

Preface

ACCORD - An International Review of Peace Initiatives emerges from a collaboration between Conciliation Resources, the International Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) and the International Peace Bureau (IPB), Geneva. Its primary aim is to inform and support agencies working in situations of violent conflict to increase opportunities for reconciliation and social justice. Among its intended beneficiaries are peace-building NGOs and IGOs, policy institutes, and all others with an interest in conflict transformation, from students and academics, to development and humanitarian workers, to religious organisations, diplomats, negotiators and journalists.

The working premise of ACCORD is that without accurate and accessible comparative information, there is a greater risk of repeating past mistakes in the design and implementation of peace interventions. To help, ACCORD intends to provide commentary, background information and critical analysis on specific interventions, along with the texts of the basic agreements which have marked their course. The theme of this pilot issue is Liberia, where the ongoing crisis is stark witness to the shortcomings of international peacemaking efforts. In the following pages, we aim to document the lengthy and fractious Liberian peace process, and to provide some insights into why thirteen individual peace accords have collapsed in half as many years.

The key Liberian agreements of the past five years are the Yamoussoukro IV Accord,

the Cotonou Accord, the Akosombo Agreement, the Accra Clarification, and the Abuja Accord. The texts of these agreements form the core of this issue, and are presented in a format which facilitates close scrutiny. Arranged around this core are three articles which provide context and analysis on the accords and on the wider peace process. Max Ahmadu Sesay's 'Bringing Peace to Liberia', presents a broad overview of the main issues related to the war and peace efforts. Dr. Charles Abiodun Alao, in his 'Commentary on the Accords', examines the strengths and weaknesses of specific agreements, while 'Civic Initiatives in the Peace Process', by Samuel Kofi Woods II, gives a first-hand account of the efforts of civic groups to help bring the war to an end. The issue concludes with a chronology and a short profile of key actors.

Readers with knowledge of other peace processes will draw their own conclusions as to the comparative lessons of Liberia's. However, we would suggest that the Liberian experience has been especially shaped by three crucial factors - the economics of war, the erosion of civilian power and the incoherence of international peacekeeping.

The first concern is with economic forces. It is clear that the Liberian conflict has been fuelled by national and international economic processes that have sustained and profited perpetrators of violence at the expense of others. To the editors of ACCORD, it is apparent that successful peacemaking in Liberia will require the transformation of processes which

perpetuate and reward acts of violence, and the reconstitution of economies which peacefully provide for broad and equitable social development. Tools to accomplish this transformation could include innovative and effective approaches to arms and trade embargoes, income-generation programmes which provide present and potential fighters with meaningful alternative livelihoods, and reconstruction and development practices that challenge patronage systems now characterised by corruption and violence.

The second issue has to do with governance. The gradual erosion of civilian authority is a distinct theme in the evolution of Liberia's peace agreements. In attempts to include all groups with the capacity or the inclination to wreck the peace, the authority of the Liberian government has steadily been ceded to the more powerful armed factions. The destabilising effects of this have become clear. On the one hand, it has signalled that violence and criminality can be legitimised as a route to political power, fuelling the proliferation of armed factions and entrenching the broader culture of violence. On the other, it has created a highly volatile coalition government which has failed to rise above mutual suspicion and narrow factional interests to co-operate for the greater national good. The experience of Liberia suggests that, while it is essential to foster a broad sense of inclusion among those wielding coercive force, peace interventions must also protect and promote civilian society, and give it a genuine role in the emerging balance of power.

The third imperative for the Liberian peace process has to do with the coherence, vigor and consistency of international peace-making initiatives. While ECOWAS must be commended for the timeliness

and persistence of its intervention in Liberia, it has broadly failed to fulfil its peace-making mandate. Especially in the early years, this is partly explained by a clash of interests and objectives among its member states. While the francophone countries of West Africa soon put their weight behind a diplomatic process which they thought might accommodate the aspirations of the NPFL, the anglophone states launched a military force which vacillated between impartial peace-keeping and 'peace enforcement' measures which expressly sought to contain the rebels and frustrate their aspirations.

Recent years have seen a substantial convergence in intra-ECOWAS agendas, largely explained by a common desire to control the mounting financial and political costs of continued entanglement. However, this convergence of interests and the presence of UNOMIL have failed to reverse either the inordinate delays and shortfalls in the deployment of observer forces, or their lack of co-ordination and professionalism. If international peace-making is to succeed, it must proceed in a more coherent and resolute manner than it has in Liberia. Furthermore, if regional initiatives like that of ECOWAS are to be sustained and consistently professional, the wider international community must provide far more substantial and timely support.

A supplement to the Abuja Accord, signed by the factions under the auspices of the ECOWAS 'Committee of nine', was released as this issue was going to press. The primary function of this supplement was to reaffirm the Abuja Accord and to reschedule the disarmament and election process derailed by the violence in Monrovia in April-May 1996. In a cosmetic attempt to dilute the overwhelming authority of armed faction leaders within

the Transitional Government, it also appointed Ruth Perry as chair of the ruling Council of State. Mrs Perry is the first individual with any political experience to hold this position since the diplomatic tilt towards accommodating the factions began in 1993.

One aspect of the new agreement which is potentially significant is the proposal for ECOWAS-wide sanctions on 'persons found guilty of acts capable of obstructing the peace plan'. These measures, announced in an ECOWAS communique attached to the revised accord, include travel and residence restrictions, the freezing of business assets, exclusion from participation in the Liberian election process and expulsion of violators' families from West Africa. Through the communique, ECOWAS also expressed its willingness to request international visa restrictions on accord violators and to invoke an OAU resolution calling for the establishment of a Liberian war crimes tribunal.

While the revised accord has the potential to secure a final political settlement, considerable scepticism is still justified. The Transitional Government remains an unstable coalition which privileges some factions while marginalising others. It is also unclear whether ECOWAS and the international community have the capacity and the will to sufficiently strengthen ECOMOG and to impose the proposed sanctions if and when this proves necessary. The threats made to violators of 'Abuja II' are strong. Whether they are backed up with effective action over the difficult months ahead will determine whether Liberians can at last begin the arduous task of rebuilding their devastated nation.

One final point. It is important to recognise that the violence which erupted on the streets of Monrovia in April-May 1996 was as much an attack on Liberia's nascent peace movement as it was a conflict between the armed factions. The burning of homes and displacement of outspoken civic leaders, the selective destruction of private media institutions and the massive looting of local and international humanitarian agencies have underlined the vulnerability of Liberia's 'civil society'. Reconciliation always entails pragmatic compromise and a degree of forgiveness for egregious wrongdoing. However, it also demands a special respect for those who have resisted the will to violence and have acted steadfastly in genuine good will to bring relief and healing. We would like to express solidarity with the civic associations and ordinary Liberian citizens who bore the brunt of the recent frenzy.

We would welcome feedback on this our pilot issue of ACCORD, as well as advice on the form and content of future issues. If you find this project in any way inspiring, we would also be grateful for letters of encouragement and support which we could use to raise funds for its continuation. Finally, on behalf of Conciliation Resources, we wish every success to the peacemaking efforts of our readership throughout the world!

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