

"Survival is Political"

-- *Quote heard on a bus in Sierra Leone*

POPULATIONS AFFECTED BY WAR IN THE MANO RIVER REGION OF WEST
AFRICA:

ISSUES OF PROTECTION.

A Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Report

May 2002

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Today, West Africa remains an intricately linked and complicated context, both politically as well as in terms of the humanitarian situation. While the war has been declared officially over in Sierra Leone and the biggest United Nations peacekeeping (UNAMSIL) force in the world today has been deployed throughout the country, the conflict in Liberia is gaining momentum. New waves of Liberian refugees are moving into Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Guinea looking for safety. Thousands of others are being displaced again and again inside of Liberia.

Tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans are going back to their homes, either from neighboring Liberia and Guinea, or from the internally displaced camps within Sierra Leone. Hundreds of thousands of people are moving in the sub-region at the same time, often through the same towns and the same camps.

This is creating a confusing situation to say the least. Many questions are being raised about the manner in which these movements are taking place. Do these people, who have been fleeing conflicts for over 10 years, have a chance to decide for themselves if they are ready to return to their homes? Are the necessary conditions in place for these movements to take place in a humane and adequate way, according to international standards? Are there appropriate assistance programs in place to facilitate the rebuilding of lives in the war ravaged areas of Sierra Leone? Who is responsible for ensuring the protection of these people in such a politically charged environment? Who decides which groups (Liberian displaced, Sierra Leonean returnee, etc.) are worthy of assistance?

As sanctions are being re-imposed on Liberia, and the multi-million dollar peace process in Sierra Leone is drawing to a close, it is the human aspect of this conflict, the rights of the people to protection and humanitarian assistance, which seems to have been lost in the political shuffle.

1. Sierra Leone

Today, Sierra Leone is trying to put the war behind it and move forward. Yet, a major part of the legacy of this war still remains; the more than one million Sierra Leoneans who left their homes during ten years of bitter fighting. As of February 2002, the UN estimated that there were 250,000 Sierra Leoneans in neighboring countries and approximately 140,000, totaling nearly 10% of the population, internally displaced persons (IDPs).

In advance of the elections and subsequent withdraw of UNAMSIL, these refugees and IDPs were sent back to their regions of origin by the UN and the government of Sierra Leone resettlement programs. However, it is difficult to consider this a resettlement program in anything but name. Driven by national and international political agendas and rife with problems, this process was poorly planned, badly organized and ineffectively implemented. The casualties are the hundreds of thousands of IDPs and returnees, who in this whirlwind of mismanagement and misallocated blame have had their rights and their protection undermined.

The background to today's situation is a history of horror and humiliation. For ten years, these victims of the war have watched loved ones die, endured prolonged hunger, suffered through physical violence and repeated escapes from various armed groups.

Even in countries of asylum outside Sierra Leone, the nightmare of fighting for their lives continued for these people.

The problems that displaced Sierra Leoneans in the region have faced seem to be exacerbated by the choices of implementing partners under the direction of the UN agencies. This is especially true in the case of IDPs. The UN agency mandated by the UN Secretary General to ensure that the displaced are assisted and protected (OCHA; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) is not operational, but rather works as a coordinating body, and therefore must rely on implementing partners to carry out this work.

The main UN agency supplying food to these populations is the World Food Program (WFP). As they are a UN agency, they rely on the figures of implementing partners. This is difficult when the figures are questionable, and when there are several different population numbers given for one camp.

Due to extensive corruption in the camp system and a very serious food deficiency at the household level throughout the region, families are forced to find ways to obtain food. This opens doors to all kinds of abuses.

It is within this context of warfare, corruption, and a constant struggle to survive that reports of children and other individuals exchanging sex for food have been documented. In addition, it is against this backdrop that the current repatriation and resettlement programs are taking place in the sub-region.

Repatriation and Resettlement: the Real Story

When talking of the current resettlement exercise, it must be clear that at this point it is a logistical program and not a true program of resettlement. This is due to a lack of respect for the basic rights of the people to be able to choose their fate, and to be treated with dignity at each stage of their return. These issues have presented themselves in different ways and are the results of a number of problems.

For the majority of the people returning to their homes today in Sierra Leone, they are going back to nothing. Their houses have been burned to the ground and entire villages destroyed. There is often no safe drinking water available, no medical facilities, no schools and no jobs. This is especially true in the harder-hit rural areas on the eastern and northern parts of the country, where also the bulk of the re-settlers are being sent. Today in Sierra Leone very few projects are in place for installing basic services in many of the areas where the displaced are being resettled.

Due to the way this program is being carried out, people's basic rights – to choose when to go home, to be transported there, to be given appropriate and sufficient supplies to make the transition – are not being protected. This has resulted in a process that more closely resembles eviction than resettlement.

The problems are found at every step of the way, as various agencies, primarily the UN and their implementing partners, have not taken up their responsibilities. The aftereffects of such a slipshod program will continue to be felt for months. As the rainy season begins we can expect the spread of waterborne diseases, such as cholera and shigellosis, due to the lack of water and sanitation in most of the resettlement areas. There is also the risk of malnutrition as people are given insufficient food to cover the ensuing hunger gap, and there is no adequate agricultural plan in place to cover their needs.

2. Liberia

The population of Liberia has seen hard times over the years. Many Liberians are all-too familiar with camp life, having been forced to flee their homes during the eight-year civil war in the 90s. This is now often called "the first war" by Liberians, and is not covered in this report. All events described in this report are related to the current conflict. All names have been changed to preserve the confidentiality of the individuals.

Several things have happened to Liberians since 2000, when the first attacks of this new conflict took place in the Upper Lofa region. They have found themselves in one of several situations, which has defined the options open to them in terms of where to flee. The option an individual has "chosen" (it is difficult to call it a choice when people explain, "we ran in the only direction where there was no fighting") determines label they are given (refugee or displaced) and therefore, what assistance they receive.

The conflict in Liberia is escalating daily. The displaced camps of Bong County are empty due to fresh attacks taking place on Gbarnga town. Camp residents have fled along with town residents (approximately 40,000 people in total) in fear of being caught in the crossfire. This has caused another major wave of people on the run either out of the country (primarily to Ivory Coast and Guinea), towards Monrovia, or hiding in the bush. For the vast majority of people this is not the first or the last time they have fled from war.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)

Since 2000, the war has greatly destabilized Lofa County, and more recently has made steady progress into Grand Cape Mount, Bomi Hills and now Bong counties, causing people to flee.

However, most people fleeing today had already left their homes several months ago, and had been surviving hidden in the bush. They had not been able to reach the camps in Bong, Bomi and Grand Cape Mount counties (Tarvey, Jene Manna, Sawmill, etc.) or those closer to Upper Lofa (Belefana) due to the location of the front lines. Many families had been attacked by several different groups during the past year, and these attacks not only involved abductions but also rapes, killings and burning people alive in their homes. Families have had great difficulty trying to escape.

The driving cause pushing people to risk their lives to travel through such dangerous areas seems to be lack of food. New arrivals report that the food situation is getting difficult. Some say civilians

and soldiers have been fighting over food. Also the time frame for crossing into Guinea is critical. Once the rains begin, the river between Lofa and Guinea will not be passable, and this would mean being stuck in Lofa during the most difficult period of the hunger gap (June – September).

In Liberia, people's right to seek refuge, either within Liberia or in countries of asylum, has been blocked continuously and by all parties to the conflict. Abductions, rape, executions and the use of civilians as human shields are all common occurrences.

The current lack of protection and limited assistance for the Liberian people also draws attention to the mandated agency OCHA that fails to take on their responsibility.

The international community, having successfully politicized humanitarian relief money in the Liberian context, has a responsibility for the plight of these people today. All of the reasons that have been put forward for not funding non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are hypocritical when looking at their policies in the sub-region. This results in the people, especially the poorest of the poor, being punished for the politics of their President.

3. Conclusion

The problems discussed in this report are not new to people who work in the humanitarian world. In fact they are depressingly common, especially in the complicated Mano River region. But, these problems also raise some very important questions for those who claim to be concerned first and foremost with the civilian population and their humanitarian needs. Perhaps the most important being:

- a. what is protection?
- b. why is it not being provided?
- c. why are the needs of displaced people still not being properly taken care of?

In **Sierra Leone**, the international community is injecting huge amounts of money, but it is going primarily to the military part of the peace process. Military operations on this scale are not only extremely important, but also very expensive, and very important to be seen as being successful. But will their success be measured against human suffering and the denial of human dignity?

The UN in Sierra Leone is in a very delicate situation. The Special Representative to the Secretary General of the UN has found himself wearing two hats: a humanitarian one, and a political/military one. It seems that the humanitarian needs are taking a back seat to the politics.

This is seen in the manner in which the government National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) is being allowed to basically evict people from the camps, claiming that the war is over now and everyone needs to go home.

So who is going to be responsible for the people's rights at the end of the day? Who is supposed to be sure that this repatriation and resettlement program takes place in humane conditions and that the basic services that all people have a right to are provided for them? Who, at the end of the day, will put the people before the peace process?

- As the next phase of this resettlement process takes place, Médecins Sans Frontières asks what is planned to ensure that the problems outlined above are not repeated?
- Are there camps and assistance available to people who choose not to return to their homes at the moment, or will the eviction process be allowed to take place anyway?
- Will repatriation be organized in such conditions (transport, supply, transit) that people dignity and needs are respected?
- Are the donor countries going to remain committed to funding any future programs for combating malnutrition and possible epidemics that may arise out of this chaotic and unprepared return program?

In **Liberia**, the issues of protection are even more life threatening. Civilians have been running from one camp to the next for years now, STILL with the international community hiding from their faces and their stories of horror behind a thinly veiled game of terminology. Médecins Sans Frontières asks how long political issues will continue to overshadow the humanitarian needs of the people.

- Why is the international community waiting to consider the Liberian context a "disaster"?

- Who is going to make sure that the people are guaranteed the right to flee conflict and persecution?
- Who is going to guarantee their safety in countries of asylum?
- Who will secure the right for humanitarian assistance to reach these people; especially the displaced?

This all comes down to one main question: when will humanitarian needs be separated from political agendas?

The war in this sub-region does not seem to be going away. As long as the violence continues the people will remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The needs which we see today, and that we know will be there tomorrow, will not go away. People will continue to survive (not live) as best they can, relying more on their own communities and traditional networks than on the international humanitarian community. It is not hard then to imagine that problems, including the sexual exploitation of people in camps, will continue.

It is almost as if there needs to be a reminder that it is not the fault of the displaced and refugees, but our systems for providing protection and assistance that does not work. They, after all, have had to learn the hard way what it takes to survive.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Today, West Africa remains an intricately linked and complicated context, both politically as well as in terms of the humanitarian situation. While the war has been declared officially over in Sierra Leone and the biggest UN peacekeeping force in the world today has been deployed throughout the country, the conflict in Liberia is gaining momentum. New waves of Liberian refugees are moving into Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast and Guinea looking for safety. Thousands of others are being displaced again and again inside of Liberia.

These are not the only people on the move. On the eve of the Sierra Leonean presidential elections (May 14, 2002) tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans were returning to their homes, either from neighboring Liberia and Guinea, or from IDP camps within Sierra Leone. Hundreds of thousands of people are moving in the sub-region at the same time, often through the same towns and the same camps.

This is creating a confusing situation to say the least. Many questions are being raised about the manner in which these movements are taking place. Do these people, who have been fleeing conflicts for over 10 years, have a chance to decide for themselves if they are ready to return to their homes? Are the necessary conditions in place for these movements to take place in a humane and correct way, according to international standards? Are there appropriate programs in place to facilitate the rebuilding of lives in the war ravaged areas of Sierra Leone? Who is responsible for ensuring the protection of these people in such a politically charged environment? Who decides which groups (Liberian displaced, Sierra Leonean returnee, etc.) are worthy of assistance?

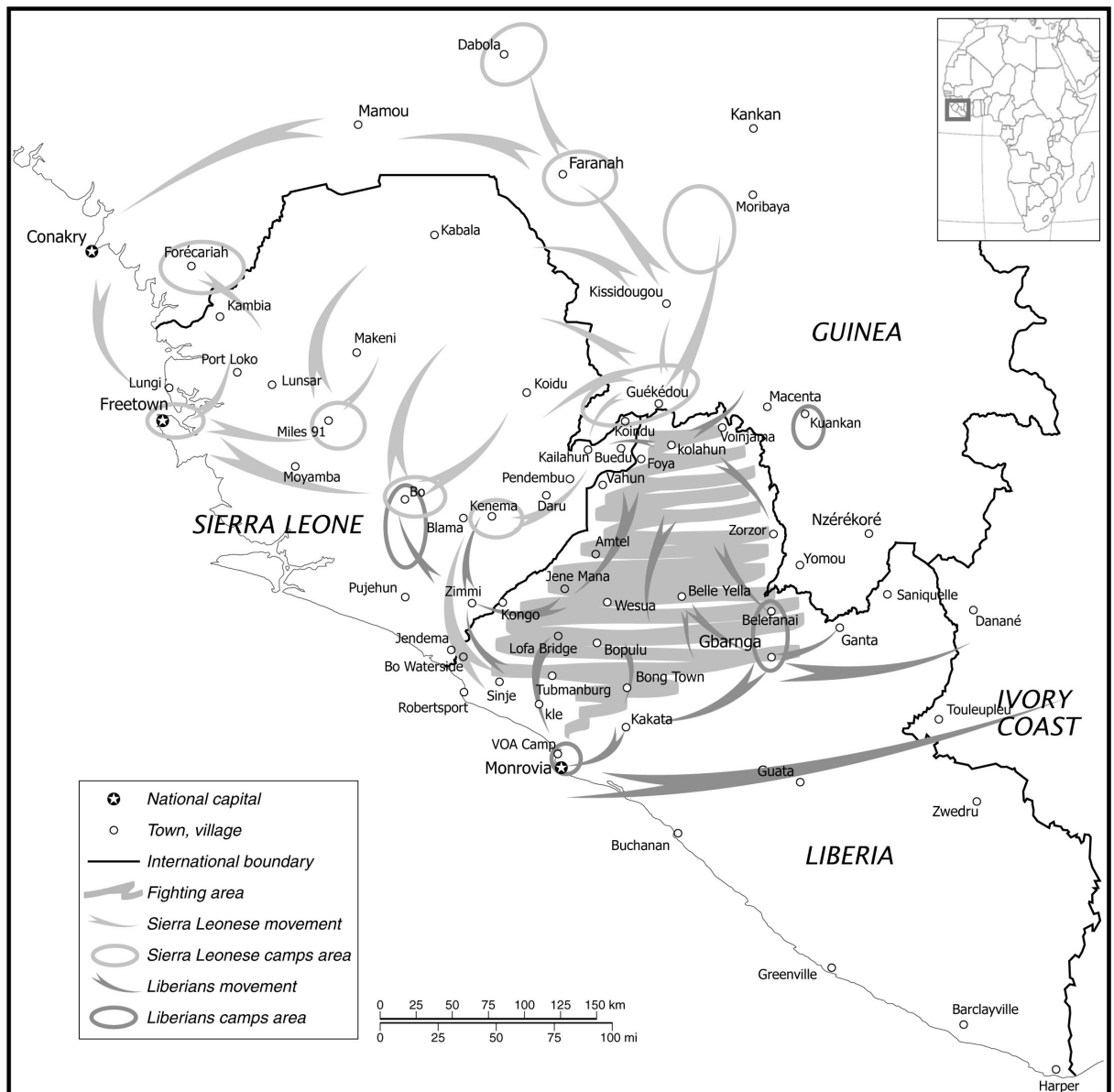
As sanctions are being re-imposed on Liberia, and the multi-million dollar Peace Process in Sierra Leone is drawing to a close, it is the human aspect of this conflict, the rights of the people to protection and humanitarian assistance that seems to have been lost in the political shuffle.

It is with the people of this region in mind – their years of struggle through hunger and warfare – that MSF has been looking into the conditions in which they have been living, and the subsequent responses (or lack thereof) of the international community to their plight. The following document, based on eyewitness accounts of MSF staff in the field, will attempt to portray what life has been like for the people of the region, both in terms of the war, and in terms of the protection and assistance they have received from those responsible for their care.

To provide an easier understanding of an admittedly complicated and confusing situation, the populations included in this report are described by geographic regions. The movement of the people in and around the Mano River region has been, and continues to be, due to protracted conflict. Survival today for many people in the Mano River region is, truly, political.

II. GENERAL CONTEXT

1. Population Movement in the Mano River Region



2. MSF presence in the region

Sierra Leone

Freetown: Currently, MSF works in 5 camps for displaced persons in the Western Area and the Kissy Mental Hospital, providing an integrated approach to physical and mental health care. MSF is also providing medical follow up of war wounded and amputees, including pain management, in Murray Town displaced camp.

Port Loko: MSF supports a therapeutic feeding center for severely malnourished children, and one clinic in the Port Loko district. MSF is also following the water and sanitation situation for the returnees who are passing through this region.

Kambia: A 35-bed hospital in the Kambia is being run by MSF, including surgery and laboratory. Eight clinics in the region are also supported by MSF.

Bombali and Tonkolili: MSF is supporting the Makeni Government Hospital, including surgery and laboratory, along with four clinics in the Bombali district. MSF is also working in Magburaka Hospital, including pediatrics and maternity wards, as well as supporting the clinics around Mile 91

and Bumbuna. Recently, MSF has begun assistance in water and sanitation at the secondary distribution and drop off points for the resettlement convoys.

Moyamba: MSF is providing primary health care to four Ministry of Health clinics in the district, and works in the pediatric ward of the Moyamba Hospital. MSF has also begun a therapeutic feeding center attached to the hospital for severely malnourished children, as well as working in a clinic in Tiama displaced camp providing basic health care.

Bo: MSF is supporting the Bo government hospital in trying to gain a level of independence from humanitarian aid by assisting in the development of a cost recovery system. Also in the Bo area, MSF is providing medical care in several of the IDP camps, including medical screening for all new arrivals. MSF is also working on providing water in Jembe camp. In the districts of Bo, Pujehun and Bonthe, MSF is involved in supporting 21 clinics.

Kenema: MSF is supporting three clinics in the district and has begun a hospital for displaced and refugees. MSF is also providing psychological support for victims of the war in one of the IDPs camps. In Segbwema, MSF has begun a mobile clinic, as well as water and sanitation facilities for the returnees.

Zimmi: MSF has recently increased its support to this area to assist the newly arriving refugees and returnees who have been passing through, fleeing from the war in Liberia. This includes water and sanitation projects, as well as mobile clinics in the region.

Kailahun: MSF has started a hospital for adults and children, including a nutritional center for severely malnourished children. MSF is also supporting one clinic in the area, and keeping an eye on the health situation of refugees from Liberia.

Koidu: MSF has recently begun supporting the Koidu hospital, including provision of emergency surgical services.

Kabala: MSF is supporting the government hospital, including surgery, laboratory and nutritional services, as well as working throughout the primary health care system in the region.

Guinea

Conakry: MSF has begun a program of support to the local NGO Fraternité Médicale Guinée, that is providing basic health care in three clinics in the city. Also, MSF has a street children program aimed at providing basic services, especially primary health care and sanitation facilities. MSF is also working in the transit camp of Mambiya providing basic support for refugees involved in the repatriation process who are in transit to Sierra Leone.

Mamou: A rural health program, focusing on safe child birth and reproductive health care, has been developed by MSF in this region where infant mortality is extremely high. This includes the training of traditional birth attendants (TBAs).

Kissidougou: MSF is providing medical care, including medical screenings for returnees, and when necessary, water, in three refugee camps.

Gueckedou: MSF is currently supporting a series of government health posts throughout the Parrot's Beak region, which was previously home to hundreds of thousands of refugees. MSF is also providing a periodic mobile clinic whenever there are new groups of refugees arriving from Liberia.

Macenta: MSF has recently started to support 4 health structures in Macenta town, in an area hosting many Liberian refugees and affected by cross-border attacks from Liberia.

Tuberculosis: MSF is working to support the national program against TB in both Conakry and Moyen Guinea.

Liberia

Monrovia: MSF is working in Redemption Hospital and a series of clinics throughout the city, focusing on the poor areas of town. With the recent influx of displaced in the country, MSF has begun medical services in newly established camps. MSF is also supporting two cholera treatment centers in Monrovia to face this endemic problem.

Bong County: Several camps in this area are supported by MSF in terms of water, sanitation and health care. This area has remained fluid with new camps opening and old ones moving depending on the security situation.

Harper: MSF is working in the government hospital providing medical care, including surgical services, and is supporting clinics in the Harper area.

3. Chronology of a regional war

December 1989: Taylor, heading the NPFL, launches his insurgency from neighboring Ivory Coast. Beginning of Liberia's civil war.

August 1990: Intervention of the ECOWAS peacekeeping force in Monrovia, the ECOMOG. An interim government is set up under its protection, but NPFL, which controls most of Liberia, refuses to take part.

February 1991: Peace Agreement deals a ceasefire, but the warring parties do not agree on ways forward. Fighting resume.

April 1991: Liberia's civil war spills over to Sierra Leone, as Sankoh's RUF launches its first attacks in Kailahun district from Lofa. Simultaneously, Taylor's opposition, based in Sierra Leone and Guinea, creates the ULIMO which starts its offensive on NPFL forces in western Liberia.

April 1992: In Liberia, NPFL, under diplomatic pressure, is forced to negotiate Yamassoukro Agreements. The ECOMOG deploys outside Monrovia and ULIMO forces progress in western Liberia. In Sierra Leone, the government is ousted by army officers who form the NPRC. First negotiations with the RUF take place.

October 1992: Fighting between ULIMO and NPFL intensifies in Liberia. ECOMOG troops leave their peacekeeping role and openly support AFL and ULIMO against NPFL.

July 1993: NPFL has to withdraw before ECOMOG-ULIMO-AFL alliance. Cotonou Peace Agreement is signed.

December 1993: First presidential elections held in Guinea since 1984 coup. L. Conté remains in power.

January 1994: NPRC decides to increase its military capacity and starts massive recruitment of teenagers in Freetown, before declaring 'total war' on RUF.

May 1994: ULIMO splits along ethnic lines Khran/Mandingo, forming Johnson's ULIMO-J and Kromah's ULIMO-K.

September 1994: Taylor's fief, Gbarnga, is attacked by anti-NPFL forces led by ULIMO-K. NPFL retaliates and targets United-Nations and NGO personnel.

April 1995: NPRC recruits various foreign mercenary groups in exchange for cash and mining concessions. Within a few months, they retake control of Freetown's surrounding areas, mining fields in the South and diamond-rich Kono district.

February 1996: Coup attempt against Conté fails in Guinea.

March 1996: Elections organized in Sierra Leone. A. T. Kabbah is elected. ECOMOG troops are deployed.

April 1996: In Monrovia, violence escalates between factions, leaving at least 1,500 people dead and forcing the USA to evacuate 2,000 expatriates residing in the country.

May 1997: Mounting support of Sierra Leone's government in favor of CDF militias, composed of *Kamajors* traditional hunters, provokes army unrest. Kabbah is ousted and forced to flee to Conakry. The *Armed Forces Revolutionary Council* is formed and invites the RUF to join in.

July 1997: ECOWAS imposes sanctions on Sierra Leone and reinforces ECOMOG presence in the country. CDF intensifies its war against RUF. In Liberia, Abuja Peace Accord's presidential elections are held. Taylor is elected with 75% of the votes.

February 1998: ECOMOG troops and CDF forces launch a counter-offensive on Freetown. Military junta and RUF withdraw from the capital to the north and the east of the country. Violence against civilians during the retreat pushes a large number of people to seek refuge in Guinea.

July 1998: Sankoh, RUF's leader jailed in Nigeria, is expelled to Sierra Leone to be put on trial for "crimes against humanity". RUF requests his immediate liberation. The US, for the first time, calls on Liberia to cease all support to RUF.

April 1999: Attacks in Guinean southern province of Forecariah. The next day, individual Guineans attack refugees accusing them of hosting rebels.

May 2000: RUF offensive on several towns held by United Nations Peacekeeping Mission, UNAMSIL. Around 500 Blue Helmets are taken hostage.

July 2000: Fighting breaks out in northern Liberian province of Lofa between government forces and intruding armed opposition group based in Guinea.

September 2000: Attacks on Guinean southern provinces of Forecariah and Guékédou from Sierra Leone and Liberia.

October 2000: Guinean president Conté declares publicly that refugees are responsible for most problems including the recent attacks. Guinean army launches attacks in Sierra Leone northern province of Kambia

November 2000: Cease-fire signed in Abuja between RUF, CDF and the Government of Sierra Leone

December 2000: Attacks on Guinean southern provinces of Guékédou and Kissdougou from Liberia and Sierra Leone.

May 2001: UN Security Council imposes on Liberia a diamonds and arms embargo for Taylor's alleged support to RUF, while in Lofa, fighting intensifies. In Sierra Leone, both RUF and CDF agree to a ceasefire and the start of a disarmament and demobilization process.

January 2002: Sierra Leone civil war is declared over by the UNAMSIL as 47,000 combatants have been disarmed since May 2001. In Liberia, the conflict escalates and as LURD forces launch an attack just few kilometers from Monrovia, the president declares a state of emergency.

May 2002: Sierra Leone prepares to hold presidential elections. UN Security Council extends sanctions on Liberia as the conflict expands to affect half of the country.

III. "I AM FROM SIERRA LEONE"

1. Current Context

Today, Sierra Leone is trying to put the war behind it and move forward. The Presidential and Parliamentary elections took place on May 14, and people are looking to the future and trying to rebuild their lives. Yet, a major part of the legacy of this war still remains: the more than one million Sierra Leoneans who left their homes during ten years of bitter fighting. There are those who fled to Liberia and Guinea while running for their lives, and others who fled within Sierra Leone and have been living in camps throughout the country. As of February 2002, the UN estimated that there were 250,000 Sierra Leoneans in neighboring countries and approximately 140,000 internally displaced people.

In advance of the elections and subsequent withdrawal of UNAMSIL, displaced Sierra Leoneans were sent back to their regions of origin by the UN and the government of Sierra Leone resettlement programs. However, **it is difficult to consider this a resettlement program in anything but name**. Driven by national and international political agendas and rife with problems, this process has been poorly planned, badly organized and ineffectively implemented. The casualties are the hundreds of thousands of IDPs and returnees, who in this whirlwind of mismanagement and misallocated blame have had their rights and their protection undermined. The situation is especially troubling in light of the recently released Save the Children and UNHCR report on sexual manipulation of refugees in the sub-region, which highlighted the lack of protection for these people and their resulting vulnerability to exploitation.

The background to today's situation is a history of horror and humiliation. For ten years these victims of the war have watched loved ones die, endured prolonged hunger, suffered through physical violence and repeated escapes from various armed groups, no matter where they turned. Testimonies are the only way to truly understand this constant struggle to survive and what the war has meant and what life has been like for people since they left their homes.

***Hannah, age 25. Returnee woman. Kailahun, Sierra Leone – April 9, 2002:** "My mother doesn't want me to tell you what happened to me. But I want to tell you, and I want people to know what happened to us.*

I left my village, in Kailahun District, in 1993 when we were attacked...I was raped and my brother was killed. We fled into the surrounding bush while the attack continued (for three days)...For two weeks we moved only at night because the RUF were everywhere. We moved every time that we felt in danger. There was fighting going on everywhere, and at times we were chased by the fighters...we had only bananas to eat.

Finally...we decided to cross into Guinea. We saw that there was no food or help for us in Guinea either. Some of the new arrivals from our area told us that there was no RUF in our village any more so my husband and I decided to go back to try to get food...we turned back into Sierra Leone and went to our village. We were there for two days when RUF attacked again. At this time they were killing all the men, so my husband ran away on his own to Guinea to save his life. I ran to Kailahun to join my family...but there was no one really to take care of me...so I decided to go back to the village...[she was only 16 at time]. The place was quiet, so I would go into the village, take food and then go to the bush and stay hidden with others...

For one year, a group of about 15 of us moved around in the bush together, living in bush camps, eating only bush yams and bananas. We moved and cooked only at night to avoid RUF finding us. Even the smoke from a fire could mean your death. During this time, the RUF had what they called a 'secret society' of women in the region, meaning that all the women belonged to them (RUF), and they would rape any woman that they found. Rape was happening everywhere. I myself was raped too many times to count. There were even cross border attacks into the camps after I got to Guinea, looking for women to rape, including old grannies. We finally decided to go to Guinea because we were so hungry. [When Hannah was asked why she did not leave Sierra Leone during that one year, she explained, 'I could live with the RUF, but I could not live without food.']

Besides widespread rape and being forced to live with serious and protracted hunger, Sierra Leoneans were also victims of brutal mutilations, and a seemingly endless series of escapes.

***Sia, age 30. Returnee woman. Tiama camp, Sierra Leone – February 12, 2002:** "I am only 30 years old. If you look at my face you will think I am older, but that is because of the hard life from the war. I am from Bomanja village, Sando Chiefdom [near to Koidu] in Kono District. [It should be noted that Sando Chiefdom was one of the first areas very heavily affected by the amputations carried out in 1998].*

I first left my village in 1998 early in the morning when AFRC and RUF attacked us. I left with 14 people in my group. We ran to the bush...My aunt had her hand amputated before being pushed out to the bush. It took us two weeks to get to the border [with Guinea] and we lived on bush yams and mangoes. Our biggest problem was hunger. One of my daughters was captured by RUF before they could get to Guinea. The rebels also had started the bush on fire to clear the bush camps, making no place safe for us."

Not everyone was able to reach Liberia or Guinea. This was most often due to their geographic location at the time they were attacked, or when they chose to flee their homes. Often, during

different stages of the conflict, these displaced were in areas that had sporadic access, at best, for the humanitarian communities, resulting in little or no help for many people who in turn watched their family members die again and again as they made their flight towards safety.

Dauda, age 32. Displaced male. Lebanese School camp, Kenema, Sierra Leone – Avril 4, 2002: *"I left my village in 1992 when we were attacked by the rebels. There were 15 of my family with me. We decided to head to Koidu because it is the district headquarters and we thought there would be more security there. We stayed here for some months (almost a year) living mostly on wild food. Three people in my family died here from sickness. Koidu was attacked in 1993 and I ran away with seven people from my family. The others were scattered in the confusion (there is still no news from these 5 people). We decided to go to Kenema where we had friends... We walked for 14 days living on bananas and plantains. We saw many wounded people in the bush at this time who had no one to help them make their way. When we arrived in Kenema we went to the RTI camp where we slept in a field for three days before we were moved into the camp. We stayed here for two years. Two people in my family died of sickness while we were here."*

2. "I went to Liberia or Guinea"

Unfortunately, even in countries of asylum outside Sierra Leone, the nightmare of fighting for their lives continued for people. The most troubling events against Sierra Leonean refugees undoubtedly took place in Guinea beginning at the end of 2000, when there were cross-border incursions from Sierra Leone and Liberia into the region of Gueckedou. For the refugees who found themselves caught between the Guinean army and the invading rebels, they found themselves once again on the run to save their lives.

Sia: *"We stayed here until 2000 when we were attacked. We ran to Massakoundou because they knew that there was a camp there. We stayed there for about two weeks but no one was there... so we moved on, trying to find other refugees or the UN. We walked... in the direction of Kissidougou. On the way we were taken by the Guinean army into a fenced-in compound. There the army accused us of being rebels and Mandingos (one ethnic group). They tried to separate the women and children from the men, but we refused because we know what that means. So the army laid everyone down on the ground and went through shooting the young boys and men in the head. I counted over 50 men that were dead, laying there on the ground when it was over. They killed my own husband and two of my sons. I cannot talk about it anymore because water will start to come from my eyes... We continued to walk trying to reach Massakoundou... There we had a lot of problems with the Guinean authorities and many men were arrested who had traditional markings on their bodies. We never saw them again. Their families assume they are dead."*

Boima, Refugee man; age approximately 85. Boreah camp. Guinea – March 16, 2002: *"We walked for nine days with a huge group of people from Katkama camp... Along the way we were stopped by the Guinean army who marched us to Kissidougou. They told us that we had to be screened... to see who were rebels... We were beaten by the army and accused repeatedly of being rebels because of our traditional markings. They held us for five days. Finally the Prefect came and negotiated that the army let us go to the camp at Massakoundou. The army agreed... On the way to the camp, myself and two other men in my family were arrested with all the other men in our group, again because of our traditional markings. The women were allowed to negotiate with the soldiers to be able to bring us food to eat. I am an old man. I can barely see. What do I have to do with war? Why would they think I am a rebel?"*

Refugee woman; age 37. Koundou Lengor Bendu Camp until February 2001: *"Harassment was the order of the day. We were stripped naked and searched for tattoo marks on our bodies by Guinean military men. Sometimes they put their hand in the women's vaginas on the pretext of searching for tattoos"*¹

Following arbitrary arrests at the hands of Guinean authorities, refugees were told in March 2001 that Massakoundou camp was being closed and that they were to be transferred to new camps. Stating that they had had enough of the treatment received in Guinea, several refugees reported telling UNHCR that they did not want to be relocated within Guinea and would only move if they could go back to Sierra Leone. According to a number of refugees, this group was consequently informed by UNHCR that if they did not move, they would be cut off from food supplies and that if they refused to leave the camp, they would no longer be entitled to refugee status and therefore the protection of UNHCR. Refugees who allegedly experienced this situation expressed the sentiment that their only choice had been to make their own way to Sierra Leone, without the assistance of UNHCR. Refugees in other camps reported a similar story.

Refugee man; age 50. Nyanfrandou camp until August 2001: *"The UNHCR Field Officer, Mr. Y, said on April 17, 2001 that we should be relocated to another camp, which was Dabola. He concluded that if we did not go to this camp, there will be no food supply for us and he will authorize the Guinean soldiers to drive us with force and raid us... Because of this speech, several refugees fled into the bush trying to cross the border into Sierra Leone. Before I go to that camp, I prefer to go to Sierra Leone and die."*²

¹ Guinea Crisis 2001: The Refugee Perspective. A report by MSF-Holland. December 21, 2001.

² Ibid.

The understanding that UNHCR was working alongside the Guinean authorities to prevent refugees from returning to Sierra Leone at this time was furthered by reports that those individuals who sought to find their own way back to Freetown were sent back at checkpoints, allegedly upon the orders of UNHCR. Interview statements suggest that this was a particular problem at checkpoints in areas around Kissidougou and Faranah.

3. "I am a Displaced Person (IDP)"

The problems that the Sierra Leonean populations in the camps of the region have faced (both refugees and displaced) seem to be exacerbated by the choices of implementing partners that have been made by the UN agencies, especially in the case of IDPs. The UN agency mandated by the Secretary General to ensure that the displaced are properly assisted and protected (OCHA; the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs) works as a coordinating body. With very little control or enforcement capacity over the implementing partners relied upon to carry out the work – whose capacity varies and has definitely been an issue at different stage of the history of the camps – OCHA is failing to assume its responsibility with respect to the IDPs.

In Sierra Leone, life in the IDP camps has been known as difficult and strained for the displaced for quite sometime.

*"It is increasingly difficult for the Government of Sierra Leone to identify land for temporary settlement of individuals. This has created sub-human conditions in existing IDP camps, with agencies unable to maintain or expand facilities to accommodate additional caseloads. Most affected are the shelter, health and water and sanitation sectors... Without timely allocation of land for construction of temporary and permanent shelters, planning and response will continue to be difficult and considerably delayed."*³

As in Liberia with the LRRRC, the main partner and counterpart to OCHA in assuming protection and assistance for the IDPs is the National Commission for Social Action, or NaCSA (previously the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation). By being a government commission, it is by definition made up of people who have been appointed by elected officials, making it inextricably linked to the government. It is this commission that is responsible for choosing the agencies that are in charge of managing the camps, which includes, among other things, registration, food distribution and sensitization of the displaced populations.

Inside the camps, these agencies then liaise with the camp chairmen, who play the role of representatives of the displaced population. Yet, many of these managers seem to have been self-appointed, and often are not displaced or do not even live in the camps. Some agencies working in these camps complain that the camp managers are only present during the distribution days. This is especially true of the camps around Freetown.

These camps have had an ongoing registration and verification exercise trying to obtain realistic numbers for the IDP populations. A family's ability to get their food ration, basic shelter, household supplies (in other words the very items that they are entitled to) depends directly on their ability to get a registration card. **But it is known that getting a card is not an easy task as this process has been marred with inaccuracies, corruption and incompetence from the beginning.** Many people report that they have paid for their registration card, and even then still did not get it. MSF counselors working in these camps have also been told by the displaced that many camp chairmen and committee member are buying and selling these cards. One way this works is the camp chairmen report the cards they have purchased as lost or stolen to NaCSA so that they can be replaced. They in turn keep the replacement cards as well.

There are also many stories of city residents living in the camps. With the destruction of the eastern part of Freetown in 1999, and the continuous influx of displaced due to the war, the city faces very serious problems of overcrowding and housing shortages. Some people have seen this as an opportunity. They rent their own home, while living for free in the camps, thereby making a nice profit.

All of this has led to confusion, difficulty in planning humanitarian operations, and also a lack of control over the camp programs and distributions. This is especially true for access to food.

In December 1999, Action Contre la Faim (ACF) carried out an assessment in the Western Area's camps to evaluate the impact of food aid on the livelihood of IDPs. This assessment revealed

³ Plan of Operation: Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees. UNHCR. September 2001.

that, "Part of the displaced living in the camp was not benefiting from food distribution, as they were not registered..."⁴

Dauda: "We stayed here for about seven months. We were not registered by anyone and we never got supplies. We lived on bush yams and cut firewood to get money. This was very stressful because at this time we could hear shooting in the surrounding forest so we were afraid of being attacked by the RUF... One person died of sickness there."

Protecting Refugees : A Field Guide for NGOs. UNHCR. 1999.

" Refugees must be able to return in safety and dignity. Return in safety means that refugees return in conditions of...physical security (including protection from armed attacks...)"

The main UN agency supplying food to these populations is the World Food Program (WFP). As they are a UN agency, the WFP must rely on the figures of the implementing partners. This is difficult when the figures are questionable, and when there are several different population numbers given for one camp. For example, at the end of April 2002, as they were preparing to move the IDPs from the camps at Mile 91 (Northern Province), NaCSA gave a population estimate of 30,000, while the camp leader reported 600 people!

Yet, even when receiving their food ration, those people interviewed explained that their family had to find other ways to make money in order to have enough to eat.

Boima: "We did receive aid but the food was never enough, so the younger people in the group did manual labor to earn money."

Sia: "In Dabola the harassment continued and we were very afraid to leave the camp. The food supply was also very small. My food was finished after two weeks. To get money, the only thing that I was allowed to do by the local community was to clean the 'excrement' in the latrines of the families with compounds near the camp."

The areas where these people found themselves encamped were often very tense, forcing them to scavenge for food in dangerous situations.

Dauda: "...when you are hungry, you are not afraid of anything."

The effect of an insufficient food ration, the ways families found to cope with this problem, and the resulting corruption is best described in an Action Contre la Faim report on the food situation in the IDP camps around Freetown.

"The wealth of the displaced was far from being homogenous: better-off displaced had very low dependence on food aid, while large numbers of IDPs, especially the ones who have spent less than one year in the camps, have developed limited coping mechanisms and faced difficulties to cover their daily food needs (...). There is a very significant gap in terms of access to cash between the poor and the middle/better-off households... the poor displaced can generate an average of (approx. \$3.40/month), while the middle/better-off generate respectively (\$122.70 to \$170.45/month) through their job and their business. Better-off displaced who obviously do not need food relief (lend) their stocks to the poor households ...when their ration is exhausted (after approx. two weeks). They obtain credit from them that they have to pay back after the distribution, in the form of food relief or in cash. This mechanism enables the better-off to speculate on the food relief - stocking food acquired for free or at very cheap prices that they release when prices go up - while it shortens the duration of the ration for the poor household... Poor households are therefore in a kind of vicious circle that prevents them from using the food aid for their sole consumption: the duration of their food ration is shortened by loans they have to pay back to the wealthier groups after the distribution, which obliges them to credit the same groups each month when their ration is exhausted."⁵

The poor often generate additional money to buy food through manual labor. These impoverished, often larger, households turn to their younger children in order to supplement the family income, especially in difficult times (when the labor market is flooded, when there is a delay in food assistance, etc.). At the end of the day, the result is that those who are truly in need are easily manipulated and drop through the cracks in the system.

It is within this context of warfare, corruption, and a constant struggle to survive that reports of children and other individuals exchanging sex for food have been documented. In addition, it is against this backdrop that the current repatriation and resettlement programs are taking place in the sub-region.

4. Repatriation and Resettlement: the Real Story

When talking of the current resettlement exercise, it must be clear that at this point it is a logistical program and not a true program of resettlement. This is due to a lack of respect for the basic rights of the people to be able to choose their fate, and to be treated with dignity at each stage

⁴ ACF Post Distribution Monitoring Report: Use of Food Aid in the Displaced Camps of Freetown. Dec.00-Jan.01. Mandela, Approved School and Grafton camps.

⁵ Ibid

of their return. These issues have presented themselves in different ways and are the results of a number of problems.

For the majority of the people returning to their homes today in Sierra Leone, they are going back to nothing. Their houses have been burned to the ground and entire villages destroyed. There is often no safe drinking water available, no medical facilities, no schools and no jobs. This is especially true in the harder-hit rural areas on the eastern and northern parts of the country, where the bulk of the re-settlers are being sent. It is for reasons, according to the UNHCR, that a Resettlement Program is meant to involve more than just the physical movement of people. Its success depends on the presence of programs to assist people in rebuilding their lives and their communities. This should involve community-based programs that can help with the problems that are faced by those returning home, so that a lasting solution to the displacement of populations throughout the region can be found.

*"The underlying fragility of economic, social and political systems is apparent in the increasingly violent and protracted conflicts that destroy the lives and livelihoods of national and neighboring populations in the sub-region. To make the repatriation and reintegration of Sierra Leone refugees sustainable...Humanitarian actions must be guided by policy initiatives and accompanied – not followed by – macro-economic and human development measures."*⁶

This is not the case though in Sierra Leone today where very few projects for installing basic services have begun in the majority of the most precarious areas to which people are returning.

This is in part because this program has been poorly planned and poorly organized. The decision to begin an actual mass movement of all of the people out of the camps throughout the country was taken very recently, leaving little time to organize the logistics of such an operation. In fact many agencies report that they are not ready, as it was agreed last year that this repatriation would take place gradually.

The 2002 plan was drawn up following the resettlement exercises that took place in 2001. A "Lessons Learned" document was compiled, and using this along with resettlement guidelines of the government, it was clearly outlined that the people would be moved in safety, that transport would be guaranteed, appropriate resettlement packages would be provided, and medical screening prior to departure would be organized.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. UNOCHA. 1998

"Principle 28: Competent authorities (the State) have the primary duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return voluntarily, in safety and with dignity, to their homes or places of habitual residence, or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country"

Yet in practice today, we see a different story. After such a brutal war and all the problems the people of Sierra Leone have faced, it is to be expected that security is a concern for all those who are now going home. Ensuring a safe environment of return to is supposed to be a part of this process, as stated in the government strategy: *"1.2.2 the Government of Sierra Leone will only facilitate resettlement into an area when it is deemed that the area in question is sufficiently safe to allow for the return of displaced people in safety and dignity."*⁷

This is certainly not the case for the three Kissi chiefdoms of Kailahun District (Eastern Province), where conditions for safe and dignified resettlement do not yet exist. In recent months, cross-border military activities from Liberia have resulted in the loss of life, kidnapping and looting. With the war gaining momentum in Liberia, this area remains at risk for these kinds of security issues to flare up at any time.

The risk of moving people in unsafe conditions in Sierra Leone has been highlighted by UNHCR for years. More recently in Guinea concerns were raised months ago, especially in terms of how this is linked to the Sierra Leonean refugees still there.

Originally, UNHCR stated that they would use their own criteria for declaring chiefdoms safe, and facilitate returns only to those areas considered safe by UNHCR, stating the agency *"should avoid, to the extent possible, contributing to the serious IDP problem in Sierra Leone by encouraging mass repatriation of refugees from unsafe areas of origin..."*⁸. However, since the influx of refugees and returnees from Liberia started to increase (February 2002), UNHCR has been transporting new returnees directly to Daru (for those going back to Kailahun District). In Daru (Eastern Province) the returnees then receive their two months supply of food and/or non-food item packages (NFI). From here, they are encouraged to make their own way home, even if they are from areas still declared unsafe. For the IDP families who chose voluntary repatriation (see below), it is an even more difficult scenario. They already had to walk to these distribution sites with a portion of their resettlement package (often more than 30 kg) as well as all of their belongings and their families. Then, just like the returnees, they too are encouraged to find their way home.

⁶ Plan of Operation: Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees. UNHCR. September 2001.

⁷ Sierra Leone Resettlement Strategy. Enabling the displaced to rebuild their lives back in their communities with safety and dignity. Revised October 2001. NaCSA.

⁸ Plan of Operation: Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees. UNHCR. September 2001.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. UNOCHA. 1998

"(...) ensure that internally displaced persons are not pressured to return to any area against their will. It is not acceptable for displaced persons to be returned to locations that are still affected by armed conflict."

It should be noted that at the end of April 2002, UNHCR has deemed the eastern portion of Kailahun District as too unsafe for staff to be based there.

5. The Desire to Go Home and the Environment of Choice

Linked to issues of security and safety is the right of people who have fled their homes, no matter what label or status they have been assigned (be it refugee, displaced or returnee), to choose whether or not they want to leave the camps and go home, and when.

It is true, most people do want to go home. The question is rather how and under what conditions are they being sent home? Some feel that they lack the information about what to expect and what resources are available to them.

Returnee man, age 34. Tiama camp, Sierra Leone – February 12, 2002: "I am waiting to go back to Koidu, but I also want to hear from the UN since they brought us to this camp...I do not want to go back until I hear that there is something organized for lodging and our houses to be re-built (tools, brick making supplied, etc.) because I have small children."

Many others wanted to wait until the elections took place to be sure that there are no security problems, having experienced what "protection" really means, while in the camps in Guinea.

Refugee woman, age approximately 65. Boreah camp, Guinea – March 1, 2002: "I want to go home but I have a lot of questions and a lot of frustration. My place is burned down. Who will help me to get tools and material to rebuild it?...I do not want to go home until after elections to see if the peace stays. I also do not want to go back to an empty village. I am old and do not want to be alone."

When faced with the options of either going back home or to another camp, there are those who, after 10 years of running through a series of camps where assistance and protection have often been minimal or non-existent, simply cannot imagine starting over again in yet another camp.

Refugee man, age approximately 85. Boreah camp, Guinea – March 1, 2002: "...If I go back now I hope that they will give us tools to rebuild our house, and food. One thing is clear. I will not go back to Sierra Leone to live in another camp. I know what it is to start in a new camp and I am tired of moving all the time."

The way in which the resettlement is happening today does not provide the possibility for people to choose if they are ready to go home now, in 6 months or even later. This is especially true in the case of the IDPs, where the only option is to leave the camps before June 2002. This was clearly outlined during an UN/NaCSA/NGO Coordination Meeting held in Kenema on April 6, when the NaCSA representative explained that the camps will be closed on June 20. If people don't want to go to their home areas then they will have to find someplace else to live besides the camps. This does not allow any provisions for those people who do not want to, or cannot, return home at the moment, making this more of a "removal" program as opposed to a "resettlement" program.

This process is explained by the Sierra Leone government's own guidelines: "All registered IDPs and displaced returnees originating from newly declared safe chiefdoms will automatically enter the resettlement process. This will be indicated during the final food distribution in IDP camps, temporary settlements and host communities, when a line will be marked across each ration card to signify that the household has entered the resettlement process." ⁹

Unfortunately the notion of voluntary resettlement has been removed by the automatic inclusion of all displaced persons into the process of resettlement once an area has been declared safe. This effectively takes away the right of all the displaced to assistance and protection, in one broad stroke.

The people who were interviewed in some of the displaced camps complained of feeling that they had been lied to, further aggravating their feelings of having no choice of whether or not to leave the camps.

One woman interviewed in Lebanese School Displaced camp in Kenema (Eastern Province) explained:

Displaced woman, age 30. Lebanese School camp, Kenema, Sierra Leone – April 4, 2002: "I left on foot to get my supply in Segbwema because they told us there would be no trucks until June or even later. When I was on the road, I saw trucks going to Segbwema filled with people from this camp! I returned here hoping to get on one of the trucks. I have small children and if I cannot get transport I will have to leave some of our things behind."

⁹ Sierra Leone Resettlement Strategy. Enabling the displaced to rebuild their lives back in their host communities with safety and dignity. Revised October 2001. National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation.

Others felt pressure to leave the camps due to different factors. In several IDP camps, the agencies providing food for the people stopped these distributions following requests from the government to do so. MSF teams witnessed other organizations putting padlocks on water pumps inside the camps.

Information was a major problem for the IDPs. Due to an improper sensitization campaign, some feared that they would not be able to vote in the camps and that they must be present in their home communities in order to vote, which is not true. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) was supposed to have done sensitization in the camps, which obviously was not done.

Dauda: "The government has told us that we have to go home... They told me that I must go home to vote in my own village..."

Many were in a rush to start their trip to the secondary distribution points as quickly as possible. As most families have to walk and carry their belongings and children at the same time, several days are needed to make this trip. The dates given for the distributions were very limited. But if they do not take part in the resettlement as scheduled for their camp, then they lose access to the food and the non-food item package (NFI) offered, since by definition of the resettlement document, they are no longer displaced.

But "displaced" is not a status to be taken away. If you are a displaced and feel too unsure of the situation to go home right now, what is your "status" then?

Displaced woman, age 26. Splendid camp. Sierra Leone – April 2, 2002: "My biggest problem is the fact that I have no house in Kono. For my future, I want to go back home but there is nothing there...I have no money to pay for transport...I am tired of staying where I am a stranger, but I do not know how I will manage when I get back."

If the camps are going to close, where can people like this woman go? There is still no clear plan on camp consolidation or closure. **No one that MSF has spoken to knows what will happen to the camps after the end of the resettlement program in June 2002.** There is even talk of forcibly evicting any stragglers from the camps, using police and military to do so. There are to date, no plans for continued assistance to the people who remain after June.

A young man at Trade Center camp in Freetown had gone with the April 2002 resettlement to Makeni (Northern Province). He had left for the resettlement, collected his package and returned to Freetown within less than a week. When asked why he had returned, he explained that his house in Makeni has been partially destroyed. Also as a young man looking after a wife and their children, Makeni was too difficult because he had no job there. At least in the camp he had a small job that provided him with about US\$9.00/month, shelter and food (when there was supply). Now he does not have the means to go home and make the necessary repairs to his house. He knows the camp will close in June, and that he may no longer have shelter, food or a job, but he will think about that when the time comes.

A 35 year-old mother of six living at Trade Center camp was recently involved in the resettlement operation to Makeni (April 2002). Her village was outside of the main part of town. She had not visited it in the three years since leaving there for the camp. She registered for the recent resettlement and picked up her package in Makeni, then proceeded to her village to check the situation there. She found the place mostly deserted, and her house burned down. When she was there she saw many soldiers around with guns that made her afraid. She saw one soldier beating a young girl. She did not know the reason, but said that the military police flogged the soldier in return. Under these conditions she returned to Makeni to collect her goods, and she made her way back to Freetown.

This is far from providing an environment that will ensure people are being given a free and fair choice about their lives, or protecting their right to assistance.

Those who were previously refugees in Guinea also explained the conditions under which they made their "choice" to be repatriated to Sierra Leone.

Sia: "In Dabola the UN came and asked us if they wanted to leave to come back to Sierra Leone. (When asked if this was her free choice, she replied 'What did we have to choose between, being killed and chased in Guinea or being killed and chased in Sierra Leone? Do you think that is a choice?') We decided to come back because at least we would be at home in Sierra Leone and not harassed by the local population."

This feeling of insecurity which these refugees have faced and under which they are asked to choose between staying in a camp and repatriation, is clearly understood by UNHCR as their report explains: "...their return in less than ideal conditions was facilitated by UNHCR due to severe limitations in preserving asylum in Guinea." ¹⁰

¹⁰ Plan of Operation: Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees. UNHCR. September 2001.

6. Voluntary Repatriation

The people in the camps were also supposed to be given a choice between going home with transport provided to them, which is called “facilitated repatriation”, or on their own which is “voluntary repatriation”. Many of the camp residents never knew that they had a choice but to go home by their own means.

Displaced woman, age approximately 40. Lebanese School displaced camp, Sierra Leone – April 4, 2002: “They told us that we had to sign up to be repatriated. It would be either voluntary or facilitated. Mr. Z explained to us that people who signed up for facilitated repatriation would have to wait for the government trucks, and that could take along time, even after the rains. Those who did not want to wait that long should sign up for voluntary repatriation. So I signed up for voluntary repatriation. But then just a few days later, the trucks came to the camp to get the others! We asked Mr. Z what happened. It was the reverse of what we were told. He said that it was a gamble and we lost.”

The term “voluntary” in this case then, refers to people who will not be given transportation to secondary distribution points and/or resettlement areas. What it does not imply is a choice, since these people have been misinformed about their options, essential services for them are stopping in the camps and the threat of forcible eviction is beginning to be heard.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. UNOCHA. 1998

“At the minimum, regardless of the circumstances, and without discrimination, competent authorities shall provide internally displaced persons with and ensure safe access to:

- Essential food and potable water;*
- Basic shelter and housing*
- Appropriate clothing;*
- Essential medical services and sanitation.”*

For those who signed up for this voluntary repatriation, most have had to make their way home on foot as they do not have the money to pay for transport. There have been little or no provisions made for those moving on foot, such as medical screening prior to departure, or water points and medical stations along the way.

At many of the secondary distribution points, there has been no provision for water, latrines, medical care or shelter. As the days for receiving NFI packages is limited (usually each camp is designated one or two days on which they can receive the supplies) people tend to rush to get to the distribution points quickly, but end up being stuck there, for different reasons, with no basic services.

Displaced woman, age 36. Segbwema, Sierra Leone – April 25, 2002: “I am blind and have four children aged three to 20 years. I left my 11 years ago because of the war. We were refugees in Guinea where my husband fell sick and died. We came on foot from Blama camp...to Segbwema where we got our NFI package. I wanted to come here right away to be sure to get my supply. I thought that if we waited for facilitated repatriation organized for after the elections, there would not be enough supply for everyone. But for three weeks we have been blocked here because we don't have money to pay for transport to our village. We live in the old school building with 6 other families. We have finished our food stock. I already sold some of my NFI to buy more food. I have no money...and it is too far to go on foot with small children. I don't know what is going to happen to us. There are many other women alone with children like me in Segbwema.”

In Makeni on April 6, 400 “voluntary” returning displaced arrived with no shelter, confused registration lists, no water and no sanitation facilities. When MSF asked the local NaCSA representative in Makeni what these people should use as latrines, they were told “that they should ask residents near the stadium if they can use their facilities should the need arise.”

On April 11, at 7 pm in the evening the MSF team in Magburaka (Northern Province) was asked to set up water at a nearby transit point for the next day, as hundreds would be arriving and no provision for drinking water had been organized.

But it was not planned by NaCSA, OCHA and UNHCR that people would stay in these secondary distribution points for long. What we saw is that many need at least several days to organize themselves in order to get home. Others face different problems. Some are not on the lists. In Kailahun town, one of the Sierra Leonean refugees interviewed in Sinje camp in Liberia was met again in the market. He explained that he left his wife in Daru because he had no idea what he was going to find in Kailahun, and he knew his house had been destroyed.

Returnee man, age 36. Kailahun town, Sierra Leone – April 9, 2002: “We all came together with the UNHCR convoy from Sinje. We slept in Zimmi and arrived the next day at Blama. Here, we got our non-food items, and then we signed up to go back home because I have had enough of camps. When we arrived in Daru, they told me that I was not on the manifest and so could not get my food. How can they say this when they see me getting off of their own trucks?”

In the recent resettlement plan to Bombali district (Northern Province), NGO counselors in Trade Center, Grafton and National Workshop camps reported that the International Office for Migration (IOM, one agency providing transport for the repatriation and resettlement programs) came into the camps one day before the planned resettlement was to take place. With the short notice, those IDPs on the list who intended to return to their homes, ran around trying to prepare their belongings as quickly as possible. The following day when the trucks arrived for the scheduled departure, the people who were told the day before that they would be leaving with this convoy, were no longer on the list. Instead, there were names of a number of other people who were not supposed to be leaving the camp at all. Many of these people were not even

from the area where the convoy was going (Makeni), and they did not speak the language. Upon arrival in Makeni, a number of registered IDPs who were on the trucks, still were not on the manifest.

Others stay in these locations because some of the agencies providing their supplies do not have enough stock to give them their resettlement packages. Instead, they issue tokens to the people and tell them that anywhere from two weeks to two months they can return to get their provisions.

Musa, age 40. Kailahun – April 6, 2002: "...On April 6th we were brought in trucks to Daru. They gave us our food supply that in theory is supposed to feed us for two months...Not everyone received their food because there is not enough. They told us, 'come back to collect your food in two weeks;' But we cannot come back! We have already paid the transport to return to our village...We stayed blocked in Daru for two weeks. We sleep outside our in abandoned houses, or even on the ground."

This is in part caused by the constant change in plans from OCHA, UNHCR and NaCSA, incorrect numbers of people who are expected at these points, and the rush to resettle everyone. On top of this there are also problems with the actual supply. Many implementing partners complain that they were not prepared for everyone to be moved. Planning, subsequent budget requests and purchasing of supplies had not included the entire IDP population. Others report that donors are slow to respond to these new requests for additional funding. This is resulting in late orders being made, late deliveries to distribution sites and at times incomplete packages. The latest news is that the ship with the needed supplies should be arriving in country in June. This affects all items, including those that are most needed; food and shelter material (plastic sheeting).

Even for those who do get their full package, some cannot afford transport and have to find other ways to go home.

Mustafa, age 29. Returnee man. On the road from Segbwema to Bunumbu – April 25, 2002: "I am going home on foot with my wife, my sister and my daughter to our village Bende Yawei, 26 miles from Segbwema (a secondary distribution point). I left my village in 1991 because of the attacks. We still have two more days of walking ahead of us. We arrived on foot from Blama camp to Segbwema two weeks ago to get our supplies. Since then we have been blocked, with no means of transport and no money to pay. We already sold our bag of bulgur (the main cereal distributed in West Africa) and two tins of oil. Yesterday, we decided to continue on foot carrying everything on our heads. At night we sleep next to the road. When it rains, we make a small shelter with the piece of plastic sheeting from our kit."

7. Vulnerables

There seems to have been little attention paid to the vulnerable groups among the IDP population, and so those who are truly in need are forced to walk to the secondary distribution sites, and then to their homes. For the elderly, pregnant women, anyone who is sick, handicapped or single parent family – this poses serious risks.

Sierra Leone Resettlement Strategy. NCRRR. 2001.

"Within the beneficiary groups...there are a number of vulnerable groups [including women, handicapped, orphans, infirm, elders] ...special attention needs to be given to them for re-establishing their basic requirements, such as shelter, rebuilding their livelihoods, and protecting them from sexual violence..."

The day following the last of the convoys out of Blama displaced camp, a quick visit showed a disturbing sight. There were a group of a few hundred people who were not given transport, and who were still living in the camp. The mark from where a fire had been burning just near the road leading into the camp could be seen. "During the night there are thieves who come into the camps and harass us when they are looting. We all had to move down here and make a fire to try to be safe."

When asked why they were still there, it was simply a lack of money for transport.

Displaced woman; age approximately 35. Blama camp, Sierra Leone: "I sold my non-food package already and that is enough to pay for me and my child, but not my property. I have already missed the date for my food supply in Sewafe. I hope that someone will take pity on me and not charge me for my bundle."

Among this group was a single mother with her sick four-year-old daughter (her husband and three sons had been killed in the war), and a young man in a wheelchair left behind to be "voluntarily repatriated."

The results of providing no medical screening before resettlement begins tends to be felt most among the vulnerable population. For those voluntary re-settlers who left Mile 91 and Grafton camps, six full-term pregnant women were identified by MSF at the distribution site on one particular day; one of the women went immediately into labor, two others were rushed to the hospital after collapsing from dehydration and exhaustion. When OCHA was asked about the medical screening for these people they said that it was up to the displaced to have asked for facilitated return.

8. Transport, NFIs and Food Rations:

As explained above, by definition, for those who signed up for “voluntary” resettlement, transport is not, and never was, to be provided. But in most instances in the field, there was no secondary transport for anyone, including those whose resettlement was “facilitated”.

Musa, age 40. Kailahun – April 6, 2002: *“To go to Kailahun we have negotiated to only pay a part of the transport, and we have sold a part of our NFI package to get this money. We have left our names with the driver and will have to pay the balance in two weeks. Today, we are blocked in Kailahun and we have no means to get back to our village...It is six months since I left the camp in Guinea.”*

Sierra Leone Resettlement Strategy. NCRRR. 2001.

“Transportation of registered IDPs : Similar to the support provided by UNHCR for returnees under assisted repatriation, all registered IDPs and displaced returnees will be provided transport assistance to a place in close proximity to their resettlement area” (...). “Resettlement, Food Rations and NFIs: When registered IDPs and returnees enter into the resettlement program they are eligible to receive a two-month ration. The food ration will be collect in bulk from a centralized distribution point within the chiefdom of resettlement”

These problems of transport are compounded by the fact that people are carrying at least 30 kg of relief supplies, on top of all of their personal belongings. For families with small children who also need to be carried (it is impossible to expect a two year old child to walk for several days) this process is even more difficult.

As well, the non-food item resettlement package (NFI) which they received is meant to be designed to help people restart their lives. However, these NFIs have not been adjusted to fit the needs of the situation that most people are facing upon return, which is to rebuild – literally – *everything*. The Resettlement Package has no seeds or tools, and only one piece of plastic sheeting which might have to be used as the only shelter material for these families going home during the rainy season. The rains make it impossible, even for those who are a little better off, to build mud brick houses as they will not have the chance to dry the bricks enough to use in construction. The only option left for most families will be to make small shelters (*baffa*) out of dried palm fronds.

There are more worrying problems that this resettlement program is making for the people as they begin their lives back in their homes.

Not only is transport not being provided to all IDPs, which forces them to sell at least a part of their already limited package, but the food packages are also insufficient given the timing of return and the length of the coming hunger period. Every year from July to September, there is a hunger gap while people await their first harvest. Even *this* first harvest will most likely be small as there are no seeds and tools included in the return kits. According to Refugees International, *“In September 2001 World Vision found that the global malnutrition rate for children under five years of age in Kono was 17%, and severe acute malnutrition was 4.7%. Although Sierra Leone’s prior insecurity and lack of health care could account in part for last year’s high malnutrition rates, these figures still indicate of the impact of the hungry season.”*¹¹

Malnutrition can currently be found in other areas of the country. In Port Loko (Northern Province), an area that saw resettlement take place last year, MSF runs a therapeutic feeding center (TFC) for severely malnourished children. Currently, there are an average of 35 new children admitted every month, and this number is rising.

In Moyamba (Northern Province), MSF is also operating a TFC. This is an area in Sierra Leone that has not had security problems for years, where the population has been stable, clinics are functional, and the communities have benefited from livestock and agricultural programs. This TFC is open year round and averages an intake of approximately 25 new children each month.

This indicates that **food security is a very important problem for Sierra Leoneans, illustrating the possible dangers these families face with only two months worth of food, no agricultural supplies and returning to communities that have been completely devastated.** According to UN representatives, this ration was chosen, ironically, as it is easier to carry a two-month supply of food than a six-month supply.

In addition to the problems with the packages, the displaced who are arriving home now are too late to be included in the agricultural support programs, as they were not present when registration in the communities took place. On top of that, other agencies are finding themselves with a funding gap for these very needed programs, and realize that they will not be able to provide enough agricultural support to vulnerable families who return home.

“...to cover the vulnerable caseload...one agency had planned to cover 17,000 vulnerable households but only received funding for 7,500 families...FAO predicts that tens of thousands of vulnerable households will not receive seeds-and-tools assistance...Most agencies offering seeds-and-tools programs completed registration last month so that communities could prepare their lands before the start of the rainy season...An international NGO reported...that ‘500 to 1,000 IDP returnees are arriving daily in Koidu, Kono district, and no one is giving them seeds and tools.’”¹²

¹¹ Food security for Sierra Leonean returnee communities in jeopardy. Refugees International. April 22, 2002.

¹² Ibid.

Those people who will be involved in the second phase of resettlement (starting at the end of May) are going to miss a good portion of the planting season, as there is a lot of work that needs to be done to the farms before they are ready for planting.

Besides the people who have gone through the UN systems of resettlement and repatriation, there are those people who did not, especially those who were refugees in Guinea, and as a result are not registered in any program, and have no rights to assistance. This will be putting an additional burden on already strained communities, as they will have no resources whatsoever.

Returnee woman, age 25. Kailahun Town, Sierra Leone – April 26, 2002: *"They told us to be in the repatriation program we had to first go and register in another camp in the north of Guinea and pay our own transport. But we had no money, so we decided to return to Sierra Leone on foot...It took us two days because of our heavy load...As we are not registered we have no right to any aid...Each night the children go to the Pakistani UNAMSIL camp where they give out the leftovers from their dinner, some sacks of onions, radishes and frozen potatoes...In Kailahun we have installed ourselves in this house with another family...There are 27 of use who sleep in three rooms."*

This lack of resources and infrastructures in the areas of return could pose serious problems in the coming months. As everything has been destroyed in many areas, people are returning to areas without proper sanitation facilities or safe drinking water.

*"Approximately 250,000 refugees and IDPs will have returned by July to areas of the country that were thoroughly decimated by the war. Almost 90% of the infrastructure was destroyed, most wells were contaminated, few health clinics remain intact and farmland that has not been worked on for...years is overgrown by bush."*¹³

One of the organizations providing transport for the resettlement program (IOM) has itself pointed out this problem: *"There is an acute lack of safe drinking water, and no sanitary systems are functioning across the Eastern Province. This is giving way to many waterborne diseases, such as diarrhea, malaria and typhoid. This is a matter of concern as many displaced populations are spontaneously returning to their areas of origin."*¹⁴

There are literally tens of thousands of people returning to the Eastern Province, many of them being driven part of the way by IOM, even though they are aware of these problems. Sierra Leone is an endemic area for cholera, and in 2000 many regions of the country, including Eastern Province, were hit by a widespread shigellosis (bloody diarrhea) epidemic. This situation of large groups of people returning to poor water and sanitation conditions, creates the perfect environment for the spread of epidemic diseases.

It is not such an easy situation to rectify. With the rainy season approaching, it is not possible to dig new wells until at least September. Also, the road conditions will deteriorate dramatically making it difficult, or impossible in some cases, to reach rural areas to carry out prevention programs.

The lack of basic health services also means that early treatment and containment of any such water borne epidemics will be not be possible. In February 2002, Médecins Sans Frontières carried out an assessment in seven chiefdoms of Kono District (Eastern Province). **In all but two of these chiefdoms there was no primary health care service existing.**

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Update on the Implementation of the Rapid Project Implementation Facility. IOM. Vol.1/No.1. February, 2002.

IV. "I AM FROM LOFA IN LIBERIA"

1. Current Context

The population of Liberia has seen hard times over the years. Many Liberians are all-too familiar with camp life, having been forced to flee their homes during the eight-year civil war in the 90s. This is now often called "the first war" by Liberians, and is not covered in this report. All events described in this report are related to the current conflict. All names have been changed to preserve the confidentiality of the individuals.

Several things have happened to Liberians since 2000, when the first attacks of this new conflict took place in the Upper Lofa region. They have found themselves in one of several situations, which has defined the options open to them in terms of where to flee. The option an individual has "chosen" (it is difficult to call it a choice when people explain, "we ran in the only direction where there was no fighting") determines the kind of label they are given (refugee or displaced) and therefore, what kind of assistance they receive.

If you are from the northern and western regions of Liberia today, you could be an internally displaced person in Liberia living in any number of camps, a refugee in Ivory Coast, a refugee in Sierra Leone, or a refugee in Guinea. You could also still be trapped in the fighting inside northern Liberia.

The conflict in Liberia is escalating daily. The displaced camps of Bong County are empty due to fresh attacks taking place on Gbarnga town. Camp residents have fled along with town residents (approximately 40,000 people in total) in fear of being caught in the crossfire. This has caused another major wave of people on the run either out of the country (primarily to Ivory Coast and Guinea), towards Monrovia, or hiding in the bush. For the vast majority of people this is not the first or the last time they have fled from war.

2. I am an Internally Displaced Person (IDP)

Since 2000, the war has greatly destabilized Lofa County, and more recently has made steady progress into Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, and recently, Bong counties, causing people to flee in front of the advancing hostilities.

Aminata, Voice of America (VOA) camp, Liberia – March 11, 2002: "I am from Fasapo village, near to Foya, in Lofa. I left nine months ago [June, 2001] when we were attacked. During this attack my 20-year-old brother was abducted..I never saw him again. I was pregnant at the time... We went to Buedu in Sierra Leone because it was close, and we thought they would be safe there. It took two days of walking... We did not carry anything with us and had to beg food from villagers along the way... the lack of food was a problem for us [5 children; aged 5 mos. to 12 yrs.]... I was very pregnant and we had no place to sleep in Buedu except outside or in the market stalls. In total we stayed there for two months... Then I heard that there were NGOs in Jene Manna [Liberia] and I decided to go there. It was difficult for me to leave [Sierra Leone]. We were stopped by the Sierra Leone Army in all the villages along the way to the border and forced to pay for 'clearance'. It was [US\$2.00] per person, plus they took what they wanted from our bundles. If we did not have enough money, we had to stay in the village and work to pay our way through. It took two weeks of walking to reach Jene Manna and I gave birth on the way inside of Liberia. After about seven months, one day we heard gunshots outside Jene Manna, so I decided to leave. We walked for two days to reach Lofa Bridge. We stayed for two weeks to rest because the walking is not easy for the children. We ate only bush yams and bananas during this time. We heard gunshots and fighting near to the village again and so decided to go to Gbama... We only stayed for about one week when we again heard gunshots and decided to flee to Kley Junction because there were NGOs there. It took us five days walking... I missed the last food distribution, and so I had to beg food from other people. One afternoon shooting started all around the town so we had to run again. We went in the direction of Monrovia. We stayed in a small village for two weeks, waiting for my aunt and son that I lost in the confusion of the attack. When I found them we all left to come to VOA because we heard there was a camp there and we could get food. I arrived about five days ago, and I was registered but I have not gotten a ration card. I know that there are many people paying for these but I have no money left. I have received nothing since I arrived in the camp. I did have the chance to find my sister in the camp and she has helped me to arrange a place to sleep for me and my children and she is sharing her food with us."

This is a typical journey for people fleeing insecure areas of Liberia. The voyage that has brought them to IDP camps has taken months, and in some cases, years, especially for those who fled Lofa in 2000 and 2001. Many people have passed through a series of camps in their progressive moves, always just one step in front of the fighting. Life in these camps is often difficult for people,

most of who arrive exhausted after walking for long periods in the bush, fleeing in fear of being attacked or harassed by security forces, without knowing where to go and what awaits them.

Others left their homes due to their immediate fear of being caught in the fighting, or due to extensive harassment by security forces. This harassment, including forced recruitment and torture, increased greatly after the threat, broadcast on the BBC Focus on Africa radio program, by LURD of an attack Monrovia, and the subsequent declaration of a State of Emergency by President Taylor on February 8, 2002. This new influx of refugees began at the end of 2001 following some major attacks in Lofa. Others arrived after the declaration of a State of Emergency and the resulting hostilities from the security forces.

Sahr, age 33. Refugee man. Jendema, Sierra Leone – February 16, 2002: "I left my home (near Kolahun) on February 9, 2001... because we could hear sustained and heavy shelling. I left behind 3 people from my family; one who was too old to walk, and 2 others who stayed behind to help her. It has been 1 year now and still I have not seen any of them."

Others found themselves caught in open conflict, and they were forced to run away to literally save their lives. This means that they fled with only the clothes on their backs, and often lost members of their families in the chaos.

Displaced woman, age 41. Voice of America camp, Liberia – March 11, 2002: "I left my home on December 7, 2001. We were working on the farm when we heard gunshots in the direction of our village. We saw people running and they were saying that it was being attacked. Seven of us were on the farm and we all ran away without even going back to our house. I left behind two sisters. I still have no news from them."

Some of these people have crossed the border into Sierra Leone, via the southern region of Zimmi (Jendema). Those who were trapped by the fighting in Upper Lofa crossed through Kailahun District (Koindu and Buedu) and into Guinea (Gueckedou).

However, most people leaving Lofa had already left their homes several months ago, and had been surviving hidden in the bush. They had not been able to reach the camps in Bong and Gbarpolu (Tarvey, Jene Manna, Sawmill, etc.) or those closer to Upper Lofa (Belefanai) due to the location of the front lines. Many families had been attacked by several different groups during the past year, and these attacks not only involved abductions but also rapes, killings and burning people alive in their homes. Many families have had great difficulty escaping.

One mother described:

Fatu, Liberian refugee woman. Tekoulu transit point, Guinea – March 17, 2002: "I am from a place near to Kolahun. I left my home on June 10, 2001 when we were attacked... at 6 a.m. and we fled to the bush in the direction of Kolahun. We walked for 2 weeks. It is not a long distance, but fighters were everywhere in the bush and so we would walk for a little, then run and hide until they passed. Sometimes, the pro-government troops would just shoot continuously into the surrounding bush along the paths or roads they were walking on. The only direction that was safe was the road leading to Kolahun.

At night we would just brush the ground in a small area and sleep there on the bare earth. Often we did not even have space for us to lie down and so we had to try to sleep sitting up. The only food that we had was bush yams. All the villages in the bush that we saw were burned and everyone was gone. We saw many people in the bush and they had the same stories as us, throwing grenades into houses with people in them, babies on their mother's backs having their head chopped off. We saw one older man with part of one hand amputated by fighters. They told him to "go... and show them this mark." [They personally did not see more amputees.]

We stayed in Kolahun for almost one year. Life there was manageable but difficult. Everything you own is property of the fighters and you are forced to work for them... The young men and boys are often used in Kolahun to go to Guinea to get supplies for the soldiers. 'Look at my head. All these wounds are from carrying so many supplies for [them].' [her son; aged 13 years].

We stayed in the town until the big attack on December 25, 2001. The attack was very bad and we counted over 200 bodies in the town itself. You could see them just laying there inside their houses. No one knows how many died running away and in the river. Pro-government troops stayed in Kolahun for 3 days. There is one young boy in the town who had both of his hands and his ears chopped off. He is still alive.

We ran to the bush and stayed there for almost all of this time. At first we could not make any kind of bush camp because things were too tense. For several weeks we often had to run because we kept hearing shooting. One man in our group died in the bush from a gunshot to the back.

(When we reached the border) and stayed in Wetkama for two weeks... Along the way one woman fell very sick and died. We tried to carry her but she was too sick. This is her daughter that I will take with me now [approximately aged 4 years and severely malnourished]."

The final driving force for people to risk passing through such dangerous areas seems to be lack of food. The new arrivals report that the food situation is getting difficult, some saying civilians and soldiers have been fighting over food. Also the timing for crossing into Guinea is critical. Once the rains begin, the river between Lofa and Guinea will not be passable, and this would mean being stuck in Lofa during the most difficult period of the hunger gap (June – September).

The same concerns were voiced among the more recently arrived IDPs in the camps in Liberia.

Displaced woman, age approximately 25. Belefanaï camp, Liberia – March 9, 2002: *"It was getting too difficult in the bush and there was not enough food for the children [4 children aged 18 months to 6 years]. I myself would have stayed in the bush if I did not have the children to think of. There are many people in the bush that are too unsure of the way or what they will find, to try to come to Belefanaï."*

Those arriving in Kailahun District in Sierra Leone are arriving from areas of Upper Lofa controlled by pro-government forces, and medically these people have been in the worst shape. Life for them has been extremely difficult. **Abductions and other acts of violence, especially rape and killings, have been wide spread.** People have also been surviving in the bush on nothing but wild foods for months. Upon arrival in Sierra Leone many of the children are malnourished, and others require urgent medical care.

Liberian refugee woman, age over 55 - January 2002: *"The fighters arrived and ordered the town [approximately 150 people] to move to another village with them...I was with my husband and 5 children. A local family accepted us into their home. Then one day the pro- government troops came to the town...They took 3 of my children away [a girl of 14 years, and two boys aged 7 and 4 years]. We were very frightened the soldiers would return, so we went into the bush... Several weeks passed before the troops found us again. They tied up my husband and beat him severely with their fists and their rifle butts. The soldiers told me that if I didn't lead them to our property they would kill my husband. I told them...they could have everything...They ordered my husband to carry the property and go with them... We tried to go to Sierra Leone...but we were taken by fighters to [another village]. We stayed there for 2 months. It was there that I learned my husband had been killed. I also received a message...from my daughter who was being held as the wife of a colonel...she had been separated from my boys who haven't been seen since. I am sure they were also killed... My biggest worry today is that I do not have a special length of cloth so that I can carry my grandchild on my back...I do not know what to do tomorrow. I have lost my family." [She arrived at the MSF therapeutic feeding center with her malnourished grandson near death.]*

Those arriving in Guinea are coming from regions of Lofa County that are held by anti-government troops. They tell stories of **forced labor, being used as human shields and having their movements controlled by the fighters.**

Liberian refugee woman. Tekoulu transit point, Guinea – March 17, 2002: *"...Sometimes fighters would come and round up people out of the bush camps and take them to Kolahun. This was either to work for them (washing clothes, carrying supplies, cooking) or to just go and sit down with them. The fighters do not like to live alone and they told us that the civilians are their protection from the enemy. We decided to leave 3 weeks ago because things were quiet. Also, there is no food. We have been living on bush yams and mangos because the fighters took all our rice, and life is getting too difficult. Look at my children [three are malnourished; one of them severely]. Even outside of town, the fighters can take anything from you, even the clothes you are wearing."*

At the crossing points for those fleeing to Guinea, a racket has been organized that exploits the civilians caught in the middle. In order to get into Guinea, a pass is needed from the fighters controlling this northern part of Lofa.

Liberian refugee woman. Tekoulu transit point, Guinea – March 17, 2002: *"We were allowed to leave as long as we have a pass... It is [US\$1.00] per person. The government troops in Guinea will not allow you to cross if you don't have these papers. This pass business started at the end of January [which coincides with the new refugees entering Guinea from Lofa]. If you don't have any money to buy the paper, you have to get a contract with the fighters or one of their girlfriends to carry coffee or cocoa to Guinea, or to carry supplies for them. If you have no one strong enough in your family to do this kind of work, you will never get the money to buy the pass."*

Not many young men, young women (without children) or old people were seen in this group. Families reported that very few men were allowed to buy the passes, and that many sons were abducted to work and fight for any of the various armed groups. These families fear that most of the people taken by pro-government forces are dead.

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. UNOCHA. 1998

"Principle 14: Every internally displaced person has the right to liberty of movement and freedom to choose his or her residence."

For those who fled inside Liberia, they too had their movements blocked repeatedly, and were prevented from seeking refugee from the war. Two of the more prominent instances include the stopping of displaced at Belefanaï (Saint Paul's Bridge) in Bong County, and Kley Junction in Bomi County.

Displaced man, age 34. Belefanaï camp, Liberia – March 9, 2002: *"We were blocked at the bridge for one month by government troops. At first they did not explain why they were keeping us. Finally they explained that it was for security reasons. We had to eat bush yams and beg food from the villagers to live. Finally, a truck came but they would only allow women to cross. I became afraid when I saw this, so I and some other men decided to try to escape. A few days later we ran away from them and traveled further down the river to a secluded place. It was there that we crossed."*

Displaced woman; age approximately 25. Belefanaï camp, Liberia – March 9, 2002: *"The soldiers stopped us all at the bridge. They told us that we could not leave for security reasons. We could hear the fighting... and they wanted us to stay there in case they were attacked. If you did not know someone with the fighters, or if you did not have money you could not cross. We stayed there for one week because we had no means to negotiate with the soldiers. Finally, I*

was able to get them to allow my children and my husband to cross. I stayed for some time and then too was able to leave."

Sahr: *"...there was shooting again very close to us. Everyone there ran away and we heard LRRRC was telling people to go to Kley Junction, so that is where we went (this was their 5th out of 9 times to escape fighting). The soldiers would not let us move. I wanted to go to Monrovia but they told us we could not pass. Then the government told us that we would be taken to another camp. We were waiting to be relocated from when the fighting happened there too. There was shooting all around the town and we ran away."*

Those who crossed into Sierra Leone at Jendema (Bo Waterside on the Liberian side of the border) are mostly people who fled the Grand Cape Mount, Bomi Hills and the Greater Monrovia areas. They have all arrived by their own means, either on foot or in a hired vehicle. There is a series of over 20 crossing points along the Mano River between Bo Waterside and Congo. Many people reported that to be allowed to cross the border, they had to pay the soldiers in cash, and quite often give the soldiers whatever they wanted from their possessions. For those who were forced to pay and did not have money, they stayed near the crossing point trying to sell some of their personal belongings to raise the money for the "fees".

Sahr: *"...we decided to go to Sierra Leone, hoping that we would be able to stop moving. At the border, the soldiers were demanding money from us before we could cross the bridge. I have registered in the camp and I am now waiting for the trucks. I don't know where I will be going. I just hope that someone can help me find my family that I left behind in Lofa."*

Displaced man, age 21. Bo Waterside, Liberia – March 5, 2002: *"I have been here for five days. The immigration and customs both want money and I don't have it. I ran away from the soldiers in Monrovia and now I am confused on what to do. How can I get across the bridge?"*

Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. UNOCHA. 1998

"Principle 15: Internally displaced persons have (b) the right to seek asylum in another country"

The one UNHCR protection officer for all of Liberia had not been seen at this crossing point by anyone interviewed. No one had come to try to negotiate their safe, and unhindered passage to a country of asylum.

This paints a grim picture for the people who are still in the inaccessible areas of northern Liberia. From the information gathered through interviews, it seems that the poor people – those without money or laborers in the family – are captives of the fighters.

Even after they finally reach a camp, the assistance and protection the people can expect varies, depending on which camp they go to. For those who reach the camps close to Monrovia and close to the offices of humanitarian organizations, there are many assistance programs (including "Child Friendly Spaces"). But if you happen to have crossed at the St. Paul Bridge and are living in Belefanai camp (closed the first week of May as the population evacuated toward Gbarnga) you will almost never see any NGO or UN presence, even though there is a military base just next to the IDP camp.

More recently, as news of these refugee camps has reached many people inside Liberia, people have started arriving on their own at the newly converted returnee-to-refugee camps around Bo and Pujehun in Southern Province. Some people wait for days in Jendema after arriving in Sierra Leone, and find no information about what to do. Others are not crossing the border at places where they can register with UNCHR. These people continue their journey to the camps on their own. However, once arriving, they found that the new UNHCR policy is not to register people directly inside the camps. This means that anyone who has walked from Liberia, crossed the border and made it to the camps in Bo and Pujehun must then return (on foot) to the UNHCR points in Jendema or Zimmi to be registered. There they must wait (where there is no food assistance) to be put in the UNHCR convoys, and then be taken back to one of the four camps. Only then will they be eligible for humanitarian assistance and be recognized as a refugee.

3. The Choice of Implementing Partners

The internally displaced of Liberia's war are in a difficult position. As they are not refugees they do not have the same rights as a refugee. But they have fled the same war for the same reasons as the refugees, they just never crossed an international border. This means that they remain primarily under the "protection" of their own government.

"It is true that a refugee camp closely resembles a camp for the displaced. In both instances, people have fled their homes and require material assistance including shelter, food, and access to health care. These similarities may have given the false impression that the operational response for refugees and displaced could be the same. The resemblance sadly stops at material needs and assistance... Displaced people remain within their country, under the

control and laws of their national authorities, and at the mercy of the threats and violence that may be the very reason for their flight.”¹⁵

Most UN agencies working with populations affected by conflict (UNHCR, WFP, OCHA) work through implementing partners. For agencies such as OCHA, these partners, often local NGOs, actually implement most of their work. For the WFP this includes distribution of food aid in the camps, for UNHCR it is registration of refugees, for OCHA it is the care of the displaced people. This tendency to rely increasingly on implementing partners with limited control opens the situation to numerous problems, especially concerning the very pressing issues of protection and the delivery of assistance. This has raised the issue of the choice of operational partners, and concern for the quality and integrity of these UN operations.

In Liberia, where open conflict is taking place and many of the displaced are fleeing all armed elements of this conflict, the operational partner and counterpart of OCHA to protect and assist the IDPs is the Liberian Refugee, Repatriation, Resettlement Commission (LRRRC). The LRRRC is a government agency that was started with the support of UNHCR in 1993. At that time there was no international body or UN agency mandated to care for IDPs, and LRRRC was created to fill this gap. Since then, the Secretary General of the UN has given OCHA this responsibility.

One major role of LRRRC is choosing the location of campsites and the registration of the IDPs. These registration figures are the official UN figures, and therefore dictate how much material assistance is given, and where. It is not a surprise that this government commission exaggerates figures and decides on new sites (quite a few near military bases) not according to the needs of the populations, but rather on the inflated figures.

At the end of April, LRRRC and OCHA reported that there were 23,718 people in the camps close to Monrovia (VOA, Jartondo, Blamacee, etc.). MSF, which has been running mobile clinics in these camps, estimates that the figure is closer to 11,000. This can be seen when walking through the new sites. Of the shelters that are already constructed, only about 1/3 are occupied. This causes duplication of unnecessary work, and also opens up the possibility of forced displacement if the government feels certain groups need to be “re-grouped” and monitored.

“Despite the fact that the Liberian Refugee, Repatriation, Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) is the ad hoc governmental agency responsible for IDPs, members of staff have reportedly facilitated Liberian security forces access to IDP camps which resulted in arbitrary mass arrests of suspected ‘dissidents’. There were reports that high-ranking members of the LRRRC actually pointed out individuals who were ‘supposed dissident collaborators’ to the Liberian security forces resulting in their arrest and harassment. On 23 and 24 February 2002, ATU and SOD (Special Operation Division) forces reportedly entered several IDP camps near Monrovia and arrested men for ‘dissident activity’. On 23 February the ATU were facilitated access to both the VOA and Zuana Town IDP camps where five people were reportedly arrested and taken away. The next evening, on 24 February, three pick-up trucks filled with ATU and SOD officers entered the VOA IDP Camp at midnight and arrested 45 young men. When family members protested the following day, all were released after payment of (US\$4 - \$30.00) for each person to the ATU.”¹⁶

Since the beginning of March 2002, around 4,000 new displaced persons arrived at Sinje camp (Great Cape Mount County), the site of a pre-existing refugee camp near the border with Sierra Leone. This camp was divided into two sections; Sinje I and Sinje II. The refugees from both of these camps have been going back to Sierra Leone with UNHCR for several months, leaving behind their empty huts. So when the new displaced arrived, they began to occupy some of the empty shelters. This was logical as all of the services needed were already present in this camp; clinic, water, shelter, toilets. Everything.

However, LRRRC in concert with UNHCR (their main donor) decided that the IDPs should be moved to another site. This makes no sense except to create duplicate services and to control humanitarian supplies. Those agencies, which are expected now to create those duplicate services (after all, these people will need food, water, shelter), were not consulted at all about this decision. Some even found out about it when it was announced in the Liberian Senate. According to the implementing partner arrangement, LRRRC should choose the site and the camp agency to manage it, conduct the registration and ensure the protection of the people.

4. Response from the International Community

The international community has all of this information, and has been updated regularly on the humanitarian situation in the country for years. **Yet still, the amount of emergency funding available (not development money) from the main donor agencies for Liberia remains largely insufficient.**

¹⁵ MSF Activity Report 2000-2001. Using the law of war to protect the displaced. Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier.

¹⁶ Liberia: State of emergency signifies a greater need for international involvement and human rights protection. Amnesty International. April 9, 2002.

The reasons behind this are linked to the international community's political positioning (most notably the US and the UK) toward the Government of Liberia. President Charles Taylor has been blamed repeatedly for supporting anti-government elements from both Guinea and Sierra Leone and with the massive, and very expensive Peace Process taking place in Sierra Leone. Accusations that RUF is being supported by Taylor have culminated in the UN Security Council imposing sanctions on Liberia in May 2001. This at the same time that as the humanitarian needs were increasing due to the intensification of the fighting.

The political agenda of the international community is clearly influencing their funding policies for humanitarian programs. As a result, the poorest of the poor today in Liberia are the IDPs. For these people, after having walked for months, fleeing conflict and persecution, passing through a series of displaced camps seeking refuge, there are not always people and services to help them. With continuously negative responses to applications for emergency funding, many organizations do not have adequate funds to provide assistance to the IDPs.

*"The result of this decline has been a rapid fall in the capacity of aid agencies to provide the needed assistance. For example: (a) Action Aid, whose funding for rural agriculture development was delayed so long that the program was not able to start during the planting season of 2001; (b) Save the Children which is now scaling back its support from 19 to 10 health clinics... For some... organizations, the funding shortfalls are so great that they are considering the termination of their assistance programmes in Liberia. Given the absence of alternative social safety nets for a lot of Liberians, this would... greatly affect their welfare."*¹⁷

These warnings and pleas have not changed the attitudes of the donor governments, which continue to label Liberia as a country with a corrupt government, and a country with no emergency humanitarian needs. At times, the concerns of NGOs seem to be treated as almost juvenile, as illustrated by this OFDA comment: *"The team also felt that there was a sense of nostalgia from some organizations and the Government of Liberia for years gone by when the international community pumped in large sums of money for Liberia."*¹⁸

DFID's Principles for a New Humanitarianism:

*"(...) We will seek to promote a more universal approach in addressing humanitarian needs. People in need – wherever they are – should have equal status and rights to assistance.
(...) We will be impartial – our help will seek to relieve civilians' suffering without discrimination on political or other grounds, with priority given to the most urgent cases of distress."*

It is difficult to believe that the policies of the international community seen in Liberia are based on humanitarian needs, or a true understanding of the repeated violence and hardship that these populations have been subjected to.

But humanitarian money, by definition, is not supposed to be conditioned by political positions.

It does not make sense then that the displaced people in Sierra Leone, for example, were considered worthy of funding from DFID (the British government disaster fund), but those in Liberia are not. Take also the case of Guinea where the U.S. Ambassador declared the country a "disaster" in November 2001 – the label needed in order for a country to be eligible for emergency humanitarian funding (from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance; OFDA). On January 14, 2002, a Situation Report written by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Bureau for Humanitarian Response (BHR) and OFDA stated: *"Since October 1, the security situation in Guinea has remained stable. However fighting in Liberia near the Guinea border and the presence of Government of Guinea troops has*

*resulted in the tenuous resettlement of the IDPs to the area... relief agencies continue to provide humanitarian assistance to IDPs as well as refugees, throughout Guinea... the U.S. Ambassador to Guinea, Barrie R. Walkley, re-declared a disaster for the ongoing complex emergency in Guinea."*¹⁹

As of May 2002, Liberia was still not considered a disaster and at the same time, UN sanctions were re-instated, leading to serious confusion between political and humanitarian agendas of the donor countries. Non-governmental agencies that have been requesting emergency funding for programs to support the IDPs since 2001, continue to have very little success.

*"The team concluded that the current situation in Bong County, involving up to 30,000 IDPs... in no way constituted a 'disaster' as defined by OFDA mandate. The assessment further concluded that the current situation was manageable, and was well within the resources and capabilities of the Government of Liberia, and relevant international organizations on the ground, to handle."*²⁰

When this point is raised with representatives from various donor governments, they usually state there is no need for emergency funds at the moment.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ OFDA Assessment Report for Liberia: June 2001.

¹⁹ Mano River Countries (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) – Complex Emergency Situation Report #2. USAID/BHR/OFDA. January 14, 2002.

²⁰ OFDA Assessment Report for Liberia. June 2001.

*"The UN Resident Representative expressed his concern over the lack of funding from donors for Liberia. This was also expressed by other UN agencies. Most of the discussion was centered on whether this was indeed a crisis that OFDA should respond to... The team believes that OFDA funds are not needed at this point. The INGOs and the UN have used their own resources to respond to the crisis... The INGOs are all concerned about not having enough resources to maintain the camps should this crisis persist for some time."*²¹

By making a direct link between the decisions to provide funding and political policies toward the government in Liberia is also a way of punishing the displaced people for the politics of their president. Following a recent visit to Liberia, OFDA representatives explained their position by saying: *"The American Ambassador has not issued a disaster declaration, in part because he wants to avoid providing Taylor with more resources to loot"*²²

The advice given to NGOs concerned about this funding policy was for : "...NGOs to continue to support populations around the IDP concentrations and that they coordinate better among themselves."²³

But it is not only the IDPs right to material assistance that awaits recognition of this war, it is also their right to protection.

*"While it has been possible to bring material assistance to displaced people, it has become appallingly clear that they are not receiving international protection. The reason for this is two-fold. The term 'internally displaced person' (IDP) is sometimes intentionally used to avoid recognizing people as victims of war."*²⁴

By not recognizing the consequences of the war in Liberia, the status and protection of the IDPs in Liberia is limited.

*"In peacetime, care of the displaced...is governed only by the rules of national solidarity and international cooperation. Protection is left to national authorities...Displaced remain under the law and authority of their own country and can only demand the respect of their most basic human rights."*²⁵

For people who are fleeing killings and violence, often perpetrated by pro-government forces, the responsibility for their rights and protection falls on the shoulders of their government. It is disquieting then to read a report from OFDA in June 2001 *already* stating that, *"It is clear that the Government of Liberia has not been able to respond to the IDP crisis..."*²⁶ Amnesty International has also highlighted the problem of protection of these people due to this situation.

*"Additionally, the government has shown no resolve to protect civilians, especially where international agencies are not present due to both security concerns and due to lack of sufficient donor funding to carry out their work."*²⁷

Even different UN agencies raised their fears in Security Council meetings in July and August 2001, explaining that they were concerned with the lack of resources for humanitarian UN and NGO programs. Without additional funding and resources for emergency programs, they said, there would be no more access, and therefore no more protection for the people, regardless of the security situation.

Funding is even a problem for those Liberians who are refugees in Sierra Leone. In discussions with Refugees International, one UN staff member explained: *"There is a big discrepancy in assistance to Liberians and Sierra Leoneans. There's just no support for Liberian refugees."*²⁸

The problems of protection that the refugees and displaced of Liberia face today are not unknown. In fact to the contrary, UNHCR has provided clear and detailed descriptions of such problems: *"The situation in Sierra Leone and the two other countries of the Mano River Union (Guinea and Sierra Leone) is intertwined. Numerous and various accusations have been made by and against these countries' leaders regarding their responsibility for the turmoil that has characterized the sub-region over the last decade. Similar sentiments have been expressed by nationals of the different countries vis-à-vis refugees, who despite fearing for their security in their own country and fleeing in search for asylum, have been blamed for the spreading wars. This has made the provision of international protection even more challenging, since the rights of refugees have been ignored to protect national security interests. As wars and hostile refugee sentiments have spread, finding refuge has also become increasingly difficult...Linked to these security situations and competing political agendas are the serious violations of human rights being*

²¹ Ibid.

²² Meeting Report. OFDA/BPRM/IA Monthly Meeting. March 28, 2002.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ MSF Activity Report 2000-2001. Using the law of war to protect the displaced. Françoise Bouchet-Saulnier.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ OFDA Assessment Report for Liberia: June 2001.

²⁷ Liberia: State of emergency signifies a greater need for international involvement in human rights protection. Amnesty International. April 9, 2002.

²⁸ The plight of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone requires urgent response. Refugees International. April 2002.

*committed by rebel and government forces. Laws are frequently suspended or altered in the name of national security and or manipulated for political reasons.*²⁹

In Koindu, Sierra Leone, there is a makeshift camp that has been built by the refugees themselves, on a site located for them by the local authorities (RUF at the time). Many have also moved into the surrounding community. Only recently did they find out that they would not be staying. During the first week of April, the police visited the camp.

Refugee man, age 38. Left Lofa April 2001: *"They told us that this is not a recognized camp, that we will not get any protection from anyone while we stay here, and if there are any cross border security problems the refugees will be blamed. They also told us to go and inform all the refugees who are staying in the surrounding villages that all Liberians have to move out of the area. This has scared us and so the next day when the UNHCR came we all registered to leave in two weeks time, but we want to leave earlier. Because just yesterday the police came back to ask us how many people had left, how many were in the camp and how many [Liberians] were in the villages. We don't want to go to the camps because we are settled here, we all speak the same language and the farms are now ready to be planted. We are also close to our homes so we can go back quickly if things get better. Even some of the local people are sad to see us go because we are friends and family. I am also afraid that once we leave this area the Liberians will stop crossing into Koindu because they will know that they are not welcome."*

But the UN sees this as voluntary relocation. In a press release dated May 2, 2002, they explained: *"The number of Liberian refugees presenting themselves for relocation within Sierra Leone had increased recently following a mass information campaign by UNHCR...Last week alone, UNHCR said, it relocated 1,400 Liberians from Kailahun District...to camps in the Bo Districts...This number represents a sharp rise...from the previous count of between 400 and 800 per week..."*³⁰

The Liberian refugees who have been moved to these official camps are facing basic security problems. In general, the Liberians are not welcome in Sierra Leone as they are still seen as the cause for the start of the war. When the Sierra Leonean returnees in the camps were asked if they saw any problems with the Liberians coming into the same camps, they said that there would be no problem as long as they had their own area in the camp and they were "watched closely". Even the Sierra Leonean staff of some NGOs described these refugees as "hostile, cheaters and fabricators". The fact that their arrival into Sierra Leone falls just before the elections does not help matters, as a Liberian refugee explains: *"Sierra Leoneans think we are children of Taylor...We are living here in fear. We do expect something bad to happen."*³¹

Unfortunately, as of the beginning of May, **they had not seen any protection officers, or people trying to sensitize the host communities about the situation of the Liberian refugees.**

²⁹ Plan of Operation: Voluntary Repatriation and Reintegration of Sierra Leonean refugees. UNHCR. September 2001.

³⁰ Sierra Leone: Liberian refugees relocated. IRIN. May 2, 2002.

³¹ The plight of Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone requires urgent response. Refugees International. April 2002.

V. CONCLUSION

The problems discussed in this report are not new to people who work in the humanitarian world. In fact they are depressingly common, especially in the complicated Mano River region. But, these problems also raise some very important questions for those who claim to be concerned first and foremost with the civilian population and their humanitarian needs. Perhaps the most important being:

- a. what is protection?
- b. why is it not being provided?
- c. why are the needs of displaced people still not being properly taken care of?

In **Sierra Leone**, the international community is injecting huge amounts of money, but it is going primarily to the military part of the peace process. Military operations on this scale are not only extremely important, but also very expensive, and very important to be seen as being successful. But will their success be measured against human suffering and the denial of human dignity?

The UN in Sierra Leone is in a very delicate situation. The Special Representative to the Secretary General of the UN has found himself wearing two hats: a humanitarian one, and a political/military one. It seems that the humanitarian needs are taking a back seat to politics.

This is seen in the manner in which the government National Commission for Social Action (NaCSA) is being allowed to basically evict people from the camps, claiming that the war is over now and everyone needs to go home.

So who is going to be responsible for the people's rights at the end of the day? Who is supposed to be sure that this repatriation and resettlement program takes place in humane conditions and that the basic services that all people have a right to are provided for them? Who, at the end of the day, will put the people before the peace process?

As the next phase of this resettlement process takes place, Médecins Sans Frontières asks:

- What is planned to ensure that the problems outlined above are not repeated?
- Are there camps and assistance available to people who choose not to return to their homes at the moment, or will the eviction process be allowed to take place anyway?
- Will repatriation be organized in such conditions (transport, supply, transit) that people dignity and needs are respected?
- Are the donor countries going to remain committed to funding any future programs for combating malnutrition and possible epidemics that may arise out of this chaotic and unprepared return program?

In **Liberia**, the issues of protection are even more life threatening. Civilians have been running from one camp to the next for years now. The international continues to hide from their faces and their horror stories behind a thinly veiled game of terminology.

Médecins Sans Frontières asks how long political issues will continue to overshadow humanitarian needs of the people.

- Why is the international community waiting to consider the Liberian context a "disaster"?
- Who is going to make sure that the people are guaranteed the right to flee conflict and persecution?
- Who is going to guarantee their safety in countries of asylum?
- Who will secure the right for humanitarian assistance to reach these people; especially the displaced?

This all comes down to one main question: when will humanitarian needs be separated from political agendas?

The war in this sub-region does not seem to be going away. As long as the violence continues, the people will remain in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. The needs which we see today, and that we know will be there tomorrow, will not go away. People will continue to survive (not live) as best they can, relying more on their own communities and traditional networks than on the international humanitarian community. It is not hard to imagine that problems, including the sexual exploitation of people in camps, will continue.

It is almost as if there needs to be a reminder that it is not the fault of the displaced and refugees, but our systems for providing protection and assistance that does not work. They, after all, have had to learn the hard way what it takes to survive.

ACRONYMS

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
DFID	UK Department for International Development
ECOMOG	ECOWAS' Interposition military force
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West Africa States
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, appeared in 2000
LRRRC	Liberian Refugee, Repatriation, Resettlement Commission
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NCRRR	National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation
NFI	Non-Food Item resettlement package
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia, created in 1989 and headed by Charles Taylor
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
RUF	Revolutionary United Front, created in 1991 and headed by Foday Sankoh
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia, created in 1991 and splitting in 1994 between ULIMO-J (mainly Khran ethnics headed by Roosevelt Johnson) et ULIMO-K (mainly Mandingo ethnics headed by Alhaji Kromah)
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees