

West Africa: Upheaval in Liberia/ Repatriation to Sierra Leone: Findings and Recommendations

Africa News

July 28, 2002 Sunday

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Length: 7047 words

Byline: U.S. Committee for **Refugees**

Body

Based on USCR Site Visit to Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire Conducted June 16 - July 13, 2002

The U.S. Committee for **Refugees** (USCR) conducted an extensive four-week site visit to West Africa from mid-June to mid-July 2002 to assess humanitarian conditions and protection concerns on all sides of all borders in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire.

USCR has visited West Africa 11 times during nearly 13 years of war and population upheaval in the region. USCR's two-person team conducted interviews and discussions with nearly 300 **refugees**, internally displaced persons, local residents, humanitarian aid and human rights workers, government officials, and diplomats.

These findings and recommendations consist of four sections: A) Overview: War in Liberia and Its Regional Impact; B) Sierra Leone Repatriation and Reintegration; C) **Refugee** Issues in Guinea D) Funding for Humanitarian Aid

(A) OVERVIEW: WAR IN LIBERIA AND ITS REGIONAL IMPACT

FINDING 1: LIBERIA SECURITY WORSENING; MONROVIA AWAITS VIOLENCE General security in Liberia continues to deteriorate. Tense residents and relief workers are convinced that Monrovia, the capital, is on the brink of worse violence in coming weeks and months. **Many** residents, diplomatic officials, and relief workers believe that an eruption of violence in Monrovia is not a matter of "if," but "when." As the war creeps closer to Monrovia, Sierra Leonean **refugees** and displaced Liberians face special dangers. Combatants attacked and emptied Sinje **refugee** camp, housing Sierra Leonean **refugees**, in June. Liberian government troops treat the four remaining **refugee** camps as security threats, regularly entering the camps in search of rebels and engaging in theft and harassment that can be **expected** to worsen as the war closes in on Monrovia. Eventual looting and ransacking of the capital's humanitarian relief offices and local businesses appears highly probable, as occurred in 1996.

Recommendation 1.1: The UN High Commissioner for **Refugees** (UNHCR) should make a policy decision to aggressively repatriate the estimated 30,000 Sierra Leonean **refugees** who remain in Liberia. The security threat they face in Liberia is more dangerous than the protection and reintegration problems awaiting them in Sierra Leone. The U.S. government and other international donors should support and encourage this emergency repatriation effort. Conditions in some returnee areas of Sierra Leone are far from ideal, to be sure. The country is already straining to absorb previous returnees, and reintegration programs are badly stretched. Fewer than 5,000 Sierra Leonean **refugees** in Liberia have registered for repatriation so far, indicating that UNHCR might have to take firm steps to persuade more **refugees** to repatriate. Given the widening war in Liberia and the likelihood of additional security problems, UNHCR should be prepared to take unpopular measures--including progressive cancellation of services--to encourage the facilitated repatriation of Sierra Leonean **refugees** residing in Liberia. As

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a second option, limited numbers of Sierra Leonean refugees unable or unwilling to repatriate should be transferred to Guinea on an emergency basis.

Recommendation 1.2: As part of a recommended policy to aggressively repatriate Sierra Leonean refugees from Liberia for their own protection, UNHCR should dramatically increase its capacity to transport Sierra Leonean refugees back home by boat or air from Liberia. The U.S. government and other international donors should supply new resources to support the emergency repatriation. With overland repatriation routes currently blocked by Liberia's war, UNHCR's new plan to repatriate up to 700 refugees per week by boat from Liberia to Sierra Leone is a step in the right direction but is alarmingly insufficient in view of the deteriorating security situation in Liberia. At that slow rate, seven months will be required to repatriate even two-thirds of the estimated 30,000 Sierra Leonean refugees currently in Liberia. A facilitated emergency repatriation should proceed more rapidly. The U.S. government and other international donors should give UNHCR the resources it needs to complete the repatriation program from Liberia to Sierra Leone in an orderly but expeditious manner within two months. Reintegration programs in Sierra Leone would require special funding and staffing to cope with the sudden influx of returnees.

Recommendation 1.3: International nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) operating in Liberia should regularly review and update their evacuation plans under the guidance of security experts. NGOs linked to the UN security network should be sure to provide weekly or at least monthly updates to the UN security coordinator in Monrovia, listing the names and precise addresses of staff members to be evacuated from Liberia in the event of an emergency.

Recommendation 1.4: It is widely acknowledged that Liberia's international timber sales and maritime ship registry system, along with diamond smuggling, fund a Liberian regime that, with its security forces, have destabilized the entire region and exploited the current war to repress political opposition and abuse the local population. The UN Security Council, with leadership from the U.S. government, should impose a ban on international timber sales by the Liberian government and should place restrictions on Liberia's ability to generate revenues from its maritime ship registry system.

FINDING 2: LIBERIA'S REFUGEE OUTFLOW WILL CONTINUE Significant new refugee flows from Liberia will likely continue and even accelerate in coming months as security in the country worsens. At some border crossing points visited by USCR, new refugees have arrived from as many as 11 villages in a single day. New Liberian arrivals consistently report that large numbers of would-be refugees remain trapped in conflict areas and will flee the country at the first safe opportunity. Interviews strongly suggest that there is a pent-up demand for escape from Liberia.

Recommendation 2.1: The U.S. government and other international donors should respond immediately to UNHCR's special appeal, issued July 7, for \$10.4 million to assist new Liberian refugees throughout West Africa. The U.S. State Department's Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (BPRM) should be prepared to pledge more than its normal one-third contribution, given BPRM's recognition of the size and urgency of the situation and the fact that UNHCR's funding appeal is several months late and millions of dollars too small.

Recommendation 2.2: In addition to funding UNHCR, the U.S. government should urgently increase its funding directly to NGOs to help them address the ever-growing Liberian refugee crisis. UNHCR/Geneva has responded slowly--almost lackadaisically--to the Liberian refugee crisis during the first half of 2002, which makes direct funding to NGOs a necessary strategy to keep pace with expanding humanitarian needs. UNHCR warrants maximum financial support, but poor leadership by UNHCR/Geneva should not be allowed to impose added misery on Liberian refugees, particularly when donors such as BPRM have resources to spend more.

Recommendation 2.3: UNHCR should move more rapidly to construct additional refugee camps and transit facilities in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire for new Liberian refugees. The U.S. government and other international donors should provide UNHCR sufficient resources, as well as diplomatic support in negotiating with host governments for new camp sites to accommodate tens of thousands of new Liberian refugees likely to flee in the near future.

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Recommendation 2.4: UNHCR and international donors should resist all pressures to construct new refugee camps in border areas of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Cote d'Ivoire. Per normal UNHCR guidelines, all refugee camps should be located at least 30 miles (50 km) from those countries' borders with Liberia. Constructing camps too close to the border, as occurred during the 1990s, would expose Liberian refugees and humanitarian relief workers to dangers of cross-border attacks, increase the risk of camps becoming militarized, and would again make countries in the region vulnerable to a spreading conflict. West Africa has a painful history of security incidents involving refugee camps located too close to international borders. Adhering to the 30-mile (50 km) buffer is sometimes more difficult than it first appears. Up to 10,000 Liberian refugees currently live in eastern Sierra Leone's Kailahun District, for example, preferring to remain on the border because of links to the area's ethnic Kissi population. Significant numbers of Liberian refugees also choose to live in border communities of Guinea because of ethnic and economic ties. Several thousand new Liberian refugees in the Danane border area of Cote d'Ivoire are resisting transfer to an existing refugee camp in another area, claiming that ethnic tensions exist in the camp. In addition, UNHCR is correctly attempting to establish transit centers in border areas to provide emergency aid and screen new arrivals before transporting them to permanent camps farther from the border. Historically, however, transit centers often develop semi-permanent residents who resist transfer, thereby posing protection problems. UNHCR and its partner agencies will have to remain firm and well-coordinated to ensure that border-area transit centers rapidly transfer new refugees to camps.

Recommendation 2.5: UNHCR, with support from international donors, should bolster its efforts to conduct a thorough and rigorous registration process for new Liberian refugee arrivals in neighboring countries in order to minimize double-counting and other fraud among refugees and local residents attempting to gain extra ration cards. The majority of Liberians arriving in asylum countries are genuine new refugees. Thorough registration screening at some border locations, however, has found that a percentage of the new arrivals--perhaps 15 percent--are fake arrivals seeking to double-register in order to gain additional food rations and other extra benefits. UNHCR is aware of the problem and has implemented strict registration measures in Cote d'Ivoire that should be replicated elsewhere. The region has a history of faulty registration procedures that have produced years of vastly inflated refugee figures, corruption, and disputes over proper food allotments. Relief officials should continue to take proper steps at the outset of the current refugee exodus from Liberia to avoid a repeat of the same problems.

Recommendation 2.6: The U.S. government and other donors should help Sierra Leonean authorities implement their plan to construct a special camp for Liberian ex-combatants who recently have crossed into Sierra Leone seeking asylum. Government officials and UNHCR have already taken steps at the border to identify dozens of ex-combatants and separate them from civilian refugees.

FINDING 3: EXPECT HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG NEW LIBERIAN REFUGEES Most new Liberian refugees so far this year have reached asylum countries in reasonably good health. Moderate malnutrition among new refugee children has been common, but serious malnutrition and other health problems have been relatively rare. The health status of new refugee arrivals could change, however. Nearly 5 percent of children were severely malnourished at a crossing point on the Liberia-Sierra Leone border in late June, according to health workers on the scene. Nearly 10 percent of new refugee children were severely malnourished at Tekoulo crossing point in Guinea in early July, according to Medecins Sans Frontieres. New refugees are already reporting serious food shortages in northern Liberia's Lofa County, meaning that future new refugees will be at higher risk of malnutrition even before they leave home. Because large numbers of would-be refugees are trapped inside Liberia and are forced to wander in the bush for several months on subsistence diets, there is reason to expect that they will eventually emerge from Liberia in poor physical condition. Many desperate civilians, unable to pay bribes needed to flee the country, might risk fleeing only when absolute hunger forces them to run, according to new refugees in the region.

Recommendation 3.1: UNHCR and other relief agencies should expect deteriorating health among Liberian refugees arriving in the second half of the year. Relief organizations should closely monitor the health of Liberian refugee arrivals at all crossing points in Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire and should have contingency plans in place to provide expanded therapeutic feeding and other health care as needed.

FINDING 4: UPROOTED LIBERIANS AT FOUR-YEAR HIGH

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Nearly Half-Million Liberians Now Uprooted Some 450,000 Liberians currently are uprooted--the largest number in four years. Nearly 45 percent of all uprooted Liberians--about 200,000-- fled their homes during the first seven months of this year. Surprisingly, the past year of violence has uprooted many residents of Lofa and Bong Counties who never had to flee their homes during Liberia's first war, during 1990-96. For them, the current conflict is worse than the previous one.

60,000-70,000 New Liberian Refugees to Date Some 60,000 to 70,000 Liberians have fled their country in the first seven months of 2002, including 30,000 or more new arrivals in Sierra Leone, up to 25,000 new refugees in Guinea, and as many as 16,000 in Cote d'Ivoire. The new outflow from Liberia, when combined with populations that fled in previous years, brings the total number of Liberian refugees to at least a quarter-million, including some 100,000 living in Guinea, about 75,000 in Cote d'Ivoire, nearly 50,000 in Sierra Leone, and up to 25,000 in various other African countries. This is the highest Liberian refugee total in three years--a strong indication of the deteriorating situation in Liberia.

Approximately 200,000 Internally Displaced Liberians The actual number of internally displaced Liberians remains speculative, but the full scope of the country's population displacement is larger than commonly reported. A just-completed verification exercise by the World Food Program concluded that about 100,000 displaced people live in designated camps. Often ignored, however, are an estimated 100,000 or more displaced persons, invisible to the international community, who live in the homes of friends and relatives, particularly in the capital. USCR interviews with salaried workers in Monrovia suggest that many of them, perhaps most, are hosting 10 to 20 displaced relatives in their homes as a result of recent violence elsewhere in the country. It is probable that 200,000 or more Liberians are currently displaced within their own country--a truer measurement of the deepening strain on Liberian society as the war widens.

Recommendation 4.1: USAID's emerging strategy of providing literacy training, skills training, and civic education to displaced Liberians is worth attempting. However, USAID should also provide adequate funding to improve water, sanitation, and health conditions at Liberia's displacement sites. USAID should fund projects to monitor protection problems among Liberia's displaced population.

FINDING 5: DISPLACEMENT SITES HAVE BECOME FRONT LINE FOR WAR It is noteworthy that sites sheltering displaced Liberians have consistently been overrun by combatants during the past year, forcing already uprooted populations to flee again and again. Displacement sites virtually have become the front lines in a Liberian war otherwise lacking clear battle lines. As civilians have fled in recent months from Lofa County to Gbarpolu County, from Gbarpolu County to Sawmill town, and from Sawmill to Klay Junction, war-related violence has hit each location. In addition, violence in May emptied displacement camps near the key town of Gbarnga. An attack in June closed Sinje refugee camp after thousands of displaced Liberians had congregated there in search of help. Tens of thousands of displaced Liberians are now congregated in camps on the outskirts of Monrovia, in Montserrado County. If the same pattern of violence continues, Montserrado County might soon become a primary military target.

FINDING 6: LIBERIANS BLOCKED FROM FLEEING Government forces and rebel troops in Liberia deliberately block civilians from reaching safety across the border. A cruel and pervasive system of "pay to escape" has taken root in Liberia, trapping thousands of would-be refugees. Government soldiers force civilians to pay bribes along exit routes and at border crossing points, according to new refugees interviewed by USCR. Rebels of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) often demand money or impose extended forced labor on individuals before allowing them to leave Liberia. Individuals subjected to forced labor typically are required to carry heavy military supplies long distances, hunt or collect combatants' food, and perform other chores before they are released days or weeks later.

Recommendation 6.1: The U.S. government and other major nations should state clearly and consistently to the government of Liberia and to LURD rebels that subjecting fleeing civilian populations to mistreatment, forced labor, conscription, and extortion is a fundamental violation of human rights for which combatants and their leaders will be held accountable.

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FINDING 7: LIBERIAN INFLUX JEOPARDIZES SIERRA LEONE'S REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS The influx of Liberian refugees into eastern Sierra Leone has put a potentially dangerous strain on war-damaged Sierra Leonean villages along the border and threatens to sidetrack efforts to reintegrate tens of thousands of repatriated Sierra Leonean refugees. The simultaneous double influx of Liberian refugees and Sierra Leonean returnees into heavily damaged border areas poses a highly unusual challenge in an area that already lacks housing, medical services, water systems, and other basic services destroyed in Sierra Leone's civil war. UNHCR staff along the border have understandably spent 75 percent of their time attempting to cope with the Liberian influx in recent weeks, diverting staff time and resources from important reintegration activities. UNHCR/Guinea has temporarily halted repatriation convoys to Sierra Leone, in part because trucks are needed to transport new Liberian refugees to camps.

Recommendation 7.1: UNHCR should deploy additional staff to eastern Sierra Leone's border districts of Pujehun, Kailahun, and Kono in order to better address the area's repatriation emergency as well as the Liberian refugee influx emergency. Current UNHCR staff in the area are competent but overstretched.

Recommendation 7.2: Repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees from Guinea should proceed slowly. This would allow more time inside Sierra Leone to integrate hundreds of thousands of refugees who have already repatriated, and would better enable the country to absorb up to 30,000 Sierra Leonean refugees who should repatriate from Liberia on an urgent basis in coming weeks in order to protect them from Liberia's worsening conflict.

Recommendation 7.3: USAID should establish a permanent mission in Sierra Leone rather than continue to operate the Sierra Leonean program from Guinea. Sierra Leone needs a permanent, fully staffed USAID operation based in Freetown to respond adequately to the country's wide range of rehabilitation and development needs. Yet USAID maintains only a minimal presence in Sierra Leone at this critical time. Sierra Leone's recovery will likely remain fragile for years to come, with different assistance needs in different parts of the country. The quality and influence of U.S. aid would likely improve with a stronger USAID presence on the ground in Sierra Leone.

FINDING 8: SIERRA LEONEAN SOLDIERS' TREATMENT OF LIBERIAN REFUGEES MIXED Sierra Leonean government soldiers have generally acted responsibly in registering and assisting refugees arriving from Liberia, according to refugee interviews and observations by USCR. Occasional harassment does occur, however. Some Sierra Leonean soldiers on the border have forced refugees to pay money to enter the country.

Recommendation 8.1: Sierra Leonean authorities should strictly forbid their troops from soliciting bribes from refugees and should investigate future charges. UNHCR protection staff in border areas should monitor such harassment and bring it to the attention of government authorities.

FINDING 9: LIBERIAN "REBELS" ARE NOT ALWAYS REBELS Terminology used by Liberian refugees to identify combatants sometimes is clear, and sometimes confusing. New Liberian refugees fleeing Lofa County sometimes refer to Liberian government troops as "the rebels" and sometimes refer to LURD rebels as "the security forces." Conversely, many other refugees interviewed by USCR clearly characterize LURD as "the rebels" and identify government troops as "Taylor's soldiers." The occasional use of the term "rebels" in reference to government troops perhaps indicates the level of abuse and destruction exacted on local populations by government forces. Government troops routinely burn houses, loot property, and kill and rape local residents in Lofa County, according to USCR interviews with refugees who recently escaped the conflict area. LURD troops are less likely to burn or rape in Lofa County, refugees say, but LURD combatants routinely press residents into forced labor and are quick to beat or kill those who disobey their orders. Combatants on all sides extort money from civilians trying to flee, often preventing their escape.

Recommendation 9.1: Human rights organizations, humanitarian aid workers, and UNHCR protection staff should be mindful of the confusing terminology sometimes used by Liberians to identify the perpetrators of specific abuses. Civilians' references to "rebels" do not necessarily mean LURD, and references to "security forces" do not always mean government troops. Careful interviewing is necessary to ensure proper documentation of events.

(B) SIERRA LEONE REPATRIATION AND REINTEGRATION

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FINDING 10: MOST REMAINING SIERRA LEONEAN REFUGEES ORIGINATE FROM HEART OF REBEL TERRITORY Some of the most difficult repatriation and reintegration work remains to be done. Most of the estimated 70,000 to 90,000 Sierra Leonean refugees who still live outside the country originate from Sierra Leone's heavily damaged eastern districts of Kailahun and Kono, formerly the heart of Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel territory. Fewer than half of the residents of those two districts had returned to their homes by the end of June, according to various estimates. Although the pace of return is accelerating weekly to Kailahun and Kono areas, many humanitarian agencies are still struggling to launch programs there. Eight chiefdoms in Kailahun District were not yet declared safe for repatriation by government and UN security officials as of late June, a problem for aid agencies that require a safety designation before establishing programs there. UNHCR staff in Kailahun District, however, regard the area as generally safe for repatriation.

FINDING 11: SEVERE HOUSING DAMAGE IN KEY RETURNEE AREAS Housing assessments by relief agencies in recent months have concluded that the war left 70 percent of homes destroyed in some towns. One-quarter of all houses were destroyed or heavily damaged in Kambia District, a major returnee area in western Sierra Leone, including 700 destroyed houses in the district capital, Kambia town. Another returnee area, Kono District in eastern Sierra Leone, has 4,000 destroyed or damaged houses. Extensive housing damage also exists in Kailahun District, in the east.

Recommendation 11.1: The U.S. government and other international donors should place a higher priority on support for shelter reconstruction programs, particularly in the heavily damaged returnee districts of Kailahun, Kono, and Kambia. Sierra Leoneans have shown themselves to be resourceful and industrious homebuilders who are able and willing to do most of the work themselves. But greater assistance in procuring zinc roofs, nails, cement, and technical support is needed to help homebuilding in hard-hit areas.

FINDING 12: WOMEN FACE SIGNIFICANT REINTEGRATION OBSTACLES Some widowed or separated women returning to their original homes in Sierra Leone have reported difficulties reclaiming their property. Under traditional indigenous law, property is owned by the husband, and ownership reverts to the husband's parents in the absence of the husband or a male child old enough to reclaim the property. Some women and children returning from years of exile in refugee camps are forced to find shelter with friends or other relatives after being denied entrance to their former homes. Humanitarian workers have also reported a continuing pattern of violence against women and girls in Sierra Leone that they ascribe to the war's legacy of brutality and sexual violence against women. Women continue to be victimized by sexual assault and domestic violence at a high rate.

Recommendation 12.1: International relief agencies and donor governments should work to sensitize Sierra Leonean officials and local chieftains to the need for changes in land tenure laws and in the judicial system to protect the rights of women. Humanitarian organizations should regularly update the training of their own staff members to help them recognize signs of sexual assault and domestic violence, and to respond appropriately. Consideration of the special needs of women should be built into all aid and development projects dealing with shelter, water, sanitation, health, nutrition, education, agriculture, community services, and good governance.

FINDING 13: POTENTIAL HOUSING DISPUTES AVOIDED SO FAR Numerous returnees to Kailahun and Kono Districts in eastern Sierra Leone find their homes occupied by squatters, including families of rebel ex-combatants. Legitimate property owners usually have managed to regain their homes peacefully. The situation deserves special monitoring, however, in view of the potential for greater housing competition as more uprooted families return home. Local chiefs in Kailahun District say they are willing to accept and reconcile with RUF ex-combatants who want to return to their original communities in the district, but say they oppose giving local land to ex-rebels who originate from other areas of the country.

FINDING 14: TEACHER SHORTAGE SLOWS REINTEGRATION Concerns about educational opportunities are often an important factor in refugees' decisions about the timing of repatriation. Serious teacher shortages currently are crippling education systems in some areas of Sierra Leone. Teachers and government employees reportedly have been slow to repatriate to eastern Sierra Leone's prime returnee districts of Kailahun and Kono because destruction from the war has left severe housing shortages and devastated local economies. Teachers and government officials who return commonly lack virtually all equipment for their jobs. Sierra Leonean

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government rules also contribute to the teacher shortage. Up to 900 Sierra Leonean teachers remained in refugee camps and were reluctant to repatriate in late June because their government does not consider them to be licensed teachers based on their years of work in refugee camp schools in neighboring countries.

Recommendation 14.1: Shelter programs in heavily devastated areas should place a priority on constructing houses for teachers and other civil servants to encourage their return, along with construction of houses for vulnerable female-headed families. Housing construction and rehabilitation programs should tap the labor of ex-combatants as part of the process of skills training and reconciliation.

Recommendation 14.2: The Sierra Leonean government should ease the country's teacher shortage and make repatriation more attractive by streamlining its teacher accreditation process for instructors working in refugee camps in neighboring countries.

FINDING 15: REFORMS NEEDED IN CHIEFTAIN SYSTEM Deep-seated grievances that fueled the war in Sierra Leone still simmer and are in danger of mounting again because of grassroots dissatisfaction with the current chieftain system, a traditional structure of local governance that reportedly has suffered an erosion of credibility because of manipulation by past governments. A significant percentage of current chiefs in the country's 150 chiefdoms assumed power by government interference or by default during the long war, according to local interviews. The role and authority of chieftains is particularly crucial during the transitional years from war to peace, when local decisions are needed on land disputes, local relief and development priorities, reconstruction of schools, community organizing, integration of ex-combatants, matters dealing with punishment and local reconciliation, new local taxation systems, property concerns, and other sensitive issues. Chieftains lacking respect or credibility among their constituents are at best an obstacle to recovery, and at worst are a source of new conflict.

Recommendation 15.1: The government of Sierra Leone should arrange for new elections of chieftains in areas lacking a recognized "paramount chief." USAID and other international donors should undertake a study of the chieftain system in order to identify exactly which chiefdoms have governance problems and determine what the international community can do to help the chieftain system reform itself.

FINDING 16: VIGILANCE BY EX-REBELS AGAINST REBEL INFILTRATION In former RUF rebel strongholds such as Kailahun District, demobilized rebel combatants often act as unofficial military observers, alerting UN peacekeeping troops and local authorities to attempted cross-border infiltration by remaining RUF combatants based in Liberia. This cooperation is a positive development and suggests that some ex-combatants are eager to reintegrate and play constructive roles.

Recommendation 16.1: Humanitarian agencies and the Sierra Leonean government should continue to seek creative ways to help former rebel soldiers become useful members of society and give them a stake in sustained peace. Programs in education, housing construction, road repair, agriculture, and food-for-work should continue to reach out to ex-combatants and other disaffected youth for years to come to keep them from slipping back into lives of violent alienation.

(C) REFUGEE ISSUES IN GUINEA

FINDING 17: LACK OF REFUGEE ID CARDS POSES PROTECTION PROBLEM IN GUINEA

Sierra Leonean and Liberian refugees continue to experience

harassment by Guinean police and military who accuse them of links

to the RUF rebels who fought Sierra Leone's civil war and attacked

Guinea in late 2000 and early 2001. Refugees in Telikoro camp near

Kissidougou aggravated poor relations between themselves and the

Guinean government by fomenting an uprising in spring 2001 that

began with an attack on a prison guard. This climate of mutual mistrust is exacerbated by the refugees' lack of a recognized refugee identity card. UNHCR has worked with Guinean officials for several years in hopes of producing and distributing identity cards. Despite completion of a refugee registration process in Guinea in late 2001, Guinean authorities continue to frustrate UNHCR efforts to distribute ID cards as planned. Guinean officials halted printing of the cards by a UNHCR-selected company in spring 2002 and demanded that printing be shifted to a more expensive company selected by the government.

Recommendation 17.1: The Guinean government should facilitate rather than obstruct the printing and distribution of refugee ID cards. It is mutually beneficial to the security of refugees, local residents, and government security personnel for refugees to carry documentation that clearly identifies them as genuine refugees under the care and protection of UNHCR.

FINDING 18: SEXUAL EXPLOITATION IN GUINEAN CAMPS CONTINUES Despite increased attention to the issue of sexual exploitation, "transactional sex" remains an ongoing problem, according to humanitarian aid workers. In the wake of a February 2002 report by UNHCR and Save the Children/UK that found refugee women and girls were exchanging sexual favors for food, non-food items, and other assistance from refugee camp workers, many humanitarian agencies have established and circulated codes of conduct for male staff members, instituted staff "sensitization" programs designed to prevent such behavior, and addressed the problem through counseling and other support networks for women refugees living in camps. Most humanitarian workers on the ground believe that while increased sensitization is valuable, the most important single factor is the continuing inadequacy of basic assistance. Women refugees, particularly unaccompanied girls and single women, routinely lack adequate food, clothing, and sanitary items. They also lack the additional income and support from a male partner to help supplement poor rations and other assistance. Another problem is funding. UNHCR/Guinea reports that while it requested \$3 million to address the sexual exploitation issue, it has received only \$350,000. Other humanitarian workers point out that while most of the focus so far has been on prevention--through sensitization workshops for male workers and female refugees--more focus is needed on the fact that aid workers engaging in exploitative relationships with children are rarely held fully accountable for their actions, in part because of shortcomings in local legal systems. Although the majority of exploitation victims are unaccompanied minor girls, prevention programs primarily focus on women rather than on girls, some aid workers point out. A new program by the International Rescue Committee to install female classroom assistants at refugee schools in Guinea may begin to address this gap. In many refugee camps, humanitarian staff are overwhelmingly male. This both increases the likelihood that such exploitation will occur and restricts avenues for women and girls to report abuses.

Recommendation 18.1: International donors should address the roots of the problem by providing funding and targeted programs to ensure that women and girls are no longer deprived of basic needs in the camp, thus making them less compelled to engage in exploitative relationships to fulfill those material needs. BPRM recently took the important step of approving \$1 million to UNHCR to combat sexual exploitation, and other donors should make it a priority to commit funding to the problem as well. Humanitarian agencies should continue efforts to target vulnerable girls and young women for special protection and outreach in a prevention capacity. In addition to preventive action, UNHCR and NGOs should impose greater accountability by insisting on the arrest of specific staff members known to be involved in exploitative relationships with children, and working with local authorities to ensure that cases are properly handled. Humanitarian agencies should make every effort to hire additional qualified female staff members.

(D) FUNDING FOR HUMANITARIAN AID

FINDING 19: DONOR SUPPORT TO REGION DANGEROUSLY INADEQUATE International donor countries have provided less than one-fourth of the funds needed by UN humanitarian agencies in West Africa this year. Donors have contributed only \$38 million of the \$164 million requested by UN aid officials, leaving a huge funding shortfall of \$126 million--a 77 percent shortfall. The U.S. government has contributed \$9.6 million within the UN's Consolidated Appeals process--about a quarter of all funding received. In Sierra Leone, relief and rehabilitation programs coordinated by the UN have received only \$20 million of the \$88 million needed. Humanitarian projects in Guinea have received only \$14 million of the \$58 million contained in the UN's original Consolidated Appeal. In Liberia, donor countries have provided less than \$4 million of the modest \$17 million requested by UN relief agencies. Fortunately, the international community has been somewhat more generous in its support to humanitarian organizations operating independently of the UN system. Donor governments have contributed \$45 million this year directly to international NGOs working in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea. These additional monies, however, still leave a combined funding shortfall of at least \$81 million for important humanitarian projects in the region.

Recommendation 19.1: Donor nations should step forward with more funding for humanitarian programs in West Africa. The U.S. government should be willing to provide more than its standard 25 percent to the UN Consolidated Appeals process. France, Germany, and Canada should increase their extremely meager levels of support. The European Commission should contribute much more than the modest \$11 million it has donated to the region so far--an amount equal to only 13 percent of all contributions to the region. West Africa is struggling to cope with the simultaneous challenge of a massive reintegration program in Sierra Leone and a major new humanitarian emergency linked to the war in Liberia. Sierra Leone badly needs new shelter for tens of thousands of refugees and displaced persons in the process of returning to devastated home areas. Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire require new refugee facilities and improved protection monitoring to cope with the influx of new Liberian refugees. Liberia must brace for substantially larger populations of displaced persons.

FINDING 20: SIERRA LEONE REPATRIATION BUDGET TOO SMALL The repatriation budget of UNHCR/Sierra Leone is outdated, too small, and underestimates the pace of repatriation. UNHCR/Sierra Leone currently operates with a \$13 million budget for repatriation and reintegration activities, which corresponds to a projection of about 75,000 repatriations this year. In fact, 100,000 or more assisted repatriations will probably occur this year, particularly as security for Sierra Leonean refugees deteriorates in Liberia.

Recommendation 20.1: UNHCR/Sierra Leone should increase its budget for repatriation and reintegration programs by at least 50 percent, to at least \$20 million. Perhaps the only way to achieve this increase is through a special funding appeal that UNHCR/Geneva should immediately authorize and donor countries should support.

FINDING 21: GUINEA'S BUDGET AND STAFFING PROBLEMS HURT REFUGEE SERVICES AND PROTECTION UNHCR officials in Kissidougou, Guinea say that persistent funding problems have forced them to make cuts in water/sanitation, health, agriculture, logistics, community services, and income-generation programs for some 40,000 Sierra Leonean refugees in the area. Although UNHCR requested \$8 million for programs to assist Sierra Leonean refugees, it has received only \$5.4 million and has shifted funds designated for repatriation of refugees into the budget for refugee care and maintenance. In Guinea's Nzerekore region, UNHCR expects to cancel shelter and logistics programs because of funding problems. Of \$3 million requested to address the issue of sexual exploitation of refugees, UNHCR has received only \$350,000. UNHCR also reports that staffing problems have hurt refugee protection in the field. In Kissidougou, only two of four protection posts are currently staffed, and one senior program officer position is vacant.

Recommendation 21.1: International donors should supplement funds for Sierra Leonean refugees. This is particularly important because refugee repatriation may slow as Sierra Leone struggles to accommodate the new Liberian influx, and the Sierra Leonean refugee population may remain in Guinea longer than anticipated. Donors should also look for ways to help UNHCR fill vacant staff positions via secondments or other measures.

FINDING 22: INADEQUATE FUNDING IN COTE D'IVOIRE STRAINS REFUGEE AID Long-term Liberian refugees as well as new arrivals are paying the price for a 70 percent reduction in funding to UNHCR/Cote d'Ivoire during the past five years. Funding to UNHCR/Cote d'Ivoire dropped precipitously after a 1997 census revealed that refugee numbers were half of their previously estimated level. The agency's two field offices are currently understaffed, their resources insufficient. In southwestern Cote d'Ivoire's Tabou border area, where 8,000 Liberians have arrived during the past seven months, no food assistance is available to new arrivals, and humanitarian aid staff have resources to assist only the most vulnerable of the new refugees. In the Danane area of eastern Cote d'Ivoire, medical referral services provided through an implementing partner are inadequate for the large refugee population of nearly 25,000. At Niela refugee camp in Guiglo, where virtually all staff members are male, no long-term female community services officer is available to provide support and referrals to newly arriving Liberian victims of sexual assault and to vulnerable girls and children. The camp's long-term Liberian refugees no longer receive food assistance, but many have not achieved self-sufficiency, in part because of inadequate funds to meet the demand for micro-credit business loans.

Recommendation 22.1: In addition to moving quickly to meet UNHCR's appeal for \$10.4 million for new Liberians refugees throughout the region, international donors should also provide funding to improve protection and assistance for the existing Liberian refugee population. This will allow UNHCR/Cote d'Ivoire to expand its staffing and its programs to help long-term refugees become self-sufficient. UNHCR should also create a long-term position in Cote d'Ivoire for at least one female community services officer to assist refugee women who have been victims of gender-based violence and to help provide protection to girls.

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Subject: REFUGEES (93%); INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (90%); RELIEF ORGANIZATIONS (90%); DISPLACED PERSONS (90%); RESETTLEMENT & REPATRIATION (89%); REFUGEE & RELIEF CAMPS (89%); UNITED NATIONS (89%); US FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (78%); MIGRATION ISSUES (77%); DIPLOMATIC SERVICES (77%); INTERVIEWS (75%); PUBLIC POLICY (74%); INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE (74%); HUMAN RIGHTS (72%); BOMBINGS (70%)

Company: SIERRA LEONE PETROLEUM REFINING CO LTD (92%); SIERRA LEONE ORE & METAL CO (92%); SIERRA LEONE ROAD TRANSPORT CORP (92%); SIERRA LEONE CEMENT CORP LTD (92%); SIERRA LEONE TELECOMMUNICATIONS CO (92%); SIERRA LEONE INSURANCE CO LTD (92%); SIERRA LEONE SHIPPING AGENCIES LTD (92%); SIERRA LEONE NATIONAL PETROLEUM CO (92%)

Geographic: MONROVIA, LIBERIA (94%); SIERRA LEONE (95%); LIBERIA (95%); GUINEA (93%); COTE D'IVOIRE (92%); UNITED STATES (92%); AFRICA (92%); WESTERN AFRICA (92%)

Load-Date: July 29, 2002