

# FOREWORD I

I wish to express sincere thanks and appreciation to the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) for honouring me with the invitation to write a foreword to this detailed and informative analysis of the roles of the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in the protection of civilians.

This volume is a significant part of the continued contribution by the ISS to our understanding of the complex dynamics of the conflicts that erupted in Africa at the end of the Cold War. The vital importance of research on the role of regional and international interventions in the restoration of stability in conflict zones, particularly the protection of vulnerable civilian populations cannot be overemphasised.

I accepted the invitation to author this foreword not merely because of my position as ECOWAS Executive Secretary, but because of the vital importance of the research on the role of regional and UN peace support interventions in the restoration of societies in conflict, particularly the protection of vulnerable civilian populations. I am keenly interested in collaborations among regional organisations, such as ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), the UN and the wider international community in the search for peace in troubled regions of the world.

The massive suffering of civilian populations – often at the hands of state and non-state armed belligerent groups – has reinforced the vital importance of such collaboration. But, though they are considered noble in intent and focus, humanitarian interventions present these organisations with formidable political, legal and other challenges. Despite the challenges, such interventions present significant opportunities for collaboration. There is growing intolerance of the suffering of civilians, especially when it results from the deliberate actions of armed groups. On the other hand, there is interest in the collaborative efforts to save conflict countries and societies from the humanitarian catastrophe that follows in the wake of conflicts, such as the devastating war in Liberia.

The analogy of firstborn children will be relevant in the context of the 14-year Liberian conflict. It is traditional in many societies to expect firstborn children to be examples and set the pattern for younger siblings. Consequently, a lot of resources are invested to facilitate their position as role models. Thus, when such children squander the capital investment by their parents and compromise the quality of the example that they

should set for their younger siblings, they cause considerable grief and pain to their parents and become a bad influence on those siblings they were expected to encourage and influence.

The same can be said of state formation, particularly in post-independent Africa where those states that were 'never' colonised were expected to set the stage for the liberation and subsequent socio-economic development of Africa. The weight of this expectation of Liberia – the oldest African republic south of the Sahara – was greater than that of other neighbouring states in West Africa and elsewhere on the continent. When the American government, through a congressional grant of US\$100,000, supported the American Colonisation Society (ACS) to 'found' the Liberian colony of 'free men of colour' in 1822, the government and the ACS expected that the 'free men of colour' would exercise a modernising influence.

After nearly 158 years of independence, the 14-year Liberian conflict is testimony to how the capital that should have endowed its leaders to make Liberia the 'Promised Land' that its founders aspired it to be had been squandered. The conflict has not only been a setback to Liberia itself, but has posed a considerable challenge to regional peace, stability and socio-economic development in West Africa. The brunt of the suffering that resulted from such a failure has been borne by the civilian population, who have endured killings, rape, displacement and other degrading forms of treatment.

For these reasons, among others, I consider it extremely important to understand the Liberian conflict from multiple perspectives, in order to provide appropriate lessons that can constructively inform policies and actions to forestall similar conflicts. While such perspectives should include the process of state formation in Liberia and the structure of the state in terms of political and socio-economic governance, they should also include the regional dimensions of the causes and consequences of the conflict. Equally important, they should include perspectives on regional and international interventions that are aimed at a timely and durable resolution of the conflict.

In West Africa since the beginning of the 1990s we have learned the hard lesson from the conflicts in the Mano River countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as Guinea-Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire, that conflicts cannot be contained within national borders. Consequently, unless such conflicts are contained, they have the potential to undermine regional peace, security and stability. Armed with this experience and with the resurgence of violence in 2003, ECOWAS attempted to gain an early

political entry into the Liberian conflict, leading to the signing of the Agreement on Ceasefire Cessation of Hostilities (ACCH) of 17 June 2003, which was followed by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 18 August 2003. Thanks to the lessons learned from our previous intervention in Liberia in the 1990s, the Community and its leaders quickly determined to deploy ECOMIL to facilitate the implementation of the instruments of peace.

This rapid and timely deployment of ECOMIL should be acknowledged and commended. The timely arrival of ECOMIL troops contributed to containing and preventing further humanitarian catastrophe, and helped, in the short space of time from August to the end of September 2003 to create the requisite conditions for the subsequent deployment of UNMIL. It is also necessary to acknowledge the deployment of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group, ECOMOG, for the greater part of the 1990s, when its member states invested enormous human, material and financial resources that they could hardly afford in those efforts.

While drawing attention to the regional efforts, I feel obliged to thank the UN Secretary General, the Chairman of the African Union and the Chairperson of the AU Commission, as well as our partners in the international community, for their close collaboration during the deployment of ECOMIL, and for the logistical and other support that they provided to facilitate the success of ECOMIL's peace-support operations. It is encouraging that the UN System, similarly informed by the lessons of its collaboration with the Community during the same period, was able to rapidly establish and deploy UNMIL on 1 October 2003, less than 60 days after the deployment of ECOMIL.

Consequently I need not emphasise the need for continued collaboration between ECOWAS, the UN and the international community to ensure that the peace process succeeds in bringing lasting peace and stability to Liberia and the region. Failure after two costly efforts will not only entail ill-affordable costs, but could also complicate the peace process and move peace and stability far beyond the horizon.

I would therefore like to commend all parties to the conflict for the commitment they have shown so far to peace implementation in Liberia. At the same time, however, I would like to call on them to show even greater commitment to the peace process and more substantive cooperation with ECOWAS, the UN and international community actors towards peace in Liberia and the region. Similarly, I wish to call on the international community to rally in support of peace efforts, and provide the material and financial resources so urgently needed to support post-

conflict peace-building and reconstruction in Liberia, including the reform of the security and other sectors.

Which way forward then for ECOWAS and the region? I dare say that the post-Cold War conflicts have underscored the need for the development of viable African security architectures with substantive peace-support capacities. Thus, the Community is working hard to establish the ECOWAS Standby Brigade (ECOBRIg) within the policy framework of the African Standby Force (ASF). The existence of well-equipped ready forces in their countries of origin will undoubtedly provide the region and Africa with the capacity for rapid deployment in regional and other conflicts in the continent, as well as under the auspices of the UN.

ECOWAS will continue to count on support from its external partners in the task of operationalising ECOBRIg as a pillar of the ASF. While expressing the Community's sincere thanks and appreciation for support towards this end, I appeal to member states to be forthcoming with more resources to build ECOBRIg in order to endow the region and the continent with the capacity for the prevention, management and resolution of existing and emerging conflicts.

I am hopeful that the contrasting features of the peace efforts in the 1990s and from 2003 to date have reinforced the useful lessons and synergy of regional peace efforts with close coordination and support from the UN and the international community. More than that, I hope that they have taught us that such UN and international support needs to be timely in order to contain conflicts and prevent their escalation. Obviously this synergy helps to safeguard civilian lives, property and livelihoods, as well as the eventual resolution of the conflict and the settlement of the underlying disputes.

I wish to reiterate that the UN and the international community should endeavour to provide timely support to African-led efforts at resolving conflicts in their backyards. At the same time, Africa and Africans need to provide more concrete resources, beyond a demonstration of political will, to lend credence to the quest for 'African solutions to African problems'.

In conclusion, I wish to commend the editors of the volume, Festus B Aboagye, head of the Peace Missions Programme (PMP) at the ISS, and Dr Alhaji M S Bah, senior researcher in the same programme, for bringing together such a diverse group of academic scholars, researchers and practitioners, whose invaluable contributions have made this volume a reality. The divergent experiences of the contributors, coupled with

those of the editors, are testimony to Africa's rich human resource capital, which, if properly applied, would steer the continent in the right direction.

Finally, I wish to thank and commend the government of Finland for providing the financial resources to support the research and production of this volume. I trust that it will help a better understanding of how to protect civilians in armed conflicts.

I sincerely hope that the recommendations and doctrinal statements put forward in this study will contribute immensely to the general discourse and improvements in future peace-support operations in Africa and elsewhere.

**Dr Mohamed Ibn Chambas**

Executive Secretary

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

25 May 2005