

**Nothing Left to Lose:  
The Legacy of Armed Conflict and Liberia's Children**



**June 2004**

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Note: Information contained in this report is current up to April 30, 2004

Cover Photo: Courtesy of Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children

Back page: Map of Liberia (Liberia, no. 3775 Rev. 6, January 2004) courtesy of UN Cartographic Section

<b>INDICATORS</b>	<b>LIBERIA</b>
<b>Population</b>	3,108,000 total; 1,515,000 under age18 (2001)
<b>Voting Age</b>	18
<b>Gross National Income (GNI) per Capita</b>	US\$490 (UNICEF, 2001)
<b>Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)</b>	Approximately 300,000 IDPs (UNHCR, February 2004) Approximately 320,000 Liberian refugees in neighboring countries (UNHCR, February 2004) Approximately 51,000 Ivorians and Sierra Leoneans in Liberia (UNHCR, January 2004)
<b>Infant Mortality</b>	134/1,000 (UNICEF, 2001)
<b>HIV/AIDS</b>	Scanty information available. Estimated 10–12% prevalence rate among adults. (2004)
<b>Education</b>	Estimated 49% of school-age children not enrolled in classes. (UN Consolidated Appeals Process 2004) Primary school enrollment estimated at 50% for boys and 24% for girls. (UN Consolidated Appeals Process 2004)  As a result of the 2003 War, many schools were closed for several months. They were also heavily looted and damaged.
<b>Gender-based Violence<sup>1</sup> (GBV)</b>	Consistent and brutal patterns of sexual violence against women and girls (Human Rights Watch, 2004)
<b>Landmines and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO)</b>	Liberia is affected more by UXO than by landmines. (Various sources in Liberia, 2004) The scope of the problem has been difficult to ascertain. (Landmine Monitor Report 2003)
<b>Small Arms</b>	Proliferation of small arms and light weapons poses a significant problem in Liberia. Estimated 8 million small arms and light weapons in circulation in West Africa. (IANSA)
<b>Child Soldiers</b>	Estimated over 15,000 child soldiers associated with armed forces between 2000 and 2003 (UN Sources)

<b>INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS</b>	<b>LIBERIA</b>
<p data-bbox="235 304 576 367"><b>Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)</b></p> <p data-bbox="235 409 560 514">Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict</p> <p data-bbox="235 556 544 703">Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography</p>	<p data-bbox="630 304 901 325">Ratified, June 4, 1993</p> <p data-bbox="630 409 771 430">Not ratified</p> <p data-bbox="630 556 771 577">Not ratified</p>
<p data-bbox="235 745 560 766"><b>Other Treaties Ratified</b></p>	<p data-bbox="630 745 1323 1186">Geneva Conventions; International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol; Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, International Labor Organization (ILO) Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (signed)<sup>2</sup></p>
<p data-bbox="235 1222 560 1327"><b>United Nations Security Council Resolutions on Liberia</b></p>	<p data-bbox="630 1222 1242 1392">Resolution 1343 (2001); Resolution 1395 (2002); Resolution 1408 (2002); Resolution 1458 (2003); Resolution 1478 (2003); Resolution 1497 (2003); Resolution 1509 (2003); Resolution 1521 (2003); Resolution 1532 (2004)</p>

**SUMMARY**

Liberia has been in a nearly constant state of civil war for 14 years. This has taken an enormous toll on the lives of Liberian children, adolescents and all civilians. Throughout the years of civil war and especially during the 2003 War, thousands of Liberian children have been victims of killings, rape and sexual assault, abduction, torture, forced labor, forced recruitment into fighting forces and displacement and other violations by warring factions, including the government of Liberia under Charles Taylor, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). A complex web of cross-border activities helped to fuel war in Liberia and to feed instability and fragility throughout the region.

Since the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) assumed power and the United Nations (UN) deployed the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), post-conflict in Liberia has seen slight improvements in the humanitarian, human rights and political situations. Yet, widespread human rights violations, including abuses against children, continue to be committed with impunity, particularly in areas where peacekeepers have been late to deploy.

This report compiles information from a variety of sources to document ongoing violations of Liberian children's security and rights. It also makes urgent recommendations to all parties that participated in armed conflict, the UN Security Council, UNMIL, international donors, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and others to take immediate action to protect Liberian children from further abuse and devastation as reconstruction in Liberia moves forward.

#### *Snapshot of Ongoing Violations of Children's Security and Rights*

- Approximately 300,000 Liberians are internally displaced, and another 320,000 are refugees in neighboring countries; an estimated 80 percent are women and children
- Refugee and IDP girls are regularly exposed to rape, sexual abuse and prostitution in camps; IDP children face robbery, harassment, intimidation, molestation and sexual violence in camps
- Refugee and IDP girls continue to be sexually exploited by soldiers, men with money, block leaders, businessmen and humanitarian workers, including those from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
- Preventable and treatable diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, acute respiratory infections and measles are the major causes of morbidity in Liberia
- Few programs for HIV/AIDS testing, treatment or education exist, despite an estimated 10–12 percent HIV/AIDS prevalence among adults (no numbers are available for children)
- Approximately 80 percent of schools in Liberia were destroyed in the 1989–1997 civil war, and the 2003 War caused further damage. Many schools remain insecure
- By April 30, 2004, 16,000 ex-combatants had entered the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) process, but only 10,000 weapons, such as machine guns, rocket-propelled hand grenade launchers and mortars had been turned in. Small arms and light weapons continue to cause insecurity and threaten Liberian children.
- Far fewer children than expected have participated in the DDRR process; reasons include lack of access (especially for girls), lack of effective sensitization about the process, inadequate prioritization of children's situation, commanders taking weapons away from children, fear of discrimination and other reasons

#### *Selected Recommendations*

*To all parties that participated in armed conflict:*

- Ensure that all children associated with fighting forces are able and encouraged to participate in the DDRR process

*To the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL):*

- Actively engage with the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the international community to improve the human rights situation for children and adolescents and end impunity for crimes against them

*To the UN Security Council:*

- Follow up on the graduated measures set out in UNSC Resolution 1539 in relation to the recruitment and use of child soldiers (details below)
- Mandate UN agencies operating in Liberia to improve coordinated data collection, collation and dissemination on violations of the security and rights of Liberian children, with special attention to incidents of gender-based violence and reintegration of children formerly associated with fighting forces
- Call on the NTGL, UNMIL and implementing agencies to prioritize specific objectives for child protection and urge donor governments and agencies to support these priority areas

*To UNMIL:*

- Ensure capacity to properly investigate allegations of abuse, sexual exploitation or other forms of misconduct; apply appropriate disciplinary measures for UNMIL personnel and encourage troop-contributing countries to take similar action, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1460, para. 10

*To donor governments and agencies:*

- Provide UNMIL, the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and implementing partners with sufficient human and financial resources to adequately protect Liberian children. This should include fully funding the UN Consolidated Appeals Process, with special attention to programs supporting children’s security and rights and including support for civil society’s role in monitoring and reporting on violations against children (UNSC Res. 1379, para. 12) and for long-term rehabilitation programs for former child soldiers

*To the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS):*

- Enhance the overall capacity of the ECOWAS child protection unit, particularly relating to monitoring, reporting and follow-up on violations against Liberian children and adolescents

## **CONTEXT**

Civil war first broke out in Liberia in 1989 when then rebel leader Charles Taylor, head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), launched an incursion from neighboring Côte d’Ivoire. Between 1989 and 1995, a brutal civil war claimed more than 200,000 lives, forced more than 700,000 people to seek refuge outside the country and left an estimated 1.4 million people internally displaced. Although the conflict was rooted in historical grievances, atrocious and widespread war crimes—including torture, beatings, rape and sexual assault—were previously unknown in Liberian history.<sup>3</sup>

After several failed attempts at a lasting peace agreement, a binding cease-fire was achieved in 1997. The same year, Charles Taylor was elected president of the country. However, his administration was rife with corruption, as government officials regularly used state power for personal enrichment. Tensions and divisions in the country continued to mount, and a series of violent outbreaks ensued. In July 2000, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a Liberian armed opposition group

widely believed to be backed by the government of Guinea, launched an incursion from Guinea into northern Lofa County. This incursion resulted in four more years of civil war, as described by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in *Back to the Brink: War Crimes by Liberian Government and Rebels* (May 2002).

Continued fighting between LURD and government forces finally set off a LURD offensive against Monrovia in 2002. Early in 2003, a new faction, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), with alleged support from the government of Côte d'Ivoire, broke off from LURD and began a simultaneous push toward Monrovia from eastern Liberia. Multiple attacks by LURD and MODEL on Monrovia ensued from June through August 2003 (this period is referred to as the "2003 War" for the purposes of this report). This warfare forced thousands more civilians to flee their homes and left many in desperate need of food, water, medical care and protection. LURD and MODEL forcibly recruited adults and children to join their ranks, drawing heavily on refugee and IDP children, while government forces conducted forced conscription raids in Monrovia.

Throughout the almost continuous 14 years of civil war and especially during 2003, thousands of Liberian children have been victims of killings, rape and sexual assault, abduction, torture, forced labor, forced recruitment and displacement at the hands of the warring factions, including the government of Liberia under Charles Taylor, LURD and MODEL. Consequently, the lives of many children and adolescents have been dominated by violence, hunger and homelessness. They have been separated from their families or orphaned and in some cases forced to turn to the street, drugs and crime. In many instances, children who fought in the 1989–1997 civil war were re-recruited in 2002 and 2003, many as adults, and have spent much of their young lives associated with fighting forces.

Children who fought with the warring parties are among the most affected by the war, according to the 2004 HRW report *How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia*. Many egregious abuses against children have been widely documented by human rights and humanitarian agencies, as well as the UN system. The following is a brief summary:

The Liberian government under Charles Taylor and the pro-government forces were responsible for summary killings, torture, abuse of civilians, rape of women and girls, abduction, forced labor and combat. They also systematically looted and burned towns, extorted money and other goods from refugees, blocked humanitarian access and forced conscription of child soldiers.

It is widely known that ex-President Taylor supported the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which abducted and forcibly recruited children as soldiers in Sierra Leone and exported general instability throughout West Africa by supporting cross-border mercenaries, illegal exploitation of natural resources including timber, diamonds and gold, and other subversive activities.

LURD and MODEL are implicated in summary executions of government collaborators and civilians, rape of women and girls, forced recruitment and use of child soldiers,

looting of civilian infrastructure, restricting refugees' movements, abduction of refugees, forced labor and other various violations.

### *Peace Process and Post-conflict*

Charles Taylor stepped down as Liberia's president on August 11, 2003, after coming under intense pressure following his indictment by the Special Court for Sierra Leone for his alleged role in crimes committed during the 10-year civil war in Sierra Leone, including the recruitment and use of child soldiers. On August 18, 2003, the government of Liberia, LURD and MODEL signed a Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, which established a permanent cease-fire and paved the way for a broad-based transitional government to take control. On October 14, 2003, Charles Gyude Bryant became the chairman (effectively head of state) of the power-sharing National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), which includes representatives of LURD and MODEL, loyalists of former President Charles Taylor and the civilian opposition. This government is tasked with organizing elections in 2005.

The post-conflict period, under the new transitional government and with significant international assistance, has seen slight improvements in the humanitarian, human rights and political situations. Yet, constant human rights violations, including abuses against children, are still committed with impunity, particularly in rural communities in northern and southeastern regions and where international peacekeepers were late to deploy, and control over government-backed militia and other illegal armed forces is still lacking. Civilians have no redress for crimes committed against them, since the judicial system remains in shambles. The UN Special Representative for Liberia, Jacques Klein, has predicted that recovery for Liberia will take at least four or five years.

From February 5 to 6, 2004, the UN, the United States and the World Bank co-hosted a Liberia Donors' Conference in New York. At the conference, the UN Development Group presented an assessment indicating that Liberia needs almost US\$500 million over the next two years in order to effectively transition to peace. The conference raised pledges for long-term reconstruction projects totaling more than US\$520 million from a variety of donors. These pledges include US\$200 million from the United States, US\$250 million from European countries and US\$50 million from the World Bank. In March, a committee headed by Chairman Charles Gyude Bryant, the United Nations (UN) and the World Bank was created to oversee implementation of the pledged donor support.

Despite the positive indicators for support for long-term reconstruction, the UN Consolidated Appeal (CAP) for Liberia, launched in November 2003, requesting US\$137 million for immediate humanitarian assistance including US\$40 million in food aid, remains largely unfunded. Refugees International (RI) wrote in February 2004 that the donor response to the CAP has been woefully inadequate. Less than US\$5 million out of US\$137 million has been pledged toward emergency programs. For example, UNICEF requested US\$6 million to fund a back-to-school program, but so far has received less than 50 percent of the request.

### *UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and Child Protection*

The UN Security Council established UNMIL in its Resolution 1509 in September 2003.<sup>4</sup> UNMIL was established for a period of 12 months to support the implementation of the cease-fire agreement and the peace process in Liberia; to protect UN staff, facilities and civilians; to support humanitarian and human rights activities, with particular attention to vulnerable groups, including refugees, returning refugees and internally displaced persons, women, children and demobilized child soldiers; and to assist in national security reform, including national police training and formation of a new, restructured military.

At the recommendation of the UN Secretary-General and upon the request of the signatories to the Accra agreement, UNMIL was authorized to act under Chapter VII of the UN charter to use force in support of the NTGL and to assist in the implementation of the Accra agreement. Taking over for troops authorized by the ECOWAS and U.S. troops, the UN deployed the first UNMIL troops on October 1, 2003. (See below for more information on ECOWAS.)

UNSC Resolution 1509 authorized up to 15,000 military personnel, including up to 250 military observers and 160 staff officers, and up to 1,115 civilian police officers, including units formed to assist in the maintenance of law and order throughout Liberia, and the appropriate civilian component. As of March 31, 2004, UNMIL had deployed 14,496 uniformed personnel, including 13,808 troops and 137 military observers, 551 civilian police supported by 267 international civilian personnel and 225 local staff. UNMIL troops deployed to Lofa County in early April 2004.

Security remains the primary concern for civilians, particularly in rural areas where UNMIL troops have recently deployed. Regarding support for humanitarian and human rights assistance, UNMIL's mandate includes the following:

- To facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance, including by helping to establish the necessary security conditions;
- To contribute toward international efforts to protect and promote human rights in Liberia—with particular attention to vulnerable groups, including refugees, returning refugees and internally displaced persons, women, children and demobilized child soldiers—within UNMIL's capabilities and under acceptable security conditions, in close cooperation with other UN agencies, related organizations, governmental organizations and nongovernmental organizations;
- To ensure an adequate human rights presence, capacity and expertise within UNMIL to carry out human rights promotion, protection and monitoring activities.

Although the UNMIL human rights team is scheduled to include 48 members, as of April 2004 only four members were deployed, according to inquiries made by representatives of the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children (Women's Commission) who visited Liberia (April 20 to May 1, 2004). One UNMIL representative told the Women's Commission that he anticipated the full team to be in place by autumn 2004.

UNSC Resolution 1509 did not specifically authorize the deployment of child protection advisers (CPAs). However, it did "recognize the importance of the protection of children

in armed conflict, in accordance with its resolution 1379” (UNSC Res. 1509, para. 9), which called for inclusion of child protection staff in peacekeeping plans on a case-by-case basis (UNSC Res. 1379, para. 10a). No clear rationale is evident as to why inclusion of CPAs was not specifically authorized in the case of Liberia, given the severe gaps in protection for Liberian children. Nevertheless, two CPAs were included in UNMIL staff plans and were scheduled to be on the ground in Liberia by early June 2004. Currently, no details are available about specific child protection initiatives taking place within the UNMIL structure, even as DDRR for children is underway.

Unlike UN missions in Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo, UNMIL does not have a separate child protection section. Rather child protection is part of the integrated protection and human rights section. Among other things, the CPAs are charged with mainstreaming child protection activities in UNMIL and working with the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR) process.

#### *Cross-border Dimensions of Conflict*

Liberia under Charles Taylor was the greatest threat to West African peace and stability for over a decade, because Liberia’s armed conflict spilled over into neighboring countries and due to deliberate tactics by Charles Taylor and his associates to undermine regional peace and security, according to Global Witness, *The Usual Suspects: Liberia’s Weapons and Mercenaries in Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone, Why it’s Still Possible, How it Works and How to Break the Trend* (March 2003).

In turn, neighboring countries have provided financial and logistical support to parties to Liberia’s armed conflict. For example, Guinea has long been known to support LURD, with the wife of LURD leader Sekou Conneh acting a “spiritual advisor” to Guinea’s President Lansana Conteh. Additionally, the government of Côte d’Ivoire has provided considerable support to MODEL for many years. The Ivorian president Laurent Gbagbo was an ally of former Liberian President Samuel Doe (president from 1980 to 1990, overthrown by Charles Taylor) and maintained alliances with prominent members of President Doe’s government. Additionally, many of President Gbagbo’s supporters in western Côte d’Ivoire belong to the Guéré ethnic group, which is closely connected to Liberia’s Krahn ethnic group. The Krahn, for a variety of reasons, have long been associated with opposition to Charles Taylor.<sup>5</sup>

A complex web of cross-border activities helped to fuel 14 years of war in Liberia and to feed instability and fragility throughout the region. These types of harmful cross-border activities include:

- Recruitment and use of child soldiers, including from refugee camps
- Use of mercenaries and foreign-national proxy fighters, including children and adolescents
- Illegal trafficking and legal circulation of small arms and light weapons
- Illicit exploitation and trafficking of natural resources
- Financing of illegal armed groups by neighboring governments

Porous borders and lack of regulations throughout West Africa have facilitated these cross-border activities. Timber, diamonds and other natural resources have been causes of conflict in Liberia and the wider region and have also been exploited by government and non-state armed groups to sustain and finance their war efforts. Lack of oversight and accountability has made it easy for armed groups, criminals and others to easily move them from one country to another, throughout the region and beyond. Additionally, children and adolescents have been used and abused in the course of all of these activities.

Ethnic diversity that crosses national boundaries in West Africa, as well as cross-border refugee flows, has also contributed to conflict and regional instability. For example, in southern and eastern Nimba County, the Gio and Mano ethnic groups were targeted by the Krahn-dominated MODEL forces throughout 2003 because of their perceived association with Charles Taylor. Killing, rape and abduction of Gio and Mano communities by MODEL were widespread in 2003, and prompted many people to flee into neighboring Côte d'Ivoire. However, even in Toulepleu, MODEL continued to launch attacks, which destroyed surrounding villages and helped fuel tensions between the Guere and Yacouba in western Côte d'Ivoire, thus, causing further instability in Côte d'Ivoire and threatening the region.

In two recent examples, in 2004, the International Crisis Group reported LURD efforts to move heavy weaponry into Sierra Leone, while MODEL was maintaining fighters ready for action in Côte d'Ivoire. This type of ongoing illicit cross-border activities poses a major challenge to reconstruction and regional peace and security.

The cross-border dimension of West African armed conflicts also has implications in the region's post-conflict justice mechanisms.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Special Court for Sierra Leone has indicted Liberians for their alleged participation in war crimes during Sierra Leone's war, including involvement in recruiting children under the age of 15 and using them for active participation in combat. Among others, the Special Court has indicted former Liberian President Charles Taylor, for his role in supporting the RUF.

### **REFUGEES AND IDPs**

During the peak of the displacement crisis in 2003, humanitarian workers estimated that one third of Liberia's 3 million people had fled their homes, seeking safety from violence, looting, rape, harassment, summary executions and the wrath of lawless gunmen associated with government forces, LURD and MODEL. At that time, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated there were approximately 500,000 Liberian IDPs and another 362,000 Liberian refugees, including 140,000 in Guinea; 66,000 in Sierra Leone; 63,000 Côte d'Ivoire; and 42,000 in Ghana. As of February 2004, UNHCR estimated that approximately 300,000 Liberians were still internally displaced and another 320,000 Liberians were still refugees in neighboring countries.

As in other situations of displacement, approximately 80 percent of displaced persons are women and children under age 18. An NGO working with Liberian refugees in Sierra

Leone estimated that approximately 60 percent of the Liberian refugees were children under age 15 (August 2003).

Even before the outbreak of war in June 2003, many Liberians sought refuge in neighboring countries or were internally displaced. At the end of 2002, approximately 380,000 Liberians were uprooted, including an estimated 280,000 refugees and 100,000 to 150,000 IDPs who sought safety and shelter in displacement camps near Monrovia and elsewhere, according to *World Report 2003*, by the U.S. Committee for Refugees (USCR). Most of this population displacement occurred in the western portion of the country.

Beginning in June 2003, hundreds of thousands of civilians were forced to flee from their homes and communities as non-state armed groups began their siege on Monrovia and indiscriminate shooting, shelling, looting, rape and other abuses threatened their security and rights. During this time, most of the displaced civilians gathered in overcrowded public buildings, such as schools (see below), Monrovia's Samuel K. Doe (SKD) sports stadium, the Greystone compound near the U.S. Embassy or makeshift shacks, with little water, food, sanitation or medical care. Additionally, humanitarian assistance to civilians was impossible due to the siege on Monrovia by LURD and MODEL.

Looting and violence in 2003 also led to massive forced displacement in rural areas. Thousands of civilians, mostly of the Loma ethnic group, fled Lofa County in northern Liberia into neighboring Guinea or into the bush, fearing ethnic reprisals against them by LURD. For example, the town of Voinjama, in Lofa County, a focal point in the struggle between Liberian security forces and LURD, was completely looted during the 2003 War. By the time a UN mission was able to enter Voinjama in October 2003, the hospital was in ruins; the access roads were overgrown; medicine, food, clean drinking water and clothing were in slim supply; and even tin roofing sheets had disappeared. Approximately 15,000 of the town's pre-war population of 20,000 had fled their homes. As of October 2003, local authorities reported that some of the town's displaced had begun to return.

#### *IDP Children—Security and Protection*

IDP children are especially vulnerable to a range of violations of their security and rights. For example, local militias loyal to government forces and illegal armed groups have forcibly conscripted young children from IDP camps, particularly before and during the 2003 War (see below). In Montserrado County, LURD forces reportedly abducted 1,000 IDPs between February and April 2003. During the same period, government-aligned militia reportedly recruited young IDPs from Jahtondo Displaced Camp.

IDP girls are regularly exposed to rape, sexual abuse and prostitution in camps, according to UNICEF. Non-state armed groups and government forces, including soldiers as young as 12 years old, prey on and rape IDP women and girls. In the SKD Stadium in Monrovia, anecdotal reports indicated that gender-based violence against women and girls was rampant. Amnesty International (AI) reported that 40 women and 20 girls reported being raped during one week alone in August 2003. Humanitarian workers

report high rates of teenage pregnancy in the IDP camps as a result of poverty and peer pressure.

In October and November 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) held a series of focus group discussions and individual interviews on gender-based violence in seven IDP camps in Montserrado County. Information from these discussions is documented in IRC's *Situation Analysis of Gender Based Violence in Liberia*, April 2004. In each camp, discussions were held with adult men and women (over age 18) and adolescent girls and boys (ages 14–18). During all discussions, there was at least one mention of having been raped, or knowing of women or girls who had been raped, during conflict. It was evident from comments made that young girls were particularly targeted for rape, with participants saying, “the young girls are the most,” “some can even rape a baby if they get a chance” and “they like 7- to 11-year olds.” The broader issue of sexual violence within the camps was raised during the discussions, with participants suggesting that overcrowding, women being forced to share rooms with men and poor structural planning, such as lack of lighting at night, placement of bathhouses and latrines, all caused sexual violence. (See Gender-based Violence section below for more information.)

Before and during the 2003 War, IDP camps themselves were marked as targets by fighting forces. In one case, a mortar hit Newport Road School, where nearly 6,000 IDPs were living. The attack killed eight civilians on July 26, 2003. In several incidents, indiscriminate shelling and other attacks by LURD and government forces were perpetrated against the estimated 20,000 displaced civilians seeking safety and shelter in the Greystone residential compounds near the U.S. Embassy, as well as thousands of other displaced civilians who sought refuge at other sites in downtown Monrovia.

Over one dozen civilians were killed in late June 2003, when they were crushed to death at the Greystone gate by a panicked mob seeking to avoid mortar shelling, and another group was killed in June by two “rockets” shot into the Greystone compound by government forces, according to HRW. During the war, IDP women and children were victimized by LURD's brutal tactic of hacking off their limbs as part of the campaign to oust President Taylor.

The SKD stadium is no longer functioning as a makeshift shelter for IDPs. Most IDPs have been transferred from the stadium to more traditional IDP camps in and around Monrovia. Reports from humanitarian workers in Liberia, in April 2004, indicate that these IDP camps are relatively well resourced and that residents generally have more access to basic services than citizens living outside the camps, although gender-based violence against women and girls and other forms of insecurity persist.

#### *IDP Children—Health*

Action Against Hunger (ACF, *Action Contre la Faim*) detected acute, moderate or severe malnutrition in 3,930 of 6,536 displaced children screened in Monrovia in June and July 2003. A similar survey conducted by World Vision International (WVI) among approximately 2,000 displaced children over the same period suggested an acute

malnutrition rate near 40 percent. At that time, ACF also identified a general decrease in food availability in Monrovia, including high scarcity of rice on the market and correlating high prices.

Poor sanitation, lack of clean water and overcrowding in the abandoned buildings and stadiums of Monrovia led to an outbreak of cholera in June 2003, according to Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). The outbreak killed over 190 people and over 35,695 cases have been reported. The high percentage of IDP children suffering from acute malnutrition may have increased the rate of severe cholera cases among children because of their increased susceptibility. The World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and partner NGOs have since launched chlorination campaigns in Monrovia and Buchanan, and have subsequently reduced the cholera risk.

Similar conditions also make malaria prevalent. Malaria accounted for between 30 and 45 percent of all illnesses reported at health centers for displaced people in Monrovia in September 2003, and a majority of cases were children below five years old and pregnant women. Many premature births occur due to malaria, according to an official of the Johns Hopkins University Malaria Program.

#### *IDP Children—Education*

Prior to President Taylor's exit, IDPs faced limited educational opportunities, as the government did not allow formal education in IDP camps. Students in the camps could either integrate into local schools or participate in nonformal programs, according to the Women's Commission's *Global Survey on Education in Emergencies* (Global Survey). For example, in Monrovia/Montserrado County, integration into local community schools was the only option for IDP children to obtain formal schooling. However, in many cases, schools have not had the capacity to integrate large influxes of children. One report also indicates that IDPs themselves attempted to open schools for children inside the camps, but received limited support from international agencies or the government to keep them running.

As of January/February 2003, even assuming that the IDP population had not significantly increased, only 32 percent of IDP children were enrolled in either local community schools or in the schools for Sierra Leonean refugees. The percentage varied radically in different areas, with the enrollment in Bong County at 56 percent, in Montserrado at 18 percent and at only 6 percent in Nimba.

Almost all 900 young people between ages of 13 and 25 (average age was 22) living in displaced communities in Liberia, who were surveyed by IRC in March 2004, reported that their studies had been negatively affected by the war (*Report on Skills Training, Employment and Livelihood Opportunities Assessment for Youth and Vulnerable Groups in Montserrado and Lofa Counties*). Of the 500 young people interviewed for this survey who were living outside of the Montserrado displaced persons camps, 8 percent reported having never been to school, 29 percent having reached elementary school, 35 percent having reached junior high school, 31 percent having reached senior high school and 11

percent were either in college, had completed some levels of college or had graduated from college.

For the 400 young people interviewed who were living in IDP camps, but were originally from Lofa County, the situation appeared even more dire. Thirty-one percent reported that they had “never been to school,” 53 percent had reached elementary school, 10 percent had reached junior high school and only 6 percent had either reached senior high school or stopped schooling at that level. None of the respondents reported having gone to college or university. According to the survey, the primary reason for these low levels of education was insecurity in school. For example, schools were cited as the initial target for attacks and looting, and schools were used for recruiting grounds for child soldiers, making children wary of attending. These issues were particularly relevant in Lofa County, which endured some of the most long lasting and brutal fighting during the conflict. Nimba, Grand-Gedeh and Gbarpolu Counties also suffered similar situations.

#### *Liberian Refugee Children—Security and Protection*

An estimated 320,000 Liberians are refugees in surrounding countries, primarily in Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana. Liberian refugee children in these countries continue to be threatened by violence and insecurity, sometimes by the very groups they sought to avoid by leaving Liberia. For example, in Guinea, to where many Liberian refugees fled from Lofa County, UNHCR and other aid agencies reported in 2003 that LURD fighters have regularly harassed the Liberian refugees and locals.

In the 2002 report *Liberian Refugees in Guinea: Refoulement, Militarization of Camps, and Other Protection Concerns*, HRW documented violations against Liberians seeking refuge in Guinea, describing how LURD or the Guinean army, often acting in conjunction, violently turned back Liberians seeking refuge, forced men and boys into work as porters and recruited them for military service, and later took women and children as young as age 10 for service. LURD troops would demand money or impose extended forced labor on individuals, including children, often entailing carrying heavy military equipment, hunting or collecting food for combatants or performing other chores. By using “pay to escape” tactics, the armed groups prevented thousands of would-be refugees from escaping to safety, according to USCR.

Liberian government forces also deliberately blocked children and their families from reaching safe haven across Liberia’s borders. Government soldiers forced civilians to pay bribes along exit routes and at border crossing points, according to refugees interviewed by USCR in 2003.

Even once inside refugee camps, serious child protection concerns remained. HRW received reports of LURD forcibly recruiting boys from camps and removing adolescent girls to be used for sex and then returning them to the camp thereafter. Similar practices were known to continue throughout the 2003 War.

According to a 2003 IRC gender-based violence prevalence study of Liberian women and girls in refugee camps in Sierra Leone, two thirds of interviewees had experienced at

least one incident of sexual violence during displacement, and almost three quarters had experienced at least one incident of physical violence, including being slapped, kicked and physically disfigured. Eighty-six percent of the women and girls surveyed reported having been threatened with a weapon during displacement, and 85 percent had been deprived of food. (See Gender-based Violence section below for more information).

Tensions between Liberian refugees and their host communities, many in the midst of or recovering themselves from armed conflict, have often been high. For example, fighting broke out between Liberian refugees and local villagers near the Jimmy Gbagbo refugee camp outside of Bo in Sierra Leone after children from the refugee camp raided a local village, setting fire to numerous houses, in March 2004. The raid was mounted in response to the failure of a secondary school to take adequate disciplinary action after two Sierra Leonean boys allegedly slapped a female Liberian refugee student. Sierra Leonean villagers responded to the raid by attacking the refugee camp, damaging its primary school and burning down a house. A series of similar incidents in the past in Sierra Leone had prompted Liberian refugees to spontaneously return to Liberia despite ongoing insecurity.

In Côte d'Ivoire, a massive influx of approximately 30,000 Liberian refugees fleeing the conflict between MODEL and government troops in eastern Liberia in June to August 2003, found themselves trapped in the violence engulfing western Côte d'Ivoire, according to *Beyond Monrovia: Liberian Refugees in West Africa* by the USCR. This lack of security further compounded the difficulty Liberian refugees had in receiving humanitarian aid or services.

Non-state armed groups operating in Côte d'Ivoire, as well as the Ivorian government's armed forces, forcibly recruited Liberian refugees, including children under age 18 (see below). Other children "voluntarily" joined the armed groups, without other options. The presence of Liberian fighters among all the fighting forces in Côte d'Ivoire fueled the preexisting xenophobia in the country, encouraging hostility and violence toward the Liberian refugee community, according to Amnesty International's 2003 *No Escape: Liberian Refugees in Côte d'Ivoire*.

Examples of threats to the security of Liberian refugee children include:

- A 12-year-old Liberian girl, who had earlier become separated from her mother and was fleeing to Guinea, described being robbed and then beaten by LURD soldiers while attempting to cross the border in Nyandemolahun (*Liberian Refugees in Guinea: Refoulement, Militarization of Camps, and Other Protection Concerns*, HRW, November 2002).
- Five Liberian children, ages 10 to 16, were abducted from their families by LURD members in Ouet Kama, on the Guinean border, and were forced to carry bags of rice and salt back to Liberia. After initially promising to return the children the same day, the commander who abducted them returned furious after one of the children ran away. The commander took another child as a replacement and told the families that as punishment he would now take the children all the way back into Liberia.

Witnesses described Guinean soldiers watching the incident without responding (*Liberian Refugees in Guinea: Refoulement, Militarization of Camps, and Other Protection Concerns*, Human Rights Watch, November 2002).

- A 16-year-old Liberian boy, whose mother had been killed and who was seeking refuge in Côte d'Ivoire after being separated from his father, described being beaten by local youth gangs and being accused of being one of the rebels fueling the conflict within Côte d'Ivoire (*Liberian Refugees Threatened in Ivory Coast*, Refugees International, March 11, 2003).
- Various sources have described forcible recruitment of refugee children by the Ivorian armed forces and Ivorian armed opposition groups from the Niela refugee camp in Côte d'Ivoire. For example, a UN Expert Panel that visited the camp in 2003 spoke to one 14-year-old boy who had been wounded while participating in a military operation. (*No Escape: Liberian Refugees in Côte d'Ivoire*, Amnesty International, June 24, 2003.)

#### *Liberian Refugee Children—Access to Basic Services*

Refugee children have varying access to basic services such as health care and education, depending on the host country and on the particular camps. In some instances, international humanitarian agencies have been able to provide helpful humanitarian and protection assistance to the refugee population. In January 2003, MSF opened a new health facility in eastern Sierra Leone in response to concerns that refugees were not receiving adequate care from the existing health structures. Many refugees in the area had spent months hiding in the bush, before arriving in Sierra Leone, and had lost the majority of their families either during conflict or while making the trip. In other locations such as in border areas in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, international humanitarian agencies, as well as UN agencies, were unable to reach certain locations even to assess the situation, which resulted in a severe lack of services for the refugee community.

Many host countries have failed to adequately provide services for refugee communities, because they did not have a cohesive refugee policy or were concerned that providing too many services might encourage the arrival of more refugees. For example, in the Budumburam camp in Ghana approximately 7,500 students were enrolled in school. However, their education was often poorly planned and chaotic, according to administrators and teachers at the camp. Of the 428 recognized teachers in the camp, only 91 had received any kind of teacher training.

Ironically, one of the few positive results of the ongoing conflict in the region has been the long-term presence of certain UN and international humanitarian agencies specializing in refugee relief. As a result of this presence, the gross school enrollment rate for children in refugee camps in Guinea was 95 percent, according to UNHCR in 2002. However, the IRC has noted a drop in enrollment of nearly 2,000 Liberian refugee children of the 36,000 young people enrolled in IRC schools the N'Zerekore and Kissidougu areas of Guinea. IRC staff note that this may be the result of repatriation to Liberia, increased sense of security in Liberia or opening of new schools.

Since the mass influx of Liberian refugees into Sierra Leone in 2002 and 2003, the number of Liberian children in Sierra Leone with access to education appeared to be quite high, mostly as the result of large-scale programs run by international agencies, according to the Women's Commission's Global Survey. Little information is available regarding education for Liberian refugee children in Côte d'Ivoire or for those living outside of formal refugee camps.

#### *Returning Home*

In February 2004, UNHCR announced plans to facilitate the return of an estimated 320,000 Liberian refugees from the West African sub-region and the resettlement of some 300,000 IDPs. This facilitated return would include food assistance and provision of farming tools, household items and materials to rebuild homes. In April 2004, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Liberia announced that orderly repatriation of the 300,000 Liberian refugees in neighboring countries would not begin until October 2004, after the rainy season. Jesuit Relief Service has raised concern about this delay given ongoing insecurity in some refugee camps.

Problems of armed robbery, harassment, intimidation, molestation and sexual violence are also still reported in IDP camps, according to humanitarian workers in Monrovia. Additionally, UN officials have raised concerns that some IDPs could remain in camps even during the next planting season, because of continued insecurity in their home areas, particularly Lofa County and Gbarpolu County. This could encourage long-term dependence on aid, as much of the nation's harvest is produced in Lofa County.

As of March 2004, over 10,000 Liberian refugees had voluntarily returned to Liberia from neighboring Sierra Leone, according to UNHCR. Humanitarian workers report anecdotally that Liberian children returning from Sierra Leone face difficult and dangerous conditions on the road returning to Liberia. Once they return to Liberia, many are left with nowhere to go because of ongoing insecurity or lack of access to their home villages. According to representatives of the Women's Commission who visited Liberia from April 20 to May 1, 2004, returning Liberian refugee children who wind up living as IDPs upon their repatriation to Liberia often had better access to schools when they were living as refugees. UNHCR reports that 3,400 of the 10,000 refugees who have returned from Sierra Leone have ended up in IDP camps.

In mid-March 2004, 1,500 refugees, including children, were held in the town of Sikiasso, at the border of Guinea and Mali, without any food or other aid, because the Guinean government suspected them of involvement in subversive activities. In April, approximately 200 individuals remained stranded.

#### *Foreign National Refugees in Liberia*

Approximately 38,000 Ivorians and 13,000 Sierra Leoneans are refugees in Liberia. Many of these refugees or third-country nationals (TCNs) became trapped in Liberia during the 2003 War, after having fled to Liberia from fighting in their home countries. The UN carried out the first official over-land repatriation in two years, assisting refugees back to Sierra Leone in March 2004. Of the 67 returning refugees in the first convoy, many were children, according to UNHCR. Since the March opening of the Bo Waterside

route between Liberia and Sierra Leone in March, over 3,700 Sierra Leonean refugees have repatriated. Estimates indicate that between 8,000 and 13,000 Sierra Leoneans remain in Liberia. UNHCR assistance to this refugee population will be cut off on June 30, 2004.

### *Reunification of Separated Children*

Reunification of separated Liberian children is a challenge exacerbated by the cross-border nature of the Liberian conflict and the West African region. For example, humanitarian workers note the challenge of determining what is in the best interest of the child when a Liberian refugee child is attending school in Guinea or Sierra Leone, but would return to a devastated community inside Liberia if family reunification is carried out. Similarly, it is complicated to determine when security and socioeconomic conditions will allow for successful family reunification and follow-up, particularly with families living in rural areas outside of Monrovia.

Despite these challenges, some progress is being made. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), in collaboration with the International Rescue Committee and other agencies, has been running a cross-border program to reunite nearly 2,000 children in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana with their families in Liberia. Between October 2003 and March 2004, 194 children were reunited with their families, almost all of who lived in or around Monrovia. To facilitate this process, these agencies publish photos of the children and circulate them through poster campaigns, local media outlets and other networks to help trace and reunify families.

### **HEALTH**

The health situation in Liberia has been very difficult to assess since the fighting broke out in June 2003. As of July 2003, MSF estimated that the health status of Liberians in more than 75 percent of the country was unknown. However, new assessments are being conducted regularly and a fuller picture of the health situation is beginning to emerge.

Even before the 2003 War, the state of health for Liberian children was among the worst in the world, with an infant mortality rate of 134 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2001. The infant mortality rate in developed countries is around six deaths per 1,000 live births. Additionally, the under-five mortality rate in 2002 was approximately 235 deaths per 1,000 children, according to UNICEF. In February 2004, less than 10 percent of Liberians, mainly those in urban and safer areas, were believed to have access to any kind of health care, according to WHO. Communicable diseases such as malaria, diarrhea, acute respiratory infections and measles are the major causes of morbidity in Liberia, according to WHO.

Little of the health infrastructure that existed before the 2003 War is currently functioning, according to WHO, with 242 of the nation's 293 public health facilities having been looted or forced to close because of lack of staff or supplies. This situation is exacerbated outside of urban centers. According to humanitarian workers, the remote counties of Rivergeee and Grand-Kru have extremely limited or no access to health care.

For example, Robertsport in Grand Cape Mount County had no health care service and all prevention activities had halted after the town was attacked in 2003, according to the report of a three-day assessment by WHO, UNICEF and WVI in February 2004. The County Health Team also participated in a portion of the assessment. The ICRC had donated basic health kits several months earlier, but no replenishment had taken place and the local hospital had been looted, vandalized and abandoned. "People rely on local quack doctors and drug peddlers. Severe cases are taken to Monrovia, which takes three hours by road," according to the report. Malaria, respiratory infections and diarrhea were the most common diseases found among children. The team also found a high prevalence of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among youth. Children generally did not appear malnourished, possibly because Robertsport is a major fishing and farming community.

General availability of locally produced food has prevented malnutrition and general food insecurity in some non-displaced communities outside Monrovia. For example, a UN emergency assessment mission to Maryland in September 2003, reported that health centers and schools had been severely looted, but that no reports of malnutrition had been reported because of the availability of locally produced food. Preliminary results of a joint 2004 survey by ACF and Save the Children-UK (SC UK) indicate a low global acute malnutrition rate ranging from 3.4 percent to 7.8 percent for children between the ages of 6 months and 59 months. The survey included a total of 2,551 children under the age of five years. This survey was referenced in WHO's *Joint Needs Assessment Paves the Way for Peace and Development in Liberia*, February 5, 2004.

In February 2004, UNICEF and WHO warned of a possible yellow fever epidemic in Liberia following at least eight deaths from the disease and 33 suspected cases. They also announced plans to launch a mass vaccination campaign against the disease in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and medical NGOs operating in Liberia. As Liberia is located in West Africa's yellow fever belt, at least six outbreaks of the disease were reported between 1995 and 2002, according to UNICEF.

A variety of UN agencies and NGOs, as well as the Ministry of Health, are operating programs to vaccinate children between the ages of six months and 15 years against measles. Over 1.45 million children have been vaccinated, primarily in Montserrado, Bong and Margibi Counties. Less than 50 percent of children aged 9 months to 59 months surveyed by ACF and SC UK in Montserrado IDP camp had the measles vaccines in November 2003, according to their vaccination cards.

The prevalence of pregnancy among young women in Liberia is relatively high, with 213 of every 1,000 young women aged 15 to 19 years old giving birth each year (as of 1998). Maternal mortality reaches 578 deaths per 100,000 live births. This is primarily due to the lack of emergency obstetrics care and poor nutrition for pregnant women, according to WHO.

## **HIV/AIDS**

There is little to no recent information available on HIV prevalence, prevention and knowledge levels in Liberia. In February 2004, WHO estimated a 10 to 12 percent adult

HIV/AIDS prevalence rate, noting the role of rampant gender-based violence during the 2003 War in facilitating the spread of HIV/AIDS. An unofficial report from an HIV testing center in Liberia estimated a 23.9 percent prevalence rate in November 2003.

The UNAIDS/WHO Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections: 2000 indicated a 2.8 percent adult prevalence rate at the end of 1999. Other details from the 2000 Fact Sheet are as follows:

- Estimated 37,000 adults living with HIV (21,000 female)
- Estimated 2,000 children under age 15 living with HIV
- Estimated 34,000 cumulative adult and child deaths due to AIDS
- Estimated 31,000 children under age 15 who had lost a mother or both parents due to AIDS
- Estimated 20,337 AIDS orphans

High levels of gender-based violence in Liberia (see below), lack of safe blood supply for transfusions and massive population movements, both within Liberia and to and from neighboring countries with high HIV prevalence rates, have created a situation conducive for an explosion in rates of HIV/AIDS and other STIs. According to UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2001*, only 6 percent of married women aged 15 to 49 years old in Liberia used contraceptives.

The dearth of information about HIV/AIDS in Liberia is particularly stark in relation to the current situation of children who are orphaned due to AIDS. No recent comprehensive study of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) has been completed in Liberia. One estimate suggests the possibility of tens of thousands of children in Monrovia and rural areas who are orphans due to AIDS.

Many victims of sexual violence interviewed for a study on the scope and impact of sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia, conducted jointly by UN Development Program (UNDP) and World Vision International, expressed fear that they may have acquired HIV as a result of rape. Researchers were told that health clinics might not be testing for HIV, because they could not provide appropriate treatment after diagnosis.

## **EDUCATION**

Approximately 80 percent of the schools that existed in Liberia prior to 1989 were destroyed during the 1989–1997 civil war, according to the Women's Commission's Global Survey. By 2002, only one half of the schools (approximately 2,470) had reopened and among those, many did not have roofs, windows, equipment and materials and suffered from severe overcrowding, according to UN estimates. "School facilities lack proper ventilation, lighting, toilets, libraries, laboratories and playgrounds," reported the UN Consolidated Appeal for Liberia, 2003.

The 2003 War caused further damage, destruction and looting by government forces and LURD and MODEL troops, which also forced all schools to close for at least five months. Approximately 50,000 displaced civilians used approximately 47 different school compounds in Monrovia and the Ministry of Education as temporary shelters

during 2003. In September 2003, the NTGL issued a directive for all displaced people to leave the schools within one week so that the schools could reopen. However, the displaced people were reluctant to leave the buildings and return to camps, fearing continued insecurity. Public schools in and around the Liberian capital reopened in November 2003 for the first time since June. The reopening was part of a new “Back to School” campaign targeting 750,000 children, sponsored by UNICEF, the Ministry of Education and NGO partners.

UNICEF and NGOs are also working to increase the number of nonformal educational opportunities for children. For example, the Norwegian Refugee Council started a Rapid Response Education Program in Liberia in 2003. This program is designed to reintegrate youth into the formal school system by providing them with basic reading, writing and math skills in teaching subjects such as religion, human rights and trauma management.

In addition to nonformal education, adolescents and young people often request assistance learning the skills necessary to earn a living. In a survey by IRC of 500 displaced young people ages 13 to 25 (average age 22) living outside of IDP camps in Montserrado County, 81 percent listed unemployment as their greatest challenge and expressed a desire to receive skills training. The skills that respondents were most interested in were divided by gender, with male respondents expressing interest in being trained as mechanics, while female respondents were most interested in tailoring and cosmetology. Both genders expressed an interest in business training and business management techniques. The survey also indicates that skills training must be coupled with ongoing support to help ease young people into the working world, and ensure that they have the skills to seek and maintain gainful employment.

Many children who do not go to school, because of school insecurity or other reasons, have become child soldiers, street children and juvenile delinquents, according to the Ministry of Education. The situation is exacerbated in rural and high conflict areas, such as the counties of Lofa, Gbarpolu, Bomi, Rivergee, Grand-Gedeh and Grand Cape Mount. Many schools in these areas stopped functioning or have functioned erratically for nearly 10 years. The Ministry of Education reports that only 35 percent of the adult Liberian population is literate.

Historically in Liberia, girls’ gross enrollment in school has been consistently less than that of boys. In 1999, the estimated primary school gross enrollment ratio was 72 percent for boys compared to only 53 percent for girls, according to the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Teenage pregnancy, early marriage and other traditional practices are commonly believed to be major factors influencing girls’ lower enrollment rates.

Displacement and lack of resources have had a dramatic effect on the teaching population in Liberia, explains the Women’s Commission’s Global Survey. Teachers have not been paid consistently since the start of the 1989–1997 civil war, forcing many teachers to take alternate or additional jobs. Nonpayment of teachers’ salaries has caused a series of strikes. As of November 2003, Liberia’s teachers had not been paid for 15 months,

according to UNICEF. Funding problems within the Ministry of Education have also caused inadequate support for Liberia's teacher training institutions. As of 2003, 65 percent of primary school teachers did not meet State teacher qualifications, according to the UN.

In April 2004, a group of teachers boycotted classes in Monrovia in an attempt to pressure the government to provide back-payment of 18 months of salary. Public school students in Monrovia staged demonstrations to show solidarity with the striking teachers, which were quelled by local police units and UN peacekeepers.

### **GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

Gender-based violence (GBV) in all of its forms is endemic in Liberia, according to RI's *Liberia: Major Effort Needed to Address Gender-Based Violence*, January 2003. During the 1989–1997 civil war, various estimates indicate that as much as 40 percent of women were raped. High levels of sexual exploitation and abuse of children continue to be evident and result in a prevalence of early teenage pregnancies. Girls face the highest risk of sexual violence, especially during migration and in the camps (see above).

Government, LURD and MODEL forces committed rape and other acts of brutal sexual violence against women and girls during the 2003 War. Reports from the field indicate that levels of GBV increased dramatically during that time. However, statistics about GBV rates have been very difficult to track. In one example, Concerned Christian Community reported counseling 1,000 victims of rape between 1994 and 2003, while they treated over 620 girls during several weeks in June and July 2003. Additionally, between October 2003 and April 2004, IRC received 991 reports of gender-based violence from women and girls in Montserrado County, with girls under 20 years of age making up more than one quarter of those reporting. The majority of cases reported were rapes related to the ongoing conflict. More than one third of the reported cases were gang rapes perpetrated by armed members of the fighting forces.

In 2003, IRC carried out gender-based violence prevalence research among Liberian refugee women and adolescents, ages 15 to 49, living in refugee camps in Sierra Leone (*Situation Analysis of Gender Based Violence in Liberia*, April 2004). Seventy-four percent of the women and adolescent girls interviewed by IRC reported having experienced at least one incident of sexual violence before being displaced and 66 percent of those interviewed reported having experienced at least one incident of sexual violence during displacement.

The most common act of sexual violence reported in the IRC research was improper sexual comments, with being touched on sexual parts, stripped or subjected to body cavity searches also commonly reported. Before displacement, almost half of the women surveyed had been threatened with harm for sex, and slightly more than a third of women had been threatened with harm for sex during displacement. Both before and during displacement, more than three quarters of perpetrators threatened to kill the women they were attacking. Before displacement, non-state armed groups perpetrated 49.6 percent of the reported cases of sexual violence and the military forces perpetrated 46 percent of the

reported cases. The military was far more frequently named as the perpetrators of sexual violence during displacement, with 65.2 percent of the reported cases attributed to the military.

Government forces are known to have committed widespread rape and sexual violence, particularly around the Bushrod Island area in 2003, according to HRW's *Briefing to the 60<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Human Rights*. LURD forces committed rape and other violence mainly in the areas of Nimba and Bong Counties, while MODEL troops engaged in widespread looting, sometimes accompanied by rape and other forms of sexual violence during the fight for Grand Bassa.

Young boys were routinely forced to rape women and girls as part of the initiation process for some fighting forces, according to RI. Various unconfirmed reports indicate that young boys have also been victims of sexual violence.

During the 2003 War, teenage girls were the most targeted, as well as single women and mothers with young children, according to a GBV expert with the IRC in Monrovia. News stories have depicted detailed reports of rape and gruesome sexual violence against girls:

- A Liberian woman reported to aid workers that she watched as gunmen raped and murdered her daughter on her 10th birthday (*The Los Angeles Times*, "Rape a Weapon in Liberian War," August 11, 2003).
- A 16-year-old girl was shot in the foot when she tried to resist a sexual attack and subsequently had her leg amputated below the knee (*The Guardian*, "Liberian Fighters in Frenzy of Rape," August 8, 2003).
- A 6-year-old girl was raped on June 5 in the VOA camp (outside Monrovia). Her grandmother found her unconscious and bleeding profusely (Agence France-Presse, "Rape Still Widespread in Post-War Liberia," August 28, 2003).

Many victims of rape are reluctant to discuss their case beyond the intimacy of their immediate family and may even be reluctant to discuss the source of their problem while seeking treatment in a medical facility, according to preliminary research on the scope and impact of gender-based violence in Liberia conducted jointly by the UNDP and WVI.

### *Sexual Exploitation in West Africa*

In 2002, a report by UNHCR and SC UK assessing the behavior of humanitarian workers, including UN personnel and peacekeepers, in the Mano River region of Africa, turned up widespread evidence of sexual exploitation of refugee children. Liberia was among the countries evaluated, with widespread exploitation based on the power dynamic between humanitarian workers and refugee populations reported. According to the assessment, the majority of children consulted knew at least one other child who had been involved in exchanging sex for money and gifts from humanitarian aid personnel. The humanitarian community's shock and outrage at the findings prompted the

establishment of the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises.

In 2002, the interagency task force created a list of “six core principles” for humanitarian agencies to incorporate into their staff codes of conduct. These principles require termination of any staff found to be engaging in exploitation; prohibit sexual activity with any child under the age of 18; forbid the exchange of any goods, services or money for sex or exploitation; and require all humanitarian employees to report abuses and all humanitarian agencies to develop systems to prevent exploitation.

During focus group discussions held by IRC in October and November 2003 in seven IDP camps, many of the participants said they knew of women who had traded sex for protection, food or services. Participants said it was a common occurrence for women to be exploited by soldiers, men with money, block leaders, businessmen and humanitarian workers, including those from NGOs. In separate research by IRC among Liberian women and girls in refugee camps in Sierra Leone, more than one third of the women and girls surveyed reported being compelled to have sex in exchange for receiving food, protection or both. This occurred both before and during displacement, according to IRC’s *Situation Analysis of Gender Based Violence in Liberia*, April 2004.

In April 2004, RI issued a bulletin, *Sexual Exploitation in Liberia: Are the Conditions Ripe for Another Scandal?*, suggesting that adequate measures were not being taken to prevent another exploitation scandal in Liberia. According to RI, UNMIL lacks a clear process for reporting sexual exploitation and as of April 2004, UNMIL had yet to follow through on a UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) request that they appoint a community focal point to receive complaints. In fact, there seemed to be widespread confusion about how to report abuse and what should happen to the perpetrator. Though UNMIL does include training on sexual exploitation in their induction training for troops, it is not highlighted as a priority issue and little follow up is conducted to ensure that personnel fully understand the severity of these issues.

## **TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION**

Extreme poverty, loss of one or both parents, separation from communities and conflict are all factors present in Liberia that make children highly vulnerable to abduction and trafficking. Women and children are at the greatest risk for trafficking, according to the International Labor Organization (ILO) report *Stopping Forced Labor* (2001) and other experts.

Liberia is a source and destination country for trafficked persons, and also has an internal trafficking problem, according to the U.S. Department of State, *Trafficking in Persons Report 2003*. Various sources indicate that Liberian women and girls have been trafficked to destinations such as brothels in Europe and for commercial sex work in Guinea and elsewhere.

UNICEF and NGOs have documented child trafficking in West and Central Africa. However, information about Liberia in particular is limited; this is in large part due to the

near constant state of armed conflict during the past 14 years. In general, identification of child trafficking networks and individual traffickers is extremely difficult because of the informal and secretive nature of the phenomenon. In the case of Liberia and West Africa, this problem is even more complicated due to ongoing conflicts and open borders intended to promote free trade, according to UNICEF's *Child Trafficking in West and Central Africa: An Overview* (2001).

Recent reports suggest that "adoption" is being used as a guise for trafficking children from Liberia to the United States and Western Europe. The Liberian Ministry of Health has initiated an Investigation Task Force in cooperation with the Liberian National Police, Save the Children, UNICEF and the Union of Liberian Orphanages, to determine the validity of allegations made in February 2004 that some orphanages may be facilitating adoption of children for profit. No documentation of such practices is available. The issue is of pressing concern because of its possible impact on over 12,000 children in approximately 135 Liberian orphanages.

The Taylor government, LURD and MODEL are all known to have used children for forced labor related to the armed conflict in 2003. In some instances, children associated with these forces were responsible for forcing other children into labor, according to the U.S. State Department's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2003. The State Department also reported that officials of the Taylor government allegedly used forced labor on their farms and forced children to work in mines, such as alluvial diamond and gold mines.

In March 2004, a reliable source verified reports of children working in gold mines, through an assessment of a mine site in Grand-Gedeh. The assessment team reported that 50 percent of the gold miners at the site appeared to be children. The team saw an estimated total of 800 children at the site, including approximately 250 children younger than eight years old. Some of the children at the site were third-country nationals, refugee or returnee children. Others were children associated with fighting forces. Approximately 75 percent of children at the site were working for adults for very little or no remuneration.

Endemic poverty in Liberia has forced many Liberian children and adolescents into commercial sex work. A survey among 200 male and female Liberian young people (ages 13 to 24) involved in commercial sex work showed that lack of education and medical and social services, as well as unemployed or underemployed parents/guardians, all contributed to girls and boys involvement in sex work. The survey was conducted by the Center for the Promotion of Democracy in Liberia (CPD) in 2002 and released in 2004. The 2003 War likely exacerbated the contributing factors described by young people in the survey. No estimates as to the number of young people involved in commercial sex work in Liberia are available.

## **LANDMINES AND UXO**

Landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXO) affect Liberia. However the severity of the human and material damage caused by mines and UXO is difficult to ascertain because of

ongoing insecurity and lack of access to certain areas, according to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL), *Landmine Monitor Report 2003*. Areas like Lofa, Grand Capemount, Bong and Kakata are likely to be affected as a result of the 1989–1997 civil war, as well as the 2003 War. A local research group reported to the *Landmine Monitor Report 2003* that landmines affect the greater Buchanan area and that some local farmers are afraid to farm because of suspicion of mines.

All factions used landmines during the 1989–1997 civil war, although *Landmine Monitor Report 2003* explains that no on-site research has been conducted. No allegations have surfaced of landmine use in the 2003 War. The Liberian government is not known to have produced landmines. Yet, it is one of the few state parties to the Mine Ban Treaty that has not submitted its initial transparency report under Article 7 to officially confirm or deny the existence of a stockpile of antipersonnel mines, according to *Landmine Monitor Report 2003*.

No information is available on landmine casualties in Liberia. The most recent report of casualties came in 2000, when a Liberian newspaper reported that 13 people had been killed and six injured in landmine incidents, according to *Landmine Monitor Report 2003*. As in all situations involving landmines and UXOs, children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to injury, death and devastation.

There are no specific landmine survivor assistance programs, although some assistance may be available through programs for people with disabilities. A Buchanan-based research group told Handicap International that adult victims are frequently unable to provide for their families, leaving their children unable to attend school.

## **SMALL ARMS**

Proliferation of small arms and light weapons poses a significant problem in Liberia, and in the West African region more broadly. One estimate suggests that of the 639 million small arms and light weapons (SALW) in circulation globally, around 8 million are to be found in West Africa, according to International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA). The security and rights of civilians, particularly children, are seriously threatened by the proliferation of SALW in West Africa. For example, proliferation facilitates mass displacement, gross human rights abuses, common use of child soldiers, militarization of refugee camps, rise in armed violence and criminality and undermining the rule of law.

Many of the SALW in circulation in Liberia arrived through illegal channels during the 1989–1997 civil war and in the lead up to the 2003 War. Three reports of the UN Panel of Experts on Liberia (26 October 2001, S/2001/1015 pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1343; 19 April 2002, S/2002/470 pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1395; 25 October 2002, S/2002/1115 pursuant to UNSC Resolution 1343) confirmed systematic flouting of the 1992 UN Arms Embargo on Liberia and the 1998 ECOWAS Moratorium on the Import, Export and Manufacture of light arms, which regulates small arms transfers to the region. The moratorium was renewed in 2001 and is set to expire in 2004. The report documented six illegal air-freight shipments to the Liberian government carrying surplus Yugoslav equipment, totaling 5,000 automatic rifles and over 4 million rounds of rifle

ammunition, as well as machine guns, pistols, grenade launchers and hand grenades (S/2002/1115).

*The Usual Suspects*, a report by Global Witness (March 2003), provided evidence of further and frequent illegal arms shipments to Liberia occurring at least two to three times every month. The report also provides extensive documentation of the involvement of the Taylor administration in the international markets of illegal arms and mercenaries and of “how the government’s access to those outlets permitted Liberian President Charles Taylor and his associates to launch and maintain a mercenary attack on Côte d’Ivoire and begin implementing an incursion into Sierra Leone.”

LURD also sought military equipment through a variety of illegal channels with factions in neighboring Guinea, Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone in the lead up to the 2003 War, according to *Small Arms Survey 2003*. The government of Guinea is well known to have facilitated the illicit supply of mortar rounds and military and logistical support to LURD, according to HRW’s briefing paper *Weapons Sanctions, Military Supplies, and Human Suffering: Illegal Arms Flows to Liberia and the June-July 2003 Shelling of Monrovia*, November 2003.

Since the DDR process renewed on April 15, 2004 (see below), ex-combatants have surrendered rifles, machine guns, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, mortars, pistols and hand grenades. However, humanitarian workers, UNMIL and others have raised concerns about missing weapons. By April 30, 2004, more than 16,000 ex-combatants had entered the DDR process, however, only 10,000 weapons had been turned in, some in a state of severe disrepair. Some reports suggest that heavy weapons and ammunition are being smuggled by MODEL and LURD supporters into Côte d’Ivoire, Sierra Leone and/or Guinea, raising concerns about continued regional instability, given the varying levels of turmoil and instability in those neighboring countries. No current information is available about continuing illegal arms flows into Liberia.

### **CHILD SOLDIERS**

Precise figures about the number of children currently or previously associated with armed groups do not exist. However, the UN has estimated that approximately 15,000 children, some as young as nine years old, were involved in fighting during the past four years of warfare. Both LURD and MODEL, as well as government forces, which include militias and paramilitary groups such as the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU) and the Special Security Service (SSS), widely used children when civil war resumed in 2000, according to *How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia*, a comprehensive study on Liberian child soldiers, published by Human Rights Watch, February 2004.

In his November 2003 report on Children and Armed Conflict to the Security Council (S/2003/1053), the UN Secretary-General included the situation in Liberia on the updated list of parties to armed conflict that recruit or use children in situations of armed conflict on the agenda of the Security Council. On this updated list, the Secretary-General specifically named the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), as well as LURD and MODEL.

The use of children as soldiers in Liberia dates to the start of the conflict in 1989. Charles Taylor's NPFL became infamous for the abduction and use of boys in war. Between 6,000 and 15,000 children were estimated to have taken up arms between 1989 and 1997. Many of these children were used in groups known as Small Boys Units (SBUs) throughout the 1990s. The 1997 demobilization plan was only partially successful in rehabilitating and reintegrating these children (see below), which left many of the same children who had fought as easy targets for re-recruitment by government forces and non-state armed groups when fighting resumed in 2000, according to HRW.

Many children who fought between 2000 and 2003 were forcibly recruited by government armed forces, LURD or MODEL during roundups or raids on refugee or IDP camps. However, many others joined these groups "voluntarily," citing various reasons such as a perception that this was the only way to survive, a desire to avenge abuses against themselves or their families or a need to gain some form of protection or food, according to HRW. Children in Bong County have reported to humanitarian workers that recruiters from the armed forces promised them US\$100, as well as assistance or transport to find their missing parents, if they fought for a short time.

These child soldiers have suffered egregious violations of their rights to life, health, protection and education. They were also victims of a broad range of abuses, such as forced conscription, beatings, rape, torture and psychological damage resulting from being forced to kill others.

#### *Government Forces*

There is no conscription in Liberia and the minimum age for voluntary recruitment is believed to be 18, but this is not enforced in practice, according to *Child Soldier Use in 2000* by the International Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (the Coalition). From 2000 to 2003, the Armed Forces of Liberia recruited children, both forcibly and voluntarily, in Monrovia and other government-controlled areas. According to the Coalition, this recruitment intensified in the immediate months prior to Charles Taylor's resignation. Counselors working with children told HRW that in 2002, as the war intensified, parents in and around Monrovia stopped sending their children to school to avoid recruitment on the way to or at schools. In July 2003, UNICEF and the NGO Don Bosco publicly denounced the forcible and voluntary recruitment of girls and boys as young as nine years of age into Liberian government armed forces.

Relief workers reported raids on schools and displaced people's camps, including an attempt to press gang school children into joining the armed forces in the northern town of Ganta on March 6, 2003. Parents and community members came together to protest these abductions, sparking off business strikes and school closures. International NGOs reported to the Coalition that government forces recruited at least one in 10 children in Montserrado displacement camps. Additionally, Liberian children seeking refuge in Sierra Leone told international NGOs of being forcibly recruited by the government's ATU and armed forces. HRW has documented graphic accounts by young recruits of the atrocities committed against them and by them, often under extreme duress.

The Coalition reported that in June 2003, the Liberian Defense Minister Daniel Chea denied that the government was forcibly conscripting children, arguing that young people were patriotically volunteering. In 1999, Liberian authorities also denied recruitment or abuse of children by the AFL, but acknowledged that recruitment of children remained a concern within the context of instability in the country.

There are no precise figures, but it is widely believed that the new government armed forces are primarily composed of former National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) fighters—an opposition group that included a large proportion of children. It is believed that children continue to be recruited into the AFL.

### *LURD*

LURD has been known to widely recruit and use children, according to the Coalition. HRW reported that children were recruited, sometimes forcibly, and used in offensives and to porter arms, ammunition and other supplies in Liberia's northern Lofa County, where LURD bases are situated. During a June 2003 LURD attack on Gbarnga, eyewitnesses reported children firing rocket-propelled grenades as well as automatic assault rifles. Liberian children seeking refuge in Guinea and Sierra Leone also reported forced recruitment by LURD. On June 30, 2003, LURD reportedly issued a statement pledging that it would no longer use child soldiers: "Military commanders are herein strictly instructed to release/discharge any military personnel under the age of eighteen." No current information is available indicating that this pledge has been upheld.

### *MODEL*

MODEL has been known to recruit and use child soldiers since it broke off from LURD in early 2003. From its outset, MODEL continued practices initiated by LURD, recruiting children from refugee camps and recently captured areas, according to HRW. MODEL also recruited Liberian refugee children and Ivorian children in Côte d'Ivoire to fight in Liberia. HRW has documented many of these cases. Additionally, most of the Liberian child mercenaries fighting on the side of the Ivorian government forces in the neighboring conflict previously belonged to MODEL and LURD.

During the lead up to MODEL's capture of Buchanan in July 2003, children were forcibly recruited from the countryside. An HRW researcher who visited Buchanan in August 2003 saw several armed children, including girls, guarding a high-level MODEL commander at his base and participating in checkpoint duties on the main road to Monrovia. Other children in and near Buchanan joined MODEL for other reasons. Civilians in Buchanan reported also that many of the young fighters with MODEL were Ivorians recruited across the border.

### *Life with Fighting Forces*

In some cases, the majority of military units comprised boys and girls under age 18. Their use and abuse were a deliberate policy on the part of the highest levels of leadership in all three groups, HRW explains.

Children interviewed by HRW described receiving limited but arduous training in operating automatic weapons, mortars and rocket-propelled grenades; maneuvering in combat; marching; and taking cover. Despite the short training, children were often the first sent out to the front lines in the face of heavy combat. The roles and responsibilities of child soldiers within the government forces and non-state armed groups were very similar, according to HRW. Boys and girls were tasked with performing heavy labor, manning roadblocks, acting as bodyguards to commanders, looting and abducting other children. Children were also beaten and abused by their superiors and forced to witness abuse and killing. In addition to their military duties, girls were raped and sexually enslaved. Boy soldiers were often drugged prior to facing combat. Children told HRW that LURD and MODEL never paid child soldiers, and children relied entirely on stealing to survive. Boys who fought in government militias described occasional and sporadic payment prior to 2003.

Girls served with all three groups during the war, although in lower numbers than boys. HRW explains that, typically, older girls and young women were fighters who served in separate units, while younger girls served as cooks, domestics, porters and cleaners. However, in some cases younger girls fought as well. Many girls were raped at the time of recruitment and were routinely raped and sexually assaulted during their time with forces. Some girls were eventually able to protect themselves from sexual assault because of the prestige they won for their ferocity. Others would capture other girls to provide sexual services to boys and men. Social workers assisting demobilized girls in Interim Care Centers (ICCs) in 2004, reported that approximately 75 percent of girls in the ICCs have suffered some form of sexual abuse or exploitation.

HRW's research also revealed that children were rarely issued military attire by any of the armed groups; most were issued T-shirts with the name of their fighting force on it. In some cases, children were involved in units like the "Buck Naked Unit," where fighters went into combat naked in order to terrorize opponents and civilians.

Some children interviewed by HRW spoke of their fear of death, of the killing of other children in battle and of those they killed, while others bragged about the killings, proud of their advancement to commander status for their ferocity. Children went through secret initiation practices such as scarification and the giving of charms or amulets for their protection. Additionally, they were supplied with drugs such as opiates, marijuana and a combination of opium and gunpowder, as well as alcohol and unidentified tablets. Children also spoke of punishments they would face for wrongdoings, such as beatings, torture and death.

Children associated with government armed forces and non-state armed groups were regularly given "fighting names," whether or not they were actual combatants, according to HRW's research. These names often signified a particular characteristic of the children or their actions during fighting. Some examples of names told to HRW include: Laughing and Killing; Mother Blessing; Captain No Mercy; Castrator; and Iron Panty.

### *DDRR and Current Status*

In the past, disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and rehabilitation (DDRR, also known as DDR) programs for children in Liberia have had limited success. The formal DDRR program established in 1997 served less than one third of the estimated 15,000 children associated with the fighting forces during the civil war. And 89 percent of those children who awaited demobilization disappeared before the process was completed, according to the Coalition. Of the children who did participate in the process, only 78 were girls, despite much evidence that their presence in the armed forces was significantly larger. Additionally, children and young people who disarmed during the 1997 DDRR program often did not find viable employment opportunities after receiving vocational training. In part, this could be a result of the failure at that time to conduct a comprehensive, national market survey.<sup>7</sup>

As fighting resumed and escalated in 2000–2003, UN agencies coordinated few efforts on prevention or DDRR for the thousands of child soldiers participating in the conflict, according to the Coalition. While many demobilized or escaped child soldiers from Liberia were in refugee camps in Sierra Leone and Guinea and benefiting from child protection programs, many more were at risk of re-recruitment by armed forces and groups fighting in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. As previously described, it is widely believed that many children who had fought with armed groups during the 1989–1997 civil war returned to the armed groups when fighting resumed in 2003.

Since the August 18, 2003 peace agreement signed in Accra, DDRR attempts in Liberia led by UNMIL, in collaboration with UN agencies and NGO implementing partners, have been marked by chaos and uncertainty. A general demobilization process sponsored by the UN, including provisions for demobilizing child soldiers, was initially set to begin on December 8, 2003, but was repeatedly postponed due to the overwhelming number of combatants presenting themselves for the process, a lack of understanding about the benefits and requirements of the program and a general lack of preparation by the UN.

During the delays, many of the children associated with fighting forces were released from or spontaneously left their units after August 2003. Some of these children returned to their families, while others languished on the streets of the capital, in other towns or in IDP camps, waiting for the DDRR process to get underway. In areas outside of UNMIL control, children remained actively engaged with fighting forces, according to eyewitness accounts.

When the DDRR program first began on December 7, 2003, under UNMIL's leadership, former combatants rioted in the eastern suburbs of Monrovia, as well as at the cantonment site (near Monrovia), over confusion about the money that would be provided in exchange for handing in their weapons. General lack of preparedness at that time also contributed to the problem as UNMIL was operating at one third of its intended capacity, with only 5,000 troops deployed, and had set up only a single cantonment site for the 55,000 to 60,000 adult and child combatants waiting for demobilization.

At the outset, the December process planned to pay each ex-combatant US\$150 after a 3-week stay in the cantonment site. However, the cantonment site was not adequately prepared to house the large numbers of people who were ready to participate in the program for three weeks. Additionally, after a couple of days the ex-combatants inside the site were becoming restless, so a new plan was devised to pay each former combatant US\$75 in cash in exchange for a weapon to quicken the pace of the process. Despite a previous agreement among the participating agencies not to provide cash payments for child ex-combatants, it proved difficult not to pay children when they showed up at the site with weapons and ammunition and the plan was revised to include children in the repayment activities (see details below). After 10 days, peacekeepers were overwhelmed by the number of former combatants eager to participate and suspended the program. At least nine people died in the riots.

After a four-month delay, the DDRR process again got underway on April 15, 2004. UNMIL had then deployed 14,000 troops in 13 of the country's 15 counties and was prepared to oversee DDRR in four different cantonment sites around the country in Gbargna, Buchanan, Tubmanburg and VOA on the outskirts of Monrovia. The program began in Gbargna on April 15, with a new site opening every five days until the last opened at the VOA camp on April 30. Plans to open six new sites are still pending. Under the new program, no upfront cash payments were to be made to ex-combatants. Rather, a first payment of US\$150 would be made after a minimum 7-day stay in a cantonment site. At that point, the ex-combatants would be discharged and provided with transport assistance to facilitate their return to the community of their choice. A final installment of US\$150 would be made after three months, assuming that ex-combatants would be participating in specific reintegration projects.

Since the DDRR process began on April 15, children ex-combatants have been receiving priority attention, including special procedures indicating that they should not spend more than 72 hours in a cantonment site. Also, they are to be separated from adult ex-combatants once inside the sites and are to be transferred from the sites to ICCs, where child protection agencies are to ensure common standards of care. As of late April 2004, the UN reported that 1,800 former combatants had registered for demobilization during the first week of the program and that over 15 percent of those that had reported for disarmament were children under age 18, including 37 girls.

However, far fewer children than originally estimated are going through the DDRR process. Child protection agencies working in Liberia believe that only a small portion of children associated with fighting forces actually have access to the DDRR process. They explain that during interviews with girls and adults at cantonment sites and in ICCs, they receive reports of girls who are not going through the DDRR process because their commanders or "husbands" forbid them to do so.

Various glitches have continued to mar the DDRR process for children and other ex-combatants. The issue of cash payments to child ex-combatants is a glaring example. Despite protests from UNICEF and NGO implementing partners, UNMIL and the Liberian National Commission on Demilitarization, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and

Reintegration (NCDDRR) decided to include child ex-combatants in this cash allowance program of US\$300. Humanitarian workers and others have raised a wide array of concerns about the potentially damaging impact of cash payments to children. For example, the payments can create financial incentives for the recruitment and re-recruitment of child soldiers, they can make children susceptible to violence as targets for theft and they can cause community tension as children and others who have not participated in armed conflict may perceive such payments as discriminatory.

Another example is the proliferation of mixed messages regarding the qualifying criteria for children to enter the DDRR process, which have resulted in confusion among the children, the general population and even UNMIL staff. Mixed messages have also aggravated confusion among combatants and caused security problems. Although UNMIL, the World Food Programme (WFP), UNICEF and other child protection agencies have carried out sensitization campaigns to minimize misunderstanding of the DDRR process, the information has not always reached children effectively, and sometimes messages delivered by non-Liberians were not well understood.

The Women's Commission delegation to Liberia learned of reports of armed groups' commanders distributing ammunition to individuals associated with the fighting forces to qualify them for disarmament and the cash payment despite the policy printed in the *Joint Operational Plan: An Instructional Instrument for the Resumption of the DDRR process in Liberia*, stating that ammunition is not a qualifying criteria for any adults or children. Accurate understanding of the DDRR process also was undermined by decisions and actions taken, such as UNMIL staff requiring women and children to have weapons in order to participate in the process, which contradicted the policy in the *Joint Operational Plan* that weapons are not a requirement for the participation of women or children.

Other issues of concern for child ex-combatants identified by the Women's Commission delegation include:

- Lack of child protection officers in UNMIL to assist in ensuring proper treatment of children during the process
- Anecdotal reports that boys and girls are fearful that entering the DDRR process will brand them as criminals and result in stigmatization
- Instances on the first day of operation of the Tubmanburg cantonment site (April 25, 2004): women and girls, including several with newborn infants and toddlers and/or who were pregnant, were the last to be transported to the site; sanitary materials for women and girls were not available; a female staff trained to perform body searches on disarming women and girls was not in place and alternate arrangements had to be made at the last minute.

Save the Children-UK (SC UK) conducted a rapid assessment to gather information about why fewer children than expected are showing up for DDRR. After an initial day of interviews at a cantonment site with children from the Bong Mines/Iron Gate area, SC UK reported the following:

- Most of the children who have gone through the DDRR process heard about it from their commanders; two boys had heard about it on the radio, but in general they felt there was little information available
- Children who have had their weapons taken away by their commanders believe that they will automatically be excluded from the process unless they are able to pay to have their names put on a list given to UNMIL
- Some children reported that they had to wait for up to six days at the pick-up point to be included in the DDRR process
- Many children from various units remain scattered around Bong Mines, Hendi and other nearby villages
- Many are tapping rubber for their commanders
- Many children who were originally abducted and associated with fighting forces are now back with their families

A combination of these factors has caused a new problem of “missing child soldiers.” Contributing factors include the lack of effective sensitization from the beginning about children’s role in the DDRR process, inadequate prioritization of children’s situation from the beginning, commanders taking weapons away from children and leaving their names off combatants lists and fear of discrimination.

Much of the DDRR program is to be funded by the United States, which has earmarked approximately US\$50 million to assist for this purpose, including US\$15 million to specifically target women and children. In April 2004, the Japanese government announced a US\$3.6 million grant specifically for child soldiers.

In order for DDRR programs to succeed in the future, most experts agree on several areas that need urgent attention. First, it will be necessary for all DDRR programs to work specifically to include girls. Since girls are less likely to have arms to turn in, or may fear the stigmatization of being associated with the fighting forces, extra efforts may be needed to reach girls through specially designed DDRR processes.

Second, based on experience from Liberia’s previous DDRR efforts, experts identify a need for long-term, multi-year programming that focuses especially on community assistance and the rehabilitation phase. This multi-year assistance will be essential for any demobilization process to be considered complete and will require long-term funding commitments.

Next, the process must be sensitive to DDRR concerns in the regional context. A DDRR program in Côte d’Ivoire offers former combatants US\$900 in the course of the demobilization process, whereas Liberian combatants will receive only US\$300. Some experts are apprehensive that this disparity could cause further instability in the region. Humanitarian workers in the region report that children are being recruited in the southeastern area of Liberia to travel to Côte d’Ivoire to participate in the disarmament and help commanders receive additional money.

As the UN and other agencies began gaining access to rural areas of Liberia, evidence began to appear indicating that a sizeable number of the children associated with fighting forces in Liberia could be foreign nationals of neighboring countries. It is likely that these children fought in other wars in West Africa before engaging in the most recent conflict in Liberia, spending a large portion of their young lives fighting with armed groups. However, as DDDR got underway in April 2004, the number of child ex-combatants who had participated in the DDDR process that were foreign nationals began to appear smaller than expected. The records of foreign national child ex-combatants in the DDDR program as of April 2004 showed that they were mostly from Guinea, followed by Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. Still, any demobilization and/or reunification process for these children will have to be carefully designed to consider the best interest of these young people and the cross-border dimensions of the post-conflict phase.

Finally, the risk of child soldiers being remobilized or new children being recruited by government forces or armed opposition groups is still high, as the situation in Liberia remains volatile and delays with the formal DDDR program and lack of funding persist.

## **UN SECURITY COUNCIL ACTIONS**

### *Security Council Resolutions*

Since 2001, the Security Council has adopted nine resolutions on Liberia. Among other things, these resolutions repeatedly requested the creation of safe humanitarian corridors for the delivery of aid and access to IDPs and refugees, established UNMIL and called for the development of a comprehensive DDDR action plan for all parties to the armed conflict. Some of these resolutions specifically address matters of child protection. The following are brief summaries of recent resolutions that relate to children and armed conflict in Liberia:

#### **Resolution 1521** (December 2003)

- Details a variety of steps that the Council is taking to curb the illicit exploitation of Liberia's natural resources and to prevent the import of arms and all related military materials.
- Calls on the international donor community to provide assistance for the implementation of DDDR and to contribute generously to consolidated humanitarian appeals.

#### **Resolution 1509** (September 2003)

- Condemns all human rights violations, particularly atrocities against the civilian population and widespread use of sexual violence against women and children.
- Urges the transitional government to ensure that the protection of human rights and the establishment of a state based on the rule of law and of independent judiciary are among its highest priorities.
- Establishes UNMIL for a period of 12 months.
- Recognizes the importance of protection of children in armed conflict in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1379 and related resolutions. Demands that all parties cease use of child soldiers.

**Resolution 1497** (August 2003)

- Stresses the need to create a secure environment that enables respect for human rights including the well-being and rehabilitation of children, protects the well-being of civilians and supports the mission of humanitarian workers.
- Demands that all states in the region refrain from any action that might contribute to further instability in Liberia or on the borders between Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.

**Resolution 1478** (May 2003)

- Calls upon the government of Liberia and all parties, particularly LURD and other armed rebel groups, to ensure unimpeded and safe movement for the personnel of UN humanitarian agencies and NGOs to end use of child soldiers and to prevent sexual violence and torture.

*Secretary-General's Reports*

Since 2001, the UN Secretary-General has submitted 16 reports to the Security Council regarding the situation in Liberia. UNSC Resolution 1509 requests that the Secretary-General report to the Security Council every 90 days on the implementation of UNMIL's mandate, increasing the frequency of reports on Liberia. In January 2003, the UN Security Council adopted UNSC Resolution 1460, which specifically "requests the Secretary-General to ensure that in all his reports to the Security Council on country-specific situations, the protection of children in armed conflict is included as a specific aspect of the report" (para. 15).

Since January 30, 2004, and the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1460, none of the eight reports submitted by the Secretary-General on Liberia contain a specific section on child protection. However, three of the eight reports contain four or more paragraphs with substantive information on child protection. Four reports provided minimal information (one to three paragraphs related to child protection), and one report does not include any information on child protection. The following are brief summaries of the three most recent reports of the Secretary-General on Liberia and how they address children protection.

**Second Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia** (March 2004)

- Minimal information on child protection.
- Includes a section on DDRR preparations that describe the initial failed attempt at starting DDRR in December 2003.
- Includes a broad section on human rights and protection of civilians, with one paragraph describing the UNICEF "Back to School" campaign.

**First Progress Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia** (December 2003)

- Minimal information on child protection.

- Includes a specific paragraph devoted to DDDR action plans for child and female combatants, highlighting specific provisions for child combatants, including that child soldiers will be separated from adult combatants and be placed in interim care centers, that they will remain in cantonment processing centers for only 72 hours and that their separate reintegration activities will include special counseling and education programs.
- Includes a broad section on human rights and protection of civilians, with one paragraph describing the UNICEF “Back to School” campaign.
- Mentions that the majority of injured persons encountered by assessment teams were children.

**Report of the Secretary-General to the Security Council on Liberia (September 2003)**

- Substantive information on child protection.
- Describes the situation in Liberia and appeals for the creation of a UN mission there.
- Highlights child protection concerns in certain key areas such as recognizing the extremely high number of children who have at some time been associated fighting forces (one out of 10), the extraordinary number of civilians who are displaced and the desperate situation in terms of access to food, health care and other humanitarian supplies.
- Calls for particular attention to be paid to the needs of women and children in devising a DDDR program and devotes a paragraph to defining “child soldiers” according to the Cape Town principles.
- Calls for a UN mission in Liberia to give priority attention to improving the human rights situation and protecting civilians, including children.
- Specifically requests that two child protection advisers (CPAs) be included in the mission, that these CPAs be tasked with: assisting the Special Representative in advocacy and activities related to ending the recruitment of child soldiers and supporting their participation in DDDR; monitoring and reporting on child protection issues; and providing training and awareness raising among UN staff as well as national military and police forces.

*UN Special Representatives*

- In July 2003, the UN Secretary-General appointed Mr. Jacques Paul Klein as Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia. In this position, Mr. Klein also serves as the coordinator of UNMIL.
- The UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, Olara Otunnu, visited Liberia in a field mission in March 1998. During the visit, he noted the substantial toll taken on Liberian children throughout the protracted conflict. At the time, Mr. Otunnu noted the importance of placing greater priority on improving public institutions, including education, health care, juvenile justice and other social services.

## *ECOWAS-ECOMIL*

Founded in 1975 by its 15 member countries, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is mandated to promote integration “in all fields of economic activity, particularly industry, transport, telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural resources, commerce, monetary and financial matters, social and cultural issues.”

Recognizing the importance of regional peace and security as essential to the promotion of socioeconomic development, ECOWAS adopted a nonaggression protocol (1978), a defense assistance protocol (1981) and a declaration of political principles (1991). Additionally, ECOWAS created the regional peacekeeping force ECOMOG in 1990.

As part of ECOWAS’ Liberia initiative, the organization facilitated peace talks and deployed its own peacekeeping force in Liberia, ECOMIL, in August 2003. ECOMIL was the primary peacekeeping force in Liberia prior to the entrance of U.S. troops and UNMIL. ECOMIL is credited as having been instrumental in improving the security situation and helping stabilize the areas of its deployment. In October 2003, the approximately 3,500 ECOMIL troops integrated into UNMIL.

In April 2002, ECOWAS established a Child Protection Unit within its Secretariat, based on commitments and recommendations outlined by member states at the 2000 Accra Conference on War-Affected Children. These included member states committing to children’s rights and child protection, and the Unit working toward military training in child protection issues and establishing adequate reporting mechanisms to respond to abuses of children’s rights. However, very little information about the Unit or its initiatives has been available since its creation in 2002.

## **URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **TO ALL PARTIES THAT PARTICIPATED IN ARMED CONFLICT**

- Immediately halt all violations against the security and rights of children. Comply with all signed agreements and uphold international humanitarian laws and international human rights, particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)
- Ensure that all children associated with fighting forces are able and encouraged to participate in the DDDR process

### **TO THE NATIONAL TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT OF LIBERIA (NTGL)**

- Harmonize national legislation with the rights prescribed in the CRC and establish national policies for young people
- Sign and ratify the optional protocols to the CRC—the Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, setting age 18 as the minimum age for recruitment into armed groups, and the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography—and take all appropriate measures to firmly uphold these regulations, including enactment of national legislation making 18 the minimum age for recruitment to the new national army

- Actively engage with UNMIL and the international community to improve the human rights situation for children and adolescents and end impunity for crimes against them
- Include policies to protect the security and rights of Liberian children in all institutions and civilian policies of the NTGL
- Immediately submit Liberia's national transparency report under Article 7 of the Mine Ban Treaty to officially confirm or deny the existence of a stockpile of antipersonnel mines; develop a national plan for mine action, with definable goals for fulfilling Liberia's commitments under the Treaty, and work with partners to develop national mine action capacity
- Strengthen the ECOWAS Moratorium on the Import, Export and Manufacture of Light Weapons by working with ECOWAS members to create a legally binding instrument in the region and harmonize national legislation accordingly

**TO THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL**

**Regarding the Children and Armed Conflict Agenda:**

- Continue to give priority attention to the situation in Liberia, and in West Africa more broadly, and effectively implement resolutions on Liberia, Children and Armed Conflict (UNSC Resolutions 1261, 1314, 1379, 1460 and 1539) and other relevant resolutions (including UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security)
- Follow up on the graduated measures set out in UNSC Resolution 1539, including taking the following actions in relation to the recruitment and use of child soldiers:
  1. Strongly condemn the recruitment and use of child soldiers, killing and maiming of children, rape and other sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement, attacks against schools and hospitals, trafficking, forced labor and all other violations committed against Liberian children and adolescents, (UNSC Res. 1539, para. 1)
  2. Call upon the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), as well as LURD and MODEL (all named in the Secretary-General's 2003 report on Children and Armed Conflict, S/2003/1053) to prepare, within three months, concrete and time-bound action plans to halt recruitment and use of children in violation of the international obligations applicable to them (UNSC Res. 1539, para. 5a)
  3. Call on the Secretary-General to appoint a focal point in Liberia charged with engaging these parties in dialogue leading to time-bound action plans that are regularly reviewed for compliance (UNSC Res. 1539, para. 5b)
  4. Consider imposing targeted and graduated measures if the parties fail to meet the commitments included in their action plan (UNSC Res. 1539, para. 5c)
- Ensure that the Secretary-General includes in all his country-specific reports on Liberia a specific section on the protection of children and gives full attention to the information provided therein, responding in a timely and effective manner to reports

of any continued violations against children's security and rights (UNSC Res. 1539, para. 14)

- Call on UNMIL, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and other relevant actors in the UN system, with support from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to ensure that the child protection advisers (CPAs) in UNMIL's protection and human rights section are sufficiently resourced to adequately address child protection concerns in Liberia
- Mandate UN agencies operating in Liberia to improve coordinated data collection, collation and dissemination on violations of the security and rights of Liberian children, with special attention to incidents of gender-based violence and reintegration of children formerly associated with fighting forces
- Call on the NTGL, UNMIL and implementing agencies to focus special attention on the issue of impunity for abuses against children and adolescents and to promptly establish systems to ensure that such crimes are prosecuted with meaningful penalties
- Reiterate its request to the Secretary-General to propose effective measures to control the illicit trade and trafficking in natural resources, small arms, light weapons and cross-border abduction and recruitment in West Africa, and take appropriate action to ensure that these measures are implemented in the Liberian context (UNSC Res. 1539, para. 3)
- Call on the DPKO, UMMIL and other relevant UN bodies to ensure the rapid and complete deployment of UNMIL's human rights section and encourage a strong role for the section in promoting and protecting the security and rights of children and adolescents

Regarding Displacement:

- Urge the Liberian government, in collaboration with UNMIL and UNHCR, to apply the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and to actively plan and facilitate the safe and voluntary return of IDPs and refugees, accompanied by appropriate social and economic support with special attention to the needs and rights of displaced children and adolescents
- Call on UNMIL and the agencies, funds and programs of the UN to strengthen their cooperation in addressing the IDP crisis in Liberia by designating a lead agency to focus on IDP services and protection
- Call on UNHCR and neighboring host countries to enhance protection for Liberian refugee children as a measure for avoiding forced recruitment into regional conflicts and to ensure that these young refugees have access to basic services such as health care and education

- Encourage UNMIL and other UN agencies and NGOs working with Liberian IDPs in camps and elsewhere in Monrovia to immediately implement greater protections for IDP girls and women to avoid rape and other forms of sexual violence

Priority Areas for Child Protection:

*The UN Security Council should call on the NTGL, UNMIL and implementing agencies to prioritize the following objectives for child protection and urge donor governments and agencies to support these priority areas:*

*Health and HIV/AIDS*

- A comprehensive and accurate assessment of the national health care system, with focused attention to services for children and adolescents and HIV/AIDS prevalence
- The rebuilding of a functioning national health care system for children of all ages, with particular view to reducing infant and maternal mortality and providing:
  - Basic medical care
  - Psychological treatment
  - Immunizations
  - Family and reproductive healthcare, especially relating to STIs, HIV/AIDS and family planning
  - Safe blood supply for transfusions
  - HIV/AIDS testing, treatment and education

*Education*

- The full resumption of the public education system in Liberia as a top priority, aiming toward free and compulsory school for all. This should begin with resumption of regular payment of teachers' salaries, elimination of school fees and support for teacher training and other programs to increase school attendance and reduce high incidence of female dropouts due to teen pregnancy, forced marriage and other gender-specific causes
- Support for accelerated schooling or other appropriate programs for children and young people who have missed educational opportunities due to the armed conflict

*Gender-based Violence*

- Appropriate and accessible health and psychological treatment for girls and women who are survivors of rape and other forms of gender-based violence. This care should be accessible inside communities, as well as IDP and refugee camps, and should include reproductive health care; HIV/AIDS testing, treatment and education; and family planning
- Provision of economic and social resources and opportunities for women and girls to reduce their vulnerability to sexual exploitation
- Transparent, regular and effective communication between agencies providing humanitarian assistance and beneficiaries of that assistance regarding beneficiaries'

entitlements, rights and channels for reporting complaints to prevent scenarios that can lead to sexual exploitation

#### *Landmines and UXO*

- Timely destruction of all stockpile mines and UXO; immediate planning and execution of rapid surveys and assessments to inform for humanitarian mine clearance; improved monitoring and reporting of landmine and UXO casualties and injuries; increased scope and capacity of mine-risk education programs, with emphasis on children and adolescents and adequate and accessible landmine survivor assistance programs; and advocacy for the full implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty

#### *Small Arms*

- Development of a legally binding instrument in West Africa to control the import, export and manufacture of small arms and light weapons

#### *Child Soldiers /DDRR*

- Halt to cash payments to children in the DDRR program to create appropriate reintegration packages for children that provide support to children, their families and communities during a long-term rehabilitation phase. The revision of this program must be carefully devised to deal with issues of equity between those children who have already received cash payments and those who will be beneficiaries of the revised reintegration package. The reintegration package should also recognize the role of formal and nonformal education in the DDRR process
- Encouragement for all children associated with fighting forces to participate in the DDRR process, including specially designed programs to reach girls and ensure that their security and rights are adequately addressed inside the cantonment sites
- Nationwide efforts to clarify the rules and procedures of the DDRR process, with special attention to the parameters of DDRR for children and women
- Fully operational Interim Care Centers, with standardized protocol for all of the necessary elements of child protection, including focused attention on protection for girls
- Long-term and fully funded rehabilitation phase, which includes community assistance and monitoring of children and adolescents who have been through the DDRR process to avoid re-recruitment

#### **TO UNMIL**

- Include advocacy, monitoring and reporting on child protection as core functions. This should include the accurate and proper documentation of the use of children in combat during the 14 years of conflict, so it may be used in future accountability mechanisms and tribunals, as well as monitoring and reporting on rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and children

- Ensure capacity within UNMIL to properly investigate allegations of abuse, sexual exploitation or other forms of misconduct; apply appropriate disciplinary measures for UNMIL personnel; and encourage troop-contributing countries to take similar action, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1460, para. 10
- Train all UNMIL civilian and military personnel in child protection issues, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1379, para. 10b
- Provide all UN peacekeepers with HIV/AIDS education and HIV testing and counseling in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1460, para. 11
- Ensure that all on troop-contributing countries are incorporating the Six Core Principles of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on Emergencies into pertinent codes of conduct for peacekeeping personnel, in accordance with UNSC Resolution 1460, para. 11 and UNSC Resolution 1539, para. 10, making these codes of conduct priority areas and carrying out follow-up activities to ensure that peacekeeping personnel maintain a high level of understanding of the codes of conduct
- Include participation of NGOs and civil society, particularly youth and women's groups, in decision-making related to humanitarian, human rights, peace-building and conflict-resolution activities
- Continue to monitor the landmine and UXO situation in Liberia and assist the development of national and other structures to conduct mine-action activities, with a focus on vulnerable children

### **TO DONOR GOVERNMENTS AND AGENCIES**

- Provide UNMIL, UNICEF and implementing partners with sufficient human and financial resources to adequately protect Liberian children. This should include fully funding the UN Consolidated Appeals Process, with special attention to programs supporting children's security and rights and including support for civil society's role in monitoring and reporting on violations against children (UNSC Res. 1379, para. 12)

Funds should be provided for a range of activities, including but not limited to the following:

- Basic medical care and immunization for Liberian children as well as strengthening existing disease surveillance mechanisms
- Emergency care targeted at reduction of infant and maternal mortality
- Educational programs, beginning with payment of teachers, subsidies for private schools and reduction of tuition fees
- Prevention and response programs for gender based violence survivors
- HIV/AIDS education, prevention and treatment, with attention to vulnerabilities of girls, adolescents and child ex-combatants

- Implementation of the Mine Ban Treaty and mine-risk education, with a focus on displaced children and returning refugee children, and quality support and services for mine and UXO survivors
  - Family reunification programs, protection programs for separated children, orphaned children, street children and other unaccompanied minors
  - Alternative income-generation opportunities to avoid unsafe and illegal child labor, cross-border trafficking and recruitment and sexual exploitation
  - Civil society activities to monitor and report on violations of children's security and rights, particularly in the context of Liberia's armed conflict
  - Long-term rehabilitation programs for former child soldiers, including special provisions for girl soldiers
- Support field offices of child protection agencies that can maintain contact with young ex-combatants leaving cantonment sites and resettling in communities, and ensure effective rehabilitation programs and monitoring
- Support long-term economic empowerment programs that prioritize and increase employment opportunities for young ex-combatants to utilize skills learned in vocational training programs. For example, support could be provided for a countrywide survey of critical skills needed for development and reconstruction, which would be followed by skills and on-the-job training for young people in the priority areas identified. These activities would also help prevent re-recruitment

### **TO ECOWAS**

- Enhance the overall capacity of the ECOWAS child protection unit, particularly relating to monitoring, reporting and follow-up on violations against Liberian children and adolescents

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<sup>1</sup> Gender-based violence (GBV) is an umbrella term used for any harm that is perpetrated on a person against her/his will that has a negative impact on the physical and/or psychological health, development

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and identity of the person and is the result of gendered power relationships determined by social roles ascribed to by males and females. Violence may be physical, sexual, psychological, economic or sociocultural, and is almost always and across all cultures disparately impacting women and children.

<sup>2</sup> The previous Liberian legislature, which subsequently ceded authority to the National Transitional Legislative Assembly, reportedly ratified the Rome Statute on October 8, 2003, just before the transitional legislature came to power. However, the instruments of ratification have not yet been deposited with the UN. For more information, see Amnesty International, *Liberia: The Promises of Peace for 21,000 Child Soldiers*, 2004

<sup>3</sup> More information about the change of war tactics in Liberia is available in Human Rights Watch's *How to Fight, How to Kill: Child Soldiers in Liberia*, February 2004

<sup>4</sup> More information about UNMIL is available at <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmil/>

<sup>5</sup> For more information on ethnicity and armed conflict in West Africa, see: *Tackling Liberia: The Eye of the Regional Storm*, International Crisis Group, April, 2003

<sup>6</sup> For more information on issues related to juvenile justice in Liberia, see: *Liberia: The Promises of Peace for 21,000 Child Soldiers*, Amnesty International May 17, 2004

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The Watchlist works within the framework of the provisions adopted in Security Council Resolutions 1261, 1314 and 1379, the principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its protocols, and other internationally adopted human rights and humanitarian standards.

Information is collected through an extensive network of organizations that work with children around the world. Analysis is provided by a multidisciplinary team of people with expertise and/or experience in the particular situation. Information in the public domain may be directly cited in the report. All sources are listed in alphabetical order at the end of report to protect the security of sources.

General supervision of the project is provided by a Steering Committee of international nongovernmental organizations known for their work with children and human rights. The views presented in any report do not represent the views of any one organization in the network or on the Steering Committee.

For further information about the Watchlist Project or specific reports, or to share information about children in a particular conflict situation, please contact: [watchlist@womenscommission.org](mailto:watchlist@womenscommission.org)  
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