

The Role of the International Community (Human Rights Watch) 1997-1999

New international aid to Liberia remained suspended due to Liberia's unpaid international debt of U.S. \$3 million. A donor's conference in April pledged U.S.\$230 million to Liberia pending a debt repayment plan to stabilize Liberia's debts. In August, a team of representatives from the donor community and the World Bank and International Monetary Fund visited Liberia to assess a framework for aid. The donors insisted that aid to Liberia would be dependent on improvements in microeconomic reporting, fiscal discipline, and respect for human rights. President Taylor in turn blamed the international community for Liberia's lack of progress during his first year in office.

United Nations

The United Nations (U.N.) Department of Political Affairs retained a small U.N. political office following the withdrawal of the U.N. Observer Mission in July 1997, to serve as a focal point for post-conflict U.N. peace-building activities in Liberia and to coordinate U.N. activities in the country. This unit was also to provide advisory services to the government in defining post-conflict priorities, to raise international funds for Liberia, and to coordinate and liaise between the government and the international community. This unit remained in Monrovia during 1998 under special representative Felix Downs-Thomas, but maintained a very low profile and was not a prominent player in raising human rights issues.

The Economic Community of West African States Cease-fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG)

The relationship between President Taylor and ECOMOG remained tense, aggravated by the president's refusal to allow ECOMOG to train and restructure the Liberia armed forces in accordance with the peace accord. The Liberian Senate refused to ratify a status of forces agreement between ECOMOG and the Liberian government. Additionally, ECOMOG alleged that Taylor was undermining their peacekeeping efforts in Sierra Leone by supporting the Sierra Leonean rebel alliance that ECOMOG was seeking to defeat.

ECOMOG retained a markedly scaled down presence in Liberia due both to the end of the war in Liberia as well as to its increased mobilization in Sierra Leone. However, it continued to man checkpoints in Liberia and to undertake search and cordon operations for arms. In a number of cases, arms and ammunition were discovered and confiscated. ECOMOG also played an indispensable role in defusing tension and stepping in on several occasions to prevent altercations between Taylor and Johnson supporters.

In April, the ECOMOG commander, Brig. Gen. Timothy Shelpidi, accused the government of violating the U.N. arms embargo by rearming Liberian soldiers, special security service agents, and police units. Brig. Shelpidi publicly questioned where the origins of the arms, which included AK-47 rifles and rocket propelled grenades.

European Union

The European Union (E.U.) was the principal donor to Liberia, with \$105 million in existing commitments for 1997-99. This assistance was managed directly by the European Commission and did not go through the Liberian government. According to the E.U., a normalization of this

aid relationship depended on Liberia's progress on good governance, including macroeconomic management, democratization, and respect for human rights. Most of the assistance focused on health, water, education, food security, infrastructure, capacity building (which included funding to some civil society organizations and women's groups), and refugee resettlement. A new program was expected in 1999 to support the judiciary and strengthen the rule of law, and an independent media support program was under discussion. In addition, some member states had bilateral programs, including the Dutch, the British, and the Danish.

E.U. officials claimed that they used quiet diplomacy, rather than public statements, to pressure the Liberian government on human rights, and that they remained very active and concerned behind the scenes. As a result, many ordinary Liberians and international observers outside the country were unaware of the E.U.'s actions on human rights matters or the scale of its programs.

United States

After Liberian forces fired into the U.S. Embassy, while in pursuit of Roosevelt Johnson on September 18, relations between the two countries became decidedly frosty. The U.S. Embassy remained closed as of October 3 pending an apology from the Taylor government. In October, embassy officials said that the U.S. government was reassessing its long-standing relation with Liberia and a decision would be made whether to continue, scale down, or close the embassy operations.

The U.S. committed about U.S.\$50 million in aid for Liberia in 1998, including funding to strengthen democratic institutions, human rights activities, the newly renovated law school, and the health care delivery system. However, the delivery of aid, apart from humanitarian assistance, was suspended in October. In July, a national conference on rebuilding Liberia prominently featured the U.S. special envoy for democracy and human rights in Africa, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and U.S. Special Envoy to Liberia Howard Jeter as guests in Monrovia. Kofi Woods of the Liberian Catholic Justice and Peace Commission participated in a face-to-face session held by President Bill Clinton during his visit to Senegal with a number of African human rights and civil society activists.

In September, the U.S. attorney general extended temporary "protected status" to Liberians for one year from September 29, 1998, allowing an estimated 20 thousand Liberians who were in the U.S. at the time of the announcement to remain regardless of their visa status.