

Diaspora Liberians Seek International Intervention

by Uwe Friesecke

A conference of Liberians living in Europe called on the international community to intervene with a military stabilization force to end the bloodshed in their war-wracked country. The conference took place in Doorn, the Netherlands on July 25-27. Conferees also demanded that the international community form a caretaker government for Liberia, if the current negotiations among representatives of Liberia's government and rebel groups, meeting in Accra, Ghana, are unable to produce by Aug. 2. Most Liberians, inside and outside the country, have lost all hope that the Liberian parties themselves can come to meaningful agreements about how to end the crisis.

More than a million citizens of Liberia's capital, Monrovia, are trapped by the crossfire between the government and rebel groups which have encircled the city. These civilians are the victims of indiscriminate brutality of the fighting forces. After two weeks of heavy fighting, with no food supplies able to reach the city, Monrovia, and the refugees who packed the city, are slowly starving to death—as usual, children especially are suffering. And now, torrential rains and the breakdown of sanitation are making the situation far worse.

The government of former rebel-leader Charles Taylor has been encircled by two new rebel groups. The Liberians for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), backed by Guinea, came from the north and northeast. The Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), supported by neighboring Ivory Coast, came from the south. Liberian sources report that these rebel forces made their advances during mid-July with the tacit agreement of the U.S. and British governments. While UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has made urgent appeals for an international intervention to end the humanitarian catastrophe, the United States government in particular hid behind indecision. Only on July 25, did President George Bush direct Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld to position military forces off the coast of Liberia to support a deployment of troops from West African countries. And only on July 28 did U.S. Ambassador to the UN John Negroponte begin discussing a UN resolution for Liberia with other UN Security Council members.

In early June, President Charles Taylor was indicted by a UN-backed Sierra Leone Special Court for war crimes, just as the new rebel offensive was in preparation. The chief prose-

cutor, David Crane, is an American. British troops are stationed in neighboring Sierra Leone, and French troops in Ivory Coast. Paris, London, and Washington all seem to have an agreement for removing Taylor, the former rebel who bears responsibility for Liberia's barbaric civil war of the 1990s.

But, rather than creating the political and economic conditions in West Africa, under which Liberians could resolve their own conflicts peacefully, the two former colonial powers, Britain and France, and the United States, with its special ties to Liberia going back to President James Monroe, are returning to their old geopolitical methods. Taylor's rebel group was helped to power in 1997; now, apparently, the time has come to remove him from power by new rebel groups. Some of these new rebels are old rebels from the 1980s and 1990s. LURD's vice president is Chayee Doe, younger brother of former President Samuel Doe, who was tortured to death in 1990 by a splinter group of Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL).

So, the Western powers continue to manipulate the conflicts in Liberia, as they did throughout the 1990s civil war. The ones who suffer, as before, are the civilians. This is why the LURD and MODEL rebels could advance to encircle Monrovia, with utter disregard for the fate of more than 1 million people. The geopolitical considerations of those power groups in the West that seek to control Africa's vast mineral wealth, through manipulated conflicts, have at best cynical disregard for the plight of Africa's people.

Fall Into the Abyss

The civil war that eventually tore Liberia apart in the 1990s has its roots in the crisis of 1979-80. And this was not just a crisis of Liberia or even West Africa. This period marked the decisive turning point in Africa policy after the fight for independence in the 1950s and 1960s. The Anglo-American and French powers made strategic decisions to give up any real development orientation for Africa, and imposed, instead, the neo-colonialist austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund/World Bank. At the same time, the financier and cartel interests sought control to loot Africa's raw materials more intensively. The Western powers used either willing African governments, such as Nigeria's Babangida dictatorship in the 1980s, or so-called rebel movements as in Liberia, southern Sudan, Uganda, and later in the Congo.

As developments in Liberia and Sierra Leone show most clearly, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the West, ironically with the help of Libya, set into motion the most nihilistic forces, which had nothing but contempt for civilized human life. The recruitment of child-soldiers in Liberia, Uganda, and the Congo is one reflection of this.

Departing from this mold, Liberia's President William Tolbert (1974-80) had increasingly oriented towards the Non-Aligned Movement; he sided with the Palestinian cause in the UN; and opened diplomatic relations to the Soviet bloc. In

Liberian Diaspora Issue Call

Liberian exile groups and citizens living in Germany, France, Sweden, Britain, and the Netherlands issued the following statement from their July 25-27 Doorn meeting.

We have concluded that the following points must be urgently addressed: 1. Peace; 2. Security; 3. Development; 4. International Dimensions.

Peace: To attain peace, there must be an unconditional and immediate cease-fire and the formation of an interim government; we also demand an international stabilization force. If there is no decision reached from the ongoing peace talks in Accra, Ghana, between now and Aug. 2, 2003, we demand that the international community should form a caretaker government, which we believe would bring the indiscriminate killings and destructions on the part of the rebels and government forces to a halt.

Security: We demand immediate, unconditional and total disarmament of all factions, including the Armed Forces of Liberia, all paramilitary forces and militias. This should be followed by an immediate demobilization and decommissioning of weapons. Therefore a Truth and Reconciliation Commission should be formed. Rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants and the reinforcement of an arms embargo must be implemented.

Development: Education and training for the entire

citizenry of Liberia with special emphasis on ex-combatants and their victims.

War Economy and International Dimensions: Reinforce sanctions on the export of the country's natural and mineral resources. Unlawful buyers and exporters of these natural resources should be prosecuted. To stop the geopolitical interplay for economic gain and control. To change the orientation of the world economy to accept our internal economic changes, as a war-ravaged country.

Liberia needs to make some economic adjustments in the first five years that may not suit certain conditions of the IMF and World Bank standards but may be in the interest of Liberia's economic revitalization.

The conference recognized that the Liberian crisis started with the military coup of April 1980, when President Tolbert, who had followed the policy of the Non-Aligned Movement, was killed by Samuel Doe, the first of the rebels who would destroy Liberia. During a Monrovia meeting of the Organization of African Union (OAU) in September 1979, demands for a new, just world economic order were voiced, influenced then by Lyndon LaRouche's 1975 proposal for an International Development Bank (IDB). This Monrovia discussion led to the adoption of the Lagos Plan of Action by the OAU in April 1980. But instead of following that road, the IMF forced "structural adjustment policies" on every African government. The genocidal results of this are only too visible in Africa today. The need for the establishment of a new, just world economic order, based on the principle of peace through development, was therefore discussed as the necessary solution for Liberia's and Africa's problems.

1979, he hosted a meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) which discussed proposals for a new, just world economic order against the IMF-World Bank depredations. These ideas had been intensely discussed by the Non-Aligned Movement, also prominently featuring Lyndon LaRouche's 1975 proposal for an International Development Bank (IDB). Guyana's Foreign Minister Fred Wills of Guyana presented the idea of debt moratoria for the poorest nations to the UN General Assembly on Sept. 27, 1976. Earlier that Summer, the Non-Aligned Movement summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka, also demanded such changes in the global economic system, which would correct the injustices from economic looting of the developing sector. In Africa, the result of the debate was the Lagos Plan of Action, which was adopted the OAU heads of state summit in April 1980, in Lagos, Nigeria.

By that time, a military coup under the almost-illiterate Master Sgt. Samuel Doe had removed Tolbert from power, and had him killed on April 12, 1980. The coup was supported

by the U.S. intelligence services. Washington recognized Doe immediately as Liberia's new head of state. The coup symbolizes the strategic decision by Anglo-American power groups—to which the French agreed—to block any real independence of Africa. Instead, one African country after another was forced to accept the IMF's structural adjustment programs—hammering the poor to achieve "freedom of the marketplace" and pay the foreign debt. Today, 23 years later, the results are visible, in the ruin of almost every one of Africa's economies, the ever-increasing poverty and genocidal disease.

Equally important, Doe's coup launched a culture of violence which would culminate in the atrocities of the 1990s' rebel movements that continues today. Right after President Tolbert was killed, members of his cabinet and other influentials were humiliated by passing them half-naked before a public tribunal for corruption. Thirteen of them were dragged to the beach in Monrovia, tied to stakes and publicly executed

by a mob of soldiers. All this was filmed and given worldwide publicity. Still, the United States had no problem recognizing the new government. Samuel Doe and his People's Redemption Council (PRC) reversed all pro-Non-Aligned Movement policies, and returned dutifully to the fold. Doe was honored with an extraordinary state visit to the United States during the Reagan Administration. Washington also stood by Doe when he rigged the elections of 1985, and when he started to eliminate rivals and opponents in most brutal ways. In January 1987, Secretary of State George Shultz, passing through Monrovia, praised President Doe's government for its "genuine progress" towards democracy. During the Cold War, Liberia was the most important U.S. power base in West Africa, with a key satellite-tracking facility.

This changed with the end of the Cold War in 1989: Samuel Doe lost his usefulness to the U.S. and a "rebellion" was in preparation.

On Dec. 24, 1989, Charles Taylor invaded Liberia with a 100-man rebel force—backed by Libya and Ivory Coast—in Nimba County in the north. Taylor had been active in radical U.S. student politics in the 1970s. He later served in the Doe government, but fled to the United States in 1983. Upon request from the Liberian government, Taylor was arrested. But, 15 months later, he miraculously escaped from a Massachusetts prison, and got back to Africa. From Ghana, Taylor and other Liberian exiles of radical Marxist persuasion, linked up with circles in Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast. In Burkina Faso, the Liberian exiles joined Blaise Compaoré in killing Burkina President Sankara, and making Compaoré Burkina Faso's President in 1987.

Compaoré in turn introduced Taylor to Libya's Col. Muammar Qaddafi, who had set up "revolutionary" training camps for dissidents from many African countries. The West African radicals, through Libya, became connected to the East African radicals, who fought for Yoweri Museveni in Uganda, John Garang in Southern Sudan, or Isaias Afwerki in Eritrea, and later for Laurent Kabila in Congo. But Taylor also cultivated his own French connection, both through Ivory Coast President Félix Houphouët-Boigny. Most of his business partners were linked to France.

By July 1990, Taylor's rebellion had spread throughout Liberia, encircling Monrovia. Then, too, the U.S. declined to intervene. Nigerian ECOMOG troops, deployed through the West African nations' ECOMOG, landed in Monrovia in August, and denied Taylor a victory in the capital. But a splinter group of Taylor's NPFL, under the command of Prince Johnson managed to trap President Doe, and tortured and killed him—the same he had meted out to the Tolbert government, in 1980. His torture and slow killing was filmed and broadcast by the Prince Johnson forces.

From then on Liberia sank into the Hell where one warlord after another fought each other. Taylor was the strongest. He controlled much of the country as Greater Liberia from his

government in Gbarnga. Because he also controlled the port city of Buchanan, he set up most lucrative trade relationships with international businesses in timber, iron ore, rubber—and diamonds. Taylor became the richest warlord, and financed the weapons for his forces which were delivered by the well-known international arms merchants. Other rebel groups were formed during the 1990s and worked on the same principle. No rebel group did not have its outside support, and all also supported rebellions such as those in Sierra Leone.

But the worst was the culture of brutality that became the fighters' code of conduct. Most of the child-soldiers were drugged, and some watched the most violent Hollywood fare, such as "Rambo," before being sent into battle. Children of eight or ten years of age joined rebel forces, and some survivors are now in their 20s and still fighting. Some estimate that in this war, from 1989 to 1997, up to 250,000 people died, out of a total population of 2.5-3 million.

After many broken peace agreements, finally in July 1997, special elections were held. Charles Taylor won. Liberians was so desperate, that slogans like "Taylor killed my father and my mother—I will vote for him," were common. But Taylor's grip on power in Monrovia was short-lived. Already in 1999, the LURD was formed in Guinea to unseat him.

Lessons from the Crisis

Today, Africa is paying the price for policy decisions which were taken by the Western powers more than 25 years ago. The denial of economic development has produced a poverty that cries out to Heaven. But the unleashing of nihilistic forces, like the rebels and warlords in Liberia or the Congo, has deeply marked whole societies for generations. The sheer terror spread by the use of child-soldiers, especially, has driven whole social strata into fear and irrationality. Liberia is faced with a collective trauma. Many families include both victims and perpetrators among them. It seems like a never-ending nightmare.

But throughout it all, the Western powers profitted from this conflict: The financiers, cartels, and power groups of the French, British, and American establishments, have nothing but racist contempt for African nations and people. And they shed not a tear, when Africans are driven to such desperation as those in in Monrovia or Congo have been in the last five years.

As much as immediate military intervention, under the auspices of the UN and possibly led by the United States, is called for to end the carnage in Liberia, this will not solve the problem. The West has to overthrow every last vestige of its own genocidal policies in Africa, and give that continent's nations the sovereignty they deserve, for their own development. If we are to achieve these policy changes, in Washington, London, and Paris, the financier-backed followers of Nietzsche's philosophy of nihilism—or the "ignoble liars" school of Leo Strauss—must be removed from influence.