# A Decade of Peace Expedition in Liberia: Actors and Factors for Consolidation

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The months of July and August 2013 are very significant for Liberia. August 11 marked 10 years of Liberia's sustained peace following what has been described by most conflict analysts as 14 years of "senseless civil war" while July 26 marked Liberia's 166 years of independence. At the peak of the conflict, Liberia was classified as "a failed and criminal state exporting violence to its neighbors."[1] Only two years after the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as president, Liberia has moved towards stability and improved relations with its neighbors. At the same time, a variety of challenges still face reconstruction efforts.

This policy brief explores the background to the Liberia civil war, current peace and security challenges and dynamics, actors and factors responsible for the sustained peace and priorities for consolidating peace.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Liberia is a relatively small country of about 3.8 million people but with strategic importance in West Africa especially as it is rich in natural resources including gold, diamond, timber and iron-ore. It is bordered to the north by Guinea, to the west by Sierra Leone, the east by Cote d'Ivoire and the south by the Atlantic Ocean. Liberia possesses about 40% of the remaining Upper Guinea rainforest.

Liberia has suffered almost 25 years of civil war, from 1989-1996 and two periods of inter- related fighting interspersed with the troubled presidency of Charles Taylor from 1999-2003. Although the territory of Liberia has been inhabited by humans for thousands of years, the state of Liberia was founded in 1847 by a small group of American slaves who established a two-tiered political system in which their elite class, based largely along the coast, ruled over the rest of the indigenous population in a pattern not entirely dissimilar from the colonialism of Liberia's neighbors. This system came to an end when a group of army officers of indigenous decent wrested control from William Tolbert and his cabinet in a bloody coup in 1980. Samuel K. Doe, of


Source: en.wikipedia.org

the Krahn ethnic group, assumed power and became the first indigenous African president of Liberia. Doe exploited Cold War geopolitics and Liberia's historic and special relationship with the United States to maintain an increasingly "kleptocratic" and abusive regime. During Doe's rule, a failed coup attempt by General Quiwonkpa led Doe to seek reprisals against the Gio and Mano ethnic groups based in and around Nimba County. A band of political exiles, led by Charles Taylor, formed the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and invaded Liberia on December 24, 1989, with the support of Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, and Burkina Faso.

Although initially a very small force in size, the NPFL was able to mobilize many Gio, Mano, and others to join them with promises of looting and reprisal against the Doe regime. By the end of the year, Doe was dead and the NPFL had splintered into multiple factions. The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) peacekeeping force deployed by

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[1] Situation Report: Institute for ecurity Studies, 5 October 2010. (Author: LansanaGberie)

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

ECOWAS found itself in the middle of a complex war in which it was unable to quell the violence or exert authority beyond Monrovia. The ensuing civil war resulted in more than 200,000 deaths and 1 million refugees. The conflict included many horrific acts of civil violence: massacres, enslavement, sexual violence, mutilations, rampant looting, and the use of children in armed conflict. During that period, there were 13 failed peace agreements and ceasefires[2]

## 3.0   THE LIBERIA PEACE EXPEDITION

The Liberia peace expedition started on the 1st of August 2003 when the United Nations Security Council passed a landmark resolution in support of a ceasefire. The initial West African peacekeepers were later integrated into the overall UN Peacekeeping mission. The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, (CPA) of August 18, 2003, established the National Transitional Government of Liberia until national elections could be held in October 2005. The transition government was to be headed by Charles Jude Bryant. The CPA also called for the United Nations to set up a peacekeeping operation in the territory. In October 2003 the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) became the largest such peacekeeping mission ever established.

By 2005 the UN mission was fully deployed and began a demobilization process, as well as coordinating national elections. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who had previously been a minister in the Tolbert government, won the presidential elections though not without allegations of election rigging and manipulations by the leader and presidential candidate of the main Opposition political Party, Ambassador George Weah.

To deal with the crimes and human rights violations committed during the wars, the CPA mandated a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to "provide a forum that will address issues of impunity, get a clear picture of the past and facilitate genuine healing and reconciliation." The Commission,


Source: UN Peacekeeping - Facebook

established in 2005 conducted hundreds of hearings in Liberia and with the Liberian Diaspora in the U.S., including admissions of guilt from perpetrators of enormous atrocities. In 2009 the TRC issued its final recommendations to the government. One of its recommendations was to establish an "Extraordinary Criminal Court for Liberia" to try those accused of committing very serious crimes during the war[3].

## 4.0   ACTORS AND FACTORS FOR SUSTAINING THE LIBERIAN PEACE

In 2007 the President declared reconciliation as top of the country's agenda to which a reconciliation roadmap was designed. The reconciliation roadmap for Liberia defines reconciliation as "a multidimensional process of overcoming social, political, and religious cleavages; mending and transforming relationships; healing the physical and psychological wounds from the civil war, as well as confronting and addressing historical wrongs including the structural root causes of conflicts in

Liberia"[4].

Implementation of the reconciliation roadmap was designed to include civil society actors, national and international NGOs, and the government. In this regard some National and International NGOs, including Civil Society Organizations are taking on the implementation of some aspects of the Reconciliation Road Map as part of their overall programs towards consolidating peace in Liberia.

The Liberian government has pursued Security Sector Reform (SSR) as a major objective. These efforts are aimed at undoing a long history of abuses by the armed and security forces, which have typically upheld the incumbent regime rather than the rights of citizens[5]. The country has established institutions such as Liberia Anti-Corruption, General Auditing, Public Procurement & Concessions and Land Commissions set up to address corruption, financial mal-practices and issues with land ownership and land rights respectively.

The country currently enjoys enormous infrastructure rebuilding after the war. Glaring improvements are in the areas of roads and housing, electricity and pipe-borne water and this is accelerating economic growth and pressurizing Liberians in diaspora and exile to return and invest/assist in the rebuilding of the country.

The women of Liberia having been instrumental to the peace process continue to be a very strong factor for


Source: equalpowerlastingpeace.org

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[2] EWARDS WACA Report on Liberia

[3] PeacebuildingData.org – Fostering Human Security, Peace and Justice

[4] National Reconciliation Roadmap (Liberia)

[5] PeacebuildingData.org – Fostering Human Security, Peace and Justice

ECOMOG Troops
Source: yeatoemcintosh.wordpress.com

the sustenance of the peace. The women are fostering reconciliation and reintegration of families at community and national levels. WANEP's Women in Peacebuilding program (WIPNET) has been providing the platform for the women of Liberia to galvanize and mobilize around peace including in the ceremonies leading to the decade of peace celebrations. No wonder the Nobel peace prize was awarded to President Johnson Sirleaf and Ms. Lyma Gbowe who was the Coordinator of the WIPNET program at the time of the war and in peace processes.

Another factor contributing to the sustenance of the Liberia peace process is the access to information and improved media environment. This has also enabled the dissemination of peace messages especially on the need to eschew violence during the 2007 and 2011 electioneering processes and the referendum.

International goodwill to Liberia has been at the peak: Multi-lateral, Bi-lateral, African Union, ECOWAS, international and national agencies including civil society, are part of the positive changes happening in the country and with commitment to continue to support the country.

## 5.0 THE UNRESOLVED ISSUES AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

The last ten years of Liberia peace expedition has witnessed remarkable progress, however analysts have pointed to ongoing tensions that may have the potential to spark renewed conflict, and some fear that civil war

along ethnic lines will break out again once the UN peacekeepers leave. Former MODEL and LURD leaders still command a certain number of followers. Liberians were also implicated in violence that erupted in Guinea in 2007 and 2010. In addition, a number of Liberian mercenaries participated in the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire on both sides following the 2010 elections, and their return to Liberia is perceived as a threat. Sporadic violence in the near past has also flared up between ethnic groups, such as between the Mandingo and Loma tribes in February 2010. Others also point to disputes over land ownership, which the International Crisis Group in 2009 called "the most explosive issue in Liberia today. Systems for settling disputes are still predominantly local and informal, but capacity is limited to deal with the massive displacement from the wars and the expropriation of farmland and plantations. Finally, national identity, and the troubled relationship between the Americo-Liberian cultural elite and "native" Liberians, is also relevant to considerations of lasting peace[6].

**Other concerns and threats to peace includes:**

*Post UN Mission:* A major concern is security situation as UN Peace Keeping mission is gradually phasing out. The insufficient numbers of law enforcement personnel, inadequate training, salaries, logistics and administration continues to create major problems for provision of security and justice. Liberia is still in the process of retraining its new army. It is reported that the new army will be around 2000 soldiers, which is seen by many Liberians as not enough to protect the country and its estimated 3.8 million citizens against various crimes and abuses. Already there is high level of robbery and burglary in the country especially in the capital – Monrovia.

*Capacities of State Institutions:* The weak capacity of Liberia's Anti-Corruption Commission and Justice Ministry to prosecute corrupt malpractices in the financial and judicial

sectors contributes to the perceived widespread corruption in Liberia. In a local daily newspaper (New Democrat) of August 14, 2013, Justice Minister Christiana Tah is reported admitting that, "both institutions lack capacity to perform well"[7]. Consequently human rights abuses within the justice system are reported to be on the rise. US State Department in its human rights report on Liberia (April 2013) criticized the government for judicial inefficiency and corruption, lengthy pretrial detention, denial of due process and harsh prison conditions. The report claimed Liberian Government Officials are engaged in corrupt practices with impunity, while conditions in the country's prisons remain very harsh and life threatening for inmates who sometimes are detained without verdict. The report lamented further on low pay levels and minimal job training for civil servants.

*Glaring inequality:* There is high degree of socio-economic inequality between Greater Monrovia and the rest of the country. Compared to residents in the capital region, those outside of Greater Monrovia have less access to education and belong to the poorest asset group while compared to the men, the women still struggle with access to education, capital for businesses as well as access to land and landed properties.

*Youth bulge and Ex-combatants:*



Source: library.thinkquest.org

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[6] PeacebuildingData.org – Fostering Human Security, Peace and Justice

[7] Quoted from article on statement by Liberia's Justice Minister, Christiana Tah. New Democrat Newspaper, Wednesday, August 14, 2013.

Another source of worry for the sustenance of Liberia peace process is youth bulge and high level of unemployed/unemployable youths who constitute a majority (about 60%) of the current population (est. 3.8 million). Majority of them were born and grew up during the country's war and now constitute "street children". In December 2012, youths held the city of Monrovia hostage for days in protest over the Monrovia City Corporation failure to pay for vacation students. They set up roadblocks on major streets of Monrovia, attacking and burning vehicles, throwing rocks and damaging objects. Disarmament and demobilization process in Liberia was short-lived; it only provided $300 in exchange of guns without exchange of skills, resulting to what is being witnessed today on the streets of Monrovia and other major cities in Liberia.

***Porous Borders and Conflicts in Surrounding Neighbors:*** Liberia's civil wars resulted in more than 1 million refugees and internally displaced persons. More than 123,000 refugees have returned since 2004, while 64,000 Liberians remain in countries of asylum. Approximately 1,500-2,000 Liberian ex-combatants and refugees live in the west near Côte d'Ivoire. Liberia is vulnerable to drug and human trafficking as it has porous borders, weak security institutions, limited law enforcement, and inadequate legislation. The technical and operational capacity of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization is weak, and lacks funding[8]. Liberian ex-combatants have been fingered as participating in several conflicts around the MRU, including the recent political crises in Cote D'Ivoire and Guinea, resulting in what is described by WANEP today as "proliferation of arms and rebels in MRU."

# 6.0 LIKELY SCENARIOS – LOOKING BEYOND THE DECADE OF PEACE

In view of the foregoing analyses, we foresee the following scenarios playing out as Liberia strive to consolidate its peace process;

**Best Case Scenario:**
*The US government* completes the plan for training adequate security personnel to take over Liberia's security. This is carried out in collaboration with AU, ECOWAS, ICGL and the UN before UNMIL depart the country. There is goodwill amongst development partners and "friends" of Liberia to support (financially and logistically) the initial takeoff of the army. Incidences of security challenges are reduced to the barest minimum and the faith in the capacity of the security to guarantee the safety of lives and properties of Liberians is restored. ***(Plausible)***

*Ex-combatants* and thousands of unemployed youths on the streets of Liberia receive sound education and are rehabilitated; employment opportunities are available in public and private sector and increases equal access to income generating ventures; the economy is evenly distributed and patriotism is enhanced. ***(less plausible)***

*The state institutions* are strengthened and empowered to perform its roles especially in curbing corruption and administering justice; there is reduction in perceived looting of public funds and resources to be ordinarily looted is diverted to infrastructural development which in turn increases citizens access to micro-credit and economic growth. ***(plausible)***

*The efforts of the Reconciliation Committee* and the acceptance of its leader (Ambassador George Weah) begin to yield fruits; Liberians who are now considered to have "war fatigue" see the need and embrace true reconciliation and collectively forge ahead in the spirit of national cohesion and harmony. ***(Plausible)***

**Realistic Case Scenario**
*AU and ECOWAS* take responsibility to complete training of Liberia's new army as the US Government departs; AU and ECOWAS peacekeeping and monitoring troops are deployed in Liberia to augment security as UNMIL draws down its forces; International community is supporting the efforts of AU and ECOWAS financially and logistically to complete the training. Security challenges are gradually addressed. ***(Very plausible)***

*Confidence in the security* and stability of Liberia is gradually restored; business opens and foreign investors steadily returns into the economy; employment opportunities and constant diversification of the economy leads to a more stable and high GDP Opportunities. ***(Very plausible)***

*State institutions especially the judiciary* is strengthened through training and financial support; Indicted public officials on issues of abuse and corruption are prosecuted; an acceptable and transparent land reform policy is instituted thereby minimizing the potentials for violence and the revenues accruing to land and other natural resources are judiciously used. ***(Very plausible)***

*The government* is supporting more initiatives on national reconciliation, in collaboration with civil society, national and international partners and the current peace endures even though gradually. ***(Very plausible)***

**Worst Case Scenario**
*Incidence* and intensity of conflicts over land upsurges because of deepening ethnic divisions in the country and increased marginalization of certain groups. This creates opportunities for conflict entrepreneurs to mobilize groups based on deepening grievances about land ownership issues.

*Government* continues to be viewed as exclusive and elitist in its approach to governance especially in rural areas; the corruption and perceived abuse of

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[8] EWARDS WACA Liberia Report

office continues unabated; the next election in Liberia is approached from a "do or die" attitude and along ethnic lines; the avalanche of arms and unemployed youths becomes an incentive for the situation to degenerate into violence and yet another civil war.

The training and transitions of security architecture to Liberian security agencies especially the military is haphazardly done with little or no incentive from ECOWAS and international community on the basis that Liberia is now "stable"; leaving unmet goals in the area of security sector reform, proper compensation for security personnel, border control, and adequate security presence in rural areas; armed robbery and other forms of criminality continues in high magnitude with implications for business and investment in the major cities and Monrovia.

Youth and ex-combatants remain underemployed and economically disadvantaged so that they serve as recruitment communities for conflict actors. The awarding of concession agreements without community participation; and with unfair inadequate salaries, inequitable distribution of resources, and unfair land distribution sharpens the sense of grievance in large segments of the population, significantly increasing the risks of violence[9].

## 7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

### To the Liberian Government:
Urgent need to ensure the overhaul of the security sector and strengthening the judiciary in order to ensue confidence in its ability to maintain peace and order in the post UNMIL. Ensure that issues relating to transparency and accountability are dealt with to the satisfaction of majority of the citizens.

Provide more vocational training, and job opportunities, including counseling services and reintegration process for youths and former fighters; support special academic institutions with incentives to remove kids and youths from the street to school (Sports academies could be explored).

Continue to support a nationwide dialogue over the events that unfolded during the war and the root causes of the conflicts. This support should include additional outreach to ensure that the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee are made available to the public and that there is continuation of an inter-ethnic dialogue.

An inclusive land reform that ensures transparency in land deals and concessions and conduct nationwide awareness and sensitization on the contents of the land reforms including agencies and responsibilities in the reforms. Ensure concession companies comply with cooperate social responsibility to communities. Involve communities in negotiating concession agreements and also invest in local and traditional dispute resolution mechanism to ensure prompt intervention over land and related disputes.

### To Civil Society in Liberia
Work in collaboration with Land Commission to ensure and all-inclusive Land Policy; embark on massive education and sensitization on its content and implement recommendations. Lead in the training of community institutions in dialogue and mediation to respond to issues of land and related matters.

Companies with concessions should make public their reports on payments of revenue to the government and local communities. CSOs should work with private companies to develop best practices on transparent reporting and facilitate public dissemination of this information.

Embark on peace education programs and work towards reintegrating ex-combatants and street children/youth.

Encourage local and community driven early warning system and policing to ensure adequate information management and responses to issues of peace and human security.

Work in collaboration with government agencies to ensure the implementation of the CPA and reconciliation process and ensure judicious use of proceeds from natural resources.

### To International Community and Development Partners
ECOWAS should consider providing transition security architecture through the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) in the post UMIL and assist in the training of Liberian army to takeover in a gradual manner.

International Community and partners to continue funding infrastructural projects especially road, electricity, and housing and make deliberate investment in the areas of agriculture and education in order to diversify the economy.

The international development partners should prioritize capacity building and state institutional development.

ECOWAS should monitor and ensure that electoral process takes place in an orderly and transparent fashion and that the security sector is deployed and able to mitigate and de-escalate potential crises.

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[9] EWARDS WACA Liberia Report
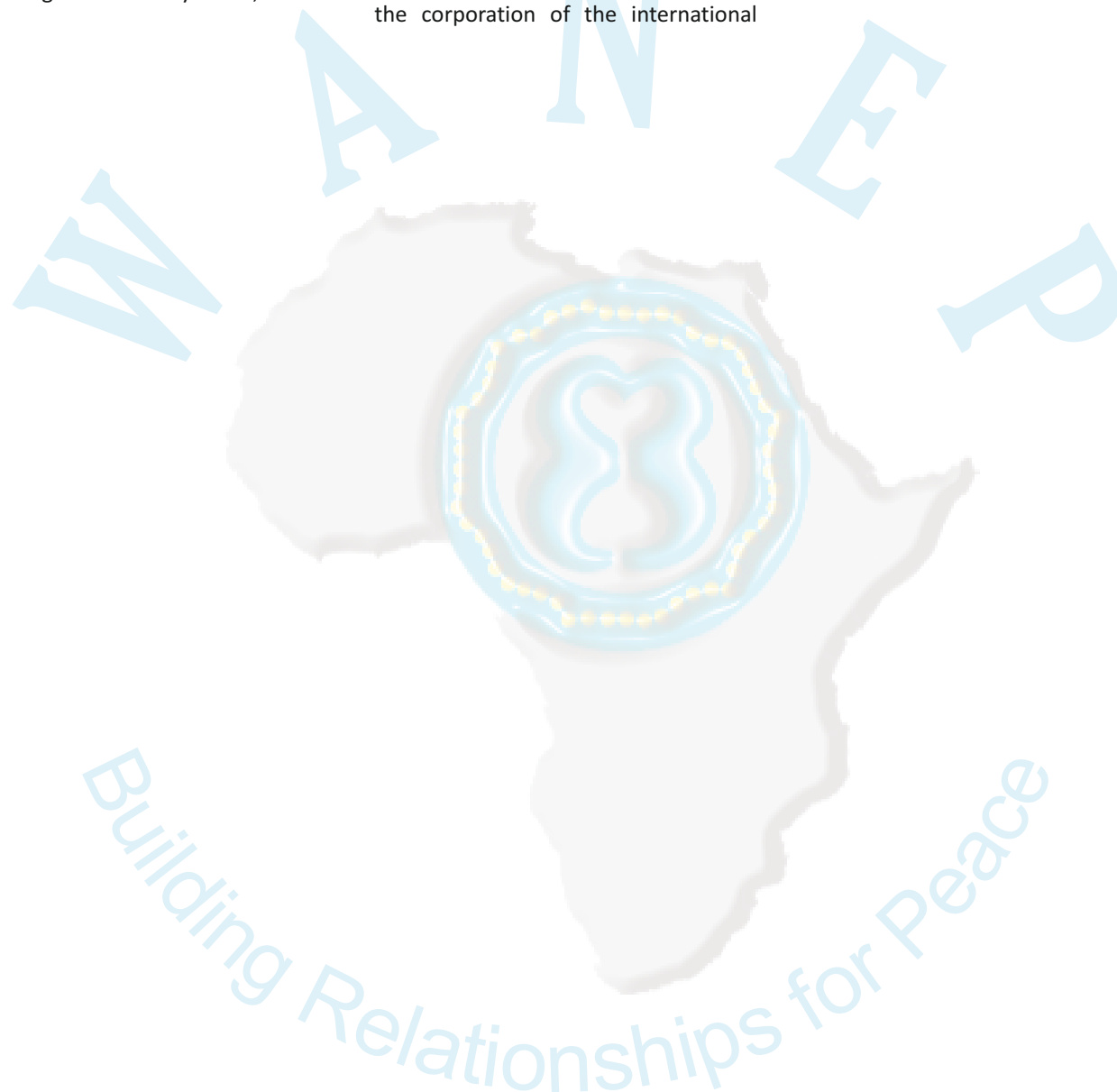
## 8.0 CONCLUSIONS

The task of building peace and stability in the last ten years in Liberia has been challenging but very encouraging. Infrastructural development and new business opportunities and investments have been palpable and obvious to the admiration of all. With two successful elections and transition, a fairly transparent referendum, daunting but inspiring reforms including in the security sector, land and other agencies, one can only foresee a quick recovery from the shackles of the war.

The prospects for future conflict in Liberia hinge on tensions surrounding disputes over land ownership and enduring cleavages between ethnic and religious groups. These tensions exist against a backdrop of widespread dissatisfaction with the government's past performance in several domains.

With the above recommendations and the corporation of the international community, Liberia has the potentials of springing back in such a very short period and becoming a beacon of hope in the MRU and entire region.