



**The Interaction between Political and
Humanitarian Action in Sierra Leone,
1995 to 2002**

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Note on references and sources

The footnotes to this report specify each source quoted, cited or drawn on in the text. For sources cited more than once, whether interviews, UN reports or published references, full details are included in the 'Sources and further reading' section at the end of this report.

Summary of findings

Humanitarian action in Sierra Leone was closely tied to the political process throughout the period of this study. Ultimately, the political will to support the peace process created conditions extremely beneficial for humanitarian assistance, most notably secure access to all of the country, and increased funding for relief and reconstruction activities. In particular, this was achieved through a revitalised and currently effective peacekeeping force (UNAMSIL) deployed in the country. However, a satisfactory outcome in Sierra Leone cannot disguise an often turbulent and unhappy relationship between humanitarian and political interests, and the inescapable conclusion that, when they did clash, humanitarian considerations consistently came second to political imperatives.

During the period under study, the UN operation in Sierra Leone underwent several quite radical changes, as did the consequent relationships between various actors and stakeholders. Six distinct periods of UN operations are identifiable between 1995 and 2002.

1. **January 1995 to May 1997:** Strong UN political support to the Government of Sierra Leone, in the midst of a civil conflict. The traditional Resident Coordinator/ Humanitarian Coordinator model (RC/HC) was unsuccessful, partly due to the exceptionally close relationship between the RC/HC and the Government.
2. **May 1997 to March 1998:** After the military junta took power in Freetown, the Government of Sierra Leone went into exile in Conakry, Guinea, accompanied by UN leadership. The latter was accused of blocking humanitarian assistance from reaching Sierra Leone, along with donors such as the UK.
3. **March 1998 to October 1999:** A small UN Observer Mission (UNOMSIL) with military observers was set up in July 1998, accompanying the West African regional force, ECOMOG. The relationship between the humanitarian community and the UN political leadership worsened.
4. **October 1999 to May 2000:** The creation and deployment of a UN peacekeeping force, UNAMSIL, culminating in the crisis involving the capture of UNAMSIL troops in May 2000. UN system leadership was provided by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), but there were serious concerns about the quality of his relationship with the UN Country Team and wider humanitarian community. The near collapse of UNAMSIL threatened the entire aid programme.
5. **May 2000 to March 2001:** A reformed and strengthened UNAMSIL with greater coherence, and significant support from the UK in the peace operation. A Strategic Framework for Sierra Leone was developed and then abandoned. Continuing concern about the relationship between UN political and humanitarian entities led to the appointment of a new Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG), who is also UN Resident Representative, Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator, a model recommended in the Brahimi Report.
6. **March 2001 to October 2002:** Peace, DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration), return of refugees and IDPs, and the significance of a single donor, the UK, in peacebuilding. The relationship between the UN political and humanitarian community greatly improved, due to the success of the DSRSG and the growing compatibility between political and humanitarian/development objectives.

The experience in Sierra Leone reveals the tensions inherent in the expectation that the United Nations will provide leadership in the political efforts to end a conflict, and simultaneously provide leadership and coordination of humanitarian activities. These tensions were particularly acute in Sierra Leone, as the political strategy was based around strong support to the Government, while much of the country, including most of the areas of greatest humanitarian need, was controlled by the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The issue was not whether or not this political strategy was correct, but that it appears repeatedly to have compromised the ability of the United Nations to negotiate access for aid agencies to RUF-held areas.

Policy coherence between UN actors in terms of a unified or common political purpose or goal well before the time of formal mission integration led to the politicisation of assistance, and deep distrust of humanitarian actors, who were wrongly perceived to be siding with the rebels. The degree of acceptance by the Government of Sierra Leone of humanitarian action fluctuated in line with its political and military fortunes. At times of pressure, the Government took an overtly hostile stance on the continued provision of assistance by humanitarian agencies to populations in territory outside Government control.

When political and humanitarian objectives appeared to clash, the humanitarian concerns unquestionably came second to the political. The clearest example was when a junta took power in Sierra Leone in 1997, and the withholding of humanitarian assistance to the country was used as a tool to try and bring about the political objective of regime change.

A distressing feature of this ‘Conakry period’ is that the withholding of humanitarian assistance was strongly supported by the UN political leadership, the UK Government (including DFID) and the Humanitarian Coordinator. The policy of preventing humanitarian assistance from reaching Sierra Leone was implemented through a combination of cutting off funding and blocking aid supplies at the border with Guinea. This policy was ‘coherent’ with the political strategy of isolating the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The political objective of regime change, however, was not ultimately achieved by depriving civilian populations of food and medicines but by the military intervention of ECOMOG, a regional force.

Based on the reasonable assumption that civilian lives that may otherwise have been saved were lost unnecessarily, this period stands as one of the most shameful episodes of humanitarian inaction in modern times. Those encouraging the policy may well have been in breach of the Geneva Conventions through attempts to block humanitarian assistance from reaching civilian populations. It appears to be a classic case of interpreting coherence as political hegemony rather than the management of different demands which are possibly conflicting but equally valid.

It was observed that UNOMSIL and later UNAMSIL withheld vital security information and even, on occasions, allegedly provided information known to be false to humanitarian actors, which could have placed their lives in peril. ECOMOG on occasion also directly accused humanitarian actors of what it saw as collaboration with rebels, due to the misperception created by NGOs’ continued assistance to needy populations in RUF-held areas, based on the humanitarian principles of impartiality and neutrality.

The near collapse of the UNAMSIL mission in May 2000 is a textbook case of an ineffectual peacekeeping mission as described in the Brahimi Report. The mission was destined to fail before it had even been deployed, by the lack of political will and internal cohesion with which

it had been set up. The revamping of UNAMSIL following the hostage-taking crisis was partly driven by the need to save the UN's mired reputation in peacekeeping.

The eventual success of the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone, after coming so close to total failure, demonstrates the extent to which good peacekeeping is dependent on political will in the United Nations, and particularly in the Security Council. The Sierra Leone case clearly shows the beneficial impact of a prominent role played by at least one UNSC member – the UK – in the peace operation and subsequent peacebuilding process. A security-first approach was adopted and finally successful in forwarding peace.

Efforts to improve the overall effectiveness of UNAMSIL had a significant and direct positive impact on humanitarian action, essentially doubling the territory in which aid agencies could operate. After five years of extremely limited and irregular access to civilian populations in RUF-held areas, with aid agencies forced to operate in conditions of extreme insecurity and unpredictability, UNAMSIL's deployment gave humanitarian organisations unprecedented, secure and lasting access to the entire country.

A unique lesson from Sierra Leone is the importance of donors adopting new approaches, and levels of commitment, for ailing countries to emerge from conflict. Since 2000, the role of the UK in Sierra Leone represents an unprecedented attempt at a coherent response to peacebuilding, involving military, political and aid interventions working to a common plan. During this time, the UK Department for International Development (DFID) has stretched conventional aid to its limits. It is a matter of regret that other donors have not shared the financial and political burden to the degree that DFID had hoped, as this places a question mark over whether such support would be repeated in other countries.

The high sums of money invested in peacekeeping in Sierra Leone, with UNAMSIL currently costing some \$692 million per year, stand in obvious contrast to the low level of voluntary contributions to other important elements of the peacebuilding process. In particular, the long-standing and well-documented reluctance of donors to support the critical DDR programme is hard to understand, in view of its crucial importance to the peace process.

The humanitarian community displayed an inconsistent attitude towards the use of UNAMSIL assets in support of its programmes. After two years of insisting on maintaining clear distance from UNAMSIL, most agencies had begun regular use of UNAMSIL assets by late 2001. Should this changing attitude be interpreted as a sensible and pragmatic response, in the context of a peace process taking hold, or as an example of the humanitarian community once again failing to agree common principles?

After several years of fraught interaction, the best relations between humanitarian, political and other actors came after the introduction of an integrated mission structure and the appointment of a DSRSG, despite strong initial reservations of humanitarian agencies concerning this coordination structure. The improvement was undoubtedly attributable to the fact that the arrival of the DSRSG coincided with real advances in the peace process. However, it was also due in large part to the character, skills and humanitarian background of the individual DSRSG, who recognised the legitimate autonomy of different actors and sought to achieve only that level of coherence which was needed to reach effective solutions and which was feasible given the varied mandates.

The DSRSG/HC/RC/RR model has many advantages, and gave the humanitarian community in Sierra Leone a voice and unprecedented access to information within UNAMSIL. This

access did not involve any trade-offs, primarily because no authority was either given or sought by the DSRSG to make programme decisions or resource allocations on behalf of UN agencies. There are many strengths of this ‘part integration, part coherence’ model (which are detailed in the main report). The structure is certainly replicable, if adequate thought is given to the two factors that have most enabled its success – the absence of conflict, and an unusually skilful and respected coordinator.

UNAMSIL had an unprecedented mandate for the protection of civilians, which merits attention and replication. During the peace negotiations, issues of human rights and justice were placed behind political considerations and the pressure to achieve a settlement. In contrast, human rights were integrated into the revamped UNAMSIL peace operation. This led to increased funding from the peacekeeping budget for the normally under-funded component of human rights, and improved sharing of information between human rights and political peacekeeping. However, there is no tangible evidence that the integration of human rights into the UNAMSIL mission resulted in greater human rights protection for civilians.

An unusual feature of the crisis in Sierra Leone is that the levels of funding for humanitarian assistance have remained modest. While increasing when the political aims of the international community have shown success, and decreasing during the junta period, the overall levels of funding have never been high. There is little evidence of the short-term surge in funding and concomitant proliferation of NGOs that have been witnessed in other humanitarian situations deemed to be of political significance to the major donors. Even during politically important population movements, such as the return of refugees and especially the resettlement of internally displaced persons, a lack of funding is felt to have contributed to the generally poor level of assistance offered to the population.

Despite clear improvements in communication and information-sharing during 2001 and 2002, the extent to which the actual delivery of humanitarian assistance improved is unclear. The overall aid effort in Sierra Leone continues to be hampered by many of the weaknesses of the humanitarian system as a whole. These include the lack of a designated lead agency for internally displaced people, insufficient baseline data to illustrate humanitarian need and poor or non-existent monitoring of the impact of interventions. Furthermore, the humanitarian community appears fragmented, with no common approach to or understanding of key issues such as how best to work alongside UN peacekeeping forces, or engage with a host government in a post-conflict situation. These weaknesses, together with a lack of clear objectives, leave humanitarian action more susceptible to manipulation for political ends.

It is not clear how humanitarian assistance has contributed to peacebuilding in Sierra Leone. Over the past two years, aid agencies have increasingly framed their assistance programmes in terms of what they can contribute to the Sierra Leone peace process. The 2002 CAP states in its executive summary that ‘the aim of humanitarian interventions is to ultimately contribute to the consolidation of peace and security’, but how it will do so is never explained. Weak monitoring of the impact of aid interventions make such claims impossible to substantiate.

Introduction

The recent history of political and humanitarian action in Sierra Leone provides a rich context for a study of this nature. The country has been gripped by a complex, confusing and often barbaric conflict, in which civilian suffering at the hands of warring parties, direct and indirect, reached terrible levels. The principal actors in the conflict were the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone, various groupings of pro-Government local militia collectively known as the Civil Defence Force, and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

Since the mid-1990s, outside involvement in Sierra Leone has taken many forms. Regional, national, international and multinational actors have all played their part, sometimes in harmony, and at other times in open and fundamental dispute. Over this period, the international community has reacted to developments in the conflict and to regime change by veering between seemingly unconditional political support to the regime in Freetown, a strategy of total political isolation, and back again.

There has been an international military presence, either a regional force (ECOMOG) and/or a United Nations observer mission (UNOMSIL) or peacekeeping force (UNAMSIL), in Sierra Leone since 1998. Originally deployed to monitor ceasefires or in support of a peace agreement, these forces also engaged at varying points in direct military confrontations with one or more of the warring parties. Other 'bilateral' political and military forces have played important roles, with the Governments of Liberia, Libya and Burkina Faso directly or indirectly facilitating the military rise of the RUF in 1991 and subsequently sustaining it, and Guinea and the UK playing roles of varying significance in its military demise ten years later.

Throughout this turbulent period of political and military activity, one of the few constants of international engagement with Sierra Leone has been the attempted provision of impartial humanitarian assistance to the victims of the conflict. The core cast of international aid agencies, Government institutions, and armed (or now disarmed) actors in Sierra Leone has actually changed little since 1995, while the form and intensity of other kinds of international political and military involvement in the country have evolved and changed beyond recognition over the same period. It should therefore be possible to isolate and explore the impact of political action as a key variable operating on humanitarian assistance, directly and indirectly, by examining how the security, access, programmes and coordination arrangements of humanitarian agencies were affected from 1995 to 2002.

Sierra Leone is also an interesting case study in terms of peacebuilding, not least because the analysis and prescription of required conditions for lasting peace has essentially remained constant from 1995 throughout the volatile subsequent years. For example, the first *Report of the Secretary-General on the Situation in Sierra Leone*, issued in November 1995,¹ lists the following among the prerequisites of durable peace: an end to hostilities, unrestricted movement for humanitarian agencies, the return of uprooted populations, a successful and rapidly implemented programme of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), the holding of elections and a general peace dividend, and the restoration of basic social service provision throughout the country.

The basic ingredients for peace remain unchanged today. The successes and failures of peacebuilding efforts over this time can therefore be taken as indicators of implementation – of the conviction, sequence, timing and skill with which each instrument has been applied.

¹ S/1995/975.

1. The RC/HC model, January 1995 to May 1997

1.1 Context

After the start of the civil war in 1991, the Government of Sierra Leone struggled to resist the advances of the rebels. Initial setbacks led to the ousting of President Momoh in 1992 by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), with Captain Valentine Strasser as its Chairman. The cause of peace made little progress for three years, with the army wholly ineffectual and beset with allegations of collusion with rebels. Outside the region, there was little apparent political interest in this ‘small, strategically insignificant country’,² although Berhanu Dinka was appointed as Special Envoy for the United Nations in early 1995.

After losing the Sierra Rutile and Sieromco mines, Strasser contracted Executive Outcomes (EO), a South African private security company which, largely succeeded in driving the RUF back from almost all of its positions. Strasser was himself overthrown by Maada Bio prior to the presidential elections held in Sierra Leone in February 1996. These elections received the backing of the international community, principally the UK and US ambassadors and the then UNDP Resident Representative, Ms Elizabeth Lwanga. Ms Lwanga was also UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator.

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and some opposition parties had strongly resisted the elections, under the slogan ‘peace before elections’, and the period leading up to the elections was one of widespread atrocities, including the infamous amputations, although ‘Remarkably, these amputations received virtually no international attention’.³

Eventually, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah was declared the winner of the elections, with 60 per cent of the vote, and he assumed the presidency at the end of March 1996. In April 1996, Kabbah and Sankoh began peace talks in Cote d’Ivoire, a process that eventually led to the Abidjan Peace Agreement in late November, for which the UN agreed to act as one of guarantors. During the negotiations, Sankoh was flown from Abidjan to meet his field commanders by ICRC helicopter, at the request of the Government.

In interviews, ICRC representatives identified this event as beginning the long process of suspicion of their activities from the Government of Sierra Leone that culminated in their expulsion from the country in 1999. Their insistence that the request came from the Government has only increased their disappointment at the levels of pro-RUF bias that they came to endure for some four years afterwards.

Apparently owing some \$30 million to Executive Outcomes, and ‘beset by IMF and international donor demands for reduced public expenditures’,⁴ Kabbah asked Executive Outcomes to leave Sierra Leone in early 1997. On 25 May 1997, he was ousted by a military coup. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), led by Johnny Paul Koroma, then took power. Less than a week later, Koroma invited the RUF to join the junta. Kabbah fled to exile in Guinea, while the US marines led a massive evacuation of more than 2,000 foreigners

² Hirsch, 2001, page 64.

³ Hirsch, 2001, page 45.

⁴ Hirsch, 2001, page 40.

from Freetown, including almost all of the international donor, development and humanitarian community.

1.2 Commentary

For the purposes of this study, and with the advantage of hindsight, the most interesting aspect of this period is perhaps the sequence in which international actors deployed their ‘peacebuilding’ tools, in comparison with what happened later. For example, most commentators agreed with the view that the military pressure exerted on the RUF by Executive Outcomes was ‘probably instrumental in the RUF’s decision to enter into negotiations with the government after almost five years of fighting.’⁵ Not surprisingly, first among RUF demands at the Abidjan negotiations was the departure of the security organisation, a point on which the RUF found an unlikely and ultimately decisive ally in the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The IMF felt that the Kabbah Government’s allocation of \$1.8 million per month to pay Executive Outcomes was not consistent with its prescription for monetary rigour. If the view of many commentators is correct that the RUF was then within months of total military defeat at this time, then the view that \$1.8 million per month was a cost that Sierra Leone could no longer afford can only be seen as an extraordinary miscalculation. This is in the context of the human, social and economic costs of the six years of warfare that followed, in addition to the estimated \$3.5–4.0 billion that UNAMSIL may well incur by the time of its final departure. (Total expenditure on UNAMSIL was around \$2.5 billion at the time of writing, September 2002).

The early departure of Executive Outcomes ‘proved a fatal mistake’:⁶ the RUF used the ceasefire to re-arm, and the coup took place five months later. Thus ended in total ignominy a policy that can only be described as something resembling ‘structural adjustment before peace’.

In keeping with the overall feel of an essentially aid-dominated approach to peacebuilding, the United Nations noted that ‘the Abidjan Accord addressed the roots of the conflict by providing a framework to further the process of democratisation and equitable social and economic development in Sierra Leone’.⁷

In terms of the details of the peace agreement, there are two further points to note. First, the UN acted as guarantor to the Abidjan Agreement. This seems to indicate certain shortcomings in the level of political analysis applied here. One of the chief failings identified in the Brahimi Report was the tendency of the United Nations to support peace accords where it may be that ‘the conflict is stalemated militarily, or that international pressure has brought fighting to a halt, but in any event the conflict is unfinished’.⁸

The same report notes that ‘local parties sign peace accords for a number of reasons, not all of them favourable to peace’, and that ‘the greatest incentive to defect from peace accords [is] when they have an independent source of income’. There are considerable grounds for seeing

⁵ Hirsch, 2001, page 39.

⁶ Hirsch, 2001, page 40.

⁷ S/1997/80.

⁸ A/55/305 (hereafter ‘Brahimi report’), paragraph 21.

the RUF's signing of the 1996 peace negotiations as a textbook example of this tendency. For example, Hirsch notes that, shortly after the agreement:

*'The Sierra Leone army, in turn, intercepted a radio message from Sankoh to his field commanders, saying that he signed the accord only to relieve the military pressure and that he intended to purchase new arms and continue the war.'*⁹

Secondly, the Abidjan Agreement of 1996 contained identical amnesty provisions for all armed actors, which caused such outrage three years later in Lomé, yet this passed without comment in Abidjan.¹⁰ Former US Ambassador Hirsch, who was to be a key negotiator in Lomé, suggests that this silence was itself an indicator of the lack of political interest in Sierra Leone in 1996. Kathy Jones, of the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA) in New York, was Special Envoy Dinka's Chief Political Adviser at the Abidjan negotiations, has said that 'No one seemed to notice, let alone complain', when recalling the reaction to the amnesty provisions in Abidjan.

For the purposes of this study, it may be necessary to concede that there is not always an inherent tension between those concerned with politics (or making peace) and those concerned with upholding human rights. Indeed, the period up to May 1997 seems to signal that, in some circumstances, some political interest is needed to arouse sufficient interest in human rights even to notice what those involved in making peace are doing.

1.3 Humanitarian action

Even in 1995 and 1996, the great majority of humanitarian assistance in Sierra Leone was implemented by international NGOs and the Red Cross movement. Even when WFP, UNICEF and UNHCR began to implement substantial programmes, a good proportion was channelled through NGOs at the point of delivery. This pattern has changed little throughout the crisis.

Access was the major constraint on humanitarian assistance, due to insecurity. The first Secretary General's report on Sierra Leone states how only half of the vulnerable people 'receive assistance with any degree of regularity, owing to security constraints'.¹¹ Aid agencies were largely operating in Freetown, and in the south and west of the country, in areas controlled by the Government. The agencies had enjoyed minimal access to RUF areas since the start of the conflict and when the first aid worker was taken as a hostage by the resistance movement. In 1992, an American Red Cross worker was held in Kailahun for more than a month, and there were many similar incidents in the following years. The situation throughout the country was made more complicated by poor discipline in army ranks. There were regular reports of diversion of aid supplies in rebel-held areas.

1.4 Funding

Most humanitarian assistance was delivered by international NGOs, with ECHO and OFDA the two largest donors. The ECHO budget for 1995 was 6 million ecus, modest in comparison

⁹ Hirsch, 2001, page 54.

¹⁰ Interview with Kathy Jones, New York.

¹¹ S/1995/975.

with that for other crises, but still representing easily the largest source of funding for NGOs working in Sierra Leone. There was no funding stipulation on operating in specific geographical areas. The 1995 CAP received contributions worth \$14 million (against requests for \$22 million), of which just under \$10 million was accounted for by food provided in kind to WFP. Only \$4 million was received in cash contributions, and shared between UNICEF and UNHCR.

In 1996, the holding of elections seemed to have the effect of increasing the amount of humanitarian assistance delivered in Sierra Leone, mainly in the food-aid sector. The 1996 CAP received contributions worth \$31 million (against \$48 million requested), of which \$26 million was as food provided in kind to WFP, with \$5 million in cash for other agencies.¹² It was only at the end of the year that a peace agreement was signed, and so 1996 saw little increase in overall access in the country.

It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the increase in donor funding available in Sierra Leone, particularly in the food sector, seems to have resulted not from any demonstrable increase in the capacity of aid agencies to demonstrate or indeed meet need, but from the elections in the country. The holding of elections was of course the principal political goal of the international community at that time. Albeit in the absence of any data to substantiate the impact of this extra food assistance worth \$16 million, it would therefore appear that there was a limited increase in humanitarian action due to the satisfactory outcome of the international community's chief political objective.

1.5 Coordination

The coordination arrangement at the time was the 'classic' UNDP Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator (RC/HC) model, in the person of Ms Elizabeth Lwanga. Even in 1995 and 1996, Sierra Leone was a difficult setting for this coordination model, given the co-existence of a civil conflict and a recognised government. However, the setting became much more difficult just before and after the elections, due to the very close relationship between Ahmad Tejan Kabbah and UNDP.

President Kabbah had been a long-term employee of UNDP, serving both in the field and at head office, culminating in a spell as the UN's Resident Representative in Tanzania. In addition to these institutional links, there was a close personal friendship between Kabbah and Ms Lwanga, UNDP's then Resident Representative for Sierra Leone, also the Humanitarian Coordinator. Given these links, it is not surprising to learn that the UNDP office in Freetown was commonly referred to as Kabbah's 'campaign office' during the 1996 elections.

Tensions inherent in the RC/HC model surfaced immediately.¹³ One UNDP official, quoted in an excellent and detailed study of the dynamics of humanitarian coordination in Sierra Leone from 1996 to 1999, has put it very plainly: 'humanitarian workers have to deal with the local

¹² The official OCHA figures are for \$41m contributions against \$58m requested, but these figures unusually reflect NGO funding (\$10m), not normally funded via the CAP. This was a one-off, therefore I have deducted the NGO component, for the sake of accurate comparison with other years.

¹³ It is worth noting the similarity with the difficulties observed in the dual role of the UNDP RC/HC by the OLS Review (Karim et al, 1997), which questioned the ability of the same person to interact with the Government of Sudan as: a) chief development partner; and b) warring party in a internal armed conflict.

government authority in order to serve the people... you can't negotiate with the RUF rebels and so alienate the government'.¹⁴

This situation was regarded as unacceptable by almost every member of the humanitarian community, for whom the absolute priority was to establish consent-based access to all areas of the country. The members of this community of NGOs and other IASC agencies were represented by the Humanitarian Coordinator. As a result, there was immediate antipathy between the top figure in the humanitarian coordination structure and most humanitarian agencies.

At the same time, the NGO community was significantly assisted by the arrival of a strong Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) presence in 1996, known as the Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit (HACU). This unit and the NGOs 'spoke the same language',¹⁵ and established effective, practical working coordination groups, notably at sector level. This alliance was deemed a success partly due to personalities (the HACU team was liked and respected by the NGOs). The main reason for success, however, was the emphasis on security, access and sectoral coordination, which provided a meaningful forum for agencies to discuss the practical issues most relevant to their programmes.

However, the political bias of the UN leadership, and the attitude of the Government, had a critical negative impact on the ability of United Nations humanitarian staff to develop and sustain negotiations over humanitarian space. There are good grounds to conclude that the nature of the RUF was such that meaningful and durable consent-based access may never have proved possible.

*'The RUF has defied all available typologies on guerrilla movements. It is neither a separatist insurgency rooted in a specific demand... nor a reformist insurgency with a radical agenda superior to the regime it sought to overthrow. Nor does it possess the kind of leadership that would be necessary to designate it as a warlord insurgency. The RUF has made history; it is a peculiar guerrilla movement without any significant national following nor ethnic support... it has remained a bandit organization solely driven by the survivalist needs of its predominantly uneducated and alienated battle front and battle group commanders.'*¹⁶

Despite this, at the time of the arrival of the HACU team, the UN had already assumed an openly partisan position towards different actors in the Sierra Leonean conflict that made effective humanitarian negotiation impossible.

By the end of 1996, political considerations had divided the chief coordinator and the 'coordinated'. The coordination model in use created:

'tension between preserving the mantle of neutrality to facilitate access to all victims of conflict and establishing some sort of working relationship with the Government... this tension became a persistent theme in coordination politics'.¹⁷

That there was no complete split in 1996 was probably due to two factors. First, in practice, there was little real sustained access to RUF-held areas. Second, for the year following the

¹⁴ Sommers, 2001, page 24.

¹⁵ Interview with Robert Painter, New York.

¹⁶ Abdullah and Muana, pages 191–192 in Clapham, 1998.

¹⁷ Sommers, 2001, page 28.

1996 elections, the international policy of support to President Kabbah created an essentially positive environment for aid-agency activity, with an overall significant increase in funding for humanitarian assistance in the country. Support to the Government meant support for aid agencies, and vice versa, encouraging a co-existence of sorts. This situation persisted until the coup, when the relative harmony was shattered.

2. The Conakry period, May 1997 to March 1998

2.1 Context

After the coup in May 1997, President Kabbah went into exile in Conakry in Guinea. The international community roundly condemned the AFRC coup, with disgust further increased by the emergence of the RUF from the forest to join the ‘junta’ in power in Freetown. Not a single country recognised the legitimacy of the coup. The international isolation was cemented in October by UN Security Council Resolution 1132 ‘deploring the seizure of power by the “junta”’, and demanding the immediate restoration of President Kabbah.

All diplomatic missions, UN agencies and many NGOs moved to Conakry at the same time. The Secretary-General sent Ambassador Francis Okelo to Conakry as his Special Envoy. However, in the weeks and months following the coup, the ICRC and a group of NGOs began gradually to resume limited activities in Freetown and, later on, in rural areas, where they found security conditions to be far better than before: ‘their ability to deliver humanitarian assistance outside the capital was better than at any time since 1993/4’.¹⁸

Some aid agencies re-established their headquarters in Freetown, to the consternation of Kabbah’s government (which referred publicly to such agencies as ‘junta NGOs’), and of Ms Lwanga and many foreign governments, particularly the UK. The most-quoted official DFID position was that minimal security and monitoring conditions for the delivery of humanitarian assistance were absent.

However, in apparent contradiction of the DFID position, senior Government figures no longer deny that their major concern was in fact that the presence of aid agencies in Sierra Leone ran counter to and even undermined the strategy of isolation, the cornerstone of their political policy. Mr Sheka Mansaray, the Secretary to President Kabbah, admitted that:

*‘the strategy of the international community in support of our Government in exile was total isolation, in every way. The insistence of aid agencies to return to Freetown went against this, and provided the AFRC with visible proof of the continuing engagement of the international community.’*¹⁹

This apparent conflict between political and humanitarian objectives resulted in a bitter split within the international community in Guinea: ‘the divide within the humanitarian community came to be seen as a dispute between a high-profile group, including the HC, then SE (later SRSG) Okelo, President Kabbah and Peter Penfold, British High Commissioner for Sierra Leone on one hand, and the ICRC-European NGO group on the other’.²⁰ There were divisions between different parts of the UN system, and within the donor community. For example, ECHO continued to fund NGOs to work in Sierra Leone during this period, whereas DFID did not. There was also a bitter ‘gloves-off’ dispute between a group of NGOs and the British Government. This row culminated in the UK Minister for International Development publicly accusing Action Aid of ‘lying’ in its submission to the International Development Select

¹⁸ Sommers, 2001, page 32.

¹⁹ Interview with Sheka Mansaray, Secretary to the President, 20 August 2002.

²⁰ Sommers, 2001, page 32.

Committee which had criticised DFID's apparent use of aid for political objectives through the restriction of emergency aid to Sierra Leone.

In early October, DHA submitted to the ECOWAS Executive Secretary a series of recommendations on sanctions exemptions procedures and related matters, suggesting seven categories of goods for *a priori* exemption ('food aid; health; shelter and survival; water and sanitation; personal and community hygiene; food production; and UN and NGO operational support'²¹). A few days later, Security Council Resolution 1132 seemed to represent the concerns of both sides, calling for humanitarian assistance to be provided in Sierra Leone, but responsibly and wisely. Resolution 1132 requested:

'all concerned, including ECOWAS, the United Nations and other international agencies, to establish appropriate arrangements for the provision of humanitarian assistance and to endeavour to ensure that such assistance responds to local needs and is safely delivered, and used by, its intended recipients.'

On the political front, negotiations between the AFRC and the international community were taking place simultaneously, culminating in the Conakry Agreement of 23 October 1997. This agreement allowed for a cessation of hostilities, a DDR programme to begin, and the resumption of cross-border humanitarian assistance from Guinea by 14 November. This was to be monitored by the Humanitarian Exemptions Committee, consisting of representatives of UN agencies, international NGOs and observers from ECOWAS.

Most parts of the agreement were never implemented. By December, it was recognised that 'humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone has deteriorated since the coup of May 1997',²² with outbreaks of measles, food shortages and reports of a health system 'near collapse'. Despite this, it was acknowledged that the 'start of cross-border relief operations had been delayed owing to certain difficulties in implementing certain aspects of the Conakry Agreement'. Significantly, the same Secretary-General's report attributes these delays not to security conditions inside Sierra Leone, but to the 'absence of ECOMOG and its inspection teams at the border between Guinea and Sierra Leone, which are required for cross-border deliveries to proceed'.

In February 1998, ECOMOG forces repulsed an attack by AFRC elements on their base at Lungi and counter-attacked, expelling the junta forces from Freetown. To the surprise of many, ECOMOG forces did not take advantage of what appeared to be an unprecedented opportunity to inflict a complete military defeat on the retreating AFRC/RUF forces, and a convoy of their leaders and equipment was allowed to escape. The humanitarian consequences of this were devastating. The retreating forces wreaked havoc on civilian populations in rural areas, and the period following their retreat from Freetown was when the killings, rapes and amputations committed by AFRC/RUF reached their peak. Furthermore, all but fleeting access by aid agencies to most RUF-held areas was subsequently lost until late 2001 or early 2002.

President Kabbah, and the rest of the international community, returned to Freetown in March 1998. On 7 March, the UN office in Freetown was re-opened by Special Representative Okelo. The function of the UN office was 'to liaise with the GoSL, ECOWAS, ECOMOG, and the UN and its agencies, as well as non-governmental organizations, and to act as the overall authority for all UN activities in the country'.²³

²¹ S/1997/811.

²² S/1997/958.

²³ S/1998/249.

With Kabbah's restoration, national and international political objectives and support for humanitarian action were again in accord. In a speech to mark his return, Kabbah identified the immediate priority of his government as the provision of humanitarian supplies, and the United Nations launched a flash appeal on 3 March 1998. On 17 April, Security Resolution 1162 'urges all States and international organizations to provide urgent humanitarian assistance.'

2.2 Commentary

From a 'peacebuilding' perspective, this period could be characterised as largely having been in 'baseline minus one'. The main objective was the restoration of Kabbah, and getting the peacebuilding process back to where it been in February 1996, with the holding of elections.

Although the circumstances could not have been more different from when Executive Outcomes was asked to leave two years earlier, once again the RUF was not pursued when a major military defeat seemed to be within grasp. This time, it was not considerations of financial discipline prescribed by the IMF, but the suggestion that elements within ECOMOG were not fully motivated to hasten that defeat. 'It remains a mystery why ECOMOG were so singularly unsuccessful at preventing their flight'.²⁴ Hirsch uses typically diplomatic language, but this lack of competence or motivation to pursue the military advantage certainly had serious long-term repercussions.

At this stage, it seems fair to note, there was not yet full coherence between the motives and goals of all outside actors in Sierra Leone. In addition, the leverage that the UK (the major outside political player) was able to exert over Nigeria (the major outside military player) was limited. This was said to be because non-cooperation with the military regime of General Abacha was a higher-priority objective in foreign policy for the UK than was the peace process in Sierra Leone.

A further observation on coherence is that this period could certainly not be seen as the high-water mark for 'joined-up government'. The Nigerians were the hegemonic political and military presence within ECOWAS/ECOMOG, yet undermined their own military objectives of support to Kabbah by the reported field-level collusion with the RUF. As for the UK, this was also the time of 'Sandline'. The details of this are beyond the scope of the study, but it is relevant as 'a parliamentary enquiry ultimately characterized the incident as a function of incompetence (different departments not being coordinated with each other)'.²⁵

The Conakry Agreement allowed for a programme of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration to take place within a one-month period, from 1 to 31 December 1997. While ultimately this provision proved irrelevant, it should be noted that identification of its importance to the peace process seemed not yet to have been accompanied by a realistic assessment of required methods and timescales. Peacebuilding was still strong on diagnosis, and very weak on implementation.

²⁴ Hirsch, 2001, page 102.

²⁵ Hirsch, 2001, page 102.

2.3 Humanitarian action

The 'exile' period was sad one for humanitarian action, which was pressured from all sides. The deposed Kabbah regime and their supporters launched vicious verbal attacks on 'junta NGOs', the term they gave to NGOs maintaining headquarters in Freetown. For agencies, this was taken as proof that the Government of Sierra Leone failed to understand or accept impartial humanitarian action: 'their allegiance to a basic humanitarian principle – neutrality – was being misunderstood as sympathy for the RUF cause because the delivery of humanitarian assistance had become so politicised'.²⁶ This caused a deep loss of mutual trust that endured long after the end of this period, and led to the expulsion of the ICRC in early 1999.

The pressure of this distrust led a group of NGOs to develop a statement of principles, which they could use to explain their mandates and way of operating to all sides in the conflict. This statement, known as the Conakry Protocol, evolved during the following year, upon the return to Freetown, and became better known as the Code of Conduct for Sierra Leone.

Inside Sierra Leone, the security situation was a complete reversal of that beforehand and since. In Freetown, the operational environment was tense and insecure. Several aid agencies were harassed, and had their vehicles and stores looted by AFRC/RUF forces. Outside Freetown, aid agencies enjoyed unprecedented security and access to populations that had been cut off from all forms of assistance for years.

One of the ironies of each side using the security situation as arguments for either withholding or increasing humanitarian assistance is that 'the two sets of findings were largely complementary: the ICRC-NGO group mostly reported on security conditions outside Freetown, while the Conakry group concentrated on activities within Freetown'.²⁷ However, agencies were short of supplies, due to what they perceived as the quite deliberate policy of President Kabbah, ECOWAS, Ambassador Okelo, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator and the UK Ambassador to use their influence to hold up relief supplies at the border.

In the course of this study, each of the five people interviewed who were in Conakry or Freetown during this period insisted that the passage of humanitarian assistance from Guinea was deliberately held up. Two former field officers from DHA (HACU) made the same observation: while the ECOWAS sanctions supposedly excluded emergency assistance, humanitarian assistance was in practice the one commodity that did not get across:

'we all knew that while our aid convoys were held at the border, there was a bush road open 5km away, where traders' trucks were pouring over en masse, going in with lorries loaded with oil and weapons, and coming out with palm oil'.²⁸

2.4 Funding

During the period of May 1997 to March 1998, the volume of funding available for humanitarian activities fell sharply. DFID suspended direct funding of all NGO activities in Sierra Leone during the junta period, although continued to support the activities of the ICRC. In contrast, ECHO continued to fund NGOs able to operate inside Sierra Leone. ECHO's

²⁶ Sommers, 2001, page 34.

²⁷ Sommers, 2001, page 104.

²⁸ Confidential interview.

budget, though, fell to 3.7 million ecus for 1997, and 6.5 million in 1998, representing the two smallest ECHO budgets of the period 1993–2002.

OFDA also continued to fund humanitarian projects inside Sierra Leone. Although the UK and the US concurred in their political analysis of the need to isolate the junta regime completely, it is interesting that OFDA did not join DFID in completely cutting off bilateral funding of those NGOs that decided to remain. This would suggest a greater independence of aid decisions from political considerations in OFDA than in DFID.

The CAP appeal for 1997 was launched before the coup. It raised only \$23 million (against \$57 million requested), the vast majority of which was again represented by contributions of in-kind food to WFP (worth \$19 million). The only cash contributions recorded that year were \$3.5 million to UNICEF (much of which was subsequently channelled through NGOs), \$585,000 to DHA, and \$260,000 to UNHCR, reflecting the continuing dominance of the NGO and Red Cross movement at the point of delivery of humanitarian assistance. The 1998 CAP, launched by the UN ‘in exile’ in Conakry, received contributions worth only \$14 million, \$8 million of which was given to UNHCR for use outside the country. WFP’s contributions fell to \$2.4 million (from \$19 million in the previous year).

It is therefore clear that overall quantity of humanitarian assistance funding to Sierra Leone fell substantially in this period. This is undeniably attributable to political factors, as it coincided with a period of economic and diplomatic isolation, from which humanitarian assistance was ultimately unable to assert its independence. Despite the clear difficulties of implementing programmes, the figures seem to back up the anecdotal view of aid agencies that opportunities to provide assistance to newly accessible rural populations of Sierra Leone were lost due to this lack of funding.

2.5 Coordination

As a direct result of the heavy politicisation of humanitarian assistance, coordination fell apart on many levels. The immediate result of this split was the evolution of two parallel coordination structures, the negative consequences of which were to be felt long after the restoration of President Kabbah.

At the level of the UN, the arrival of Ambassador Okelo as Special Envoy further reinforced the close relationship between the UN and the Government of Sierra Leone at a political level. However, it widened the gulf between the UN and those agencies implementing assistance, primarily the ICRC and a group of NGOs.

Considerable personal criticism was levelled at Ambassador Okelo during this time. However, he was the head of the United Nations presence in Sierra Leone, and the criticism could fairly be interpreted as the first major indicator of growing tension between an increased political role for the UN in Sierra Leone, at a time when the overarching goal was regime change, and its traditional leadership role on humanitarian issues.

This tension was most acute when Okelo and the UN Humanitarian Coordinator were widely believed to be two of the chief players blocking the effective functioning at the Guinea/Sierra Leone border of the Humanitarian Exemptions Committee. ‘Okelo was publicly making statements in support of aid going into Sierra Leone, but in private held anti-aid views every bit

as strong as Penfold or Kabbah'.²⁹ The most authoritative external study of that period describes this absurdity, noting how:

*'the UN's lead role on the exemptions committee had seriously damaged its credibility by positioning the world body as blocking its own humanitarian operations and preventing humanitarian assistance from crossing the border.'*³⁰

Although the Humanitarian Coordinator has a formal responsibility to other members of the IASC, by this stage in practice the relationship of the HC with agencies operating inside Sierra Leone had generated into open mutual antipathy and contempt. Every representative of a humanitarian agency from those times interviewed for this study mentioned the HC's refusal to 'stand-up' for humanitarian principles and agencies. Shortly after the restoration of Kabbah and the return of the international community to Freetown, UNDP was asked by the Government of Sierra Leone to replace the Humanitarian Coordinator.³¹ As in 1996, however, successful coordination continued at the field level between NGOs and HACU.

In contrast to the previous period, political and humanitarian action struggled to reach any form of accommodation. Funding dropped off, while the independence and impartiality of the ICRC and other NGOs were openly questioned by a hostile President Kabbah. While the insistence of humanitarian organisations on their right to operate in non-state-controlled areas has often irked Government representatives, an unusual feature of this period is that Kabbah's criticism of many aid agencies was echoed, explicitly or implicitly, by senior United Nations and donor government officials.

The basic principles of humanitarianism came under greater political pressure during this period in Sierra Leone than at any time before or since. No alternative political and military strategies were carried out to achieve the overarching political aim of the period, regime change in Freetown. In this absence, many governments and parts of the UN system seem to have resorted, at least in part, to 'probably the least sophisticated tool in the toolbox of international relations'³² – the application of conditionality to humanitarian assistance.

However, the goal of regime change was not accomplished by withholding humanitarian aid, and starving people to death in the forest. It was accomplished instead by the military intervention of ECOMOG. This apparent policy of the Government of Sierra Leone, certain UN figures, and donor governments was in clear breach of the Geneva Conventions.³³ Looking back on this period, it is impossible to disagree with Sommers' conclusion that 'Politics overwhelmed humanitarianism' in Conakry.³⁴

²⁹ Confidential interview with senior ex-HACU field worker.

³⁰ Sommers, 2000, page 33.

³¹ Interview with Sheka Mansaray, Secretary to the President of Sierra Leone, August 2002

³² Macrae and Leader, 2000.

³³ Specifically, of Common Article III, applicable here in a non-international armed conflict.

³⁴ Sommers, 2000, page 32.

3. UNOMSIL, March 1998 to October 1999

3.1 Context

On President Kabbah's return to Freetown in March 1998, the West African regional force, ECOMOG had updated its concept of operations, which now included 'providing security for key individuals, UN personnel, including military personnel, and non-governmental organisations'.³⁵ This was unwanted, in so far as aid agencies had always been adamant that they did not wish to be 'protected' by ECOMOG.

ECOMOG, over the whole period of this study up until the mass deployment of UNAMSIL, had an uneasy relationship with the humanitarian community. Aid agency personnel, were terrified of ECOMOG, and approached its checkpoints with little less trepidation than those of the RUF or CDF. There were numerous instances reported of harassment, and looting of aid vehicles and commodities by ECOMOG (known by humanitarians in both Sierra Leone and Liberia as 'Every Car Or Moving Object Gone').

In July 1998, Resolution 1181 of the Security Council established the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL) and deployed a small number of military observers (MilObs) to work alongside ECOMOG. The initial deployment was 70 MilObs, later increased to 230 and then 260. This was at a time when ECOMOG troops in Sierra Leone were reported to number between 10,000 and 17,000, though the exact figure is not known. Special Envoy Okelo was designated the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Sierra Leone.

One of the main tasks of UNOMSIL was to gather security information, and share it with Okelo and other parts of the UN system, including humanitarian agencies. In reality, UNOMSIL was slow to share information with humanitarians. The deep distrust of the Conakry period had accompanied the key players back to Freetown. Even after the departure of Ms Lwanga, the division within the international community remained, with the ICRC, NGOs and UN operational agencies in one camp, and UNOMSIL, SRSG Okelo, the Government and ECOMOG in the other.

As 1998 progressed, both the humanitarian and the security situations were deteriorating. A *de facto* partition had developed, with the north and the east of the country still held by the AFRC/RUF, while the south and west enjoyed relative stability. For example, the second report of the Secretary-General on UNOMSIL states: 'a humanitarian crisis of serious proportions is developing in isolated areas of Sierra Leone, particularly the north-east (where) humanitarian agencies have been unable to assess needs there because of unpredictable security'. Yet, a few paragraphs later, 'in southern and western regions, there is better security and stability... the UN, under the leadership of UNDP, is supporting peace-building efforts within the context of preventive development'.³⁶

³⁵ S/1998/249

³⁶ S/1998/960

There were no gains in terms of access to RUF areas in 1998; indeed the post-Junta period is considered the all-time low point in terms of access, with few agencies venturing outside the capital and major provincial towns, which they accessed by helicopter. In contrast with what was to transpire with UNAMSIL, aid agencies seemed happy to accept the use of UNOMSIL's aircraft and helicopter during this period, particularly in the first half of 1999. In the few areas where agencies could operate, there was an increase in harassment of aid agencies by pro-government CDF forces and by ECOMOG soldiers.

Relief agencies believed that the rebels were gaining strength in the latter half of 1998. As the situation degenerated, humanitarian staff accused UNOMSIL of 'politicising' the security situation, by downplaying the strength and continuing threat posed by the rebels. Ironically, this time, political actors accused aid agencies of exaggerating the security threat. UNOMSIL, ECOMOG and the Government 'described a steadily improving situation while NGOs and ICRC officials noted an increasingly insecure situation across the country'.³⁷ A HACU official felt that SRSO Okelo 'equated support to the Government with ignoring the reality of what was going on in the country'.³⁸

In December 1998, the same official relates how UNOMSIL MilObs gave a briefing at the weekly meeting of the entire humanitarian community which was a 'pack of lies'. The UNOMSIL officer announced at the meeting that there had been a large battle, and that the rebels had been defeated. NGO personnel were told not to draw down their missions. This turned out to be totally untrue; no such battle had taken place. It is striking that the same incident was described in almost identical language in an interview for this study with another former HACU field officer two days later – this official described December 1998 as a 'low point' in relations with UNOMSIL, recalling how, at security meetings, 'MilObs were lying to NGOs – and this is the only and truest way to describe it. It was a period of blatant and foolish manipulation of the truth for political ends.'

As it turned out, the AFRC and RUF advanced unopposed on the capital, and almost all of the international community, including UNOMSIL, evacuated Freetown in the last days of December. The AFRC/RUF entered the city on 6 January 1999, killing more than 5,000, mutilating scores more and displacing more than 150,000 people. Many of these atrocities were carried out by AFRC soldiers.

During the chaos, the UNOMSIL offices were destroyed by rebels, and, in an ironic interpretation of the force's mandate to protect humanitarian workers, ECOMOG soldiers also detained and physically mistreated national staff members of a number of humanitarian NGOs and the ICRC, apparently accusing them, without evidence, of being rebel collaborators.³⁹

The humanitarian consequences of this attack were devastating. At a time when there were more than 700,000 IDPs and 450,000 refugees in Guinea and Liberia, the ability of the humanitarian community to meet those needs was at its most constrained. The UN stayed out of Freetown until March, as did many NGOs. Almost all commodities and operational assets such as vehicles and cars had been looted or destroyed, more than two-thirds of the country was inaccessible by road, and most international NGO personnel commuted to Freetown in a helicopter leased by ECHO and OFDA for that purpose.

³⁷ Sommers, 2000, page 74.

³⁸ Confidential interview, New York.

³⁹ S/1999/237.

Security Council Resolution 1231 in March 1999 stressed the need for increased humanitarian access, specifically calling:

'upon all parties to the conflict in Sierra Leone fully to respect human rights and international humanitarian law and the neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian workers, and to ensure full and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to affected areas.

However, this appeal was made to no avail:

*'Rebel gains have increased the number of needy people while at the same time limiting aid workers' access to affected areas. Half of Sierra Leone is estimated to be out of reach. Agencies believe that peace negotiations offer the best chance of access'.*⁴⁰

On the 18 May 1999, a ceasefire was signed, and negotiations between Sankoh and Kabbah began in Lomé. SRSO Okelo played a key role in the negotiations, supported at various stages by his Human Rights Adviser, and by Kingsley Amaning, the former UNHCR Representative and newly appointed Humanitarian Coordinator. The Lomé Peace Accord was signed on 7 July and ratified by the Parliament of Sierra Leone eight days later. The UN was one of the moral guarantors of the agreement, which also made reference to the deployment of a 'neutral peacekeeping force comprising UNOMSIL and ECOMOG'.

The key provisions of the Lomé accord included an end to hostilities, an amnesty for all past acts committed during the conflict, and the immediate start of a DDR programme. A Commission for the Management of Strategic Resources was established, to be chaired by Sankoh, which gave him control of the diamond fields. Sankoh was also to assume the status of vice-president. The RUF was given four further cabinet posts and promised support for its transformation into a political party. The agreement also allowed for full prisoner releases, the safe return of refugees and IDPs, the guarantee and promotion of human rights, and the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Aid agencies were promised safe and unhindered access to all parts of the country by signatories to the agreement.

While it is easy to criticise the failings of the Lomé peace agreement, Sankoh and the RUF were in a strong position the time of the negotiations. The RUF was in control of some two-thirds of the country, and all of the diamond mines. Twice, Kabbah had to rely militarily on ECOMOG, to restore him to power in February 1998 and to keep him in power in January 1999. Prior to Lomé, the Nigerians, the backbone of the force, had told Kabbah that they were going to pull out, placing further pressure on him to make a deal. The Peace Agreement to some extent reflected what each side wanted from a deal – as one Western diplomat put it, 'Kabbah wanted peace, Sankoh wanted power.'⁴¹ As things turned out, the key achievement of Lomé was that 'there was a peace agreement at all, as it allowed the United Nations to deploy peacekeepers.'⁴²

The signing of the peace agreement had an immediate positive impact on humanitarian access. Even within two weeks, the Secretary-General was noting how 'in the wake of the agreement, unprecedented cooperation between RUF, the Government and the aid community has put the delivery of humanitarian assistance within grasp for the first time in years'.⁴³

⁴⁰ S/1999/645.

⁴¹ Quoted in Hirsch, 2001, page 82.

⁴² Interview with former US Ambassador Hirsch, IPA, New York.

⁴³ S/1999/836.

Aid workers identify the period immediately following the Lomé peace agreement in July up until the arrival of the first UNAMSIL forces in November 1999 as a period of greatest achievement in establishing moderate consent-based humanitarian access to RUF-held areas. OCHA field staff used the provision about access within the Lomé accord to begin negotiating access, beginning with the consent of Sankoh and other RUF leaders in Freetown, and then slowly extending it to rural areas. Access was always negotiated on the clear understanding that, at the first abuse, the whole initiative would stop.⁴⁴

An expanded UNOMSIL was suggested, strengthened with staff in civil and political affairs. Among its responsibilities explicitly listed by the Secretary-General was ‘to work closely with humanitarian organisations to exchange information on security conditions with a view to ensuring the widest possible access for humanitarian assistance to populations in need’.⁴⁵

The Secretary-General recognised that successful implementation of the peace agreement would require a ‘coherent and comprehensive response involving the Government and its international and national partners’.⁴⁶ He then took the decision, later commended by the Security Council,⁴⁷ that ‘a strategic framework be developed for Sierra Leone, encompassing political, assistance and human rights aspects. Through this framework a mutually reinforcing comprehensive political strategy and assistance programme would be developed.’

On the ground, progress was slow, and insecurity again hampered access by aid agencies.⁴⁸ The establishment and first meeting of the International Contact Group, attended by President Kabbah, international organisations, and representatives from 23 donor states generated ‘strong political support’⁴⁹ for the peace process, but only limited pledges of contributions for DDR programmes, and for logistical support to ECOMOG.

As he had indicated earlier, President Obasanjo of Nigeria, citing the gradual return of peace in Sierra Leone, made good the pledge he had made in the recent presidential campaign. He formally informed the UN Secretary-General of his intention to pull out 2,000 Nigerian troops from the ECOMOG force each month for five months, beginning in August. This withdrawal would have decimated ECOMOG, which, apart from the 10,000 Nigerian troops, had very few troops from other countries. The only other ECOWAS countries then having troops in Sierra Leone were Ghana and Guinea, with in the region of a battalion each, and Mali, with perhaps 500 troops.

Secretary-General Annan announced that the United Nations would have to ‘proceed on the basis that a robust peacekeeping force be deployed to ensure the implementation of the peace agreement.’⁵⁰ The initial force level was set at 6,000, a figure ‘predicated upon ECOMOG remaining in Sierra Leone.’ On his recommendation, Security Council Resolution 1270, on 22 October 1999, created the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL).⁵¹

⁴⁴ Interviews with Andrew Cox (former OCHA humanitarian affairs officer for Sierra Leone), New York.

⁴⁵ Interviews with Andrew Cox (former OCHA humanitarian affairs officer for Sierra Leone), New York.

⁴⁶ S/1999/836.

⁴⁷ Security Council Resolution 1260, 20 August 1999.

⁴⁸ S/1999/1003.

⁴⁹ S/1999/1003.

⁵⁰ S/1999/1003.

⁵¹ S/1999/1003.

3.2 Commentary

From a peacebuilding perspective, the period from mid-1998 to mid-1999 is notable for two reasons. First, after Kabbah's return to Freetown in 1998, there was the first big push towards implementing a DDR programme. Plans were made for an estimated 33,000 combatants to be disarmed. The disarmament was to be implemented by ECOMOG, in the presence of UNOMSIL observers, and UNDP and the World Bank were to take the lead in reintegration.

Second, soon after Kabbah's return, there was a visit in May 1998 of the World Bank, the African Development Bank, DFID and the EU, 'to discuss a wide range of development-related matters'.⁵² The visitors were essentially confined to Freetown, due to insecurity. While the need for DDR and development programmes had always been recognised as key ingredients of any peacebuilding process, the logic has to be questioned of beginning implementation at a time lacking even a hint of a ceasefire or peace agreement. In October 1998, the Secretary-General reported that the 'intensification of fighting caused by the launching of the CDF/ECOMOG offensive and the consequent large-scale mobilization of both CDF and re-indicted RSMLF personnel do not at present provide the best conditions for the rapid progress of disarmament and demobilization.'⁵³

The Lomé agreement was clearly the most significant development of this period. The agreement itself became embroiled in controversy, notably over the amnesty provisions and the fact that the UN was designated one of the moral guarantors of the agreement:

'After the signing of the present agreement, the government of Sierra Leone shall also grant absolute and free pardon and reprieve to all combatants and collaborators in respect of anything done by them in pursuit of their objectives, up to the time of the signing of the peace agreement'.⁵⁴

When this became known in New York, the UN Secretary-General faxed a handwritten addendum, clarifying that the 'United Nations holds the understanding that the amnesty and pardon in IX of the agreement shall not apply to crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of IHL'.⁵⁵

The arguments of course revealed the tension inherent in negotiating a peace agreement while also remaining faithful to immutable human rights principles. This tension was inevitably most keenly felt within the United Nations, a key player in the political negotiations and also the institution arguably most endowed with the responsibility to uphold global respect for human rights.

In the end, the Lomé agreement allowed for the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).⁵⁶ This was seen as the best course to navigate between the conflicting imperatives of negotiating peace and staying as faithful as possible to human rights principles. Recognising that judicial accountability was unlikely, those involved saw the TRC as the most appropriate alternative form of accountability.

⁵² S/1998/486.

⁵³ S/1998/960.

⁵⁴ Clause 2, Article IX: Pardon and Amnesty, Lomé Peace Agreement.

⁵⁵ S/1999/836.

⁵⁶ Clause 1, Article XXVI: Human Rights Violations, Lomé Peace Agreement.

One person interviewed for this study who was closely involved with the Lomé negotiations observed that:⁵⁷

'a lot of revisionists are now re-writing history. The impression now that everyone of good will was vehemently opposed to amnesty is just not true. At the time of Lomé, everyone thought it was the only way to avoid a slaughter. The RUF were winning, ECOMOG were looking to pull out, there was no chance, zero, that the RUF would have signed the agreement without this amnesty.'

3.3 Humanitarian action

The UNOMSIL period was extremely challenging for humanitarian action. The military situation, in particular the havoc created by retreating AFRC/RUF forces, both increasing humanitarian needs and making it effectively impossible for agencies to operate. Insecurity was the principal constraint on humanitarian action over the entire period, originally in rural areas, but then extending to Freetown. The international political and financial backing of the restored Kabbah government was not able to assist humanitarian agencies on the issue of access.

At the time, the only body formally mandated to provide security to humanitarian agencies was ECOMOG, and this role was self-awarded, announced without invitation or consultation. This coincided with the period when the Government and ECOMOG were most distrustful of humanitarian agencies, and when the Government-backed CDF militias and ECOMOG were regularly threatening aid workers and looting their supplies.

In November 1998, a workshop was held in Freetown, facilitated by three external consultants, to help the NGOs develop their code of conduct. The consultants' report explains that the initiative arose from the 'recognition of the need for the humanitarian community to work with one voice and to impress on the needs of all parties to the conflict the impartiality and neutrality of humanitarian agencies.'⁵⁸ A revised code was then adopted.

A Code of Conduct Committee was formed of NGO representatives, with ECHO and ICRC participating as observers. The role of the committee was to promote the code, and to deal with disputes arising from its interpretation and implementation. Many NGOs found this committee an innovative and effective way for key humanitarian actors to discuss and find solutions to the inevitable problems arising in such a difficult environment. The consultants' report ends with the suggestion that, 'at some future date, there may be merit in negotiating a similar agreement between the humanitarian community and other actors, such as the Government, ECOMOG, or the CDF'. The RUF is not included in this list, indicating that, in late 1998, the humanitarian community did not consider it possible that a consent-based access agreement with the RUF could be agreed.

On the contentious issue of armed escorts, it was agreed that 'exceptional use of armed escorts' would be allowed, on a case-by-case basis, if it could be demonstrated to the Committee that the circumstances had met four key criteria:

1. that humanitarian needs are great enough to justify the use of an armed escort;

⁵⁷ Confidential interview

⁵⁸ Consultants' Report on the Humanitarian Principles and Protocols Workshop, 19–21 November 1998 (Bradbury/Leader/Jeffery).

2. that escort must be a last resort after all methods of access have been exhausted;
3. the escort should be capable of deterring attack;
4. providers of the escort should be disciplined and understand the nature of their mission with regard to humanitarian operations.

Given that the principal constraint to humanitarian action was insecurity, and the dangers to aid workers all too real, the apparent refusal by UNOMSIL to share security information with humanitarian agencies is hard to understand. Even more serious is the allegation that UNOMSIL staff actually lied to UN agencies and NGOs about the security situation for political reasons,⁵⁹ encouraging them to remain in areas when it was not safe to do so. While impossible to substantiate now, this allegation was made by three separate interviewees during this study. What is certainly both sad and ironic is that ‘UNOMSIL, a UN institution created to facilitate the return of peace to Sierra Leone, was viewed as a threat to security by so many humanitarian officials in Freetown’.⁶⁰

January 1999 saw the consequences of the politicisation of humanitarian action that had been encouraged and indeed driven by senior figures in the Government of Sierra Leone, donors and the UN figures in Conakry. After the RUF had entered Freetown in January 1999, several NGO and ICRC staff were verbally and physically abused by ECOMOG soldiers, and accused of helping the rebels to enter the capital. The Government of Sierra Leone publicly repeated this allegation about the ICRC, leading to its decision to evacuate all staff on security grounds, when normally they would have stayed to assist civilian casualties of the fighting, of which there were thousands.

The departure of ICRC from Sierra Leone in the face of accusations of assisting the RUF indicates the perilous state of ‘humanitarian space’ at this time, and of the lack of commitment of the Government of Sierra Leone to humanitarian principles. The findings of this study indicate that those figures in the UN and diplomatic community who failed to use their undoubted influence on the Government of Sierra Leone during the Conakry period to ensure understanding and respect for basic humanitarian principles have more than a measure of responsibility for the treatment that aid agencies such as the ICRC received during that period.

At the end of the period, the signing of the Lomé agreement in July 1999 led to an immediate improvement in humanitarian access. Probably due to the presence of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Sierra Leone in the UN negotiating team, the Lomé Peace Agreement included provisions on humanitarian access.⁶¹

A pattern emerged that was to remain from this time onwards. When the peace process advanced, access and security for aid staff increased. When it faltered, access and security were lost. In practice, if not in name, from Lomé onwards, humanitarian action and political action were back in accord. From this point on, the chief variable acting on humanitarian access would be the success or failure of efforts to keep the peace.

3.4 Funding

⁵⁹ ‘UNOMSIL doesn’t want to give out bad news’, donor official quoted in Sommers, 2001, page 73.

⁶⁰ Sommers, 2001, page 75.

⁶¹ Article XXVII, Humanitarian Relief, Lomé Peace Agreement.

Over the ‘UNOMSIL period’, the volume of international funding to Sierra Leone increased. DFID resumed bilateral funding of NGOs. ECHO’s budget for 1998 was 6.5 million ecus, and increased to 9.6 million ecus for 1999. However, for many agencies, more important than any funding was the consistent public support given by ECHO to humanitarian agencies (and principles) during this difficult time. For example, an ECHO-hosted March 1999 Special Consultation Meeting on Humanitarian Aid to Sierra Leone concluded that ‘the Government of Sierra Leone, and ECOMOG bear some responsibility in not facilitating the work of humanitarian organisations because of unjustified suspicion that aid is not neutral’.

There was a CAP ‘flash appeal’ in March 1998, when Kabbah and the UN returned to Freetown. This raised \$2.35 million. The CAP appeal for 1999, again launched from Guinea by a UN community that had again been forced to evacuate for security reasons, received only contributions of \$12.4 million against \$25 million requested. Of this, almost half (\$5.4 million) consisted of contributions to UNICEF, while WFP and OCHA received \$2.6 and \$1.3 million respectively.

The post-Junta period therefore saw a discernible increase in the quantity of humanitarian assistance funding to Sierra Leone. This increase cannot be attributed to an increase in access, and is therefore probably attributable to the return of the internationally recognised Government to Freetown. While not complaining, aid officials expressed a degree of frustration at the contrast with the year before. As a HACU field officer in Sierra Leone observed, ‘during the junta period we had access and no funding. In the post-junta period, we had funding and no access’.⁶²

3.5 Coordination

An increased political role for the United Nations in Sierra Leone, and the arrival of UNOMSIL, was not accompanied by any substantive move towards greater UN integration. While SRSG Okelo, and then SRSG Adeniji who replaced him in 1999, remained officially the overall authority for all UN activities in the country, there was no formal relationship between the office of the SRSG and UNOMSIL on one hand, and the Humanitarian Coordinator and UN agencies on the other. Sommers describes it thus: ‘the entrance of UNOMSIL into Sierra Leone did not upset the existing coordination structure: it simply assumed the position at the top of it’.⁶³

Nor was there much informal contact. The split from Conakry if anything grew wider, and ‘by 1998, most international NGOs and ICRC officials seemed to view UNDP, UNOMSIL and the Sierra Leone government as essentially a single unit.’⁶⁴ The bulk of humanitarian activities in the country continued to be implemented by NGOs, with the coordination of HACU. A senior NGO official described at the time how ‘the coordination structures have developed in spite of the Resident Representative / Humanitarian Coordinator, and, when UNOMSIL came along, the coordination structure was already in place.’

Furthermore, the one obvious area in which UNOMSIL could have brought added value to the existing coordination system – security information – was dysfunctional. The UN agencies retained their own security official, who complained that UNOMSIL refused to share

⁶² Interview with Amjad Abashir, OCHA New York.

⁶³ Sommers, 2001, page 26.

⁶⁴ Sommers, 2001, page 27.

information with him. The result, absurdly, was two parallel UN security systems, ‘lacking a formal system for information management or information sharing’.⁶⁵

The nadir of this coordination failure was the period leading up to the January 1999 attack on Freetown, when humanitarian workers to this day are convinced that UNOMSIL deliberately lied to them about security for political ends. Sommers concluded ‘the lack of coordination between UNOMSIL and the UN Security officer (and by extension all other UN agencies) effectively threatened the entire humanitarian operation. UNOMSIL’s stance on this issue seemed unnecessary and even reckless’.⁶⁶

It is clear that, even then, the UN leadership in New York found this unacceptable. It cannot be coincidental that the expanded role, post-Lomé, spelt out for UNOMSIL in the 7th *Seventh Report of the Secretary-General on UNOMSIL* explicitly includes working ‘closely with humanitarian organizations to exchange information on security conditions’.⁶⁷

To conclude, by the time that UNAMSIL was created in October 1999, relationships between UN agencies and NGOs on one hand and UN political and military figures on the other were already very poor. Thus, efforts at ‘coherence’ between a humanitarian community and a peacekeeping force started off from a position of considerable disadvantage. This was not only undesirable but dangerous, and can be directly attributed to the interaction between political and humanitarian action in Sierra Leone over the previous three or so years.

On 19 May 1999, the Deputy Secretary-General requested that the United Nations develop a Strategic Framework for Sierra Leone. In an internal memo, she informed UN agencies and political departments that the framework ‘should include a strategy for attaining a peaceful settlement of the civil conflict and for post-conflict peace building’ and would ‘aim to further enhance the synergy between the UN political strategy in Sierra Leone and the international assistance activities. It would also aim to promote greater effectiveness and coherence in the international assistance programme’.

Given that the Lomé negotiations began at almost precisely the same date, little work was done on the development of a Strategic Framework before the arrival of UNAMSIL later in the year. Although the decision to ‘develop a Strategic Framework approach for Sierra Leone’ was welcomed by Security Council Resolution 1260 on 20 August 1999, no mention was made of it, for example, in the eighth report of the Secretary-General on UNOMSIL, issued on 23 September 1999. The Strategic Framework is therefore discussed later in this study (particularly in Section 5.5 below).

⁶⁵ Sommers, 2001, page 73.

⁶⁶ Sommers, 2001, page 76.

⁶⁷ S/1999/836.

4. UNAMSIL, October 1999 to May 2000

4.1 Context

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone was created by Security Council Resolution 1270, on 22 October 1999. The initial maximum troop level was set at 6,000. In addition to its core task of cooperating ‘with the Government and the other parties to the Peace Agreement in the implementation of the agreement’, UNAMSIL was also asked ‘to ensure the security and freedom of movement of UN personnel’, ‘to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance’ and ‘to support the operations of the SRSG and his staff, human rights officers and civil affairs officers’.⁶⁸ Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, UNAMSIL was also charged, ‘within its capabilities and areas of deployment, to afford protection to civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, taking into account the responsibilities of the Government of Sierra Leone and ECOMOG’.⁶⁹

There are two important points to note about the creation of UNAMSIL. First, although the humanitarian agencies always intended to keep their distance from it, they strongly endorsed the creation of a United Nations peacekeeping force.⁷⁰ The consensus, after years of trying largely unsuccessfully to establish nationwide consent-based access for humanitarian operations, was that security was a necessary precondition for aid programmes.

Second, and most importantly, despite the ignominy that was to follow, the content of Resolution 1270 with regard to assistance and protection is seldom criticised. Indeed, in a recent briefing to the Security Council, the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator stated that ‘UNAMSIL’s mandate was exemplary in terms of its comprehensiveness on the inclusion of protection of civilians in armed conflict issues and objectives in terms comparison to other mandates’.⁷¹

Indeed, Resolution 1270 is mentioned more than any other in the UN Security Council Presidential Statement of March 2002.⁷² Of the 12 primary objectives set out in this statement, Resolution 1270 is listed as a precedent for 9 of them: access to vulnerable populations; separation of civilians and armed elements; justice and reconciliation; security, law and order; disarmament, demobilization and reintegration; training of security and peacekeeping forces; effects on children; safety and security of humanitarian and associated personnel; and humanitarian impact of sanctions. (The remaining three primary objectives are small arms and mine action; effects on women; and media and information.)

Recognising the comprehensiveness of Resolution 1270 is crucial, as it shows that the humanitarian and protection issues that arose during the first 18 months of UNAMSIL’s presence in Sierra Leone were not failings of mandate in the peacekeeping force, but failures of

⁶⁸ Security Council Resolution 1270 (1999).

⁶⁹ Security Council Resolution 1270 (1999).

⁷⁰ Interviews with representatives from OCHA, the Red Cross movement, Oxfam GB, CARE International, MSF and others.

⁷¹ Briefing to the Security Council on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, Mano River Union Workshop by Carolyn McAskie, Deputy ERC, 18 July 2002.

⁷² S/PRST/2002/6.

implementation. This is where the contents of the *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* (the Brahimi Report) become critical to the study.

The initial failure of UNAMSIL that culminated in the May 2000 crisis coincided with the research and drafting of the Brahimi Report. On the opening page, the authors acknowledge that ‘the need for change has been rendered even more urgent by recent events in Sierra Leone’. This is mirrored in the observation in late May in the fourth report of the Secretary-General on UNAMSIL that it is ‘obvious that the United Nations will have to draw lessons from its experience in Sierra Leone’.⁷³

The first year of UNAMSIL’s presence exemplifies all of the main observations of the Brahimi Report about the causes and attributes of failed peacekeeping missions in general. Among the chief internal weaknesses were:

1. limited political interest in Sierra Leone (‘A mission such as UNAMSIL would probably not have faced the difficulties it did... had it been provided with forces as strong as those currently keeping the peace in Kosovo’⁷⁴)
2. no troop contributions from any developed country (‘No developed country currently contributes to the most difficult UN-led peacekeeping operations from a security perspective, UNAMSIL and MONUC’⁷⁵)
3. slow deployment of troops, with the actual strength always lagging far behind the authorised force numbers (for example, on 1 January 2000 there were 4,800 troops, but up to 10,000 authorised, and on 1 March 2000 there were 7,400 troops but 11,000 authorised)
4. poor equipment and logistical ability and, perhaps most importantly, a total inability to pose a credible deterrent threat sufficient to defend themselves, other mission components and the mission’s mandate.

Externally, Sankoh and the RUF represented the perfect ‘spoiler’, far from committed to the peace agreement they had signed up to, and sustained by substantial sources of income and one or more neighboring states.

In December, the peace process was in difficulty, and, with it, the humanitarian programme. Already, ‘deteriorating security conditions throughout the country have reversed gains in humanitarian access’,⁷⁶ and, in direct contravention to the Lomé agreement, there was once again regular interference with humanitarian personnel and supplies in RUF areas, such as the detention in December for ten days of two MSF workers in Kailahun. In addition, only 4500 out of an estimated 40,000 combatants had presented themselves for DDR. Of the weapons handed in, few were of serviceable quality, and there was an average ratio of only one weapon per four combatants, both classic indicators that the DDR process was floundering.

In February, the Security Council made a bleak assessment of the lack of real progress in Sierra Leone, noting that:

‘the peace process thus far has been marred by the limited and sporadic participation in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, by the lack of progress on the release of abductees and child soldiers, and by continued hostage-taking and attacks on humanitarian personnel.’⁷⁷

⁷³ S/2000/455.

⁷⁴ Brahimi Report, paragraph 106.

⁷⁵ Brahimi Report, paragraph 104.

⁷⁶ S/1999/1223.

⁷⁷ Security Council Resolution 1289, 7 February 2000.

The Security Council then adjusted its mandate. With regard to humanitarian assistance, the mandate was altered from the previous general ‘facilitation’ role to one that required UNAMSIL ‘to facilitate the free flow of people, goods and humanitarian assistance along specified thoroughfares’. The DDR programme continued to falter.

By this time, humanitarian workers were seriously concerned about the peace process, which they believed was ‘unravelling’, a concern shared by others. A DPKO official recalled colleagues trying to get a meeting with the USG for Peacekeeping during his visit to Sierra Leone from the 19 to 21 March, to express their fears of an imminent breakdown in the peace process. Their request was turned down by people above them in the UNAMSIL hierarchy, who were reluctant to change the USG’s schedule at short notice.⁷⁸

Of equal concern was the perception among humanitarian agencies of what one former OCHA field worker described as a ‘staggering lack of competence in the UNAMSIL mission.’⁷⁹ They tried unsuccessfully to meet with Adeniji, who they viewed as existing ‘in an ivory tower, removed from any sound advice or decent information’.⁸⁰

Within the mission itself, there was disarray, with the Indian and the Nigerian contingents not on speaking terms, due the former’s belief that the latter were acting in ‘total complicity with the RUF’.⁸¹ Even more importantly, the relationship between SRSG Adeniji and Force Commander Jetley had broken down completely.

On 1 May 2000, UNAMSIL troops and observers were detained by the RUF in Makeni, and the crisis began. SRSG Adeniji was on home leave in Nigeria, and could not be located. Within a few days, some 350 peacekeepers had been taken hostage, and some were brutally tortured and killed.

On 7 May, a crowd of 30,000 gathered to protest outside Sankoh’s house in Freetown. Shots were fired into the crowd, and Sankoh disappeared. For a few days, it was feared that Freetown would fall to the rebels. The UNAMSIL mission was in disarray. Once again, information was an issue, as members of the humanitarian community had information that contradicted what they were hearing from their contact points within UNAMSIL. During one confidential interview, a humanitarian worker described the scene:

‘UNAMSIL was saying that the rebels were in Freetown. We had information that they were still three or four days away. I drove to UNAMSIL. It was one of the most surreal sights of my life. The place was in chaos – soldiers arguing, shouting, drinking, fistfights, an atmosphere of chaos. I tried to find the Chief Military Observer to tell him that the rebels were not in Freetown, that they still had time.’

The UK sent a battalion of paratroopers, whose arrival in Freetown on 8 May secured the capital. A Naval force arrived the following week, providing a further ‘over-the-horizon’ threat. On 17 May, Sankoh was captured near his home and imprisoned, an incarceration that continues to this day. With these two developments, the immediate crisis passed, though it was not before 15 July that the last peacekeepers were released by the RUF.

⁷⁸ Confidential interview, New York.

⁷⁹ Confidential interview, New York.

⁸⁰ Confidential interview, New York.

⁸¹ Confidential interview, New York.

At the onset of the May crisis, all humanitarian agencies evacuated all international staff from RUF areas. Almost none would return before February 2001, while some areas remained off limits for well over a year. Aid agencies had pinned their hopes of sustained access to RUF areas on the Lomé agreement and a successful peacekeeping mission. The failure of both was a grave setback for the humanitarian community.

4.2 Commentary

From a peacebuilding perspective, there was a definite lack of coherence in the actions of the international community in the critical period following Lomé. In particular, the donor community was slow to follow up the agreement with concrete funding of the DDR programme, something that had always been seen as a critical component of peacebuilding efforts. ‘If the RUF was to be persuaded to disarm, the financial and material resources for disarmament and peacekeeping needed to be quickly available’.⁸² The failure of many of the same governments to provide troops or logistical support to UNAMSIL also undermined the effort invested in negotiating the peace agreement.

Former US Ambassador Hirsch expressed the understandable frustration of those closely involved with the process, noting ‘the international community’s rhetorical support for Lomé quickly proved far greater than its tangible commitments’, probably because their resources were by now heading elsewhere, specifically to Kosovo and East Timor.⁸³ Whatever the reason, ‘such parsimony creates an enormous obstacle to sustainable peace. By failing to provide the resources essential for disarmament and demobilization, the international community thwarts the process to which it has pledged political support.’⁸⁴

4.3 Humanitarian action

The first UNAMSIL period began with unprecedented optimism in the humanitarian community that, following Lomé, there would at last be sustained access to the whole country. Lack of consent and chronic insecurity had been the two principal barriers to access in RUF areas since the start of the war. The provisions in Lomé about humanitarian assistance and the imminent deployment of UNAMSIL forces throughout the country seemed a solution to both problems simultaneously. In addition, the imminent departure of ECOMOG and planned demobilisation of the CDF were further grounds for guarded satisfaction.

However, at the same time, aid agencies were concerned about the impact that the arrival of an armed UN peacekeeping force would have on the image and acceptance of the humanitarian community. This fear was particularly keenly felt by the NGO community and by the UN humanitarian agencies: ‘the major operational problem that NGOs face is insecurity. They fear that the UN peacekeeping operation will restrict their movement still further’.⁸⁵ Memories were still fresh of the poor relationship with UNOMSIL, and the traditional split between UN political and the Government in one camp, and UN and NGO humanitarian in the other, largely persisted.

⁸² Hirsch, 2001, page 86.

⁸³ Hirsch, 2001, page 86.

⁸⁴ Hirsch, 2001, page 95.

⁸⁵ From a trip report of the ECHO Desk Officer for Sierra Leone, February 2000.

At this time, however, there was little or none of the discussion about the use of UNAMSIL assets in support of aid operations that would dominate the agenda in 2001. The Code of Conduct Committee was very strong in late 1999 and early 2000, and the humanitarian community maintained a united stance on keeping a distance from UNAMSIL.

Practical temptations for agencies to break with the Code were in any case limited. This was mainly due to the fact that, between its deployment and the May 2000 crisis, the peacekeeping force had insufficient logistical capacity for its own requirements, so assisting humanitarian agencies was never really on the agenda. When asked whether his agency had used UNAMSIL assets to deliver aid supplies during 1999–2000, a logistician from World Vision replied, ‘no, because they would not have got there’.⁸⁶ In addition, ECHO provided the funding for an ‘NGO helicopter’, a practical measure designed not only to facilitate access in an insecure country, but also to help aid agencies to maintain their distance from non-humanitarian actors.

By February 2000, there was growing concern in the humanitarian community at what was perceived to be the growing tension between the RUF and UNAMSIL troops. There was already recognition that the fates of the humanitarian programme and the peacekeeping mission were related. The same report notes that ‘while mandates vary, an integrated approach to addressing the problem is inevitable. If the political process fails, the cost to the humanitarian, human rights and development dimensions will be high, and vice versa.’ This analysis turned out to be entirely accurate. Just three months later, the political process had failed, and the peacekeeping forces had been engaged in battle by one of the parties to the peace agreement. The door for aid agencies that had opened in Lomé was abruptly slammed shut.

A final observation on this period is that one clear result of humanitarian access to RUF areas becoming increasingly linked with adherence to Lomé and the presence of UNAMSIL peacekeepers was an end to accusations of ‘bias’ or ‘collusion’ levelled at humanitarian agencies by the Government of Sierra Leone. This did not represent a final ‘triumph’ of humanitarian principles, but instead the simple political calculation that, with, with a peace agreement finally in place, aid agency presence and programmes were now seen as useful contributors to the goal of ‘restoring state authority’.

4.4 Funding

The signing of the Lomé Peace Agreement in 1999 had an immediate impact on levels of funding for humanitarian assistance. ECHO’s budget for 2000 increased to 11 million euros, its highest annual figure for Sierra Leone, though still a tiny fraction of what was being spent by the same donor in the Balkans. In late March, ECHO agreed strategic guidelines for its activity in Sierra Leone. Key among these objectives were:

1. to maintain an adequate level of assistance in order to meet the emergency needs of the population
2. to continue to apply a ‘smart aid’ approach in ECHO funding policy
3. to ensure that the main political stakeholders create a more enabling environment for the provision of humanitarian assistance inside Sierra Leone.

The CAP appeal for 2000 received \$23 million of contributions against \$60 million requested. This was almost double the amount of the previous year but, again, a very modest sum

⁸⁶ Informal interview, Freetown.

compared to those raised in many other crises. Of the total, \$10 million went to WFP, \$5 million and \$4.8 million to UNHCR and UNICEF respectively, and just under \$1 million to OCHA. A striking feature of the 2000 CAP for Sierra Leone is that UNAMSIL (Civil Affairs) included projects in the appeal. Against \$730,000 requested, UNAMSIL received \$179,500 of contributions. Again, an increase in humanitarian assistance accompanied positive developments in the political process.

Also in early 2000, there were further signs of ‘good donor-ship’, with ECHO and OFDA again making public statements in support of humanitarian principles. In an unusual and commendable step, at a time of growing tension between peacekeepers and the RUF, the two major donors of humanitarian assistance, OFDA and ECHO, agreed a joint public statement in support of independent and impartial humanitarian action.⁸⁷ Stating that ‘humanitarian assistance is neutral, apolitical and non-partisan... and is motivated solely by the needs of people who are victims of disaster, including war and civil strife’, the donors affirmed that ‘it has been and is the policy and intention of the European Commission and the US to provide humanitarian assistance to people on all sides of the conflict, wherever they are located.’ This followed a video-conference between the two donors, a form of coordination continuing today.

4.5 Coordination

The coordination between political and humanitarian actors in Sierra Leone remained poor through all of this time, and further worsened during the months immediately following the May 2000 crisis. After the decision to deploy UNAMSIL, just after Lomé, many humanitarian actors complained that the DPKO survey mission to Sierra Leone made little or no effort to consult with them. An OCHA official in Freetown at the time also related how the survey team had almost completely failed to consult with the humanitarian community. A DPKO official confirmed that the assessment had been handled badly:

*‘Problems start when DPKO do their assessment missions ahead of a deployment. The prevailing attitude is “we are coming in with our unit, our hardware, our unlimited funds... what could we possibly learn from you humanitarians, with your dirty t-shirts and your scraggly cars?”’*⁸⁸

In view of the sensitivity of the UN being about to embark on a peacekeeping mission in a country where it already had a large humanitarian presence, this was a major error. Certainly, what happened at the start in Sierra Leone set the tone of much of what was to follow, and fell far short of what United Nations headquarters expects today:

*‘any peacekeeping operation should be mandated, designed and resourced to support and at the very least not to hinder the humanitarian action. How this is done will vary from case to case; there is no single model, and there thus needs to be close cooperation between DPKO and OCHA at all stages of mission design and planning.’*⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Joint Donor Statement by the European Humanitarian Office (ECHO), USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Response (BHR), and the US State Department Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), agreed 20 March 2000.

⁸⁸ Confidential interview, New York.

⁸⁹ A/55/977, paragraph 270.

Again, the failure of efforts to develop a single system of security coordination stands as a telling indicator of the poor relationship between UNAMSIL and the humanitarian community, particularly the UN Country Team. This was picked up by the main donors of humanitarian assistance, ECHO and OFDA, who in their March Joint Donor Statement, ‘call on UNAMSIL to duly inform the humanitarian agencies of every security incident to allow them to take the necessary measures and limit their exposure to risk’.⁹⁰

As the security situation deteriorated, so did the relationship between UNAMSIL and the UN Country Team. This culminated, almost unbelievably, with the UN Agencies’ Security Officer being ‘thrown out of UNAMSIL security meetings in early May, at the height of the crisis’,⁹¹ thus depriving the humanitarian community of essential security information at a critical time.

While remaining the overall authority for the UN in Sierra Leone, SRSG Adeniji exerted no pressure on either UN agencies or NGOs to take programme decisions for political reasons. There were monthly meetings between the SRSG and the UN Heads of Agencies but nothing that could be described as an effort at strategic coordination. ‘No discussion was encouraged at these meetings... we used to go around the room, everyone read out a summary of their activities, the most basic form of information exchange, and nothing beyond that.’⁹²

This period, universally agreed to be the low point between UN political and UN humanitarian agencies, was also exactly when the Strategic Framework was being developed. It is possible that the development of the framework stemmed from a recognition that the division between UN humanitarian agencies and UN political/military staff was unacceptable. Those involved on both the political (UNAMSIL) and the humanitarian sides viewed the framework exercise as a ‘complete headache’.⁹³ Some of the scepticism was justified, in so far as the political and security situations were changing daily. Within the United Nations, the Strategic Framework was seen as a headquarters-imposed exercise, with neither Adeniji nor UN Agency Heads seemingly enthusiastic.

The principal fear of UN humanitarian agencies was that their involvement in the development of a Strategic Framework would alienate them from the NGO community which wanted no part in the exercise. A donor representative noted in a confidential March 2000 trip report that ‘coordination between “humanitarians” and “politicals” has historically been less effective. The UN decision to apply its Strategic Framework raised serious misgivings among the NGOs and caused embarrassment for the UN aid agencies.’

This is the first manifestation of one of the principal ‘stress points’ arising with moves towards greater integration. In countries where UN peacebuilding missions are deployed, and there are calls for greater integration between UN political, military and humanitarian activities, there may be a strong internal logic towards increasing internal dialogue and coordination. Yet, the process of integration may alienate the United Nations from the NGO community, which consists of the agencies actually implementing the bulk of humanitarian assistance programmes. While first apparent during the Strategic Framework process, this tension dramatically worsened with the attacks on the UN peacekeepers by RUF forces in May 2000.

⁹⁰ Joint Donor Statement by the European Humanitarian Office (ECHO), USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Response (BHR), and the US State Department Bureau for Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM), agreed 20 March 2000.

⁹¹ Interview with UN Agency Country Director, Freetown.

⁹² Interview with UN Agency Country Director, Freetown.

⁹³ Interviews with DPKO and OCHA staff, New York and Freetown.

5. Deadlock and review, May 2000 to March 2001

5.1 Context

In a recent discussion paper,⁹⁴ Thant Myint-U of OCHA examined the relationship between humanitarian and peace operations in crisis countries. He identified a stage in a peacekeeping operation where integration of the two strands becomes impossible:

'once peacekeeping moves from adherence to its classical principles of neutrality, deployment by consent, and use of force only in self-defence, and towards a "robust impartiality", there is a direct, practical conflict between the imperatives of a peacekeeping mission (so-called) and a humanitarian operation seeking access in the midst of war.'

This is exactly what happened in the months following the May 2000 crisis, when UNAMSIL became 'forced into combat with one of the parties that had pledged to cooperate with it'.⁹⁵ Within two weeks, the authorised troop strength was raised to 13,000,⁹⁶ and UN peacekeeping forces became involved in direct hostilities with the RUF. The arrival of the UK forces in Freetown stabilised the situation in the capital. Negotiations continued with the RUF over the fate of UN peacekeepers, most of whom were released through Liberia in the second half of May and early June, after pressure was brought on the RUF by President Charles Taylor. On 15 July, UNAMSIL launched a 'robust military operation' to free personnel trapped in the east of the country, during which 'RUF casualties [were] unknown, but believed to be significant'.⁹⁷

Security Council Resolution 1313 recognised that 'the RUF offensive against UNAMSIL since May 2000 revealed serious inherent weaknesses in the mission's structure, command and control and resources'. It made several changes to strengthen UNAMSIL's mandate, including, most significantly, 'To deter and, where necessary, decisively counter the threat of RUF attack by responding robustly to any hostile actions or threat of imminent and direct use of force'.⁹⁸ This was the point at which the UN effectively took a side in the conflict, a posture entirely consistent with a 'Brahimi Report' understanding of impartiality, but also the moment 'where peacekeepers and humanitarians part company'.⁹⁹

From July until the end of November 2000, there was a political and military standstill, with no progress towards the establishment of a political dialogue. Since the May crisis, most of the RUF leadership was in jail. Between May and August, there were regular, if minor, skirmishes between the RUF and UNAMSIL forces. In late August, the West Side Boys (a breakaway faction of ex-AFRC soldiers) took hostage 11 UK soldiers, who were freed on 10 September by UK special forces. Over this period, the 'humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone continued to deteriorate. In particular, the lack of access severely restricted humanitarian operations

⁹⁴ Myint-U, 2002.

⁹⁵ S/2000/455.

⁹⁶ Security Council Resolution 1299, 19 May 2000.

⁹⁷ S/2000/751.

⁹⁸ Clause 3b, Security Council Resolution 1313, 4 August 2000.

⁹⁹ Myint-U, 2002.

inside the country. More than 1 million Sierra Leoneans were said to remain ‘beyond the reach of aid agencies in rebel-controlled areas’.¹⁰⁰

The deadlock continued until the meeting in November between the RUF and UNAMSIL in Abuja, where a ceasefire agreement was signed on 10 November. Once again, this allowed for the ‘unimpeded movement of humanitarian workers.’ In December, RUF and Liberian Government forces were accused of launching attacks on towns and villages inside Guinea. The Armed Forces of Guinea in turn carried out massive retaliatory attacks on RUF-controlled areas of Sierra Leone in January and February 2001, apparently inflicting huge losses on the rebels. While the presence of UK troops in Sierra Leone is often credited with ‘persuading’ the RUF to abandon military action, those most closely involved (including staff at the British High Commission) identify the damage inflicted on the RUF by the Armed Forces of Guinea as almost as significant as the UK’s ‘over-the-horizon threat’.

There are no reports of further skirmishes between the RUF and UNAMSIL after September 2000, although question marks remained about the extent of the RUF’s commitment to peace. The Secretary-General’s report noted that ‘it would appear that so far RUF is ready to implement only those aspects of the Abuja agreement that pose no threat to its military strength.’¹⁰¹

In October and November, there was a one-off instance of negotiated access to RUF areas, as part of a nationwide UNICEF-sponsored campaign to eradicate polio. Some 60,000 children in RUF areas were vaccinated. However, even on this occasion, ‘health workers were temporarily detained and manhandled by RUF in the Koinadugu district, resulting in the loss of vaccines and equipment’.¹⁰² However, by February and March 2001, the ICRC and a limited number of NGOs tentatively resumed efforts to gain consent-based access to some RUF areas.

Internally, over this period, UNAMSIL was undergoing a fundamental process of review. First, an internal assessment team visited Sierra Leone in the first week of June ‘to review the operations of UNAMSIL and report on measures that could be taken to make the operation more effective.’ General Manfred Eisele, a former AS-G at DPKO, led the team.¹⁰³

In August, the strengthening of the mandate and military capability of UNAMSIL coincided with the publication of the Brahimi Report. The Secretary-General was unequivocal about the relevance of this timing:

‘In a sense, the course taken by the Security Council, Member States and the Secretariat with regard to the situation in Sierra Leone represents an important first test of our joint responsibility to implement the practical recommendations made by the Panel, with a view to making the UN truly credible as a force for peace.’¹⁰⁴

In October, there was a high-level Security Council Mission to Sierra Leone, led by Ambassador Sir Jeremy Greenstock. While noting some improvements in UNAMSIL, the mission made a number of recommendations on what they perceived to be a strong lack of

¹⁰⁰ S/2000/1055.

¹⁰¹ S/2001/228.

¹⁰² S/2000/1199.

¹⁰³ The full Eisele report was never published, and remains classified. Much of the report was written ‘for the eyes of the Secretary-General only’.

¹⁰⁴ S/2000/832.

coherence both within UNAMSIL, between UNAMSIL and other parts of the UN system, and within the international community in general:

*‘The Security Council, other parts of the UN system, ECOWAS, the international financial institutions, individual donors and international non-governmental organisations are all heavily engaged. Each can do and is doing much to address the different aspects of the crisis and its underlying causes. The ideas, energy, commitment and resources are there, but some of the key actors continue to work in unharmonized and, in certain cases, competing directions. Among the Government, ECOWAS and UNAMSIL, and in each of them, we found different perceptions of the reality on the ground, and of policy objectives and the strategy and means necessary to meet them’.*¹⁰⁵

Responding to a direct recommendation of the Security Council mission, the Secretary-General announced that he was ‘considering the appointment of a second Deputy Special Representative for Sierra Leone’.

5.2 Commentary

From a long-term peacebuilding perspective, the near collapse of the UNAMSIL deployment was probably the best thing that could have happened. In the words of a former DPKO Desk Officer for Sierra Leone, attacking the United Nations forces proved ‘the death blow for the RUF, as it unleashed the forces that ultimately brought about their downfall’.¹⁰⁶

For the first time, the UN and its allies began to implement a security-first approach to peacebuilding. They abandoned the discredited ‘carrot’ approach, based on the negotiation and promise of DDR programmes and seats in government, in favour of a ‘stick’ approach, based on military strength. ‘The eventually overwhelming presence of UNAMSIL with the right UN mandate, further strengthened by a small but very professional British military contingent finally persuaded the RUF and to some extent its external backers that they were not going to win’.¹⁰⁷ This approach was backed up with political and economic pressure on the RUF and its allies, notably the sanctions imposed on Liberia.

The May 2000 crisis could be said to have directly created, finally, the international political will, prior absence of which had so clearly contributed to UNAMSIL’s weakness. This occurred in two ways. First, after the ignominy of the May crisis, the fate of UN peacekeeping in general came to be seen to hang on the fate of UNAMSIL. Donor states paid their contributions, better-trained troops with more equipment were sent to Sierra Leone, including air and ground transportation units. As a UNAMSIL Commander recounted, ‘I was given very, very good soldiers, far better than Jetley, and sufficient resources and other tangible things that I could do my job with’.¹⁰⁸ The result was, finally, an ability to implement a security-first approach to peacebuilding.

Second, the growing involvement of the UK in Sierra Leone not only provided a degree of military backbone to UNAMSIL when it was most needed but, critically, led the UK Government to assume an ever-larger political stake in the Sierra Leone peace process. ‘The

¹⁰⁵ Report of the Security Council Mission to Sierra Leone (S/2000/992).

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Adriaan Verheul, DPKO, New York.

¹⁰⁷ Glentworth, 2002.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Lt Gen Opande, Force Commander, UNAMSIL.

more our involvement has succeeded, the less it can be seen to afford to fail.¹⁰⁹ (The role of the UK is discussed in more detail at the end of this study.)

5.3 Humanitarian action

Two main forces most affected humanitarian action in this period. First, access into RUF areas since 1999 had been premised on adherence to the Lomé agreement, and the deployment of peacekeepers throughout the country. Despite the humanitarian community making every effort to distinguish its personnel from peacekeepers, and being supported by donors with funding for parallel transportation systems and dissemination of the Code of Conduct, there was no way for aid agencies to remain in RUF areas once hostilities with UNAMSIL had begun.

There is no firm evidence, however, that the RUF would have been more hostile to aid agency personnel because of increased association with UN peacekeeping forces. Force Commander Opande was clear in his belief that the 'RUF could distinguish peacekeepers from all other international organisations, and their workers'.¹¹⁰ Pallo Bangura, former leader and Presidential Candidate of RUF-P, also felt that combatants were aware of the difference between peacekeepers and humanitarians, but that this would not have improved the security of aid workers at this particular time.¹¹¹

The ICRC, however, still felt it necessary upon its return to RUF areas in March 2001 to devote a full six weeks to dissemination activities, structured around repeatedly stressing the difference between the peacekeeping troops and humanitarian agencies. The humanitarian community expected that remaining in RUF areas would be dangerous, after many years' experience there of harassment, detention and serious assault of aid agency staff.

It was possible, however, to discern a pattern that most of the serious hostage-taking incidents since 1995 had taken place at times when RUF was under pressure militarily. The humanitarian community therefore seems prudently to have decided that there was no sense in attempting to negotiate consent-based access at a time when the RUF was under unprecedented political and military pressure. Essentially, there was no option for aid agencies other than again to pull back to Government-held areas, and see how the conflict developed.

This of course creates difficulties for humanitarian agencies, as it suggests that there are certain times of certain conflicts where the 'humanitarian imperative' cannot be met, at least not until political or military steps are taken first. Garth Glentworth, Senior Governance Adviser to DFID, has used Sierra Leone as a case study of post-conflict reconstruction. The first of his tentative conclusions there is 'The need to give primary attention to the security situation, if necessary, at the expense of humanitarian and development priorities.'¹¹²

That such decisions are usually taken by outside agencies, such as DFID, and almost always without consultation with civilian populations, only adds to their inherent moral difficulty. As Myint-U observes, there are 'no objective measures or standards upon which to base this sort of utilitarian calculus. Who can say that a hundred lives lost today is more important than the

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Andrea Reidy, Deputy UK High Commissioner, Freetown.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Lt Gen Opande, Force Commander, UNAMSIL, Freetown.

¹¹¹ Interview with Pallo Bangura, Freetown.

¹¹² Glentworth, 2002.

chance for lasting peace down the road? It's a familiar problem, but one with no general answer.¹¹³

Coherence suggests simultaneous deployment of various humanitarian, development, political and military actions in search of a peacekeeping goal. In Sierra Leone, however, the successful formula turned out to be sequential.

5.4 Funding

Developments over this period coincided with a sizeable increase in humanitarian funding. The ECHO budget for 2001 was increased by a modest 1 million to a total of 12 million euros, reflecting confidence at the end of 2000 that the peace process was beginning to take root. In addition to continuing to finance the NGO helicopter, ECHO funded the creation of a full-time post to facilitate the Code of Conduct. However, overall, for a period that witnessed an unmistakable increase in international political interest in Sierra Leone, NGO funding seems to have remained fairly static, certainly when viewed next to comparable stages of some other crises.

The CAP appeal for 2001 showed the largest year-on-year increase, both in percentage and in real terms, of the entire period covered by this study. For 2001, contributions worth \$56 million were received, against \$74 million requested. Of this, \$25 million went to WFP, just under \$20 million to UNHCR and \$9 million to UNICEF. Again, an increase in humanitarian assistance accompanied positive developments in the political process. There was also a dramatic increase in DFID's total funding during this year. Having been £7 million in 1997, £14 million in 1998 and £17 million in 1999, it rose to £68 million in 2000.¹¹⁴

5.5 Coordination

A period beginning in May 2000, with coordination between humanitarian and political actors in tatters, ended with the imminent arrival of a new Humanitarian Coordinator, Alan Doss, who was also the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General (DSRSG) for Governance and Stabilisation, fully integrated within the UNAMSIL management structure and reporting to the SRSG. That less than six months separated the May 2000 crisis from the first announcement of his appointment is testament to both the speed with which the peace process was developing, but also the urgency with which the United Nations perceived the need to improve its internal coordination.

At the start of this period, there was a lack of communication and coordination at almost every level. UNAMSIL itself was in disarray. The Indian Force Commander and his Nigerian Deputy were not on speaking terms.¹¹⁵ Manfred Eisele's review team 'found a serious lack of cohesion

¹¹³ Myint-U, 2002.

¹¹⁴ For all relief and development activities, figures are taken from the DAC website. Unfortunately, figures for 2001 were not available in September 2002, when this report was written.

¹¹⁵ In an extraordinary memo, said to have been written in late May and subsequently leaked to the press in September, Jetley openly accused the Nigerian contingent of collusion with the RUF for economic gain. (The memo can be read at <http://www.sierra-leone.org/jetley0500.html>). Jetley was 'retired' a few months later, ostensibly with malaria. The accuracy of this diagnosis was thrown into question when the Indian and Jordanian governments withdrew their contingents from UNAMSIL in protest.

within the Mission [as well as] serious problems related to internal communication and coordination between the civilian and military components, as well as within each component.’

The crisis of May 2000 left UNAMSIL regarded as a ‘sorry joke’¹¹⁶ by the humanitarian community, which felt deep anger at the events of May 2000. At a senior level, the relationship between the SRSG and the heads of UN agencies also faltered, culminating in a two-month period between May and July, a time of crisis for the UN in Sierra Leone, when there was no meeting between the two groups. When meetings resumed, the then head of the Political Affairs Unit within UNAMSIL is said to have informed the SRSG that he was no longer prepared to meet with the UNCT, in view of what he saw as its insulting attitude.¹¹⁷

According to a Desk Officer of a UN agency:

‘in the two years I have been covering Sierra Leone, the UNCT relationship and the SRSG has always been tenuous. It seriously worsened during the May hostilities, when the SRSG stopped meeting with the Country Team. Eisele’s recommendations on strengthening UNAMSIL included improving relations with the Country Team, in particular on policy issues affecting the agencies. While cosmetic changes have been made, there still seems to be little real dialogue.’

Changes began to be made, just as the Brahimi Report was published. First, to improve cohesion within the mission, Behrooz Sadry, a highly experienced UN official with a reputation as a troubleshooter, was appointed DSRSG. Improving the internal functioning of UNAMSIL was understandably the first priority. Once these changes were underway, attention was focused on improving coordination with UN agencies and other international organisations.

In terms of improving information flow between UNAMSIL and humanitarian agencies, a key development of this period was the creation with the OCHA office in Freetown of a Humanitarian Information Centre (HIC), jointly staffed by one humanitarian specialist and Military Observers. This Centre, still operational at the time of writing, stores and provides information relevant to both the humanitarian and the security situation in the country.

The HIC is viewed positively by many aid agencies, although ECHO opposed the creation of the centre, and the presence of UNAMSIL MilObs. At the time, their field representative felt that aid agencies should be doing all they could to maintain ‘clear blue water’ between themselves and UNAMSIL. For that reason, ECHO took the decision to base the Code of Conduct Disseminator post that it was funding not within the HIC, but inside the office of the NGO MERLIN.

In terms of coordination between assistance and political/military activities, progress on the development of the Strategic Framework was slow over this period. Work was suspended during the peacekeeping crisis, although it was resumed in the latter half of 2000. A final draft was published on 26th January 2001, which introduced the Strategic Framework as a ‘principled, flexible, field-driven, integrated approach which ensures that interventions in post conflict Sierra Leone are mutually reinforcing, coherent and adequately integrated’.

For the purposes of this study, it is fair to say that the Strategic Framework is a blueprint for coherence, and says very little about management or integration. It sets out a common

¹¹⁶ Interview with OCHA Humanitarian Affairs Officer, New York.

¹¹⁷ Interview with DPKO official, New York.

(peacebuilding) goal, ‘The purpose of all interventions in Sierra Leone is to support the peace process through implementation of the Peace Agreement’, and then lists the range of activities through which this will be achieved. These include saving lives, reducing human suffering, assisting war-affected populations to return to their homes of origin, and promoting good governance, national reconciliation and the respect for human rights.

The Strategic Framework also commits all stakeholders to adherence to certain humanitarian principles:

‘Assistance will be provided within the context of efforts to achieve sustainable peace; Life-sustaining humanitarian assistance shall be provided according to the principles of humanity, universality and impartiality; Assistance interventions should only operate on the basis of assessed needs.’

Setting out core humanitarian principles seems a significant strength of the Strategic Framework Approach compared to current planning frameworks within integrated missions.

After the visit of the Security Council Mission to Sierra Leone, although the recommendation does not directly appear in the report, UK Ambassador Greenstock is said to have recommended the creation of a second DSRSG post, and that the post-holder should also assume the role of the Resident Coordinator, Humanitarian Coordinator, Designated Official and Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme in Sierra Leone.

The process of appointing Alan Doss, ironically, was strongly criticised for a lack of consultation with different UN agencies and departments. OCHA was not informed about the decision until after it was made, itself an indicator that some of the Brahimi recommendations about improving communication at UN headquarters had yet to be translated into action. OCHA and UNDP declared a joint demarche, expressing their concern to UN Deputy Secretary-General Fréchette about the way in which the appointment had been announced, and the terms of reference prepared without their input. When news of the creation of the position reached the field, the strongest reaction was from NGOs. The Director of ECHO also informally expressed her concern to the UN.

Critically, the way in which the decision was taken risked undermining OCHA’s position within the Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC), with whose members OCHA is required to consult on issues relating to the appointment of a Humanitarian Coordinator. The announcement of Doss’s appointment, and in particular the decision to integrate his post within the Senior Management Structure of UNAMSIL, entailed a clear risk of disenfranchising OCHA’s partners in the IASC, particularly the Red Cross movement and the NGOs. This consultation should not have been a matter of choice, but merely reflects the responsibilities that the Humanitarian Coordinator has towards the IASC.

Given the well-publicised lack of cohesion within the UN system, it appears neither surprising nor unreasonable that the rhetoric of synergy and inclusion of the Strategic Framework began to sound rather hollow. Between the announcement of Doss’s appointment as DSRSG and his taking up the post in March 2001, the Strategic Framework was quietly dropped. The terms of reference given to DSRSG Doss include, ‘to exercise authority over UN agencies present in Sierra Leone, with a view to an integrated comprehensive approach toward a durable peace in Sierra Leone, including through the development of a strategic framework’. More than one interviewee referred to Doss’s appointment as ‘the Strategic Framework made flesh’.

6. Peace and integration, May 2001 to October 2002

6.1 Context

Around the time of the second DSRSG's arrival, UNAMSIL's Concept of Operations ('ConOps') for 2001 was revised. UNAMSIL's primary (and political) objective remained unchanged:

'To assist the efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone to extend its authority, restore law and order and stabilise the situation progressively throughout the entire country, and to assist in promotion of a political process which should lead to a renewed DDR programme, and the holding, in due course, of full and fair elections.'

But humanitarian activities were given increasing prominence:

*'the Mission's updated ConOps integrates military and civilian aspects and envisages the deployment, in successive phases, into RUF-controlled areas of UNAMSIL troops, UN Civil Affairs, civilian police and human rights personnel, representatives of humanitarian agencies, and government personnel and assets to establish and consolidate State Authority and basic services in these areas. Success of this concept will very much depend on the extent to which these mutually reinforcing efforts are coordinated between the actors involved.'*¹¹⁸

In March, the mission strength was increased again, to 17,500, in keeping with the twin-track strategy of political negotiation with the RUF, backed up with credible military strength. The same Security Council Resolution also demanded:

*'that RUF take immediate steps to fulfil its commitments under that agreement to ensure full liberty for the United Nations to deploy its troops throughout the country, the free movement of goods, unimpeded movement of humanitarian agencies, refugees and displaced persons.'*¹¹⁹

A month earlier, RUF forces in the Kambia region had been heavily defeated by the Armed Forces of Guinea, the UK retained its 'over-the-horizon' threat, and Charles Taylor, himself under pressure from sanctions, is also believed to have used his influence on the RUF. On 2 May, the UN, the Government and the RUF met again in Abuja, and agreed to move forward. From this point onwards, the peace process genuinely took hold.

A very small number of aid agencies tentatively returned to RUF areas in March 2001, before UNAMSIL had established a presence: ICRC to Kailahun and MSF to Makeni, for example. However, the overwhelming pattern was for aid agencies to follow the peacekeeping force as it deployed. It is also the case that while UNAMSIL's deployment allowed humanitarian organisations to resume their activities wherever the forces went, humanitarian considerations did not influence the pattern or the timing of the military deployment. In other words, the

¹¹⁸ S/2001/228.

¹¹⁹ Security Council Resolution 1346, 30 March 2001.

decisions of where to deploy and when, were not influenced by information about the assistance and protection needs in any given area.¹²⁰

The criteria followed by Force Commander Opande when planning the deployment was to send forces first to areas where the RUF was strongest (such as Makeni and Magbaraka), and secondly to deploy in such a way that effective communication was maintained within the Force. Humanitarian considerations did not influence these decisions. An example given by Force Commander Opande was Kailahun, always known to be one of the areas of greatest humanitarian need, but an area where UNAMSIL could not deploy until late in the operation for military reasons.

Nor was humanitarian assistance used as a ‘carrot’ by UNAMSIL political or military personnel to persuade the rebels to disarm, according to those closely involved in the negotiations. Force Commander Opande recalled how, during their negotiations, the RUF regularly asked him to ‘get the NGOs to come back’, but that his answer was always that he was not in a position to make any guarantees, he had no authority over humanitarian organisations or their assets.

By June, the United Nations was confident that ‘significant progress has begun to be achieved in the Sierra Leone peace process.’¹²¹ A new DDR programme was launched on 18 May and, for the first time in the entire conflict, ‘weapons handed in by the RUF... were of serviceable quality and included several heavy weapons’.¹²² The disarmament and demobilisation of former combatants took place over the next eight months, as UNAMSIL progressed throughout the country.

Little by little, as UNAMSIL deployed to areas such as Lunsar, Makeni and Kambia, humanitarian agencies returned.¹²³ However, the speed with which UNAMSIL was deploying around the country meant that aid agencies struggled to keep up. This exposed some cultural differences between the military and humanitarian agencies, with the former frustrated at what they felt were unnecessary delays in establishing aid programmes. This cultural difference is still evident in UN headquarters. Recalling a time when the Indian contingent first reached Kailahun in early 2001, a DPKO official related how UNAMSIL invited humanitarian agencies in: ‘but they said no, they had to do a security assessment, and then a needs assessment, and before you know it, two months have passed... nothing but bullshit excuses, in my book.’¹²⁴

Partly for this reason, this was the time when UNAMSIL contingents began to provide limited assistance directly to the local population. Troops shared food, set up limited bush clinics, and in some cases repaired hospitals or schools. An important characteristic was that this was not externally funded, troops ‘had to strain their own resources to meet some of the immediate needs of the populations in their areas of deployment.’¹²⁵ This meant that the majority of such activities were confined to areas where contingents from the richer troop-providing countries were based – notably Pakistan and Bangladesh. The Country Director of UNICEF in Sierra Leone, Ms Joanna van Gerpen, was reluctant to use the word humanitarian (or later rehabilitation) assistance to describe these activities by contingents. She felt that the term

¹²⁰ Interview with Lt Gen Opande, Force Commander, UNAMSIL, Freetown.

¹²¹ S/2001/627.

¹²² S/2001/627.

¹²³ S/2001/627.

¹²⁴ Interview with DPKO official, New York.

¹²⁵ S/2001/857.

‘charitable activities’ more accurately described the assistance delivered directly by contingents.¹²⁶

The difficulty for many humanitarian agencies was that this assistance was given as part of an explicit ‘hearts and minds’ strategy, in order to increase the acceptance by the local community of the peacekeeping force, and to demonstrate immediate benefits from the peace process. Much of the debate about the provision of aid by the military in Sierra Leone, as in other countries, has focused on this question of motive. Does the identification of political and security benefits of providing assistance mean that aid should not be provided by military contingents, especially when no humanitarian organisations are operating in the same area? While the ‘hearts and minds’ strategy was commonly mentioned by all those interviewed (including Force Commander Opande, and UNAMSIL Chief of Staff, Brigadier Ellery), a Desk Officer from DPKO made the additional point that providing assistance improves security for peacekeepers by increasing their acceptance in an area.¹²⁷

By December 2001, the troop strength finally reached its authorised ceiling of 17,500. This was the first time that actual UNAMSIL troop strength reached its authorized level. At the same time, 36,741 ex-combatants had presented themselves for DDR. Disarmament was completed on 17 January 2002, by when the number of registered ex-combatants was over 47,000. Of these, 19,183 were ex-RUF, 27,695 ex-CDF and 198 ex-AFRC.

On the humanitarian side, between March and September 2001, the major focus was on basic service provision in newly accessible areas. NGO programmes followed UNAMSIL’s trajectory around the country. A feature of this period was that very few new NGOs arrived in Sierra Leone, a characteristic of many other ‘loud’ emergencies, particularly following peace agreements. There was consequently little of the competition, flag-sticking and turf battles between NGOs that had been evident in Kosovo after the peace agreement, or Afghanistan. As a result, many NGOs had to re-orientate their existing programmes, which for years had been based almost exclusively in the south and west of the countries. This took time, which frustrated elements within both UNAMSIL and the Government of Sierra Leone.

Towards the end of 2001, humanitarian agencies and the Government were faced with a new though welcome challenge. Due to a rapidly improving security situation in Sierra Leone, and a simultaneous deterioration in security in neighbouring Liberia, Sierra Leonean refugees began to return from Liberia. At the same time, refugees from Liberia were arriving in Sierra Leone. On top of this, a large resettlement programme was about to begin for the 300,000 or more internally displaced living in various camps and towns in the country. Planning started in the latter part of 2001.¹²⁸ The resettlement started slowly, with only 4,000 IDPs resettled in the first phase in December, and only marginally more in the second phase in January and February.

By the time of the third phase in March, the attention of both the Government and the international community had started to focus on the elections, scheduled for May 2002. From the end of March to the end of April, between 130,000 and 150,000 IDPs were resettled. This dramatic increase in the rate of resettlement was facilitated by UNAMSIL, which made 100 trucks available for the transportation of IDPs and their belongings, following a request from OCHA. This third phase is explored in more detail at the end of this report.

¹²⁶ Interview with Joanna van Gerpen, Country Director of UNICEF in Sierra Leone, Freetown.

¹²⁷ Interview with Adriaan Verheul, DPKO New York.

¹²⁸ ‘Sierra Leone resettlement strategy: enabling the displaced to rebuild their lives back in the community with safety and dignity.’ NCRRR, Sierra Leone, October 2001.

The elections were held on the 14 May 2002, and ‘conducted in a remarkably peaceful atmosphere’.¹²⁹ UNAMSIL had been given a mandate to support the elections, Security Council Resolution 1389 declaring that, ‘UNAMSIL shall undertake election-related tasks’, including logistical support to the National Electoral Commission, facilitation of free movement of people, goods and humanitarian assistance throughout the country, and being prepared to ensure public order.

The results of the election saw President Kabbah returned to power with over 70 per cent of the vote, and a crushing defeat for the RUF-P, which received only 1.7 per cent of votes cast. Pallo Bangura, the RUF-P’s defeated presidential candidate still views the elections as a great success, and has said that they ‘taught the RUF how to contest power politically, as part of a democratic system and, more importantly, it taught them to accept how to lose’.¹³⁰

The election defeat of the RUF-P did not bring about any renewal of hostilities, and the security situation has remained fairly stable. The two primary concerns are the impact on Sierra Leone of the continuing instability in Liberia, and the presence of some 50,000 ex-combatants in the country, disarmed, demobilised, but not yet fully reintegrated.

When this study took place (September 2002), UNAMSIL still had 17,500 troops fully deployed throughout Sierra Leone. President Kabbah had declared the conflict at an end on 18 January 2002, announcing that ‘the war has now ended, but a new war has started, the war against poverty.’ Elections had taken place, without major security incidents and in a reasonably free and fair manner. The focus within UNAMSIL was very much on planning the ‘draw-down’, and setting troop levels and clear objectives between now and its planned final departure at the end of 2004.¹³¹

6.2 Commentary

A sequential, security-first approach to peacebuilding was ultimately what seemed to work in Sierra Leone. Once UNAMSIL and its allies were finally working effectively, the peace process advanced very quickly in the country. The Government of Sierra Leone, with the support of the international community, was then responsible for implementing as quickly as possible the other activities seen as critical for maintaining what military pressure had achieved. The priority activities were DDR, and restoring the capacity of the Government in both the security sector, and with regard to basic social service provision.

These were simple enough goals, but required a huge range of simultaneous and sustained commitments by the international community. In addition, this had to be accomplished in a country officially ranked as the world’s poorest, and where there were almost no civil servants or social services of any description outside the capital.

In peacebuilding terms, a truly coherent response from the international donor community was not only desirable but essential. Here, the record is mixed. On the positive side, the international community moved quickly to address the issue of Sierra Leone’s foreign debt. In

¹²⁹ S/2002/679.

¹³⁰ Interview Pallo Bangura, the RUF-P’s defeated presidential candidate, Freetown.

¹³¹ At the time of writing, the 15th Report of the Secretary-General on UNAMSIL was not yet available but was expected to include more details of the ‘draw-down’ of UNAMSIL, and the role it will play during 2003 and 2004.

September 2001, the Government presented its Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) to the World Bank and the IMF, which agreed that Sierra Leone had met the criteria for access to debt relief under the enhanced HIPC initiative. In the following month, Sierra Leone's outstanding external debt was reduced from \$180 million to \$45 million. In terms of complementarity with efforts to restore state authority and services, this was a hugely important step.

Yet, the United Nations and World Bank have experienced persistent difficulties in fully funding many of the key post-conflict activities, even those that have always been identified as critical to peacebuilding. Most seriously, the DDR programme has always struggled to attract the funds it needed, a situation aggravated by the fact that the final number of ex-combatants presenting themselves for DDR was more than twice the figure estimated at the start of the programme. Within a month of the May 2001 resumption of the DDR programme, there was a \$17 million shortfall reported in the World Bank administered Trust Fund set up to support the National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (NCDDR), the Government body responsible for the programme. By June, reports stressed 'a serious risk that the DDR programme will soon stall as a result of insufficient funding'.¹³²

In September 2001, the Security Council expressed:

*'concern at the serious shortfall in the multi-donor Trust fund for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programme, and urges international organizations and donor countries to support generously and urgently the efforts of the Government of Sierra Leone in this regard.'*¹³³

This concern was repeated in an almost identically worded resolution at the end of March 2002.¹³⁴ In December 2001 the Secretary-General noted the 'limited availability of reintegration opportunities for ex-combatants, as a result of inadequate funds'.¹³⁵

Over the same period, both the Special Court and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission have received very little in the way of pledges. By September 2002 for example, three years after the Lomé agreement that allowed for its creation, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had received \$1 million of the \$12 million that was requested. With regard to reconstruction, the European Union has pledged a large contribution to assist the Government of Sierra Leone, but the disbursement process is predictably slow, and no funds have yet materialised.

Such parsimony towards peacebuilding activities appears highly incoherent, in view of the high sum invested in UNAMSIL which has an annual budget of between \$650 million and \$700 million. The total cost to the international community is likely to be between \$3 billion and \$4 billion by the end of 2004. Given this, it seems extraordinary that the DDR programme which has, since 1995, been identified as a post-conflict activity of primary importance, regularly falters every six months for lack of modest contributions. Kathy Jones, a Senior Political Affairs Officer with DPA, described the lack of money in the Trust Fund for reintegration of former combatants as one of the two principal threats to peace in Sierra Leone over the long

¹³² S/2001/627.

¹³³ Security Council Resolution 1370, 2001.

¹³⁴ Security Council Resolution 1400, 2002.

¹³⁵ S/2001/1195.

run, the other being Liberia. She described donor attitudes as ‘incredibly frustrating and short-sighted’.¹³⁶

In a way, however, the incoherence is perfectly logical, merely reflecting the difference between core peacekeeping costs, which are funded through assessed contributions, and all of the other peacebuilding activities mentioned, which rely on voluntary donations. The higher the bill for peacekeeping, so the logic goes, the less inclined donors are to make further voluntary contributions.

Unsurprisingly, there have been calls to include funds for DDR as a core peacekeeping task, and so to make it eligible within regular (assessed) contributions. The Brahimi Report includes this as a recommendation: ‘The panel recommends that the legislative bodies consider bringing demobilization and reintegration programmes into the assessed budgets of complex peace operations’.¹³⁷ All three people from DPKO in New York interviewed for this study made this point – and yet none of them were confident that it would happen.

All the evidence suggests that the major donors on whom much of the financial burden would fall are highly unlikely to agree to such a change. The issue was discussed, for example, at a Security Council meeting on Sierra Leone in the latter half of 2001. The US Ambassador’s view was:

*‘The Secretary-General has raised serious concerns about the lack of resources for DDR. He has also implied that, should voluntary funding not be forthcoming, he will seek assessed funding... That has created a problem. DDR are not, in the end, the responsibility of the Security Council, and we question whether assessed contributions are the best means of meeting the need that exists’.*¹³⁸

Nonetheless, the continuing absence of a mechanism capable of releasing funds for reintegration of former combatants swiftly enough to keep pace with a rapidly evolving peace process is a major structural weakness in the current system.

For relief and development agencies operating in Sierra Leone, a concerted and admirable attempt has recently taken place to develop a single planning framework encompassing all activities currently being implemented in Sierra Leone. Learning from the mistakes of the earlier attempts to develop a Strategic Framework, the current strategy is notable for the way in which it has been developed at field level. The key feature of the UN Strategy to Support National Recovery and Peace-building in Sierra Leone, is the way in which it portrays relief, rehabilitation and development activities and existing plans as all working towards a common peacebuilding goal. This includes, for example, the 2002 CAP, the Interim Poverty Reduction Paper (I-PRSB) for Sierra Leone and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The five aims of the strategy are:

1. strengthening the security framework and regional collaboration
2. facilitating reintegration
3. reducing poverty
4. fostering good governance, and
5. protecting human rights and encouraging reconciliation.

¹³⁶ Interview, New York.

¹³⁷ Brahimi Report, paragraph 47c.

¹³⁸ S/PV.4340.

This includes a good balance of political and assistance components, resulting in the strategy document being referred to as a Strategic Framework in all but name. The strategy paper was developed in a collaborative manner and appears to have a good level of ‘buy-in’ from the different UN agencies, again suggesting that with two important ingredients, peace (or the absence of conflict) and effective UN system coordination (now provided by the DSRSG), there is no inherent reason why political and development and/or assistance aims cannot co-exist with a reasonable degree of synergy.

The one outstanding question is about what role humanitarian assistance really plays in consolidating peace. As in other contexts and countries, the case is assumed, rather than proven. The strategy paper, for example, directly echoing the 2002 CAP, states that ‘humanitarian assistance has also a role to play in promoting peace and help[ing] communities to recover and overcome their differences’, but does not spell out exactly what form that role should take.

Furthermore, in the ‘lessons learned’ section of the 2003 CAP workshop report,¹³⁹ participants acknowledged that ‘improvements are yet to be made in the monitoring of programmes, impact analysis and joint planning with beneficiaries and communities’. Without improvements in these key areas, it is hard to see how the veracity of the peacebuilding function attributed to assistance can be assessed. The humanitarian community would do well to be cautious about setting out hypothetical claims for its activities, which may look good on paper but lack an empirical basis.

6.3 Humanitarian action

The key debate relating to humanitarian action that has arisen over this last period has been around the relationship between UNAMSIL and the humanitarian agencies, particularly the use of UNAMSIL assets by humanitarian agencies. From UNAMSIL’s arrival in 1999, until the end of 2000, the humanitarian community had almost entirely adhered to the position that UNAMSIL assets should not be used by humanitarian agencies. This consensus began to weaken towards the end of 2000.

Use of UNAMSIL assets by humanitarian organisations

The NGO Code of Conduct was not revised upon the arrival of UNAMSIL, or at any stage afterwards, as it was felt that the section ‘Exceptional Use of Armed Escorts’ was a sufficient guide. The Code of Conduct Committee met regularly in 1999 and 2000, and its policy of distance from UNAMSIL was to a large extent vindicated at the time of the May 2000 crisis. This stance was given concrete support by donors, particularly ECHO. Between 1999 and 2001, for example, NGOs had their own helicopter, as well as having access to those run by WFP.

However, by the second half of 2000, some agencies started to feel that use of UNAMSIL assets was necessary. In August 2000, for example, at a time when UNAMSIL and the RUF were still engaged in military confrontations, CRS wrote to the Code of Conduct Committee, explaining that ‘unfortunately we are finding that security and logistical constraints are compelling us to use the UNAMSIL helicopter, in order to deliver these essential commodities (food aid) to our beneficiaries’.

¹³⁹ The workshop was held on 25–26 July 2002 at Lakka, outside Freetown.

By January 2001, some of the requests made relied on an expansive understanding of what constitutes life-saving assistance. For example, the Norwegian Refugee Council wrote to OCHA on 2 January 2001, requesting the use of UNAMSIL helicopters for the construction of schools – ‘assistance of this sort will accelerate the completion of the schools, thus improving the educational status of the children in Kailahun district.’ It seems surprising, and to some extent remiss, that the Code of Conduct in Sierra Leone was never revised after UNAMSIL’s arrival – the version that (technically) exists today is still the one agreed at the November 1998 workshop.

The arrival of Alan Doss in March 2001 co-coincided with rapid progress in the peace process, when agencies were beginning to re-consider their policy on this issue. It was necessary to expand programmes fast, at a time of growing feeling that all belligerents, including the RUF, again considered the UN a neutral peacekeeping force. Nonetheless, DSRSG Doss recalls, on his very first day in Freetown, getting ‘a lecture from the Code of Conduct Committee’, including being asked not to have his picture taken with the military.¹⁴⁰ By April and May, in a further improved political environment, ‘agencies such as WFP and UNHCR felt in good conscience that they needed access to some areas that they could not reach without the use of UNAMSIL assets.’¹⁴¹

Alan Doss also found that UNAMSIL was initially relatively reluctant to make its assets available for humanitarian activities. This was not a case of a military force desperate to show that it was assisting the aid effort, as in Albania and Macedonia in 1999, for example. When assets were deployed, they were always charged, and often at very high cost to aid agencies and their donors.

This reveals an important contradiction within UNAMSIL. At a time when it was very keen for its own troops to provide assistance, and publicly began to espouse the ‘hearts and minds’ doctrine, DPKO and senior UNAMSIL staff were untroubled by the fact that such activities were not in their mandate, nor had been factored into troop-strength calculations. Yet, over the same period, they did not appear to show the same flexibility or generosity to the humanitarian community.

During what was to become a fairly regular exchange of letters relating to the payment by OCHA for UNAMSIL assistance, the Chief Administrative Officer of UNAMSIL spelt out the position to OCHA very clearly:

*‘first and foremost, I wish to clarify that while UNAMSIL is pleased to lend assistance to the activities of UN OCHA Sierra Leone both on humanitarian grounds as well as in the spirit of cooperation that is the hallmark of the UN system, **the mission is under no obligation to divert its resources which are budgeted primarily for the accomplishment of its peacekeeping mandate.** Accordingly, UN OCHA should not rely on UNAMSIL to meet its operational requirements’.*¹⁴²

With great irony, however, the position of Alan Doss as DSRSG and Humanitarian Coordinator, which had been so opposed by most aid agencies when his appointment had been first announced, was immediately appreciated, as it enabled them to get the access to UNAMSIL assets that they felt their programmes increasingly required.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with DSRSG Doss, Freetown.

¹⁴¹ Interview with DSRSG Doss, Freetown.

¹⁴² Letter from Ibrahim Zeekah (UNAMSIL) to Dennis Johnson (OCHA), 14 March 2001.

By the end of 2001, the use of UNAMSIL assets by agencies was, to all intents and purposes, routine. Very few aid agencies maintained their earlier stance. Only the Red Cross (quietly), a small group of other NGOs including Oxfam GB, SCF-UK and ActionAid (discreetly) and MSF (loudly) maintained a policy of not using UNAMSIL helicopters and trucks in all but exceptional circumstances.

The Code of Conduct Committee had almost ceased to function by the end of 2001, when ECHO funding for the dissemination position ended. By then, MSF had ‘un-signed’ the code in protest at the actions of the majority of signatories, while the ICRC had withdrawn its observer status, ‘as there was nothing left to observe’.¹⁴³ An independent evaluation was later carried out of the code, and concluded that, after two years, if NGOs remained serious about the continued dissemination of the Code, then they should take on responsibility for its functioning and costs. No such initiative from NGOs has been forthcoming.

In late 2001, and especially in 2002, UNAMSIL trucks were used both in the return of refugees from Liberia, at the request of UNHCR, and in the resettlement of IDPs, at the request of OCHA. The latter operation was particularly significant in logistical terms, involving 100 trucks. MSF withdrew from providing transit assistance to these convoys in protest at their use of armed UNAMSIL trucks. However, MSF provided health kits to medical staff from other organisations who were prepared to accompany the convoy, in order to avoid jeopardising the health of the people on the move.

Possible consequences of humanitarians working closely with armed forces

What conclusions can be drawn about the significance of the gradual erosion of the distance that most humanitarian agencies were so insistent that they wished to maintain when UNAMSIL arrived in 1999?

First, there are differences in how different humanitarian organisations relate to humanitarian principles. For the ICRC and the rest of the Red Cross movement, there has never been any wavering from their first position. For them, distance or otherwise from UNAMSIL has never been debated, it is simply assumed and accepted. This suggests an institutional approach to certain principles that is genuinely deontological.

The position of a minority of NGOs, like Oxfam and Save the Children, has not changed at all. Other NGOs, principally MSF and ACF, have not only remained faithful to their principles, but have taken an activist and publicly critical stance both towards the direct provision of assistance by contingents, and to the delivery of aid and movement of people by aid agencies using UNAMSIL assets.

The majority of NGOs, however, one by one decided to avail themselves of UNAMSIL assets. This suggests that most NGOs took a pragmatic and utilitarian approach to the interpretation of principles. They adopting certain rules in 1998 when it was useful to do so, and quietly dropped them three years later as the pendulum of utility started to swing the other way. For many NGOs, principles are better understood as a means to an end, the application of teleological and not deontological ethics. The only consistent factor was that, all the way through, the posture adopted by most NGOs seemed to be premised on what was most useful for their programmes.

¹⁴³ Interview with Jean-Pierre Schaerer, Head of Delegation, ICRC Sierra Leone.

A second and broader question is prompted by events in Afghanistan. At what point, in a post-conflict environment, do certain rules cease to apply? Can criteria be set, which, once met, mean that aid agencies can work alongside peacekeeping troops without these dilemmas?

The final consideration is to assess what impact this might have on the future image of international humanitarian workers in Sierra Leone, and beyond. To what degree are some agencies justified in fearing that, if conflict returns, the current close cooperation between humanitarians and peacekeepers will impact negatively on future attempts to negotiate consent-based access to populations, and to position agencies as impartial?

This question is almost impossible to answer with certainty. It has been found that most people in Sierra Leone, especially outside the major towns, do not appear to distinguish between different international actors, whether peacekeepers (UN black), UN agencies (UN blue) or NGOs.¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, if hostilities returned, it is far from clear that the warring parties would agree to consent-based and unhindered access, regardless of current cooperation. After all, 1998 to 2000, when humanitarians did all they could to maintain a distance from UNOMSIL and then UNAMSIL forces, were the very years when aid agencies suffered the most harassment and attacks.

The best guess of this study is that the risks of current cooperation prejudicing future operation are small. In Sierra Leone, the chances of conflict returning soon seem slim. It seems even more unlikely that there could be a future conflict in which aid agencies would otherwise have been accepted as impartial by warring parties and allowed to operate had they not been associated with UNAMSIL in the current phase.

Where there is a risk, however, is on a wider level. What makes working alongside armed UN forces acceptable in one context, and not in others? The danger of an ad-hoc approach in one country is that it may make it harder to insist on the independence of humanitarian action from military action in other countries. It is rather like a model of client politics – the benefits to aid agencies of cooperating with UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone are concrete and highly concentrated. The risks of doing so may still be obscured, and are thinly spread out.

6.4 Funding

No figures were available from ECHO at the time of writing to detail its funding for 2002. However, the CAP appeal shows that, for the first nine months of 2002 (to September 2002) there had been a discernible decrease in the amount of funding for humanitarian assistance. The CAP for 2002 had only received contributions worth only \$25 million, against more than \$68 million requested. This is a sharp drop from the \$58 million received in 2001 (although there were still three months remaining for contributions to be made to the 2002 appeal at the time of writing).

Interestingly, more than half of all CAP contributions made in 2002 went to UNHCR, for refugee resettlement, and for work with refugees from Liberia. WFP had reported contributions worth less than \$1 million, while UNICEF had received just over \$4 million. OCHA had received 100 per cent of the \$1.3 million that it requested for 2002, which can be interpreted with a degree of confidence that donors view humanitarian coordination in a positive light.

¹⁴⁴ Promoting Transparency and Accountability, Report on Field Trials in Sierra Leone, Koenraad Van Brabant, Humanitarian Accountability Project, July 2002

This is significant, as 2002 is the first full year after the arrival of the DSRSG for Governance and Stabilisation.

The overall funding shortfall is significant, given the severe difficulties encountered during the IDP resettlement programme earlier in 2002. The shortfall is particularly severe for IOM (in receipt of \$1 million against more than \$16 million requested), the agency initially allocated responsibility for transporting IDPs and their belongings, and whose inability to organise adequate services led OCHA to request the use of UNAMSIL trucks for the operation. Albeit without accurate data available for NGOs, the CAP data would appear to substantiate the view expressed by both NGOs and UN agencies that a widespread lack of funding has had a direct negative impact on IDP resettlement.

Despite UN and Government of Sierra Leone planning documents that are quite clear about the continuing need for humanitarian assistance alongside longer-term interventions as the peace process takes hold in the country, the figures suggest that donors are keen to cut back on their support to emergency programmes. Figures for 2002 lend weight to the overall conclusion that, while funding for humanitarian assistance increased in Sierra Leone at times of increased international political involvement, this rise was both more modest and more temporary than in other high-profile emergencies such as Kosovo, East Timor or Afghanistan.

6.5 Coordination

UNAMSIL structure and operation

In September 2002 (the time of writing), UNAMSIL had 17,500 troops in Sierra Leone, 297 international civilian staff and 553 local civilian staff. SRSG Adeniji was the ultimate authority over UNAMSIL, supported by two deputies, Behrooz Sadry, the DSRSG for Operations and Management, and Alan Doss, the DSRSG for Governance and Stabilisation. It has been pointed out that the combination of nationalities and backgrounds within this top management structure is both significant and deliberate.

The SRSG, a former Nigerian diplomat, enjoys close relationships with the heads of states in West Africa, considered critical in view of the regional dimensions of the conflict. DSRSG Sadry, on the other hand, is a lifetime UN official, with an apparently encyclopaedic knowledge of the UN system and highly respected for his ability to get things done. DSRSG Doss is British. Thus, the structure brings together people conversant with and accepted by the three dominant political interests in Sierra Leone: ECOWAS, the UN and the UK. The Brahimi Report does allow for, and even encourages such considerations: 'The choice of one or more deputy SRSGs may be influenced by the need to achieve geographic distribution within the mission's leadership.'¹⁴⁵

There is, apparently, no organogram for UNAMSIL. If there were, it would show a slightly unusual structure. That the SRSG manages the two DSRSGs is clear, and, below them, their management responsibilities are as would be expected, with DSRSG Sadry managing the operational side of UNAMSIL, and DSRSG Doss overseeing the sections of Civil Affairs, Civilian Police, DDR Coordination and Elections. However, a number of substantive sections report directly to the SRSG: Political, Policy & Planning, Human Rights, Child Protection and Public Information.

¹⁴⁵ Brahimi Report (paragraph 94).

Senior staff meetings are held three times a week, with all section heads attending. They are described as overly information-based, and held too frequently and in too short a space of time for the meetings to become a forward-looking forum for planning and coordination.

Part coherence, part integration

DSRSG Doss's position in the hierarchy can be described as 'part coherence, part integration'. Within the UNAMSIL structure, he provides a degree of integration downwards, managing the four sections in the mission that correspond with his responsibilities. Upwards, however, he reports to a number of different people and organisations – locally, to the SRSG and through him to DPKO, but also to Mr Oshima as Humanitarian Coordination, and to Mr Malloch Brown as Resident Representative and Resident Coordinator.

In terms of his key positions as Humanitarian Coordinator and Resident Coordinator, apart from the obvious relationship with UNDP, DSRSG Doss has no direct authority over any organisations, or their assets. He therefore relies on 'traditional coordinator's tools – persuasion, cajoling, occasional bullying, etc'.¹⁴⁶ His position lacks the formal authority to deploy humanitarian assets in pursuit of political goals, even if he wanted to. He insists that he has never come under or asserted any pressure to take a humanitarian decision on political grounds.

At no point in this study did either an NGO or a UN agency representative suggest in an interview that any decision relating to humanitarian assistance had been taken by DSRSG Doss on political grounds. The only time that this allegation has seemingly been made was in an MSF report of May 2002: 'The SRSG 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.'¹⁴⁷ It should be stated, however, that this report lacks credibility.

Lack of integration at UN headquarters

The greater integration of UN operations at field level in Sierra Leone has not yet been matched with a corresponding improvement at headquarters. There is no IMTF for Sierra Leone, although presumably it would have been possible to have constituted one in the two years following the publication of the Brahimi Report. In general, headquarters coordination remains poor. A weekly video conference is held, but is said by those attending in both locations to represent 'basic information exchange' between the field and the different departments in New York.¹⁴⁸ Within the Secretariat, what used to be monthly coordination meetings between DPKO, DPA, OCHA and other interested UN agencies or departments have slipped, and are now held every three or so months, symptomatic of the lack of value attached to them.

From available information, it seems to be the case that DPKO New York still fails to consult properly with other departments, including OCHA. This remains an internal management challenge for the UN. There seems to be a discernible gulf within DPKO between what has been written about improving understanding and recognition of humanitarian concerns, and some of the attitudes and practices that appear to persist.

For example, it was acknowledged by the Secretary-General in June 2001 that:

¹⁴⁶ Interview with DSRSG Doss, Freetown.

¹⁴⁷ Medecins sans frontieres, 2000.

¹⁴⁸ Interviews with OCHA and DPKO staff, Freetown and New York.

*'any peacekeeping operation should be mandated, designed and resourced to support and at the very least not to hinder the humanitarian action. How this is done will vary from case to case; there thus needs to be close cooperation between DPKO and OCHA at all stages of mission design and planning, in particular on such pivotal issues as those related to the protection of civilians'.*¹⁴⁹

Yet, a senior official within DPKO gave a rather different blueprint for cooperation during an interview: 'we should convey to the humanitarian and development crowd, "we are offering you the opportunity to sit around the table and coordinate with what we plan to do; and if you do not agree, we will do it anyway. What do you think?"'¹⁵⁰

In a similar vein, a DPKO lessons-learned study¹⁵¹ has been criticised by UN humanitarian agencies for missing a golden opportunity to apply precisely the system-wide scope to an evaluation that the greater field-level integration should logically have entailed. An evaluation officer from a UN agency active in Sierra Leone noted that 'it seems clear that this is a study focused very much on DPKO's and UNAMSIL's performance rather than on that of the UN system more generally.'¹⁵² If this does indeed turn out to be a missed opportunity, it will be a particularly frustrating one, precisely because the history of UNAMSIL has clearly seen both the best and the worst of relationships and coordination within the UN system.

Humanitarian coordination

From 1995 up until March 2001, most of the period covered by this study, there had been a 'disconnect' between the leadership of the coordination structure and the agencies working on the ground, principally the NGOs. 'The UN's greatest difficulty in Sierra Leone... has been the lack of interagency coordination and poor interaction with the large and diverse NGO community.'¹⁵³ When the appointment of DSRSG Doss was announced, NGOs reacted with understandable concern to the proposed new coordination arrangements, specifically that the Humanitarian Coordinator would be positioned within the UNAMSIL hierarchy. After years of growing disenfranchisement from UN coordination structures, this was seen as the worst idea yet, and greeted with trepidation.

Yet, even within the first few months, the relationship between NGOs, UN agencies and the new DSRSG was far better than at any time before. The improvement was noticed immediately,¹⁵⁴ and has continued ever since. In a note for the file written in 2001,¹⁵⁵ OCHA staff identified reasons for this success. The two most important were context and personality.

Frist, the arrival of the DSRSG coincided with the recuperation of UNAMSIL, and the final acceleration of the peace process. This meant that there was a merging of political and humanitarian interests in the external environment, which perfectly reflected the different responsibilities of his position. Therefore, and remembering that coordination is always helped when accompanied by a menu of practical benefits offered by a coordinator, DSRSG Doss's

¹⁴⁹ A/55/977, paragraph 270.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with DPKO Official, New York.

¹⁵¹ This study is ongoing at the time of writing, late September 2002

¹⁵² Internal e-mail, shown to author.

¹⁵³ Hirsch, 2001, page 101.

¹⁵⁴ Report on the Mission of the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator to the Countries of the Mano River Union, 17–25 April 2001.

¹⁵⁵ The Sierra Leone experience of the DSRSG/HC/RC/RR/DO Coordination model, Note for File, OCHA, 2001.

position in the senior management team of UNAMSIL meant that he was ideally placed to ensure that UNAMSIL placed their assets at the disposal of humanitarian agencies.

Second, it is clear that DSRSG Doss as an individual is an extremely effective coordinator. From the outset, he placed a very obvious importance on his role of Humanitarian Coordinator, fixing a series of regular commitments to this aspect of the role, such as weekly meetings with OCHA, weekly meetings with the UN Country Team, and attending the monthly NGO meeting. An OCHA Note for File described how:

*'Magnanimity is the best word to describe what Doss brings to this extraordinarily challenging position... he has an inclusive approach, ensuring that no one felt left out. At his regular monthly meetings with international NGOs, he is frank in his briefings and welcomes NGOs to take advantage of his open door policy. Issues raised by NGOs at these meetings are given top priority in Doss's mountain of responsibilities. He ensures immediate follow-up and action, demonstrating that he takes their work as seriously as he does the political and military work of UNAMSIL.'*¹⁵⁶

Many of the past difficulties between UN agencies and NGOs and UNAMSIL had arisen from (and reinforced) the perception of humanitarians that their concerns are not taken seriously. Having their Humanitarian Coordinator within 'the power', especially when they saw that this in no way lessened his commitment to humanitarian concerns, was a very effective way to counter this perception, which is strongly felt in the field and in headquarters.

At a practical level, the arrival of DSRSG Doss also banished some of the key coordination failings of preceding years. In particular, he perceived it as his responsibility to share relevant security information with the OCHA team. As a member of the Senior Management Team within UNAMSIL, he was able to provide information of impeccable quality.

The DSRSG/HC/RC/RR/DO model

The decision to appoint Alan Doss is likely to have been influenced by the findings of the Brahimi Report. Published three months before the October 2000 visit of the Security Council to Sierra Leone that recommended the step, the report contains a general endorsement of the model of joint roles:

*'The Panel notes the precedent of appointing the resident coordinator / humanitarian coordinator of the team of UN agencies, funds and programmes engaged in development work and humanitarian assistance in a particular country as one of the Deputies to the SRSG of a complex peace operation. In our view, this practice should be emulated wherever possible.'*¹⁵⁷

The key question, looking forwards, is to what extent, and under what circumstances, is this model replicable? Inevitably, given the almost universally positive manner in which this appointment is now viewed, there will be calls to replicate it in other countries where peacekeeping forces are deployed.

¹⁵⁶ The Sierra Leone experience of the DSRSG/HC/RC/RR/DO Coordination model, Note for File, OCHA, 2001.

¹⁵⁷ Brahimi Report, Paragraph 99

The theoretical advantages of the DSRSG model are obvious. It gives UN agencies, and their partners, a voice in what inevitably will be ‘the biggest show in town’.¹⁵⁸ In both real and qualitative terms, it is a management structure designed to ensure that the experience and concerns of UN agencies, the presence of which usually both precedes and outlasts a peacekeeping mission, are heard in analytical, planning and decision-making forum within the UN mission. This point too was made in the Brahimi report: ‘the Panel believes that there should always be at least one member of a senior management team of a mission with relevant UN experience, preferably both in a field mission and at headquarters’.¹⁵⁹

Another attraction of the model is that a DSRSG from a UN agency background is likely to result in much greater influence for UN agencies and their partners than in situations where the SRSG has no deputies. The issue of the selection and appointment of SRSGs, and the criteria by which they are chosen, is consistently raised as a barrier to effective integration by humanitarians: ‘SRSGs are not chosen. Like leaders of the Tory Party, they emerge....’¹⁶⁰

SRSGs are political appointments, and the coordination skills or humanitarian or development know-how of prospective candidates do not appear to influence the selection process. Furthermore, there is reportedly little or no consultation with UN agencies about an impending appointment, a point on which several UN agency headquarters staff expressed regret.

Frustration at this is keenly felt by UN humanitarian agencies, not least because the advent of integrated missions led by SRSGs has coincided with a long, often painful, but ultimately successful process of persuading UNDP to make the selection criteria and process for RC/HC candidates more sensitive to humanitarian issues. Now, an additional layer of management has been placed on top of the structure, on which humanitarian and development agencies have little influence. Note this extract from the UN Plan of Action on Peacebuilding (October 2001):

‘The quality, practical experience and personal attributes of UN staff in the field and at headquarters are major criteria of a successful peace-building effort.... Numerous improvements have been introduced in the area of selection of UN Resident Coordinators (RC/HC), focusing on specific qualifications, aptitudes, experience and behaviour of RCs.... Efforts to improve the preparation of S/RSGs through better orientation and training programmes should continue.’

Behind the appropriately diplomatic language, the differing emphasis on ‘selection’ of RC/HCs against ‘preparation’ of SRSGs is significant. Agencies opting for a DSRSG from a UN agency background, and who has been through an HC assessment process, are likely to be better served than by the alternative of simply hoping that an SRSG has an interest in humanitarian issues, and a willingness to place them at or near the top of his or her agenda.

Host government coordination

It is also important to acknowledge the increasingly important role of the Government of Sierra Leone in coordination, at the national, regional and district levels. Like many authorities in regions and countries experiencing the effects of conflict, the Government of Sierra Leone had historically found it challenging even to keep track of, let alone coordinate, many of the activities implemented by international NGOs. While there has been a government body

¹⁵⁸ Interview with Adriaan Verheul, New York.

¹⁵⁹ Brahimi Report, paragraph 98.

¹⁶⁰ Interview, New York.

charged with coordination of humanitarian activities for many years,¹⁶¹ it has often struggled to keep abreast of all the different programmes.

During the conflict, many NGOs felt that their independence would be compromised by working too closely with the Government while the war continued and therefore wanted to maintain a healthy distance. Undoubtedly, however, an additional factor was the residual mutual mistrust between the Government and some of the NGOs, whom the former had accused of being 'junta NGOs' when they continued to work in Sierra Leone during the period of exile of the now restored administration.

However, now that the country is in a transition phase, it is increasingly problematic that many NGOs continue to pay scant regard to government coordination structures. Given the importance to the peace process of the Government being seen to provide basic social services for the population of Sierra Leone, it is vital for NGOs to include a capacity-building component in their work, and to show patience with nascent coordination structures, particularly at local level.

That many NGOs have not adapted their attitudes was a common complaint of several senior Government figures. Commissioner Sesay of NACSA, for example, stated that:

*'now there is peace, the message from the Government to humanitarian agencies is 'fit in'. Many NGOs are struggling with this new reality, and seem to lack the capacity or the willingness to operate within a functioning state'.*¹⁶²

It is a difficult balance, not least because the country remains desperately poor, with humanitarian needs still widespread, particularly in areas where refugees and IDPs have recently returned. There are no guidelines between the (humanitarian) imperative of meeting basic needs on the one hand, and the (peacebuilding) imperative of it being demonstrated to the population that it is the Government that is meeting them.

The issue has been further complicated by a recent confusion in Government coordination structures. In addition to NCRRR/NACSA, the Government created the National Recovery Committee in 2001, with the aim of involving line ministries more directly with the recovery effort. This has created a degree of duplication and indeed competition between the two Government coordination structures, which efforts are underway to address.

Some see this lack of clarity as a natural concomitant to the transitional phase through which the country is currently passing, while others see the two bodies as competing for the resources that the international community is investing in Sierra Leone. This competition has been observed within the international community as well. One UN agency head observed how the NACSA/NRC competition is to some extent going on by proxy within the UN family, with OCHA supporting NACSA, and UNDP throwing its weight behind the NRC.

¹⁶¹ This was initially the NCRRR (the National Commission for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction), but evolved into NACSA (the National Commission for Social Action) in 2002. The personnel remained essentially the same, with both chaired by Commissioner Kanja Sesay.

¹⁶² Interview with Commissioner Sesay of NACSA, Freetown.

6.6 The quality of the peace

The issue of governance introduces the final and arguably the most difficult question: what is the quality of the peace that has been brought to Sierra Leone? Most commentators identify two principal threats to the current absence of hostilities: conflict in Liberia, and a possible failure of governance in Sierra Leone.

While all is currently quiet in Sierra Leone, the Mano River region remains extremely unstable. In particular, the ongoing conflict in Liberia poses a serious risk of spilling back over into Sierra Leone. Conflict in the Mano River region was described by the Deputy UK High Commissioner as like a ‘beachball’, which had been passed from Sierra Leone to Guinea and was currently in Liberia, and at any time could float back over.¹⁶³ Nobody in Freetown denies that ex-combatants from all sides in Sierra Leone are currently fighting in Liberia (ex-CDF forces are said to be fighting with the rebel LURD forces fighting President Taylor, while ex-RUF combatants are said to be fighting in support of their former backer) – the only point of debated is over the numbers involved.

The continuing threat posed by Liberia to its neighbour, and the apparently complete inability of the international community to identify effective ways of influencing President Taylor at a time when it has done so much in Sierra Leone, is of course testament to the limitations of an international system that can only deal with unstable regions on a state-by-state basis.

In an echo of the ‘junta period’ in Sierra Leone, it appears that humanitarian assistance may again be being withheld for political reasons from Liberian civilians affected by the conflict. In almost identical arguments to those over assistance to Sierra Leone in 1997–98, some agencies are accusing donors of not funding life-saving assistance for political reasons, while donors are justifying their decisions by what they describe as the absence of minimal monitoring conditions.

The second potential threat to peace in Sierra Leone relates to the Government. Ultimately, the key variable that determines whether or not the current peace will last over the longer term is likely to be the nature of governance. If the time and the money invested by the international community in Sierra Leone translates into the provision of basic social services and an effective and honest system of law and order, then the current peace may well last.

If Sierra Leone can make progress on the key issues of governance, corruption and social service provision, then it is also more likely that the country will continue to attract support from the donor community, as it fits so many of the important criteria, such as being in sub-Saharan Africa, having considerable debts and low per capita income.¹⁶⁴ The current Government knows that good governance is crucial for continued donor support.

For its part, the donor community knows that its political, military and financial investment in Sierra Leone has always been channelled as support to a Government largely made up of the same elite which has historically served the population of Sierra Leone so poorly. Is this elite capable of or even genuinely interested in fundamental change? We have yet to see whether the people of Sierra Leone will see that elusive peace dividend.

¹⁶³ Interview with Andrea Reidy, Deputy UK High Commissioner, Freetown.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with DSRS Doss, Freetown.

7. Five key themes and questions

7.1 Quick-impact projects – merit and motive?

Quick-impact projects are funded by UNAMSIL to restore civil authority and basic social services, as part of recovery after war. One key question is whether decisions about which activities to support are taken on the basis of an informed appraisal of their likely social impact, or on the grounds of their political utility. The management arrangements of the UNAMSIL Trust Fund provide an interesting insight to this question.

The UNAMSIL Trust Fund was set up in 1998 but continues to operate. Until now, the fund has supported 32 projects, with a maximum contribution of \$15,000 per grant. Of the 32 projects, 13 are classified as civil affairs, 6 as human rights, 9 as child protection, 3 as civilian police, and 1 as political affairs (these categories corresponding to units within UNAMSIL). The diverse range of activities supported includes construction of police stations, reintegration of child combatants and training of psychosocial workers.

The Trust Fund receives voluntary rather than assessed contributions and (until 2002) has received contributions of some \$1.4 million, the majority from two donors, the Dutch and the Japanese. In the terms of reference for the Trust Fund, it is clearly stated that ‘the Special Representative of the Secretary General is designated as the Programme Manager for the Trust Fund’.

The guidelines issued by UNAMSIL include the following section on coordination with other actors:

‘UNAMSIL’s mandate and resources impose very close coordination with other partners involved in the restoration of civil authority and the delivery of basic services, first and foremost the UN agencies and the NGOs. While UNAMSIL has strong operational presence on the ground, UN agencies have the mandate and the experience for humanitarian assistance and longer-term capacity building. The niche defined above for activities funded under the Trust Fund should avoid duplication with the programmes of other UN agencies. The necessary partnership that entails will be facilitated by the management arrangements envisaged by the Trust Fund.’¹⁶⁵

When the DSRSG for Governance and Stabilisation was appointed, his terms of reference clearly included, ‘Supervise the design and implementation of quick-impact projects to be financed through the Trust Fund for Sierra Leone’. DSRSG Doss’s formal role as both Humanitarian Coordinator and UNDP’s Resident Representative is ideal for ensuring the complementarity of Trust Fund projects with other UN programmes as envisaged above, a synergy that could only be increased by the DSRSG’s long personal experience as a development professional.

It therefore seems significant that the DSRSG has not been delegated the management of the Trust Fund by Special Representative Adeniji, nor is he involved at any stage of the appraisal

¹⁶⁵ ‘Quick impact projects to support the restoration of civil authority and basic public services’, UNAMSIL.

process. The obvious contradiction that this represents would seem to suggest that quick-impact projects are still valued within the UNAMSIL leadership for their political utility, rather than their technical merit.

Quick-impact projects, therefore, when not assessed and carried out on the basis of an impartial needs-based approach, should be neither considered nor marketed as humanitarian. Consequently, donors should give serious consideration to whether it is appropriate to fund quick-impact projects from humanitarian budgets. It is therefore questionable whether UNAMSIL quick-impact projects should be included within UN Consolidated Appeals for Sierra Leone.

7.2 Military involvement in assistance – where to draw the line?

Within the UNAMSIL mission, the direct provision of assistance to populations is viewed positively. The Force Commander of UNAMSIL identified these interventions as one of the great successes of the UNAMSIL operation. Brigadier Ellery, Chief of Staff, echoed this assessment: his view is that the counter-insurgency warfare has been most successful ‘not killing terrorists, but by putting a nation back on its feet and giving people chances.’¹⁶⁶

Some humanitarian agencies, on the other hand, have been very critical of UNAMSIL contingents giving out assistance. In addition to the general and long-held objections from certain aid agencies (such as MSF and ACF), there were context-specific objections from other agencies. They pointed out that, in Sierra Leone, such interventions were mainly carried out by troops from richer countries, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh and Ghana. Areas with contingents from poorer countries often received nothing. This might cause resentment, the ‘hearts and minds’ logic in reverse.

For two reasons, the direct provision of assistance by contingents in Sierra Leone might be considered less problematic than in other situations. Firstly, UNAMSIL was a clearly identifiable peacekeeping force and, where it had acted militarily in the conflict, this had been in self-defence. Unlike during the 1999 Balkans crisis or more recently in Afghanistan, there has never been a suggestion that assistance was provided in Sierra Leone, at local, national or international level, to muster support or gain acceptance for offensive military actions, or to mitigate their consequences.

Secondly, because of the insecurity and the way in which the peace process and UNAMSIL deployment developed in Sierra Leone, military personnel often reached previously inaccessible areas days, weeks and even months in advance of humanitarian agencies. For example, soldiers from Pakistan Battalion provided medical assistance in Kono for three months before humanitarian agencies felt able to move in. This initial assistance ‘was highly appropriate and saved lives’.¹⁶⁷

The question in Sierra Leone was therefore not ‘who should provide assistance, aid agencies or contingents?’ but rather, ‘which is better for the population, to receive assistance from the military, or to receive no assistance?’ To continue to hold a negative view, in the prevailing circumstances at that time, would be a difficult ethical position to defend. As a Senior OCHA

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Brigadier Ellery, UNAMSIL Chief of Staff, Freetown.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with DSRSR Doss, Freetown.

official put it, ‘Does the beneficiary care whether the truck that brings the food is armed or not? There is an arrogance in the humanitarian community about this.’¹⁶⁸

What makes a judgement harder is the lack of any concrete evidence of the impact of quick-impact projects such as these on target populations. Writing for the ODI, Jane Barry and Anne Jefferys have noted that:

*‘to date there has been no significant external evaluation of military ‘humanitarian’ activities... the criteria should be cost-benefit analysis, impact in the short and longer term, cultural appropriateness, participation levels, implications for local economic, political or social structures and sustainability’.*¹⁶⁹

There are, however, two difficulties. First, there is the issue of motive. Inevitably, the espousal of the ‘hearts and minds’ doctrine clouds the issue, especially for agencies which see the entitlement of a population to humanitarian assistance as a right, and therefore their duty to provide. Even when conceived to win support for a peace process, the existence of an ulterior motive is problematic, and clearly places a question mark over whether such assistance is provided impartially, on the basis of need alone.

Second, there is an important debate going on within UNAMSIL and DPKO about what role military contingents should play in the rehabilitation effort. The debate has come into sharper focus with discussions about the ‘draw-down’ of UNAMSIL. It has also revealed that, even within an integrated mission, individuals from political, military and development/humanitarian components are still capable of fundamental disagreement on key strategic issues.

The underlying problem is what to do over the next year with the 13,000 or so peacekeepers who will stay in Sierra Leone, and who, in order to fulfill their peacekeeping objective, really have little to do other than be present. This has led to senior military leaders in UNAMSIL, including Force Commander Opande, and Brigadier Ellery, looking for ways to involve the troops in the rehabilitation of the country. The leaders hold that ‘troops would much rather be employed helping those less fortunate than themselves than sitting on their arses for a year doing nothing.’¹⁷⁰ As a result of this, influential figures in both UNAMSIL and DPKO headquarters have wanted to create a budget for rehabilitation activities, to be directly carried out by troop contingents, and to try and get it funded via assessed contributions.

DSRSG Doss and his office unsurprisingly do not endorse this proposal, considering that rehabilitation work carried out by military units is neither appropriate nor cost-effective¹⁷¹ nor sustainable. UN agencies and their partners have both the mandate and the expertise to carry out this kind of work. Most definitions of coherence are based on different actors carrying out different activities, towards a common goal, but with clear division of responsibilities based on mandates and institutional expertise. This proposal, on the other hand, could be seen as ‘mission creep’. ‘If you have to justify the continuing presence of peacekeepers in a country in

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Kevin Kennedy, OCHA.

¹⁶⁹ Jane Barry and Anne Jefferys, ‘A bridge too far: aid agencies and the military in humanitarian response’, HPN Paper 37, ODI.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Brigadier Ellery, UNAMSIL, Freetown.

¹⁷¹ Concerns about cost-effectiveness are not imaginary. In 2001, UNAMSIL budgeted (and used) US\$ 16 million for medical equipment, supplies and services. This figure for military use was 20 per cent of the entire Consolidated Appeal for humanitarian assistance in 2001.

terms of their potential contribution to rehabilitation work, then something is way out of kilter.¹⁷²

It is certainly the case that there is a worrying lack of understanding in the military leadership about what rehabilitation work involves. (One senior UNAMSIL officer, for example has asked informally that, in a country that needs to restart its rice production, what could be more ideal than the presence of 3,000 Bangladeshis willing to show them how?) While UNAMSIL planners are clear that their forces need to step back in 2003, to allow the new Sierra Leone army to be seen to be providing security, they seem to ignore or fail to understand that the same principle applies to rehabilitation.

The DSRSRG made an important additional point on this issue of employing idle labour in rehabilitation projects. From a peacebuilding perspective, the international community should be much more concerned about finding a way to involve the 55,000 ex-combatants on rehabilitation projects, rather than worrying what to do with 13,000 peacekeepers.

The discussion point that arises from the Sierra Leone study is not whether or not the use of military contingents in the first phase of an emergency is justified, but, once started, when and on what criteria should their use end? What started in 2000 and 2001 with essentially small-scale, charitable activities, such as sharing cooked food rations and providing medicines, has led to senior figures within UNAMSIL and DPKO New York openly suggesting that contingents carry out rehabilitation activities with assessed contributions.¹⁷³ There are currently no criteria or guidelines to focus the debate. Where do you draw the line?

7.3 The IDP resettlement programme – business as usual?

Between March and May 2002, the Government of Sierra Leone implemented a huge resettlement programme of internally displaced persons (IDPs), with the assistance of the humanitarian community. Severe problems were encountered, including the poor quality of information given to IDPs about their transport options and aid entitlements, the quality of aid services provided en route, and the lack of social services such as schools and clinics in areas where IDPs were returning. An additional concern was raised about whether or not there was adequate security for a safe return, in particular in the three Kissi chiefdoms of Kailahun, where there were regular border incursions from parties to the conflict in Liberia.

These problems were due to a combination of factors, notably the scale and complexity of this particular phase, exacerbated by poor technical performance from certain humanitarian agencies assigned key roles. Many humanitarian organisations expressed their concern, but one episode in particular stands out. In April 2002, MSF International issued a controversial press release, accusing the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone of rushing the resettlement, and placing the elections before the well-being of the internally displaced. A more detailed report repeating the same allegations was published in May 2002.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Interview with DSRSRG Doss, Freetown.

¹⁷³ A very recent e-mail from DPKO headquarters to Brigadier Ellery recognizes that the current discussion 'is unlikely to produce any cash from assessed contributions at this stage (contacts within key Permanent Missions have unfortunately made it clear that there is no appetite for it among the bean counters) – those same informal contacts have nonetheless encouraged us to place a marker to help move the broad policy as we are doing in the 15th Report'.

¹⁷⁴ Populations affected by war in the Mano River region of West Africa: issues of protection, Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2002.

If the MSF allegations were correct, then this case would have been a clear example of humanitarian considerations (safe and dignified return) being subjugated to political imperatives (the holding of elections, a key political objective of UNAMSIL in Sierra Leone). Humanitarians would therefore consider this to be an unacceptable trade-off. This would also have exposed a potential conflict of interest between one of DSRSG Doss's key political objectives and his role as Humanitarian Coordinator. The terms of reference for Alan Doss require him to 'Provide advice and encouragement to the Government with regard to... the organization of elections and the transition to a new Government, in due course'. This issue was therefore investigated in some detail during research for this study in Freetown.

No humanitarian agencies disputed the fact that the execution of the resettlement programme raised serious shortcomings in aid agency performance, but none interviewed shared MSF's perception that political agency was driving the process. Many felt that MSF had mistaken technical incompetence for politicisation. In particular, the depiction of a 'process that more closely resembles eviction rather than resettlement' was rejected outright by both humanitarians and politicians. This point was discussed with a variety of senior Government and opposition political figures. Responding to a direct question, none among even the opposition figures interviewed (Ernest Bai Koroma, Zainab Bangura and Pallo Bangura) felt that the resettlement process had been driven by political considerations.

Representatives of humanitarian agencies had long been aware that the greatest pressure for early resettlement had come from the IDPs themselves. For example, 'All interlocutors agreed that ultimately the wishes of IDPs have prevailed, thus confirming the voluntary character of the return'.¹⁷⁵ The MSF report itself is of unusually poor quality. The quotation on the front cover, 'Survival is Political – conversation overheard on a bus in Sierra Leone', rather sets the scene for the lack of research rigour throughout the report. The poor quality of the report is to be regretted, as it seems to have undermined the credibility of a potentially important voice in the humanitarian community in Freetown. The way in which the press release was launched in New York, without the humanitarian community in Freetown being informed beforehand, was viewed negatively both by the UN and the NGO community.

However, no one disputes that this phase in particular of the resettlement of the internally displaced had serious shortcomings, which in turn resulted in confusion and clear physical distress for a great many vulnerable people. In May 2002, the President and Chief Executive of Refugees International, Kenneth Bacon, wrote a letter to the ERC, Mr Kenzo Oshima, expressing serious concerns about the resettlement operation. According to Refugees International:¹⁷⁶

'the fundamental problem is that no one agency has been given overall coordination and operational responsibility for the IDP programme. We urge you to arrange the designation of a lead agency for IDPs in Sierra Leone as soon as possible... the lead agency should be one with the necessary management and operational control as well as the funding to distribute and coordinate resources'.

In his reply,¹⁷⁷ Mr Oshima acknowledged that the problems affecting the resettlement operation were 'indeed serious', that OCHA, the UN Country Team and their partners were striving hard to address them, but that the designation of a lead agency was not a priority. What

¹⁷⁵ Report on Mission to West Africa, 15–24 April 2002, IDP Unit, OCHA.

¹⁷⁶ Letter from Mr Kenneth Bacon to Mr Kenzo Oshima, 9 May 2002.

¹⁷⁷ Letter from Mr Kenzo Oshima to Mr Kenneth Bacon, 12 June 2002.

is particularly telling in his letter is his statement that ‘addressing the needs of IDPs typically involves an exceptionally large number of partner agencies, each with their own mandate and funding source’.

The relevance to this study is as follows. In a rapidly evolving situation, UNHCR was able to reallocate its funding and personnel to react adequately to the needs of returning refugees. Meanwhile, the IDP resettlement operation floundered. Despite the more integrated coordination structure firmly established by mid-2002, the IDP resettlement programme in Sierra Leone suffered from problems largely caused by its reliance on multiple agencies and funding sources.

This, of course, is a systemic weakness, acknowledged at a global level, where it has long been recognised that IDPs fall through the gaps between institutions and mandates. The lack of a designated lead agency for assistance and protection of IDPs has long dogged the humanitarian system. What the resettlement operation in Sierra Leone seems to show is that, despite its undoubted advantages, the more integrated UN coordination structure cannot resolve all of the humanitarian world’s structural weaknesses and problems.

7.4 Human rights and integration – coherence versus autonomy?

The Human Rights office has been fully ‘integrated’ within the United Nations management structure since 1998. When UNOMSIL was first deployed to Freetown after the junta period, a Senior Human Rights Adviser was appointed to assist Special Envoy Okelo. The initial objective was to advise on the human rights aspects of the treason trials that were held in the post-AFRC period. As feared, these trials resulted in mass executions of ex-AFRC supporters, against the wishes of the international community.

At exactly the same time, during the retreat of the AFRC, the first reports of widespread mutilations and amputations were emerging from Sierra Leone.¹⁷⁸ Hence, by the time that the first Adviser¹⁷⁹ to SE Okelo arrived in Freetown, he had an explicit function within the mission, but was also representing the High Commissioner in a country where she had begun to take a keen autonomous interest in what was happening.

When the scale of the human rights abuses in Sierra Leone became apparent, the OHCHR decided to go to DPKO and ask to be involved in peacekeeping. The proposal was enthusiastically welcomed by DPKO, ‘like pushing an open door’¹⁸⁰, since when there has always been a Human Rights section within UNAMSIL. The mainstreaming philosophy was both consistent with the human rights mandates that the Security Council was increasingly giving to peacekeeping missions, and catalysed with the internal recognition within the OHCHR of its institutional limitations with regard to funding and capacity.

This background is important, because the challenge of being both fully integrated within the peacekeeping mission and having an autonomous interest in human rights issues in Sierra Leone has been the key feature of discussions around management structure and arrangements ever since.

¹⁷⁸ MSF International presented a dossier to Mary Robinson in March 1998.

¹⁷⁹ Interview (telephone) with Michael O’Flaherty.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Michael O’Flaherty.

According to its Mandate and Scope of Activities (agreed at the start of UNAMSIL's mission in late 1999, and not updated since then), the UNAMSIL Human Rights Section has three main fields of activity:

1. monitoring ('Monitoring compliance by government and by all parties to the conflict with human rights and international humanitarian law')
2. providing technical assistance in building the capacity of national institutions, and
3. undertaking and supporting human rights and peace awareness programmes.

The Head of the Human Rights Section reports directly to SRSG Adeniji, a management arrangement that has not been altered by the arrival of the two Deputy SRSGs in recent years. The section has up to 15 national and international human rights specialists, as well as a Child Protection Unit.

There is also a child protection specialist from SRSG Otunnu's office within UNAMSIL, who works separately from the Human Rights Section, reporting directly to SRSG Adeniji and working out of his office. This arrangement is reported to have led to a degree of confusion on certain child protection issues, when Otunnu's representative and the Child Protection Unit within the Human Rights Section have given different and sometimes contrary advice.¹⁸¹

The limited number of people interviewed with direct experience of having worked in the Human Rights Section all identified a number of advantages of the section being integrated within the United Nations mission.

First, an integrated Human Rights Section has enjoyed an intimate relationship with the political leadership of the UN mission, and therefore a definite capacity to influence. One indicator of this influence, albeit a controversial one, was the presence of the Senior Human Rights Adviser alongside Okelo throughout the negotiation of the Lomé Peace Agreement. Although overshadowed by arguments about amnesty provisions, this nonetheless 'resulted in a wide range of Human Rights provisions in the Lomé agreement that would not otherwise have been included'.¹⁸² It is also felt that potential influence that the Office can exert directly or indirectly over the Government of Sierra Leone is infinitely stronger from within UNAMSIL than it would have been as an independent office. Overall, there was a strong feeling among all those interviewed that it is better to be inside looking out, than outside looking in.

Second, by being integrated, the Human Rights Section has a level of access to information that it would never have enjoyed working from an independent office outside the mission. The section enjoys essentially unlimited access to UNAMSIL cables and reports, and has the chance to use the Military Observers as their 'eyes and ears' throughout the country. More than anything, the Human Rights Section needs to know what is going on in Sierra Leone. The quality of information has been impeccable, and has to be compared with the expected alternative of 'irregularly tossed dull scraps of information [from] UNAMSIL', had the section been working from an independent office.¹⁸³

Third, being integrated has critically allowed the Human Rights Section to build up and maintain its unit through assessed contributions. This is particularly relevant for the OHCHR, which historically has experienced particular difficulties in attracting adequate voluntary funding to work in many countries. Finally, and related to this, as part of the UN mission, the

¹⁸¹ Interviews, Freetown and New York.

¹⁸² Interview with Michael O'Flaherty, Geneva.

¹⁸³ Interview with Maarit Koenen, UNHCHR Liaison Office, New York.

Human Rights Section can avail itself of all of the logistical and communications structure in UNAMSIL, rather than having to set up meagre parallel systems funded through voluntary contributions.¹⁸⁴

The only ‘disconnect’ comes from the fact that, while Human Rights staff and offices can be funded with assessed contributions, programme inputs still depend on voluntary contributions. While OHCHR has taken steps to address this, there were instances in the past where the Human Rights Section had a staff of 15 but no money to hold a workshop.¹⁸⁵

As for the disadvantages of being integrated, many identified the most important as being exactly the same as the principal advantage, namely the close relationship with the political leadership. In Sierra Leone, unlike Afghanistan, the concern has focused less on being silent on human rights abuses committed by the Government since the peace agreement, and more on the peace agreement itself. The participation of the Human Rights Section in the UN negotiating team at Lomé in 1999 is obviously controversial, given the unconditional amnesties granted as part of the agreement to Foday Sankoh and the RUF. Given the strength of the RUF at the time, and the imminent withdrawal of ECOMOG, there are many who feel that Lomé was politically the best deal possible.

For the purposes of this study, however, it was less the agreement itself that was the issue, and more the presence of the Human Rights Section and the UN in general as part of the negotiating team, and therefore party to political deal-making. There are many who share the view expressed by Human Rights Watch that the peace negotiations were ‘characterised by complicity by the UN’.¹⁸⁶

The Lomé agreement clearly demonstrated the potential for tension within an integrated mission between the political imperative of striking a deal, where everything is negotiable, and the non-derogable nature of human rights, where nothing is. The argument also reveals two essentially irreconcilable views about making peace. For some, the priority has to be on stopping the killing, even it involves absolving criminals from judicial accountability for their crimes. At Lomé, the recognition that a non-judicial form of accountability for past crimes would have to be found led to the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the text of the agreement.

According to the other view, there can be no lasting peace without respect for the law and judicial accountability for past crimes. Here, in one way, the international community and the Government of Sierra Leone were fortunate that the RUF resumed hostilities in May 2000. This has enabled Sankoh and other RUF leaders to be charged with crimes committed since the Lomé amnesties, and also led to the creation of a Special Court.

A second potential disadvantage of integration relates to the reporting line. During Okelo’s period, this was a particularly contentious issue. It is said that the insistence of the first Senior Human Rights Adviser on issuing a report through Geneva that criticised ECOMOG for human rights abuses led him to be asked to leave Sierra Leone by SRSO Okelo in late 1999. In the end, it was agreed to introduce a dual reporting line, where reports are sent simultaneously to DPKO in New York and to OHCHR in Geneva. This seems a satisfactory procedural solution to the challenge of maintaining a degree of independence for the Human Rights Section.

¹⁸⁴ Interviews, Freetown and New York.

¹⁸⁵ Interviews, Freetown and New York.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with Corinne Dufka, Human Rights Watch, Freetown.

UNHCHR Geneva has rather undermined its own insistence of these dual reporting arrangements, however, by what appears to be a consistent failure to provide any feedback upon receipt of reports from the field. One person interviewed, who spent a year in the Human Rights Section within UNAMSIL, noted that received no feedback from anyone in OHCHR Geneva on the content of field reports. Conversely, there was regular and constructive feedback and questions from DPKO, often emanating from the USG level.

A final main disadvantage to integration is that the Human Rights Section within UNAMSIL has been asked on several occasions to take the lead on internal investigations into the behaviour of peacekeeping troops. The topics of investigations include the sexual exploitation of minors by peacekeepers, and the recent alleged shooting dead of unarmed rioters by UNAMSIL troops. Some interviewees, both within the UN mission and from human rights organisations outside it, expressed strong feeling that the use of the section as a *de facto* 'internal affairs' unit had led to it being regarded with increased suspicion by the military and political leadership within UNAMSIL.

Here again, the objectives of the Human Rights Section and those of the political leadership of UNAMSIL may not be complementary. For example, it was suggested during interviews that the section had been told by the political leadership within UNAMSIL on more than one occasion to tread carefully in their investigations into the behaviour of peacekeepers, as the 'the last thing that the mission can afford is further withdrawals of soldiers after the departure of the Indians and the Jordanians'.¹⁸⁷

On balance, the experience from UNAMSIL is that the benefits of integrating human rights decidedly outweigh the disadvantages. The access to information and the necessary funds to staff a large section would both have been most unlikely had the OHCHR established a separate office in Sierra Leone. There are, however, disadvantages that future missions need to be aware of. To some extent, these disadvantages can be mitigated by establishing dual reporting systems, with clear memoranda of understanding between DPKO and the OHCHR, and to giving consideration to passing responsibility for the investigation of human rights abuses committed by peacekeepers to the Office for Internal Oversight at United Nations Headquarters in New York.

7.5 The UK in Sierra Leone – villain of the conflict and hero of the peace?

The UK's role in Sierra Leone, particularly in the period 2000 to 2002, is extraordinary. During these years, the UK made a huge range of financial and other commitments to the peace process in Sierra Leone, providing support simultaneously to almost all of the elements recognised as essential for the establishment of a durable peace. The tasks which the UK Government has taken a lead in supporting include:

1. training the Sierra Leone armed forces;
2. re-establishing the police force;
3. creating a politically neutral intelligence service;
4. disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR);
5. governance, including the establishment of an anti-corruption commission;
6. developing government capacity to provide social services;
7. support to the re-establishment of field administration (chiefdoms);
8. re-establishment of the judicial system; and

¹⁸⁷ Confidential interview.

9. support to NGOs and UN agencies involved with emergency humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance.

It is hard to imagine a better example of one donor working to the limit of its capacity and resources to implement a coherent approach towards peacebuilding. Within DFID, the success this time is felt to have resulted from not ignoring unconventional elements that have made the difference – ‘for once, we have not pussyfooted around security’.¹⁸⁸

DFID has always seen security-sector reform as a key ingredient of the peacebuilding effort, much of which has been achieved through cooperation with the Ministry of Defence (MoD). The most visible indicator of this has been the key role that the UK armed forces have played in training the new Sierra Leone army. Similar support has been given to re-establishing the Sierra Leone Police (SLP).

‘Vital external appointments and control systems have helped to stabilize the situation. The British Military Adviser to the Acting Sierra Leone Chief of Defence Staff has effectively controlled the Armed Forces. The British Inspector General of Police has done the same thing in a direct executive capacity with the SLP.’¹⁸⁹

Cooperation with the MoD over Sierra Leone has left Garth Glentworth, Senior Governance Adviser to DFID, ‘more and more convinced we need an integrated approach’.¹⁹⁰

Within ‘UK plc’, Sierra Leone clearly represents an unprecedented attempt at a coherent response to peacebuilding, involving military, political and aid interventions. Within this ‘joined-up government’, there is nonetheless a clear hierarchy. The response to Sierra Leone has always been DFID-led. An indicator of this was the admission by UK diplomatic staff in Freetown that they felt the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) would have no objection to the next UK Ambassador being a DFID appointment. As one DFID official put it, ‘the motor for UK policy is Clare Short and always has been. So long as Clare Short remains Secretary of State, Sierra Leone will not be allowed to fail.’¹⁹¹

In terms of planning, the most relevant framework is a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that is being developed between the Governments of the UK and Sierra Leone. On the UK side, there has been joint development between DFID, the FCO and the MoD. The MoU will underpin the relationship between the two governments for the next ten years, clearly setting out expectations of what will be contributed by each of them. The current thinking is to have third parties independently assessing adherence to the MoU at regular intervals. This MoU is a novel initiative, and an important tool for a ‘coherent’ UK response.¹⁹²

Ironically, and showing a regrettable if predictable lack of solidarity with the UK, it is almost certain that the reluctance of other donors to contribute generously to peacebuilding and reconstruction activities relates directly to the degree of investment, financial and political, that the UK has made in Sierra Leone. For a country that has never been high on agenda of international donors, there is an assumption that the UK will usually step in to fund key activities that have run out of money. This assumption can be supported, as the UK twice

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Garth Glentworth, Senior Governance Adviser, DFID.

¹⁸⁹ Glentworth, 2002.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Garth Glentworth, DFID, London.

¹⁹¹ Confidential interview.

¹⁹² This is not to say that none of the old problems remain. When asked about communication with the FCO, one DFID official replied, ‘we communicate – we share all our information with them, and they share nothing back’ (confidential interview).

bailed out the Trust Fund for DDR at the last moment, in 2001.¹⁹³ This may go some way to explaining the lack of a wider donor base. The UK has tried hard to get other donors involved, but so far without success.

*'This has been a major commitment by one donor and, with the Secretary-General, we believe that it is time that this burden was shared more widely.'*¹⁹⁴

It should also be mentioned that, as a result of the scale of its investment in Sierra Leone, the UK's ability to finance conflict prevention and reduction work in other parts of Africa has been significantly reduced. Almost all of the budget of the Africa Conflict Pool has apparently been used in Sierra Leone.

From a peacebuilding perspective, DFID has drawn two interesting conclusions from its involvement in Sierra Leone. The first relates to the question of coherence, and recognises the

*'need to have a sufficiently extensive pattern of assistance... the requirements in donor delivery are formidable. [Donor] aid agencies are often not well enough internally coordinated to put together packages of this nature. Links with other domestic providers (such as the military and police) are sometimes not well developed, let alone coordination with other donors in agendas this complex. Donors will have to gear themselves up to supply these sorts of combinations if they are to be effective.'*¹⁹⁵

The second conclusion is that:

*'the range of urgent needs in post-conflict reconstruction can lead donors into areas of assistance where they have not worked previously and which are at the limits of foreign aid legislation. One such example in Sierra Leone is support for the redevelopment of intelligence and security services as a vital part of security sector reconstruction. Conventional limits on aid will have to move if there is not to be cherry picking by aid agencies of what is possible rather than what is needed.'*¹⁹⁶

The UK's commitment to the peace process over the past few years is commendable. However, this arguably makes it even more regrettable that the UK was so instrumental in attempts to block humanitarian assistance to Sierra Leone during the junta period from 1997 to 1998. This would seem to strengthen the case of those who have argued that humanitarian assistance should enjoy statutory independence from political considerations,¹⁹⁷ as is the case with ECHO. The UK's changing role as a donor over the past five years could be summarised as 'villain of the conflict and hero of the peace'.

¹⁹³ Interviews with UK High Commission, Freetown.

¹⁹⁴ Ambassador Greenstock, UN Security Council Debate on Sierra Leone, 2001 (S/PV.4340).

¹⁹⁵ Glentworth, 2002.

¹⁹⁶ Glentworth, 2002.

¹⁹⁷ Macrae and Leader, 2000.

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Geneva		
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Michael O'Flaherty	OHCHR	Director, Asia-Pacific Department
Freetown		
Alan Doss	UNAMSIL	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Governance and Stabilisation
Lieutenant-General Daniel Opande	UNAMSIL	Force Commander
Brigadier James Ellery	UNAMSIL	Chief of Staff
Desmond O'Malley	UNAMSIL	Officer in Charge, DDR Section
Peter Tingwa	UNAMSIL	Chief, Political Affairs Section
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Ms Sarah Muscroft	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer (telephone interviews)
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Jonathan Andrews	UNHCR	Programme Officer, Resettlement
Jean-Pierre Schaerer	ICRC	Head of Delegation, ICRC Freetown
Steen Wetlesen	IFRC	Head of Delegation, IFRC Freetown
Andrea Reidy	UK High Commission	Deputy UK High Commissioner in Sierra Leone
David Lutterrell	UK High Commission	3rd Secretary (Political)
Ian Stuart	DFID	Representative for Sierra Leone
Mr Sheka Mansaray		Secretary to the President of Sierra Leone
Mr Ernest Bai Koroma	APC Party	Leader of the Opposition, Leader of APC Party
Mr Pallo Bangura	RUF-P	Former Director-General and 2002 Presidential Candidate
Ms Zainab Bangura	MFP	Leader of Movement for Progress Party
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Gary Walker	NACSA	Senior Adviser to Commissioner Sesay

Simon Arthy	NACSA	Recovery Adviser
Julie Koenen-Grant	USAID	Representative for Sierra Leone (telephone interview)
Wael Ibrahim	OXFAM GB	Country Representative
Karen Moore	CARE	Country Representative
Chris Robertson	SC-UK	Programme Director
Rolf Appels	MSF-H	Interim Country Director
Tom White	MSF-B	Country Director
Corinne Dufka	Human Rights Watch	Researcher
Peter Kluczny	IFES	Elections Supervisor

London

Dr Garth Glentworth	DFID	Senior Governance Adviser
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Mr Mark Bowden	OCHA	Chief, Policy Development and Studies Branch
Mr Kevin Kennedy	OCHA	Chief, Humanitarian Emergency Branch
Mr Andrew Cox	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
Mr Amjad Abbashar	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
Mr Thant Myint-U	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
Ms Ahunna Eziakonwa	OCHA	Humanitarian Affairs Officer
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Acronyms and abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
CAP	Consolidated Appeals Process
CDF	Civil Defence Force
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DDR	disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DHA	Department of Humanitarian Affairs (UN)
DPA	Department of Political Affairs (UN)
DPKO	Department of Peace-Keeping Operations
DSRSG	Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
ECOMOG	West African regional force
ECOWAS	The Economic Community Of West African States
ERC	Emergency Relief Coordinator (UN)
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office (UK)
HACU	Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Unit (UN)
HC	Humanitarian Coordinator
HIC	Humanitarian Information Centre
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IASC	Inter Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross and Red Crescent
IDP	internally displaced person
IHL	international humanitarian law
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMTF	Integrated Mission Task Force
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MilObs	Military Observers
MoD	Ministry of Defence (UK)
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NACSA	National Commission for Social Action
NCDDR	National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
NCRRR	National Commission for Relief, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
NRC	National Recovery Committee
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (UN)
OFDA	Office of US Foreign Disaster Assistance
OHCHR	Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (UN)
RC	Resident Coordinator (UN)
RC/HC	Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (UN)
RR	Resident Representative (UN)
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SRSR	Special Representative of the Secretary-General
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (peacekeeping force)
UNCT	United Nations Country Team

UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission on Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOMSIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WFP	World Food Programme (UN)