

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Mano River Basin is perhaps best known for the Revolutionary United Front's campaign of amputation during Sierra Leone's civil war from 1991 to 2002. The area encompassed by Sierra Leone, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea is rich in diamonds, timber, and cocoa, but incredibly poor in governance, stability, and literacy. There are a number of complexly interwoven threats to the fragile peace in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea, and to the difficult stalemate in Côte d'Ivoire. Broadly, these threats are driven by three overarching and interlinked themes: the movement of displaced people; the failure to reintegrate and return them to their homes in the post-conflict context; and the influence of illicit trade.

The UN Missions in Sierra Leone and Liberia have successfully debunked the myth that the "barbaric" conflicts in the two countries were "beyond peacekeeping" as some commentators had claimed. Both DDR processes have concluded, with mostly successful outcomes. UNAMSIL is scheduled to draw down and pull out by 31 December, 2005 (one year later than originally planned), while UNMIL still has a lot of work to do in the lead-up to elections in Liberia scheduled for 11 October, 2005. UNOCI's disarmament programme in Côte d'Ivoire is scheduled to begin on 27 June 2005, with elections to follow on 30 October 2005, and the UN has committed to monitoring the regional situation carefully before removing the 3,400 troops remaining in Sierra Leone. At its peak, UNAMSIL had 17,000 troops in the country.

One of the West's biggest concerns about the cycles of violence in this sub-region is its connection to terrorism. Al Qaeda is known to have traded in diamonds with the RUF, particularly in the months leading up to the World Trade Centre attack of 11 September 2001. The United States has already begun anti-terrorist training in other West African nations where it fears that extremists are "sprouting like anthills on the savanna." People living on less than one dollar a day should not have to build terrorist training camps before getting the attention of donor countries. However, the global nature of the trade in valuable resources and small arms does put a spotlight on conflict in the Mano River Basin. A focus on the next generation of warfare (where there

are few big, visible adversaries and a lot of small, independent ones) requires a thorough understanding of what defines and threatens peace. Previously the domain of humanitarian work, policy and conflict analysts as well as donors now need to give close attention to the movement of displaced people, the requirements of post-conflict reintegration, and the effects of international trade to build sustainable peace.