The Sierra Leone peace process: learning from the past to address current challenges

An Expert Seminar Report, 27 September 2000, London by Catherine Barnes, Ph.D. & Tara Polzer, Conciliation Resources

Contents

About the seminar

Executive Summary

Background

Exclusion as the cause of war; inclusiveness as the key to peace?
- 'Freetown centralization' and exclusion
- Women's roles: leadership and marginalization
- 'Civil society' and the peace process
- Representation
- Utilising traditional structures and processes for participation and conflict resolution

Involvement of international actors
- Foreign governments, the peace process and armed intervention
- Role of UNAMSIL
- Role of the United Kingdom

Ideas for addressing the current situation
- Interim government of national unity?
- Considerations about processes to facilitate justice and reconciliation

About the seminar

To mark the publication of Accord 9, Paying the Price: the Sierra Leone Peace Process, on 27 September 2000, Conciliation Resources facilitated a seminar for Sierra Leoneans active in the peace process and representatives of the London-based diplomatic community, the UK government, international NGOs and media organizations, and scholars specialising in policy issues connected to peace process. The seminar was structured as a facilitated discussion, divided into two sessions around several key questions:
Civil society and peacemaking: What lessons can be learned about the role of civil society organizations in peacemaking from their involvement in / exclusion from the Lomé peace process? What roles can these organizations usefully fulfil today to address the current challenges?

Foreign governments, international institutions and peacemaking: What lessons can be learned about the role of foreign governments and international institutions from their involvement in the Lomé peace process and subsequent role as 'moral guarantors' to the agreement? What are appropriate roles for these actors today to support a return to peace in Sierra Leone?

This report seeks to reflect and integrate the outcomes of this discussion, in the hopes that it will provide analysis useful to others working toward peace in Sierra Leone. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of Conciliation Resources, its donors, or any individual participant and are the responsibility of the authors.

Conciliation Resources would like to thank the Calpe Trust and the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs for their support of the Accord: Sierra Leone project and the UK Department for International Development and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation for their general support to the Accord programme.

Executive Summary

The seminar explored the roles of civil society and international actors in peacemaking after the Lomé Peace Agreement in July 1999. In the discussion of the local dynamics, the main issues raised by participants concerned the importance of an inclusive peace process. The main lines of exclusion in the past have been a) regional, with excessive centralisation around Freetown; b) gender-biased; c) mitigating against effective civil society input into formal peace processes; and d) marginalizing traditional peacebuilding practices.

The primary focus of discussion about the influence of international actors was on the roles of the UN, the UK, and ECOWAS countries in both the peace process and in current attempts at 'peace enforcement'. Concern was expressed about the perceived partiality of interventions and the focus on a military 'solution.' Further issues raised were the lack of a clear mandate for peacekeeping or peacebuilding, and problems of timing and commitment in the international community.

In discussions about how the provisions of the Lomé Peace Agreement might be improved, some participants suggested the need for an interim government of national unity. Others focused on the need to rethink the amnesty provision to include traditional conceptions of reconciliation. One theme that ran throughout the discussion was the argument that that a military 'solution' cannot in itself address the causes of war. Peace-making efforts should
instead be directed toward fostering broad-based, inclusive processes capable of addressing the underlying causes of war, with support for economic regeneration to encourage the voluntary demobilisation of armed combatants.

Background

Since the outbreak of war in 1991, there have been three attempts to bring the conflict to an end through a negotiated settlement: the Abidjan Peace Agreement in November 1996, the Conakry Peace Plan in October 1997, and most recently the Lomé Peace Agreement in July 1999. As their names suggest, the processes used to bring about peace have extensively involved other West African governments, both acting though the auspices of ECOWAS and independently. Their involvement has been accompanied by the participation of other international organizations (Commonwealth, ECOWAS, OAU and UN) as well as other interested governments (notably Libya, United Kingdom and United States). These external powerbrokers have sought to use their good offices and leverage to bring the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the government of Sierra Leone to the table to reach a settlement.

The terms of these agreements centred primarily around the principles of power-sharing and amnesty and the role of foreign troops but also included provisions for social and economic rehabilitation and reintegration. Each round of negotiations were concluded and agreements signed without the effective participation or endorsement of the wider Sierra Leonean public, despite the many attempts of organised civil society to have a voice in determining the arrangements that will shape the future of the country.

With the outbreak of fighting in Sierra Leone in May 2000, implementation of the 1999 Lomé Agreement has been severely compromised - to the point that its validity as a framework for peacebuilding in the country has been called into question and the 'pursuit of peace by peaceful means' has been stalled. Nevertheless, many Sierra Leoneans continue to affirm the Lomé Agreement and advocate its application in current conditions - although its provisions for a blanket amnesty are disputed. What is clear, however, is that the renewal of fighting has raised many questions about the process by which the Lomé Agreement was reached, its terms and conditions, and the methods for implementing the agreement. To address the challenges presented by the current crisis and the long-term tasks of peacebuilding, it is important to understand - and learn lessons from - the previous peace processes.

This seminar was designed to explore these issues. The emphasis was on analysing the roles of civil society and international actors in peacemaking. This focus was chosen because: (a) at this point in time, action in these sectors may hold the greatest promise for enabling conflict transformation, and (b) seminar participants come from these sectors and are therefore in a position to comment on these themes and apply the analysis in their work.
Although the focus was on the roles of civil society and the international community, other issues were addressed, including the causes of the war, strategies for reconstructing government, and dilemmas in fostering justice and reconciliation.

Exclusion as the cause of war; inclusiveness as the key to peace?

The past ten years have witnessed the complete political, economic, social and territorial fragmentation of Sierra Leone. Yet the seeds of this fragmentation existed well before the war broke out. As one participant pointed out, and others concurred, the underlying cause of war in Sierra Leone is the marginalization and exclusion of some groups and regions from the political process and economic opportunity. As such, the conflict should not be seen as simply a war between the government and the RUF; instead it is the result of deeper problems of exclusion. Therefore it is unlikely that strategies relying solely on reaching a negotiated agreement between the government and the RUF can address these underlying causes and foster a sustainable peace.

It was argued that there is no single sector that is capable of bringing along all other sectors to reconstruct the social, political and economic life of the country. Processes and agreements that effectively exclude and marginalise any sector of society are likely to fail, as those excluded will have no commitment to them. Participants highlighted the sectors that have been excluded from decision making roles in the official peace process to date, including civil society organizations and community representatives, women, armed groups other than the RUF, prominent individuals not aligned with President Kabbah, and especially people from regions other than Freetown and the western area.

'Freetown centralisation' and exclusion

According to a number of participants, Sierra Leone has long been dominated by the interests of those in Freetown, causing great disparity amongst the regions in access to political power and socio-economic development. Freetown's dominance is exacerbated by the effective disbanding of local government (and the representative mechanisms it can enable), the underdevelopment of the physical infrastructure needed to unite the country, the corruption of administrative and judicial organs of government, and polarisation of the regional support base for different political parties. The war has now create a situation where, although the resources of this highly centralised state are concentrated in Freetown, the government's authority does not extend across the entire country.

Participants pointed out that this 'Freetown centralisation' has been reflected in the peace process to date. Many in the regions believe that those in Freetown are concerned only with the fate of Freetown. For example, one participant
explained that in the early years of the war the government largely ignored the pleas of civilians in the regions who called on the government and the RUF to take concrete steps toward peace. He argued that the government was not motivated to seek peace until the war threatened Freetown. Others argued that this centralisation was also manifest in most aspects of the peace process. Prior to the Lomé talks, such consultations that took place were essentially Freetown based, with few attempts to involve representation from the provinces. The Lomé agreement made provisions for a range of commissions to oversee implementation. Once again, representatives from the provinces were mostly excluded. Yet there are a range of important stakeholders outside Freetown who should be involved, including local community representatives (possibly utilising the Paramount Chieftancy structures), armed combatants (Kamajor civil defence forces, West Side Boyz, ex-SLA/ASRC, etc.), former combatants, and civil society organizations (religious, non-governmental, etc.).

One participant pointed out that almost all political and 'peace building' activities currently take place in Freetown. Some people interpret these activities as working on the 'national' level because they take place in the capital. Yet because of the strong Freetown-bias at the so-called 'national level', these 'national' actors are rarely able to effectively represent the interests and points of view of people in the regions. It was recommended that actors in the international community should take this into account when designing their interventions and not rely solely upon Freetown contacts.

Participants emphasised that a durable peace process will need to involve stakeholders from all the regions of Sierra Leone. Any agreements reached will need to include strategies to address the fundamental inequity of the distribution of resources amongst the districts of Sierra Leone. A principle that may be key to this is process is decentralisation of the state structure, while rebuilding cross-cutting institutions across the regional divides.

**Women's roles: leadership and marginalization**

According to one participant, women and women's organizations have played a crucial role in developing a non-partisan voice for peace and democratisation over the past ten years. Following massive street demonstrations led by women in 1995, National Consultative Conferences (Bintumani I and II) were held in Freetown and set the stage for elections and a return to civilian government. Women's organizations had a leading role in setting the agenda for this process and subsequent civil society efforts to foster a participatory peace process.* Yet these organizations were excluded from a place at the negotiation tables in both Abidjan and Lomé.

One outcome was that women have been marginalized in the Lomé agreement. As a participant pointed out, there is only one reference to women. They are acknowledged as victims of the war and the agreement provides that
'special attention shall be accorded to their needs and potentials...to enable them to play a central role in the moral, social and physical reconstruction of Sierra Leone.' (Part 5, Art. XXVII, Para. 2) Yet it ignores the role of women in the political and economic reconstruction of the country. Nevertheless, women remain a vital resource for peacemaking and peacebuilding. It was argued that their organizations probably have more scope than other structures to cut across regional divides and they can draw on a tradition of initiatives to address the challenges of diversity and representation.

'Civil society' and the peace process

Many participants argued that the active involvement of civil society is critical if peace is to return to Sierra Leone. There was some discussion about how civil society is defined but, at its broadest, it includes all organizations and voices that are not representatives of the government or other political and military parties or a commercial business enterprise.

Participants pointed out that civil society actors have been important in creating an enabling environment that made peace talks possible but have had very little influence on the content of the process and the agreements reached. Several pointed out the irony of the international community's support, through UNOMSIL, for the RUF and AFRC's 21-day 'family meeting' to prepare for the Lomé negotiations, while civil society and the government were left on their own to make preparations.** The National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights did hold a three-day consultative conference of parliamentarians, paramount chiefs, political parties and other civic organizations in April 1999. It largely endorsed the legitimacy of the Kabbah government and the Abidjan and Conakry agreements as the basis for a negotiated settlement - yet strongly objected to any form of power sharing with the RUF-AFRC. One participant questioned whether the government-endorsed consultation process was convened not to hear the 'voice of the people' but to gain legitimacy for its own position and shore up its bargaining leverage. Despite the consultative platform, the Lomé agreement included provisions for a power-sharing government, partly due to pressure from the presidents of Burkina Faso, Liberia, Nigeria, and Togo.

Nevertheless, there was no direct participation of Sierra Leonean civil society organizations in the Abidjan process and limited involvement at Lomé. In this, the role of the Inter-Religious Council has been unique (although, as one participant pointed out, it may not consider itself as a part of 'civil society' given its religious character). It was instrumental in initiating dialogue with the RUF and Charles Taylor of Liberia. As official observers at the Lomé talks, they helped to facilitate dialogue and mediate. They continue to play a role in supporting implementation of the agreement. According to one participant, it is revealing that the Council was partly able to play this role because its institutional base and financial resources provide a security that enable its
perceived legitimacy and independence.

Participants identified a number of problems with the role of civil society in the peace process. One participant cautioned that it should not be assumed that civil society is always right. He questioned whether there would be a Lomé agreement at all, given the reluctance of many civic organizations to endorse negotiations with the RUF. Similarly, some now question whether the outcomes of the Bintumani I and II conferences - which insisted on negotiations before a peace process - helped or hindered the search for peace. Another pointed out the transborder / regional dynamics of the war and questioned whether civil society is well positioned to address this dimension of the conflict. Another warned that non-governmental organizations and movements have to be careful that they are not co-opted by narrow political interests.

While acknowledging these dilemmas, other participants maintained that - after thirty years of repressive rule - the integrity of Sierra Leone's social and political institutions has been dismantled or corrupted. One argued that this situation can only be transformed through strong grassroots-level self-organisation and pressure on the government. In civil society there exists the potential to generate institutions that can unite across other divisions and take on a national character. Yet this potential needs support (financial, technical, and political) if its promise is to be realised. Another participant agreed and added that this support should be designed to help foster the institutional strength and independence of organizations in this sector, while encouraging the diversity necessary to reflect the distinctive character of the different constituent members in the population.

**Representation**

A central problem in any peace process will be how to address the dilemma of representation, i.e., who is capable of speaking on behalf of others at the negotiating table to ensure that their interests and values are incorporated into an agreement. Participants pointed out that in Sierra Leone, it cannot be assumed that a group or individual can represent the entire population or even sections of the population - despite some claims to the contrary. This problem extends through political parties, the fighting forces, and in civil society. According to one participant, until a democratic process and values are ingrained in society, it will be difficult to address this representation problem.

**Utilising traditional structures and processes for participation and conflict resolution**

One participant pointed out that another form of exclusion is the marginalization of ordinary people in decision making, as all too often it is assumed that the elite are the only ones capable of running the country. Yet
the traditional community decision-making system, the barrae, continues to exist throughout Sierra Leone. This is a system of consultation in local communities so that interests and ideas can be discussed and a consensus position formulated. A representative is then selected by the community to take this position forward to the next level of consultation and decision-making. This consultation and consensus building process can help to address the problems of representation inherent in other institutions, yet it does not have any status in the formal mechanisms of government. This system was activated prior to the Lomé negotiation to develop recommendations for the peace process. A final meeting was held in Freetown, involving representatives from all the provinces who had emerged out of consultations chiefdom by chiefdom, district by district. Yet the recommendations from this meeting were ignored. However it is an example of a mechanism that could be revived to facilitate participation in a peace process and foster broad-based representation.

Involvement of international actors

There are a diverse array of international actors - including foreign governments, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), international NGOs and commercial businesses from Africa and farther afield - who have had roles in the war and peace processes in Sierra Leone and whose involvement has been and remains critical in shaping the course of events. Some have supported one of the warring parties, while others have sought to restore stability, and a few have done both. The primary focus of discussion was on the roles of the UN, the UK and ECOWAS countries in both the peace process and in current attempts at 'peace enforcement'.

Foreign governments, the peace process and armed intervention

Several pointed out that the international sponsors of earlier peace processes, in their haste to reach a 'quick fix' agreement, did not encourage in-depth and broad-based consultations that could have helped to address the problems noted above. Several argued that foreign governments instead seemed to impose the terms of settlement. This sometimes resulted in situations that were disadvantageous to the government - which, admittedly, has been in a very weak position and thus unable to enforce its own terms - and utilised processes that seemed to undermine democratic and constitutional principles.

One difficulty in the role of foreign governments and intergovernmental organizations is that they have frequently been perceived as providing either deliberate or de facto partisan support to factions in the conflict. Particularly important to the RUF is the (widely perceived though difficult to prove) support from Liberia's Charles Taylor, Libya's Muammar Gahddafi, and Blaise Compaoré's Burkina Faso. In other cases, support for the RUF may have been inadvertent. For example, one participant argued that US Envoy Rev. Jesse Jackson promoted what was a premature ceasefire agreement in May 1999.
This agreement effectively froze the RUF's control over large amounts of territory - including the economically valuable mining regions - at a time when the government had been regaining territory. On the other hand, troops contributed through ECOWAS and - through bilateral agreements - from Guinea, Nigeria, and now the United Kingdom, have tended to shore up the government position. Yet there are accusations that they were often motivated more by the opportunities for profiteering from the diamonds and other resources than in serving the terms of their contract or upholding the principles of humanitarian law. The perception of partisan support has often complicated the peace process. And yet, according to one, without bringing along all of these external stakeholders in a peace process, it may be impossible to reach a durable settlement. Another pointed out that there is a need to develop an adequate strategy to address the transborder / regional dimension of these conflicts and to tackle some of the underlying factors that exacerbate conflict, including involvement in a war economy through arms shipments and diamond smuggling.

Some of these dilemmas are rooted in the problems related to the distinct tasks of peace-making, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement. According to one participant, peacekeeping is not appropriate in Sierra Leone because there is no peace to keep. Therefore the task should be one of peace-making, implying the need to create structures at all levels of society to rebuild government, state institutions, and socio-economic infrastructure. Such a programme would require different and more sustained resources from the international community. Another questioned the meaning of peace-making in relation to the fighting parties, wondering if it was intended primarily to 'force peace' on the parties or to foster a genuine willingness to reintegrate. Another participant called attention to the problem of distinguishing between peacekeeping and peace enforcement in the context of Sierra Leone. If the government has limited enforcement capacity (militarily, legally, or socially), it will have difficulties making the transition from peacekeeping to normalised 'rule of law' and thus international forces could be drawn into an enforcement role. This would then raise questions about whether the mission is, in effect, an occupation force. Another claimed that it is unlikely that UNAMSIL will be given a broad peace-making and enforcement mandate or that it would have the capacity and long-term political support to conduct such a programme. He argued that these tasks should be the responsibilities of the Sierra Leone government. He acknowledged that this government is in need of assistance to do so (he identified military training and financial aid as a priority) and claimed that many foreign governments are willing to contribute in this way - even if they are not willing to contribute their own troops.

Another participant observed that there has also been a problem with the timing of international intervention activities. There was a long period after the
signing of the Lomé agreement when the parties were slow to start implementing the provisions that they had little interest in fulfilling. The states and IGOs that were moral guarantors did not actively push for them to be fulfilled and may not have provided the support needed for them to be implemented effectively. One person argued, for example, that if a fraction of the resources that are now going into the international military operations had been spent on economic reconstruction projects, the disarmament and demobilisation programme might have been more effective. Another participant cautioned that to prevent another set of problems escalating in the current circumstances, the international community should be urgently addressing the current threat of instability in the region as a whole - with particular attention to Guinea and Liberia. Nevertheless, as one person commented, international troops and resources can only be supports and not substitutes for domestic - or, as relevant, regional - responsibility for the resolution of conflict and reconstruction of government and society.

Role of UNAMSIL

The mandate of the UN Mission in Sierra Leone, UNAMSIL, was to assist government efforts at disarming and demobilising former combatants and to create the stable conditions necessary to implement the Lomé agreement. Yet the capture of about 500 UN troops in May 2000 called its mission into question and raised doubts about its operational capacity to achieve it. UNAMSIL is now in a situation where it has shifted from peacekeeping to armed operations. According to one participant, the central dilemma now is whether the international community should essentially use its force to prop-up a government with little popular legitimacy in the name of the Lomé agreement.

One participant argued that the UNAMSIL deployment reflects many of the fundamental problems faced by UN peacekeeping worldwide and it is not unique in having difficulties achieving its mandate. There was some debate about whether UNAMSIL has been effective in Sierra Leone. One person argued that, as in Cambodia, there was little relation between the number of troops and resources and their effectiveness. Another countered that the size is necessary to maintain control over territory and lines of communication - although he pointed out that some of these tasks can be handed over to Sierra Leoneans as military training programmes are expanded. Another countered, however, that one of the main problems that has been faced by the mission has resulted from inadequate leadership and management capacity, which has greatly diminished its effectiveness. He argued that unless this basic problem is addressed, it will continue to be plagued by failure regardless of changes in its objectives.

Some argued that international troops continue to have a paradoxical impact. For example, according to one person, the UNAMSIL troops today are essentially reinforcing existing divisions of the country by stabilising the control
of different fighting forces. The current situation is highly beneficial to the RUF because it has retained control of the diamond and agricultural areas. Another pointed out that UNAMSIL troops may even create a potential obstacle at some point to a government effort to regain territorial control from the other militias. For example, what will happen to UNAMSIL troops if the newly trained Sierra Leone Army (SLA) - backed by British troops - mounts an offensive? Thus there is a concern that an increase in peacekeeping forces without clear action toward integration may result in a stalemate that would mean the partition of Sierra Leone. As few support the status quo in the country, there is a dilemma between trying to promote the security of Sierra Leoneans while at the same time enabling the reintegration of the country.

Role of the United Kingdom

Since sending in its own troops in May 2000, the UK has pursued a bilateral military strategy in Sierra Leone. A number of participants questioned why the UK has been unwilling to commit its troops under the auspices of UNAMSIL - particularly as British troops have displayed their competence and many commented that they would increase the effectiveness of UNAMSIL operations. According to one participant, the UK is not a part of the UN force because it has chosen to direct its energies to training the national army. This overtly partisan support would be counter to the UN mission mandate. Another participant noted that most Sierra Leoneans have welcomed British intervention and have not seen it as a neo-colonisation. Yet the political opposition interprets the UK as essentially supporting President Kabbah. He cautioned that the UK should be very clear whether it is supporting the principles of constitutional order and democratisation or whether it is supporting a specific government.

One person pointed out that a key motivation in Britain's current involvement is the concern about leaving Sierra Leone 'in the lurch'; while the British public may be sympathetic to this, they will still scrutinise the mandate of British troops. There are questions about whether the UK can effectively substitute its own troops for the Sierra Leone army. There were a number of questions about whether the strategy to train government troops is adequate to address the problems. The current objective is to train 1000 troops every six weeks, until the army is large enough to defeat the RUF. Yet, as one person pointed out, the people brought into this training scheme are mostly from the old SLA. This means that other fighters, particularly the Kamajor civil defence forces, are not being integrated into the national army. It will be difficult to ever restore the government's authority in enforcing the rule of law if there are multiple armed forces in the country - even if they are not supporting insurrection. Therefore there should be some action towards integrating these forces. There is also the troublesome problem that, in the past, many elements in the SLA have been willing to support military coups and have been implicated in
atrocities. It was questioned whether these fighters are capable of being sufficiently transformed by a short training course so that the government and population can rely on their professionalism and loyalty.

Another participant pointed out that the UK is not only working with the government or through military aid. It is also working with the legal system and with paramount chiefs to try to support the strengthening of these sectors. Therefore the UK should be understood as having a multi-faceted involvement that is under continual review to maintain its responsiveness to changing conditions.

Ideas for addressing the current situation

Many participants were unclear of the goal of the current strategy of foreign governments (particularly the UK) and the 'international community'. It seems to be oriented toward crisis management and shoring up the Kabbah government through training of pro-government troops. It is unclear whether the current strategy can be effective in addressing the causes of war and supporting a transformation of the conflict. Although there is a need to protect the basic security of Sierra Leoneans, it was pointed out that a military 'solution' cannot in itself address the causes of war. This raised the question of whether the attempt to rely mostly on military strategies risks the waste of more lives and resources and only protracts the war further. From this assessment, some concluded it would be better to direct resources toward economic regeneration and social rehabilitation. This would help to create the conditions on the ground for voluntary 'social demobilisation' in the realisation that the fighters will come back home if they have something to come home to. There is a need to work on all these fronts to address the current challenges. Participants shared their ideas to address the current political situation and the tasks of justice and reconciliation. Most appeared to agree that strategies to address the war in Sierra Leone will need to be much deeper than just picking up from the Lomé process.

Interim government of national unity?

There was some discussion of mechanisms that might facilitate a political reconstruction of the country. Several questioned whether the Kabbah government retains sufficient support to be capable of unifying the country; yet there is the fear that elections could divide it further. One participant proposed the formation of an interim government of national unity. Such a government would need to involve representatives of the disparate groups in Sierra Leonean society - including those who are now in the diaspora - and be able to develop strategies that could take into account the diverse interests and needs of different sectors of the country. Another participant questioned this idea and expressed concerns about who would be members of such a government and how they would be chosen. The Lomé agreement provided for a power-sharing
government that rewarded those who had used violence and terror in their quest for power. She wondered how this interim government would differ from that arrangement - and whether it would be capable of involving those who did not use violence to promote their views and interests. The response was that it would not need to include parties involved in armed rebellion. If a democratic process could be used to agree on the principles and processes of such a government, then the questions of the specific people to be involved could be addressed. This discussion raised the question of whether a national conference process, as has been undertaken in some other post-war situations, could help to address these problems.

**Considerations for processes to facilitate justice and reconciliation**

Another problem is how to address the underlying need for justice and reconciliation. The Lomé agreement provided for a blanket amnesty, which was always highly controversial amongst Sierra Leoneans, yet it also envisioned a process for fostering truth and reconciliation. Although this topic was not addressed in depth in the seminar, a number of people commented on issues that should be taken into consideration in charting a way forward on these thorny problems.

One person suggested that there is a need to operate on the principles that amnesty should be earned and linked to a process of contrition and remorse for previous actions. The blanket amnesty given in the Lomé agreement may have circumvented any public acknowledgement of the crimes committed or any remorse for carrying them out. This observation applies to all the fighting forces - not just the RUF. Another participant argued that some people are locked into thinking of the truth and reconciliation process as essentially a mechanistic exercise that should be conducted according to the schedule envisioned at Lomé. Yet the twelve month timetable can be very limiting and may preclude work at the community level.

Several participants commented on the judicial process of addressing justice issues. The UN plan to institute a special international court for Sierra Leone raised a number of questions. One participant was concerned that the mandate and operation of such ad hoc courts may be biased toward one of the conflict parties. It thus risks the perception that it is a kind of "victor’s justice" and undermines the confidence in impartiality that a mechanism such as the International Criminal Court may eventually be able to fulfil. Another pointed to the dilemma that because a court will only address the cases of a limited number of combatants, therefore other fighters who may have committed atrocities will have an unclear status. According to another participant, the timing of the introduction of the international court presents a further dilemma. Fighters may not be willing to give up their arms if they perceive the threat of persecution. There was also a comment about the need to reform the entire justice system in Sierra Leone - from the police, through the judicial process, to
the penal system. Addressing the problem of war crimes will not be sufficient to address the underlying lack of faith in the system of justice in Sierra Leone.

Others focused on the need to draw on social and cultural resources to facilitate reconciliation. One contributor suggested the potential value of drawing on traditional forms and practices for forgiveness and reconciliation that could help to reintegrate people - particularly ex-combatants - into their communities. Another suggested that the policy of giving cash for arms as a strategy for decommissioning should be reconsidered so that these financial resources could be redirected to local community development projects where the ex-combatant is from - thus helping to foster community integration.

Another issue discussed concerned the level at which these processes take place. As was revealed by the earlier discussion on the fragmentation of Sierra Leonean society and the problems of centralisation and exclusion, a process that takes place on an elite level in Freetown is unlikely to have the qualities of broad-based inclusion needed to facilitate reconciliation. There was a recognition that any judicially-based criminal process will not be able to address the more fundamental issues of reconciliation that may need to involve social and economic justice. Civil society may be able to play a key role in facilitating some of these other processes.

As one participant pointed out, after thirty years of undemocratic regimes and warfare, there is a need to rebuild the social and moral framework of the country. This process will need great commitment from all Sierra Leoneans, not the external imposition of structures and agreements. The international community can provide practical and moral support for this process and help to ensure that it lives up to the spirit of international human rights and humanitarian standards.

Notes
* For more information, see Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff 'Sierra Leonean women and the peace process', Accord 9: Paying the Price: The Sierra Leone Peace Process (London: Conciliation Resources, 2000).

** In May 1997, junior military officers calling themselves the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) staged a coup, forcing President Kabbah to flee. They invited the RUF to join the new junta government, thus forming an alliance that was reflected in the Lomé negotiation process.

Participant List

Rebecca Abraham, Accord Outreach Coordinator, Conciliation Resources
Steve Archibald, Regional Director West and Central Africa, CARE UK
Olu Arowobusoye, West Africa Programme, International Alert
Lord Eric Avebury, Parliamentary Human Rights Group, House of Lords
Catherine Barnes, Accord Programme Manager, Conciliation Resources
Nana Busia, West Africa Programme Manager, International Alert
Kathryn Clarke, Governance and Institutional Development, Department for International Development
Paul Clifford, Responding to Conflict
Pauline Eizema, Second Secretary, Political Affairs, Royal Netherlands Embassy
Jeannette Eno, West Africa Programme Manager, Conciliation Resources
Ron Fennell, Consultant
Ambrose Ganda, Editor & Publisher Focus on Sierra Leone
Sarah Glyde, Programme Officer - Southern & West Africa, CARE UK
Alpha A. Jalleh, Link Africa
Ambrose James, Acting Sierra Leone Programme Officer, Conciliation Resources
Lars Jessen, Swedish Embassy
Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, Barrister
Kimmo Lahdevirta, First Secretary, Embassy of Finland
Comfort Lamptey, Consultant
Andrew Mawson, Consultant
Guus Meijer, Co-Director Organizational Development, Conciliation Resources
Louise Mellor, Assistant Desk Officer for West and Central Africa, British Red Cross
Jonas Moberg, Second Secretary Foreign Ministry, Embassy of Sweden
Abdel-Fatau Musah, Research and Publications Coordinator, Centre for Democracy and Development
Nete Oestergaard, Royal Danish Embassy
Abiodun (Abbey) Onadipe, Media Programme Manager, Conciliation
Resources

Esther Panda, Founder/Director, Children's Relief Trust

Tara Polzer, Research Intern, Conciliation Resources

Peter Raven, Sierra Leone Programme Manager, Christian Aid

Fred Robarts, Deputy Programme Manager, Sierra Leone Desk, Department for International Development (DfID)

Peter Tucker, Retired Head of Sierra Leone Civil Service

Michael Wundah, Editor, The Tribune