Sierra Leonean government and poor coordination among the government, the UN, and relief groups, which delayed Sierra Leone’s appeal for international aid.

In Segbwema, a small town that has received more than 16,000 displaced people, paramount chief M. B. Jimmy-Jaju IV said, “The Red Cross established a clinic with three nurses [to aid the displaced], but they only have first aid kits, and no drugs. The hospital here is not free, and the displaced in need of treatment don’t have money to pay.” At a center for the displaced in Segbwema, Lucia, a woman who arrived at the center one month earlier with 13 family members, said, “Since I got here, I go and cut wood to sell so I can buy food. One person in my family is in the hospital, and I also need money for that. Yesterday, we had no food.” A man at the center for two months said...
In March 1991, the Liberian civil war spilled over into Sierra Leone. Rebels, mostly Liberians but possibly also some Sierra Leoneans, entered and captured parts of eastern Sierra Leone. The brutality and atrocities associated with the Liberian war descended on the Sierra Leonean people, many of whom fled the area. Liberian refugees who were living in Sierra Leone were also forced to flee again.

USCR visited Pujehun, a Sierra Leonean town near the Liberian border, shortly after it had been retaken from the rebels by the Sierra Leonean army. This group of Sierra Leoneans, who had hidden in nearby forests during the rebel occupation, were on their way home. Rebels still occupy some areas in Sierra Leone, and fighting continues along the border between the NPFL and ULIMO, a new, mostly Krahn Liberian group that opposes the NPFL.

that he was receiving food for his family from the Red Cross every two weeks, "But it's not enough because we share it with many others. Six other people eat from the rations my family of five receives."

Liberian Refugees Repatriate from Sierra Leone
It is not known how many Liberian refugees living in Sierra Leone were caught behind rebel lines following the incursion (some relief groups estimate as many as 30,000 to 40,000), or what happened to them. However, tens of thousands of Liberian refugees escaped before the rebels reached the areas where they were staying and made their way to Freetown. Liberian refugees became scapegoats for Sierra Leoneans' anger over the rebel incursion. In July 1991, *New African* reported, "All Liberian refugees...are seen as 'spies' in the employ of the rebels. As the harassment and persecution continues, there have been tales of random and often unprovoked beatings of the refugees."

Many refugees approached UNHCR asking to repatriate, but the agency declined to organize a mass repatriation. Hubert Edongo Menye, UNHCR
Head of Desk for West Africa, told USCR, "UNHCR is not in a position to promote mass voluntary repatriation because conditions of security and dignity are not fully met in Liberia." Even though Monrovia could be considered safe, Edongo said that it would be irresponsible for UNHCR to repatriate refugees there knowing how overcrowded the city was.

The interim government in Monrovia arranged for the repatriation by ship of Liberian refugees from Freetown (UNHCR facilitated transportation from the interior to Freetown and provided food and water for the sea voyage). According to Dr. Alfred Kulah, executive director of the interim government's National Repatriation and Resettlement Commission, "We felt it was our responsibility to provide Liberians the opportunity to return here." Kulah rejected UNHCR's argument that overcrowding in Monrovia was an obstacle to repatriation. "If there is one inch of land in Monrovia and people want to voluntarily come here," Kulah said, "UNHCR should help them to do that."

Estimates of the number of refugees who repatriated from Freetown vary widely, but 12,000 to 15,000 is the figure most commonly heard. Only some 17,200 Liberian refugees remain in Sierra Leone, of whom 7,200 receive international aid at the Waterloo refugee camp, near Freetown. Considering the number of Liberian refugees who either fled to Guinea, returned to Monrovia, or remain in Sierra Leone, the 125,000 estimate of the Liberian refugee population in Sierra Leone prior to the rebel incursion appears high.

**ULIMO** The incursion resulted in the formation of a Sierra Leone-based armed force of Liberians who had been living as refugees in Sierra Leone. ULIMO, as the force is known, is made up mostly of former AFL soldiers and other ethnic Krahn (including many young boys). ULIMO fought alongside the Sierra Leonian troops to push the NPFL out of southeastern Sierra Leone. Then ULIMO troops crossed the river that marks the Liberian-Sierra Leonian border and fought the NPFL on Liberian soil. The two groups still battle—indecisively—along the border, with each side gaining, then losing, ground. Although Sierra Leonian President Joseph Momoh denies that he continues to support ULIMO, it is widely believed that the Sierra Leonian military does so.

In January 1992, rebels still held some areas of eastern Sierra Leone, but fighting along the Sierra Leone-Liberia border had subsided, at least temporarily.

**THE SEARCH FOR PEACE**

**The Yamassoukro Accords** Following the November 1990 cease-fire, ECOWAS has led the search for a political resolution to the Liberian conflict. It has brought Sawyer and Taylor together for several meetings, most recently in September and October 1991 in Yamassoukro, Côte d'Ivoire. At the September meeting, Yamassoukro III, participants hammered out an agreement that would pave the way for internationally monitored elections for a single Liberian government. It called for:

- Continued observance of the cease-fire;
- The encampment and disarmament of troops under ECOMOG supervision;
- The depositing of arms and ammunition in armories, also under ECOMOG supervision;
- The establishment of a five-member Elections Commission to organize and supervise elections; and
- A four-nation ECOWAS committee to visit Sierra Leone and Guinea to enlist their cooperation in restoring normalcy along their border with Liberia.

Yamassoukro IV set a timetable for implementation of the agreements reached at Yamassoukro III. Encampment and disarmament of troops was to occur within 60 days of November 15. Elections were to be held by April 1992. It was also agreed that all "hostile foreign forces" (meaning ULIMO) withdraw from Sierra Leone, and that a "buffer zone" be established on the Liberian side of the Liberia-Sierra Leone border. To accomplish these goals, ECOMOG was to "enjoy freedom of movement throughout the territory of Liberia"; all warring factions would "willingly abandon their fighting positions and move into designated camps"; and, "all entry points into Liberia would be monitored by ECOMOG troops."

It was also announced at Yamassoukro IV that Senegalese troops had joined the ECOMOG
forces (a U.S.-supported move) and that Guinea-Bissau would also send troops. Including troops from more French-speaking nations in ECOMOG was meant to ease Taylor’s concerns about Nigerian dominance of ECOMOG.

The results of the Yamassoukro IV meeting were greeted with great enthusiasm (at least among the less skeptical). However, November 15 came and went, with no progress towards encampment or disarmament in sight. On December 31, thousands of demonstrators in Monrovia called for immediate enforcement of the peace accord.

**Prospects for Peace: Mixed Verdict** Some observers say that the failure to invite the INPFL and ULIMO to the Yamassoukro meetings weakened the prospects for peace. Shortly after Yamassoukro IV, Johnson said he would not cooperate with the plan because he had not been invited to participate. According to press reports, ULIMO issued a statement on November 14 saying that they rejected “major aspects of the agreement.”

Taylor, though agreeing to the proposals at Yamassoukro, subsequently told Africa News, “This government [the NPRA] is not going to be dissolved, and this army [the NPFL] is not going to be dissolved.”

Elections cannot take place unless Taylor’s troops are encamped and disarmed, ULIMO’s threat neutralized, and the AFL and INPFL securely confined to barracks. But the elections cannot simply follow. The rainy season in Liberia begins in early summer, making many roads impassable. Once it begins, it is unlikely elections can be held until after it ends in October/November. The status quo could therefore continue until at least the end of 1992, with the potential always present for renewed fighting or for a complete breakdown of the peace process.

In January 1992, there were both positive and negative trends in relations between the various Liberian factions. The interim government introduced several measures that irked the NPFL, including imposing an embargo on luxury goods (fuel, cigarettes, beer, etc.) leaving Monrovia for NPFL-controlled areas, and devaluing the Liberian dollar and issuing new bank notes to replace the old currency. Taylor condemned the introduction of the new currency and banned its use or even possession by anyone in NPFL areas (however, according to a Monrovia radio report, members of the NPFL were among the thousands of Liberians lining up at Monrovia banks to exchange their old Liberian dollars for new). Johnson said that he executed two of his top INPFL officials in January (other reports said he executed three) because they had the new currency. On a more positive note, there were reports that the NPFL eased restrictions on travel to and from Monrovia on some roads.

**REPATRIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION**

**A Challenge for Liberia and the International Community** Although many Liberian refugees have already returned home, the vast majority of those who fled remain in exile. If, when, and how they will return, and what will be done to help them reintegrate are major questions facing Liberia and the international community.

Virtually all the Liberian refugees USCR met want to return home. It is likely that most will, with the possible exception of ethnic Krahn and possibly Mandingos. Although the Krahn USCR interviewed also want to return home eventually, they are the most wary about their security upon return.

Some refugees say that concern about how they would feed their families in Liberia stops them from moving back. Most, however, cite continuing insecurity in Liberia or uncertainty about how the peace process will evolve as reasons for not returning to Liberia now. According to Fabienne Bonjour, an ICRC staff member in Côte d’Ivoire, “They are waiting for the situation to settle, to see who will rule the country. So, they are reluctant to rush back. Also, they don’t know what they will find. They’ll need food, seeds, medical and educational assistance.” Yet the belief that refugees can and should return now is said to be gaining ground among relief officials. Gerry Hamilton, the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. Embassy in Abidjan, said, “There is a growing feeling among relief officials in Tabou and Danane that people should start going back.”

**Official Repatriation: UNHCR Makes Plans, Yamassoukro Doesn’t** Unlike the UN plan mandating that Namibian refugees be repatriated in time for them to participate in Namibia’s first elec-
tions, the Yamassoukro agreements do not provide for the repatriation of Liberian refugees before elections, even though they represent a significant percentage of the Liberian electorate. The issue of formal, assisted repatriation is therefore left entirely to UNHCR.

UNHCR has drafted a repatriation plan, but has not set a date for its implementation. The draft, presented at a UN interagency meeting in Abidjan December 13-14, 1991, says, "UNHCR will not at this stage actively promote a mass voluntary repatriation to Liberia because conditions are not yet conducive for such an action." It adds, "The time frame for refugees' registry for repatriation will be determined by family, seasonal, and logistical factors, as well as the individual refugee's perception of the situation in Liberia at any given time." UNHCR has now opened an office in Monrovia to coordinate repatriation.

The UNHCR repatriation plan reflects the agency's economic hard times; it seeks to carry out a mammoth task with a very modest budget. The plan is to be implemented over a six-month period, and anticipates that some 176,000 Liberian refugees, particularly those from villages and towns near the border areas, will return home on their own, either before the formal repatriation program begins or simultaneously with it. Another 356,000 refugees would be provided transportation to Liberia. They would return through one of ten entry points, and be taken to reception centers to be established at Gbarnaga, Yekepa, Zorzor, Voinjama, Harper, and Monrovia.

All the returnees would receive a repatriation package that would include a set of agricultural tools and several kilograms of seeds. WFP would reallocate food currently earmarked for refugees in countries of asylum to returnees in Liberia.

UNHCR plans only limited involvement in the returnees' reintegration, however. Mostly, such assistance is expected to be provided through the UN's comprehensive Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Program for Liberia, which includes a request for funding for a program of assistance to returnees and internally displaced Liberians.

**Relief and Reconstruction: Limited Help** The overall program of relief and reconstruction assistance to Liberia has many components, but the UN program is the core of that effort.

The UN issued its first appeal for emergency aid to Liberia, for $6.3 million, in December 1990. In July 1991, the Secretary General issued a second appeal for $135.5 million for the period July 1991 through July 1992, to provide both emergency and reconstruction aid to Liberia in several key sectors.

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<tr>
<th><strong>UN APPEAL FOR LIBERIA</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Food:</strong> $80.4 million to provide food aid to 1.4 million people.</td>
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<td><strong>Health:</strong> $15.5 million to reopen medical facilities, revitalize programs for disease control, and deploy eight health relief teams throughout the country.</td>
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<td><strong>Water and Sanitation:</strong> $6.7 million to provide new water sources, refurbish hand pump wells that have become polluted, and continue to carry out the rehabilitation of the White Plains water plant, which serves Monrovia.</td>
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<td><strong>Education and Children in Difficult Circumstances:</strong> $5.4 million to rehabilitate schools, provide educational materials, and support projects to assist children who have been orphaned, separated from their families, and traumatized by the war.</td>
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<td><strong>Agriculture:</strong> $10.8 million to provide seeds and agricultural tools, restock poultry, and assist fisheries.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Assistance to Displaced Persons, Refugees, and Returnees:</strong> $13.8 million to assist the reintegration of refugees returning from neighboring countries, internally displaced Liberians, and some 12,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in Liberia.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Program Support:</strong> $3 million for implementation of the UN program.</td>
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The UN program aims to help Liberians build a new Liberia, not just reconstruct what existed in the past. According to UN coordinator Mountain, "There is a body of opinion that...reform of a number of the institutions and policies of the pre-war days is long overdue. The reconstruction process should be geared to a Liberia that can be more self-sufficient than was the case in the past. If there's some benefit to be seen from this tragedy
it's to use it as an opportunity to go in new directions."

The international response to the December 1990 and July 1991 UN appeals for Liberia has been less than adequate. According to UN sources, as of November 1991, donor contributions to the two appeals totaled only $78.3 million (approximately $56 million in food aid and $22.3 million in non-food aid). Of that, $48.7 million was given by the United States ($45 million in food aid, but only $3.7 million in non-food aid). A UN official in Monrovia expressed concern that while donors, particularly the United States, were providing much of the required food aid (for which, he said, UN officials were grateful), they were not coming forth with the funds needed to implement the equally important non-food sectors.

According to an October 1991 OFDA report, since the Liberian crisis began, the United States' total contribution to the relief effort (not only to the UN appeal, but also to other relief projects in Liberia, and to Liberian refugees in neighboring countries) has been $127.9 million.

The poor international response is no doubt due to a variety of factors, including donors' domestic economic problems. But insecurity in Liberia is another stumbling block. A U.S. official familiar with the situation said, "Disarmament of soldiers is holding up international response to the UN appeal. If it clearly begins, donors will be more forthcoming." Another reason for the poor response is the continuing perception that the United States should take the lead in providing assistance to Liberia.

No Longer "Special": The Future U.S.-Liberia Relationship

The relationship between the United States and Liberia has already irrevocably changed as a result of the United States' having stayed on the sidelines during the crisis. Ambassador De Vos describes his perception of the relationship:

"Does the United States have a special relationship with Liberia as it does with the United Kingdom or Israel? No. Do nine-tenths of Liberians know where the United States is? Yes. Do nine-tenths of Americans know where Liberia is? No. The relationship is more special to Liberians than to the United States. It's a one-sided image of the relationship."

Whether the relationship is special or not, the widely held perception in the international community that the United States should take primary responsibility for assistance to Liberia means that Liberians will have to rely largely on U.S. help to rebuild.

What will the U.S. response be? De Vos says that the United States "might wind up being the largest donor" to the UN appeal for Liberia. He adds, "In terms of reconstruction aid.... If Liberians truly want to run their country in a proper way, with...honesty and integrity and more than a semblance of democracy, the United States will probably want to help. But if that doesn't happen, it will be hard to mobilize support in the United States for Liberia."
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

All Liberians have been casualties of the brutal conflict that began in December 1989. Many thousands were killed or injured, countless others witnessed the death or torture of loved ones. More than 650,000 Liberians—more than a quarter of the country’s population—remain in exile; half a million more are displaced within Liberia.

Despite the November 1990 cease-fire, the absence of a full political resolution to the conflict means that the country cannot yet begin to rebuild, and that Liberian refugees cannot yet return home. In the interim, assistance to those affected by the conflict must continue.

It appears that progress is being made on the political front. NPFL head Taylor, interim president Sawyer, and ECOWAS leaders have agreed to the disarmament of combatants, to be followed by democratic elections. But for every step forward there seems to be another step backwards. Until all the parties involved actually implement the provisions of the ECOWAS-mediated Yamassoukro agreements, Liberia will remain in a state of prolonged limbo, neither at war nor at peace.

If and when peace comes, other challenges will await the Liberian people. Many of those they must tackle on their own. But, realistically, they will also need substantial material assistance from the international community, and their need will come at a time when other large-scale repatriation programs such as those to Cambodia and Ethiopia are underway and competing for shrinking international resources, and when the former Soviet republics are seeking aid to rebuild their economies. In the United States, economic recession has contributed to an “America first” attitude that is resulting in reduced spending on foreign aid. Aid to Liberia is not high on the Administration’s agenda.

Nevertheless, the international community must insure adequate protection and assistance for Liberian refugees, promote their successful repatriation and reintegration, and facilitate Liberia’s reconstruction and reentry into the world community. Otherwise, Liberia’s nightmare will not end. In this context, the U.S. Committee for Refugees makes the following recommendations:

1) The OAU, the UN, and individual countries with influence in the region (including donor countries) should actively back ECOWAS’s peace-making efforts, both politically and financially. The NPFL and the interim government of Liberia (as well as the INPFL, AFL, and ULIMO) should immediately implement the provisions of the Yamassoukro agreements. Words are not enough.

The ECOWAS-sponsored Yamassoukro talks yielded a peace plan offering the only concrete hope for ending the protracted political impasse that has followed the Liberian civil war. The international community, and particularly the OAU and the UN, should support ECOWAS. New UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, elected with substantial support from African countries, should capitalize on that good will by encouraging African leaders—some of whom have influence over leaders of the various Liberian factions—to press hard for immediate compliance with the peace plan. Donor governments should also use their political leverage to push the Liberian factions towards peace, and should provide ECOWAS concrete financial support.

Until the Liberian factions implement the provisions of the Yamassoukro agreements and Liberia is under one democratically elected government, it will be difficult to mobilize and channel developmental aid to Liberia, and the threat of renewed fighting will remain.

2) All the armed Liberian factions should cease recruiting children into their ranks, and demobilize children currently serving in their forces. Liberians, and the international community, should give top priority to implementing programs to assist children traumatized by war.

Countless Liberian children have been
victims of, witnesses to, or forced perpetrators of, brutal violence. The psychological effects of these experiences will plague them--and Liberia as a whole--for decades to come. The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child calls on states to “refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of 15 years into their armed forces.” Many of the boy-soldiers in Liberia are well under 15 years of age. While there is growing recognition in Liberia of the severity of this problem, armed factions continue to use child soldiers. They must stop doing so immediately. They are wrecking countless young lives and contributing to the future instability of the country.

Programs to assist emotionally troubled children must be made available. Training programs for demobilized child soldiers are also necessary. The international community should help provide the human and material resources needed to make this possible.

3) **UNHCR must ensure that Liberian refugees receive adequate protection and assistance until they can return home.**

UNHCR’s program of assistance to Liberian refugees has improved substantially since the early months of the refugee emergency. However, the program is underfinanced, so refugees receive only the most basic assistance; the food distribution system in Guinea is still inadequate; and in both Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea, health care and medicines are not readily available. UNHCR must continue to work with donors, local authorities, and its implementing partners to ensure that these problems are ironed out. UNHCR also needs to monitor closely the new asylum determination process in Côte d’Ivoire, to ensure that newly arrived asylum seekers are given a fair hearing.

UNHCR should specifically document and analyze the lessons of the cohabitation experiment involving Liberian refugees and locals so that it does not repeat mistakes that it has made and can better respond in similar future situations.

4) **Donors should respond generously**

when UNHCR appeals for funds to implement its repatriation program for Liberian refugees.

The possibility exists that Liberian refugees can repatriate in 1992. It depends on the sincerity of those who participated in the Yamassoukro meetings and the willingness of the other Liberian factions to end the war. If that happens, the international community will be called upon to finance the repatriation program.

But the international community, though welcoming the possibility of large-scale repatriations, has not matched its rhetoric with actions. That is surprising and disturbing. Many of the refugees worldwide who are now—or may soon be—able to repatriate have been victims of the Cold War. It is ironic that, in the aftermath of the Cold War, they should again be victimized because their home regions are no longer geopolitically important.

At a time when donor resources are shrinking, repatriation is a worthwhile investment. Repatriation is a permanent solution, in fact the optimum solution long espoused by both UNHCR and donor countries. Helping refugees to go home when they are able to is far preferable to maintaining them—at great cost—as refugees. A well-handled repatriation is also an investment in the future, because if accompanied by adequate reintegration and development assistance, it can contribute to political stability and economic self-sufficiency in the refugees’ home countries.

5) **The United Nations should press donors for full funding of its program of assistance to Liberia.** The UN program is sound, and is a lifeline for hundreds of thousands of Liberians. Sierra Leoneans displaced as a result of the rebel incursion into their country must also be assisted.

The UN’s 1990 and 1991 appeals for aid to Liberia have met only a limited response ($141.8 million requested and only $78.3 million pledged as of November 1991). In early 1992, the UN will launch its appeal for the coming year. The UN program seeks to provide food, water, agricultural assistance, medical care, and education.
throughout Liberia. But it is not only those already in Liberia that are dependent on the UN program of assistance. UNHCR’s repatriation program does not provide for the reintegration of refugees once they return home. That is supposed to be covered by the overall UN plan for Liberia. Donors—and not just the United States—should provide the financial support needed to implement the UN program. But the UN can not sit back and wait for funding to come. It must be proactive. The UN should press donors to support its vital Liberia program.

In Sierra Leone, more than 145,000 people have been internally displaced, and as many as 169,000 have fled to Guinea, as a result of the rebel incursion into their country. While those who are in Guinea are being assisted through UNHCR, the internally displaced continue to suffer. Sierra Leone is getting some international help, much of it from the United States, but its needs are overshadowed by the larger Liberian situation. The situation in Sierra Leone needs continuing monitoring to ensure that needed help reaches the affected populations.

6) The United States should take the lead in mobilizing reconstruction assistance to Liberia.

Once Liberia is stable, its reconstruction must begin. Some steps on that road are already being taken as part of the relief effort. But for Liberia to stand on its own two feet in the future, the economy will have to be revived, industry and foreign investment encouraged. Basic services such as electricity and communications will need to be fully operative. More schools and institutions of higher learning must reopen.

That will require development assistance, not just emergency relief. At present, the United States is barred from providing development aid to Liberia by the Brooke amendment, which prohibits such aid to countries that fail to repay foreign loans (the Brooke amendment was imposed on the Doe regime). Congress now appears inclined to waive the Brooke amendment, and may do so in early 1992. It is imperative that it do so.

But it is not only the Brooke amendment, or economic hard times in the United States, that blocks U.S. reconstruction aid to Liberia. The U.S. government has largely lost interest in Liberia. Yet many in the international community continue to say that the United States should take the lead in providing reconstruction aid.

They are right. The United States does have an inescapable moral responsibility to help the Liberian people. For too long, we supported a regime that oppressed the Liberian people. We should now do the right thing by Liberia. Realistically, we can not do it alone. But by taking the lead, the United States can seize the moral high ground and be in position to persuade other nations to support Liberia’s reconstruction efforts.

Liberia’s democracy and human rights track records have not been good. Its government has been fraught with corruption and self-interest. Power has been concentrated in the hands of a few. The suppression of opposition was common even before Doe, and became more brutal during his regime. More recently, the civil war—with its attendant atrocities, suffering, displacement, and destruction—has traumatized the Liberian people and devastated the country.

Now, Liberians have the opportunity to start anew. The international community can and should assist materially, but it is up to Liberians to put aside thoughts of revenge, learn to live together once again, and work towards the institution of democratic principles and respect for human rights. Only by so doing can they hope to attract the international support and aid they will need, and proceed to build a better, stronger, more humane Liberia.