

FOREWORD II

I wish to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Peace Missions Programme (PMP) at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) for inviting me to write one of the forewords to this important study on the protection of civilians in Liberia. I do not need to overemphasise how research of this nature contributes to our understanding of the complex dynamics of the conflict that has gripped Liberia in the past decade and a half. As Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN, I see the invitation as part of my responsibilities to the people of Liberia and the UN family.

I should hasten to point out that the Liberian conflict brought untold suffering to the civilian population, who had to endure rape, mass murder, expulsion from their homes, and other forms of intolerable human degradations. This suffering was meted out by all sides in Liberia's senseless road to self-destruction.

The outbreak of conflict in Liberia coincided with significant changes in the international political landscape that were precipitated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. While some regions of the world basked in the much-anticipated post-Cold War peace dividend, the people of Liberia were trapped in a vicious cycle of violence which claimed over 250,000 lives and displaced nearly a million others. Thus, while the war raged on, the international community were preoccupied with the changes to the international political order characterised by a century of standoff between the superpowers. Yet the Cold War contributed to the creation of conditions for the kind of political rupture that engulfed Liberia and its neighbours in the 1990s. In the contest for allies, both Cold War power blocs propped up one-party and military dictatorships in Africa and elsewhere for as long as these dictators remained loyal to the objectives and interests of their overlords.

The indifference of the international community to the plight of the civilian population prompted the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to send its Ceasefire Monitoring and Observer Group, ECOMOG into Liberia in August 1990. This move saved tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of innocent civilians trapped by the conflict and marked the beginning of an unprecedented relationship between the UN and regional economic communities such as ECOWAS in the area of regional peace and security.

Some observers of the unfolding humanitarian tragedy blamed the international community, including the UN, for failing to take timely concrete steps to stop the carnage in Liberia. However late or little the UN action was, the relationship between the UN and ECOWAS in peacekeeping was consummated in the establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) in 1993.

Although UNOMIL's mandate was restricted to observation, it marked a turning point in UN peacekeeping as to some observers it signified tacit acceptance of the pivotal role of regional organisations in leading efforts to keep the peace in their backyards, something that would have been unthinkable during the Cold War. As a sign of the paradigm shift in international peace-support operations, the relationship between the UN and regional organisations was replicated in Sierra Leone, the Balkans, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia, again following that country's relapse into violence in 2003.

Meanwhile, the Liberian conflict, which had subsided after the election of the former warlord Charles Taylor as president in 1997, was re-ignited in late 2002 by disgruntled Liberians sheltering in neighbouring Guinea and Sierra Leone. As in the 1990s, the conflict in 2003 created a serious humanitarian crisis, but this failed to register on the radar screens of the international community. Consequently ECOWAS, which had been involved in finding solutions to Liberia's conflict since its intervention in 1990, deployed troops to help stem the tide of violence and ameliorate the suffering of hundreds of thousands of civilians, including returned refugees, who were trapped by the new fighting.

But unlike the earlier deployment of ECOMOG in the 1990s, the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) was deployed with the endorsement of the UN Security Council, which adopted Resolution 1497 (2003), which authorised the deployment of a multinational force to Liberia. The swift deployment of ECOMIL troops and the absence of the legal, political and diplomatic acrimony that had attended the deployment of ECOMOG is clear testimony that ECOWAS, the UN and the international community had all learned some invaluable lessons from the previous intervention. On this note, I wish to commend ECOWAS for its timely deployment of ECOMIL, which not only saved the lives of thousands of innocent civilians, but also laid the foundation for the eventual deployment of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Further to this, the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1509 (2003) marked the establishment of the United Nations Mission

in Liberia (UNMIL). On 1 October 2003 ECOMIL formally handed over its peacekeeping duties to UNMIL in a ceremony that witnessed the re-hatting of its troops to the UN blue berets. This was significant as it underscored the synergy between regional and international peacekeeping efforts, a development that was made possible with the end of the Cold War.

UNMIL is part of the new generation of peacekeeping missions with a mandate to protect the civilian population in the mission area. Thus, since its deployment to Liberia in October 2003, UNMIL has attempted to put in place mechanisms that would not only guarantee the physical safety of civilians, but would ensure that their socio-economic and political aspirations are realised in the long term. It is in this vein that I share the objective and focus of this volume in exploring UNMIL's support and protection mandate. Focusing on various aspects of the peace-building process, the contributors have addressed a wide range of issues, such as disarmament and demobilisation, transitional justice, restoration of civil authority, restructuring and retraining of Liberia's security agencies. These are deemed to have long-term impact on the welfare, safety and security of the civilian population. The formal ending of the country's voluntary disarmament and demobilisation process, the retraining of the discredited Liberia National Police (LNP), the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), plans for restructuring the armed forces and for elections later in 2005 are some of the tangible results from UNMIL's deployment, in consolidation of the foundation established by ECOMIL.

But although the UN System was 'up to speed' in assuming the mandate for the peace operation, it has not attained commensurate speed in supporting other peace-building efforts, particularly those relating to the rehabilitation and reintegration of disarmed combatants, as well as the capacity-building of national institutions for governance and security. Among other things, these are a result of the funding gap between emergency and development aid from the international community and the somewhat limited scope of the mandate of UNMIL. However, this weakness should not detract in any way from the significant achievements of UNMIL in the peace-building programmes mentioned above.

I wish to extend my gratitude and appreciation to the editors of the volume, Festus Aboagye and Dr Alhaji M S Bah, for bringing together such an erudite group of scholars, practitioners and researchers, who, through their incisive analysis, have not only helped to broaden our understanding of the conflict dynamics in Liberia and the Mano River

basin, but have deepened our appreciation of the inherent challenges in protecting civilians in conflict and post-conflict zones. Their individual and collective contributions constitute a significant step in the search for sustainable peace and security in Liberia and the region as a whole.

I am aware that this project would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the government of Finland. I would therefore like to extend my sincere gratitude to the government and people of Finland and their embassy in South Africa, for their continued commitment to and support for the promotion of regional and international rule of law, peace and security around the world.

Once again, I thank the ISS for giving me the opportunity to make my humble contribution to this worthwhile venture. Research of this nature places the ISS at the centre of the drive to promote human security and democracy in Africa and beyond.

I sincerely hope that the research results will inform a deeper understanding of the policy and practical issues involved in humanity's collective effort to protect vulnerable civilian populations, both during and after conflict.

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