

# Lessons from Liberia

BY

- GEORGE KLAY KIEH JR.

19 AUG 2011

From 27 August to 30 September 1990, an ECOWAS-sponsored All-Liberia Conference was convened in Banjul, the Gambia. The meeting brought together the leaders of Liberia's various political parties, interest groups and warring factions, with the exception of the NPFL, which refused to participate. The NPFL's refusal was based on the fact that it made the determination that the conference would not have met its ultimate desire of making Charles Taylor, its leader, the head of the interim government. At the close of the conference, the following measures were taken:

1. The President and the Vice-President of the Interim Government of the National Unity were elected. Correspondingly, the structure of the Interim Legislative Assembly was devised. The law-making body consisted of thirty-five members – two from each political party, one from each of the thirteen regions of the country, four from the Prince Johnson-led Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), and six from the Charles Taylor-led National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Additionally, the speakership of the interim legislative body was reserved for Taylor's NPFL, and the deputy speakership was allotted to Prince Johnson's INPFL.
2. The 1984 constitution remained in force; but the appropriate modifications were made that were apropos to the prevailing circumstances.
3. The President and the Vice-President of the Interim Government were not eligible to run for public office in the ensuing elections. However, the Speaker of the Interim Legislative Assembly and other government officials were allowed to become candidates in the elections.

Despite the attempts to accommodate Taylor, his warring faction denounced the conference. As the NPFL's Justice Minister J. Laveli Supuwood asserted, 'The interim government led by Dr. Amos Sawyer is a group without legitimacy ...' (West Africa 1990:2714).

Barely a week after the conference, an important development occurred: Head of State Doe was captured and killed by the Johnson-led INPFL. The emergent perception was that with the death of Doe, and the formal collapse of his regime, Taylor's NPFL would be willing to accept the ECOWAS Peace Plan, and participate in the interim government. However, the accord failed to end the war for several

specific reasons. The central element of the contents of the peace agreement dealing with the interim government did not satisfy Taylor, the principal warlord. This was evidenced by Taylor's reaffirmation of his demand that he be given the presidency as the *quid pro quo* for ending the war (Kieh 2009). Another factor was the character of the NPFL: The militia consistently played the role of the 'spoiler'. That is, it made the decision to undermine the peace process, as long as Taylor was not handed the leadership of Liberia. Also, no actor in the international community was willing to enforce the peace accord.

## Lessons from Liberia

BY

- GEORGE KLAY KIEH JR.

19 AUG 2011

### The Banjul II Peace Accord

On 24 October 1990, a meeting was held in Banjul, Gambia, under the auspices of ECOWAS. The meeting was attended by representatives of the interim government of Liberia, and the INPFL. The Taylor-headed NPFL refused to attend. The major outcome of the meeting was the establishment of a ceasefire agreement. However, in the absence of the NPFL, the other warring faction, it was difficult to achieve this goal.

This agreement failed for two major reasons. The contents of the agreement still did not meet the NPFL's central demand that Taylor be made the head of the transitional government. Like the previous failed agreements, neither ECOWAS nor any other external actor was willing to serve as the enforcer of the agreement. Hence, the trend of appeasing the NPFL continued with the mediation of another agreement.

### The Bamako Accord

After intensive diplomatic efforts, particularly with the support of Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, ECOWAS persuaded Taylor to sign a formal ceasefire agreement with Johnson's INPFL and the remnants of Doe's army on 30 November 1990. However, after signing the accord, Taylor claimed that although he accepted the cessation of hostilities, he did not accept the other provisions that buttressed the ECOWAS Peace Plan. This emerging trend of vacillation on the part of Taylor's NPFL continued the prolongation of the impasse and the war.

Again, the failure of the peace agreement was due to the fact that the key elements of the substantive contents did not meet the NPFL's central demand that Taylor be

made the head of the transitional government. The related problem was that the NPFL was determined to continue performing its negative role as a 'spoiler' as long as its key demand was not met. In addition, the agreement lacked enforcement, which is the bedrock for the successful implementation of any peace agreement.

### **The Banjul III Peace Accord**

On 21 December 1990, the leaders of the three warring factions – Taylor (NPFL), Johnson (INPFL), and Bowen (remnants of Doe's Army) – met in Banjul. In a clear concession to Taylor, the group agreed to convene a second All-Liberian Conference that would hold a new election for an interim administration. However, Taylor's NPFL made a concerted effort to stymie the development of the modalities for the proposed conference by refusing to cooperate.

Although this agreement subsequently led to the holding of the Second All-Liberian Conference, the difficulties in formulating agreed upon modalities for the conference made its failure imminent. The key reason was that the NPFL knew that the conference would not have led to Taylor becoming the leader of the interim government. Thus, the NPFL chose to continue playing its 'spoiler' role. Significantly, in the absence of an enforcer, the implementation of the agreement was doomed to fail, against the backdrop of the emergent trend of the NPFL not abiding by the terms of even the peace agreements that it signed.