

CONCLUSION

Sarah Meek

One year after the publication of 'Peacekeeping in Sierra Leone' we have witnessed a new phase in that country, and the peacekeeping function performed by UNAMSIL. Sierra Leone is moving down a remarkable path of peace-building. A feat that seemed distant eighteen months ago has now become reality. Few observers in 2000 would have predicated the Sierra Leone of today. Although the challenges remain many and complex, the government of Sierra Leone, its people, the United Nations, its agencies, UNAMSIL and the donor community seem to be sustaining the will to meet the battles ahead.

This monograph has attempted to illustrate the multiple efforts currently underway to bring that elusive situation, a 'sustainable peace' to Sierra Leone. A few critical milestones have been achieved already – the largely straightforward and on-time disarmament and demobilisation of RUF and CDF combatants, for example, which led to the symbolic 'war is over' declaration of January 2002.

The elections in May 2002 were anticipated by many observers of Sierra Leone as being critical to the country's future. Would Sierra Leone turn the corner towards a more peaceful future, where political differences could be resolved without violent conflict – or would the RUF decide that their strength lay in a military, as opposed to political, future? At the end of the day, elections won out and were conducted in a situation of remarkable calm. The elections became the benchmark against which the future direction of the UN mission in Sierra Leone was judged. When the elections went off without serious disturbances or fraud, UNAMSIL was able to focus its attention to drawing down its presence in a coordinated, rational manner. This allowed the mission to maintain its presence, but shift its focus from a military operation to supporting the government of Sierra Leone in its efforts at building peace.

It would be wrong to downplay the challenges facing Sierra Leone, but it would also be wrong to view the developments in the country in an entirely negative light. The chapters in this monograph have tried to illustrate in a bal-

anced way what has been achieved to date and what still remains to be done. With the presence of the UN in the country changing, a new model for UN operations in Sierra Leone is being developed. It will include a strong UN civilian police (CivPol) presence, working closely with the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project (CCSSP) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) to try to rectify years of neglect and abuse of the SLP.

UNAMSIL will still need to play an important confidence-building role in the country, including monitoring the public reaction to changes in its structure, composition, mandate and size. It needs to make sure that these are not viewed as the UN 'pulling out' of the country and leaving Sierra Leone to fend for itself. However, at the same time, the UN mission is shifting its focus away from short-term humanitarian assistance to longer-term development support that will need to continue for many years.

Increasingly, however, the burden of effort to rebuild Sierra Leone is moving on to the shoulders of the government, working in partnership with UN agencies, bilateral donors and non-governmental organisations. As the chapters in the monograph have illustrated, the government is facing the challenge of reforming the Sierra Leone Armed Forces and the SLP so that they can take over the protection of the country, along its borders by the SLAF, and internally by the SLP. A new model army or police force cannot be crafted in a few months, or even a few years. It will take time for the training and practice to develop into professional security forces that have the trust and support of the population.

The government is also having to address the need to move beyond the war, most directly through completing the reintegration of remaining ex-combatants and initiating the Special Court and Truth and Reconciliation Commission processes. These each pose significant challenges. Although the mechanics of the reintegration process seem well entrenched, it must be ensured that ex-combatants can become constructive members of Sierra Leonean society who can find non-violent ways to voice frustration and dissatisfaction. In the case of the Special Court and the TRC, these institutions may well test the commitment of the government of Sierra Leone, ex-combatants and citizens to engage in what has been a deeply painful process for some in other countries, such as South Africa.

And, stretching into the future, is the ongoing need for the country to re-engage across its length and breadth – to become a country again. This requires the extension of governmental authority to all the provinces, the

building of infrastructure and systems to govern equitably, and the involvement of Sierra Leone's vibrant civil society to find a voice for itself in the politics and governing of the country.

During the field research in Sierra Leone, many of the people interviewed emphasised the need for a longer-term commitment by the international community to Sierra Leone, primarily through a 'pledging conference' where funds to sustain the progress made to date would be announced. Happily, this took place. In November 2002 the Sierra Leone Consultative Group meeting took place in Paris and resulted in donor countries and organisations committing themselves to assisting the country in its rebuilding efforts. Already Sierra Leone has been granted relief amounting to \$950m on its debt, and has qualified for Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) status. In addition, the United States of America announced that Sierra Leone will benefit from the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which will provide duty-free access to US markets for Sierra Leone.¹

The Sierra Leone government in turn committed itself to working towards greater inclusion, good governance, decentralisation, equity, and sustainable growth. In addition, it expressed its intention to focus on basic education and primary health care. To spur economic growth, the Sierra Leone government said it would focus on five key areas: private sector development, agriculture, reviving the mining industry, improving the country's infrastructure, and building human capital with community-driven programmes in education, health, and HIV/AIDS prevention and awareness.²

Of course there are conditions attached. Sierra Leone must meet certain benchmarks, especially on anti-corruption measures, privatisation and public administration. Some of these may be difficult to achieve in a country that has had so much of its infrastructure, livelihoods and way of life decimated by war.

The United Kingdom, the most visible of Sierra Leone's external supporters, has committed to a ten year programme of support for the social and economic development in Sierra Leone – to the tune of £120m over the next three years.³ Again, the agreement – a Poverty Reduction Framework Arrangement – includes benchmarks for both Sierra Leone and Britain that are to be achieved during 2003. In addition, the funding provided directly to the budget of the government of Sierra Leone is linked to progress in specific reform issues, for example, public administration, security and financial management.

For its part, the United Nations and the United Nations Security Council have recognised that they cannot walk away from Sierra Leone at this precarious stage in its transition from war to peace. The United Nations Security Council resolution in September emphasised “the importance of the continuing support of UNAMSIL to the Government of Sierra Leone in the consolidation of peace and stability”.⁴ Concretely, this resulted in the Council approving plans for a phased drawdown of UNAMSIL’s 17,500 force, and recognition of the need to sustain capacity of the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) during this transition. The latter has resulted in an increase in the mandated number of civilian police, who will work with the Commonwealth Community Safety and Security Project team members to bolster the SLP as it regains its footing in Sierra Leone’s hinterlands.

The United Nations has set conditions for itself in Sierra Leone. Again, benchmarks – the new targets – have been identified. These must be met before each subsequent phase of the draw-down can occur. The prime benchmark is security, both internally, and along Sierra Leone’s border with its most fractious of neighbours – Liberia.

Any discussion of peace in Sierra Leone must always be qualified with a question regarding the situation of Liberia. The international community – in the form of the UN Security Council – is taking an increasingly hard line against Liberia and the regime of Charles Taylor. Most recently, the UN Security Council announced new sanctions in the form of arms embargoes, against both the government (which has been under embargo since 1996) and the rebel-led opposition group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD). The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, has committed himself to finding a solution to the conflict in Liberia in the hopes of building peace in the Mano River Union region of West Africa.

The World Bank statement issued at the Consultative Group meeting in Paris sums up the enormous strides Sierra Leone has made. The country has established ‘a unique track record for a post-conflict country’. Less than a year after the war officially ended, the country has achieved a six percent growth rate while inflation has fallen to zero percent. This has been achieved, the Bank said, despite ten years of war, the resettlement of 300,000 displaced persons, and the demobilisation of more than 70,000 combatants.⁵

It is clear that Sierra Leone is firmly on the path to building peace. It will happen in spurts, and it may sometimes appear as if little progress is being made. However, with the continued support of the international community and the

commitment of the government of Sierra Leone and its citizens, it may be possible – cautiously – to say that that peace can indeed be built after so many years of war.

Notes

- 1 Statement by US delegation to Sierra Leone Consultative Group, Paris, France, 13–14 November 2002, Press release, <<http://www.sierra-leone.org/usgovernment112002.html>>, accessed 2 December 2002.
- 2 Sierra Leone news <<http://www.sierra-leone.org/slnews1102.html>>, accessed 2 December 2002.
- 3 Department for International Development, *Britain Commits to Partnership for Reconstruction with Sierra Leone*, Press release, 13 November 2002.
- 4 United Nations Security Council Resolution 1436, 24 September 2002 (S/RES/1436 (2002)), New York.
- 5 World Bank, *Sierra Leone: Partners support the country's plans for peace, recovery and development*, Press release, 14 November 2002, <www.worldbank.org>, accessed 3 December 2002.