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**NINETY-FOURTH ORDINARY SESSION AT
AMBASSADORIAL LEVEL OF THE CENTRAL
ORGAN OF THE MECHANISM FOR CONFLICT
PREVENTION, MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION**

**29 AUGUST 2003
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**Central Organ/MEC/AMB/3.(XCIV)
Original: ENGLISH**

**REPORT OF THE INTERIM CHAIRPERSON ON
THE PEACE PROCESS IN LIBERIA**

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. During its 92nd Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa on 12 and 13 June 2003, the Central Organ was briefed on the situation in Liberia. Since then, a number of important developments have taken place in the country, encompassing both the political and military aspects of the peace process.

II. EVOLUTION OF THE NEGOTIATION PROCESS

2. It is to be recalled that the Peace Talks on Liberia had been convened by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), in Accra, on 4 June 2003. On that occasion, President Charles Taylor expressed his intention to step down from office if that could bring peace to Liberia. However, while the opening ceremony was going on in Accra, the UN Special Tribunal in Sierra Leone served a warrant of the arrest of Mr. Taylor, purportedly through the Government of Ghana. Following the opening ceremony and the tensions created by the purported arrest of President Taylor, the Peace Talks commenced at Akosombo, Ghana, under the daily mediation of the ECOWAS Mediator, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, former Head of State of Nigeria, assisted by a team of facilitators/technical experts drawn from the African Union (AU), the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), the ECOWAS Secretariat and the US State Department.

3. In the wake of intensive negotiations conducted at Akosombo and, subsequently, at Accra, where the Peace Talks moved to, an Agreement on Ceasefire and Cessation of Hostilities was signed, on 17 June 2003, between the Government of Liberia, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). It was anticipated that a Comprehensive Peace Agreement would be reached within 30 days after the signing of the Ceasefire Agreement, but took longer to be achieved, due to a number of factors, including the insistence of LURD and MODEL that President Charles Taylor should abdicate the office and leave the country, and, further, that they should head a transitional government to be set up after his departure.

4. On his part, President Taylor insisted that he could only leave after the arrival of peacekeepers to ensure an orderly transfer of power. In this respect, it should be recalled that President Taylor, on 6 July 2003, confirmed his acceptance of the offer of asylum in Nigeria from President Olusegun Obasanjo.

5. On 31 July 2003, after an Extraordinary Summit in Accra devoted to the situation in Liberia, an ECOWAS Ministerial Delegation flew to Monrovia to inform President Taylor that the Vanguard Force decided on by the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council, at its meeting held in Dakar, on 22 July 2003, would be deploying into Monrovia on 4 August. The Delegation also proposed to President Taylor that he step down on 7 August, that is, three days after the arrival of the Vanguard Force.

6. However, President Taylor offered to, and indeed did, step down on 11 August. He handed over to Vice-President Moses Blah, in accordance with the consensus reached within the region that the transitional period which would follow the departure of President Taylor would take the form of a two-tier process. The swearing in of Mr. Blah as Interim President was witnessed by the Chairperson of the African Union, President Joachim Chissano, President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa and President John Kufuor of Ghana, current Chairman of ECOWAS, as well as the Prime Minister of Togo. On my part, I was represented by a Delegation led by Ambassador Mahamat Habib Doutoum, Interim Commissioner.

7. Difficulties, nonetheless, remained as a result of the positions taken by LURD and MODEL, who still insisted on leading the executive branch of the transitional government to be established when Mr. Blah would hand over. After further consultations within the region and with members of the international community, as well as with President Blah, the leaders of LURD and MODEL, who had congregated in Accra, a consensus was reached that, in accordance with AU's principles on unconstitutional changes of government, the Chairmanship and vice-Chairmanship of the executive branch would be allocated to the political parties and civil society. At the same time, it was agreed that LURD and MODEL would have a say in the final selection of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman.

8. On 18 August 2003, Liberia's warring factions and political parties signed the long-awaited Comprehensive Peace Agreement that is expected to pave the way for the restoration of lasting peace and security in the country. In a Communiqué I issued to mark the occasion, I welcomed this development as an important step forward, and called on all concerned Parties to seize this

opportunity to work together in order, once and for all, to bring an end to the bloody conflict that has not only torn apart their country, but has also largely contributed to the instability in the Mano River Region. I also appealed to the international community in general and the United Nations in particular, to render all necessary assistance, including the speedy deployment of a peacekeeping force, to sustain the momentum in the peace process.

9. Under the Peace Agreement, the signatories to the Ceasefire Agreement of 17 June committed themselves to ensure a total and permanent cessation of hostilities. The Agreement calls on ECOWAS to immediately establish a Multinational Force to be deployed as an Interposition Force in Liberia to secure the ceasefire, create a zone of separation between the belligerent forces and thus provide a safe corridor for the delivery of humanitarian assistance and free movement of persons. The Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), established under the June Ceasefire Agreement, is to continue to supervise and monitor the implementation of that Agreement. Furthermore, the signatory Parties agreed on the need for the deployment of an International Stabilization Force (ISF) in Liberia. Accordingly, they requested the UN, in collaboration with ECOWAS, the AU and the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL), to facilitate, constitute and deploy a United Nations Chapter VII force to support the Transitional Government and assist in the implementation of the Peace Agreement.

10. The Peace Agreement contains a number of other provisions related, among others, to the disengagement of forces of the parties; the cantonment, disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (CDDRR) of combatants; the reform of the security sector; the release of prisoners and abductees; the respect for human rights and international humanitarian law; and the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

11. The Agreement also provides for the establishment of a National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) to be inaugurated by 14 October 2003,. Its mandate will expire in January 2006, with the inauguration of the Government that would be put in place following the elections scheduled for October 2005. Following consultations held by the Mediator with the political parties, the LURD and civil society groups, an allocation of cabinet positions, public corporations and autonomous agencies or commissions was carried out. The Agreement also provides for the modalities for the selection of members of the other two branches of government, namely the judiciary and the legislature. These positions shall be filled following due consultations in

Monrovia in the coming weeks, to be supervised by the international community.

12. The Peace Agreement calls on ECOWAS, in collaboration with the UN, AU, EU and the ICGL, to set up a monitoring mechanism in the form of an Implementation Monitoring Committee (IMC) in Monrovia that will ensure effective and faithful implementation of its provisions by all the Parties. More generally, the Peace Agreement calls on the international community, including the AU, to use its good offices and best efforts to ensure that its spirit and content are implemented in good faith and with integrity by all the Parties.

13. On 20 August 2003, the representatives of the Government of Liberia and those of LURD and MODEL selected Mr. Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the Liberian Action Party, to chair the NTGL. It should be recalled that, under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, neither those persons who hold the positions of Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the NTGL nor the holders of principal Cabinet positions and those of Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the Transitional Legislative Assembly, the Chief Justice and all Associate Justices of the Transitional Judiciary, shall contest for any elective office during the 2005 elections.

III. DEPLOYMENT OF ECOMIL

14. On 1st August 2003, the UN Security Council adopted resolution 1497 (2003), which authorized Member States to establish a Multinational Force in Liberia to support the implementation of the June 2003 Ceasefire Agreement, and to prepare for the introduction of a longer term United Nations Stabilization Force to relieve the Multinational Force. The Security Council declared its readiness to establish such a follow-up United Nations stabilization force to support the Transitional Government and to assist in the implementation of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

15. The Vanguard Force of the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) began to arrive at Roberts International Airport (RIA), on 4 August 2003. As of now, there are about 1,500 troops, the bulk of whom are from Nigeria, who are conducting operations in Monrovia. They have not yet started to deploy countrywide, where fighting has been reported in some areas. In addition to Ghana, other contingents are expected to deploy. Pledges to provide troops have been made by Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Mali, Senegal and Togo. Once at full strength, the peacekeeping force will comprise between 3,000 to 3,500 troops.

16. The deployment of ECOMIL has been welcomed with a sense of relief by the local population, which paid a heavy toll to the fighting that followed the launching, on 19 July 2003, of a major offensive on Monrovia by LURD. On 14 August 2003, LURD forces relinquished control of the Free Port of Monrovia to ECOMIL, and withdrew also from Bushrod Island. The following day, as the division between the areas controlled by the Government and those under LURD control vanished, thousands of people crossed the bridge linking Monrovia to Bushrod Island and the Port.

17. On its part, the United States of America has positioned 2,300 Marines off the coast of Liberia to assist ECOMIL. On 14 August 2003, 200 Marines entered Liberia, and have been conducting patrols in the area surrounding RIA and the Free Port. Since then, about half of them have been withdrawn to ships off the coast.

IV. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

18. The humanitarian situation in Liberia is appalling. Several years of conflict have had devastating consequences, ranging from the lack of safe drinking water to increasing level of preventable diseases and shortage of medical and food supplies. Liberia is ranked 174 out of 175 by the UNDP Human Development Index. As many as 500,000 to 600,000 people are internally displaced (IDPs). In addition, over 200,000 Liberians are refugees in the neighboring countries. Many humanitarian agencies were forced to leave the country after being targeted by government militia and rebels, who looted their stocks and equipment.

19. Since the deployment of ECOMIL, the situation has somewhat improved, especially in the capital. The opening of the Monrovia Port has made it possible for humanitarian operations to resume. This has also enabled NGOs and private companies to proceed with plans for commodity deliveries to Monrovia. Furthermore, humanitarian organizations have started to work towards the extension of their activities beyond Monrovia.

20. On 17 August 2003, the Government of Liberia, LURD and MODEL signed an Agreement in Accra to ensure free and unimpeded access to all territories under their control, as well as to guarantee the security and safety of international organizations and NGOs. This Agreement was witnessed by ECOWAS, the AU and the UN.

21. However, the security situation remains precarious. This is constraining the delivery of humanitarian assistance. In addition, fighting in some parts of the country, in particular in Buchanan and Bong County, is threatening the safety of dozens of thousand of IDPs, including women, children and the elderly.

V. ROLE OF THE AU

22. From the onset of the Liberian conflict, the AU has been involved in efforts to find a peaceful and negotiated solution. Thus, the AU Commission participated actively in the Accra negotiations that led to the June Ceasefire Agreement and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 18 August 2003.

23. On 6 August 2003, and as part of the AU's efforts to promote peace and stability in the Mano River Region, I appointed Ambassador Ramtane Lamamra as my Special Envoy for Liberia. Amb. Lamamra, who is a seasoned diplomat from Algeria, will be working closely with the leaders of the countries of the Region and with ECOWAS and the United Nations.

24. Equally, the Commission has been actively involved in the military aspects of the peace process, through its participation in the meetings of the ECOWAS Defence and Security Commission and the Mediation and Security Council, as well as through its military representation on the Joint Verification Team (JVT). On 1st August 2003, the Commission appointed an Officer to participate in the reconnaissance mission of Monrovia and in the planning towards the deployment of the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). The Officer is subsequently expected to represent the Commission on the JMC.

25. On 11 August 2003, the Commission received a letter from World Vision Africa, urging the AU to take the lead and do more to end the conflict in Liberia. In particular, World Vision Africa called on the AU to:

- take the lead in drawing attention to the crisis in Liberia and to step up its efforts in mobilizing the necessary resources for the peacekeeping efforts;
- ensure that human rights, in particular the rights of children, are protected; and

- make a long term commitment to Liberia, with the objectives of establishing the rule of law, ensuring respect for human rights and laying the foundation for a free and open political process.

VI. OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

26. With the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the peace process in Liberia has now reached an important stage. But agreements would mean little if they are not sustained by a genuine political will and determination to translate the commitments made into concrete actions on the ground.

27. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement makes several references to the African Union, which, together with other members of the international community, is invited to facilitate the implementation of the commitments entered into by the Liberian Parties. I also should like to recall that, in its Communiqué of 24 July, the Central Organ called on the Commission to take all appropriate steps to sensitize the international community and to facilitate the mobilization of the requisite resources to sustain ECOWAS efforts. More generally, the Commission was requested to work closely with ECOWAS with the view to ensuring a speedy resolution of the conflict.

28. It is my intention, in light of the above, to identify concrete measures that should be taken by the AU Commission to support the peace process in Liberia. In the meantime, there is need to establish an AU presence in Monrovia to enable our Organization to play the role expected of it in the IMC and other structures that are being established, so as to take the process to its logical conclusion, including the post-conflict reconstruction and rehabilitation of Liberia.

29. On its part, and in light of the forgoing, the Central Organ may wish to:

- welcome the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and appeal to the Parties to scrupulously observe their obligations contained therein;
- express its sincere gratitude to the current Chairman of ECOWAS, President John Kufuor, President Obasanjo and the other Leaders of the region, as well as the UN Secretary-General, for the sustained efforts and the critical contributions they made towards the achievement of a negotiated solution;

- express its appreciation for the role played by the international community, including the UN, the EU, and members of the ICGL, in support of ECOWAS efforts, and call upon them to facilitate the mobilization of the requisite resources to ensure the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement;
- express its appreciation for the role played by the civil society organizations of Liberia, including the Inter-Religious Council and the Mano River Women Peace Network, both before and during the negotiations, and encourage them to contribute to the scrupulous implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement;
- welcome the appointment of Ambassador Lamamra as AU Special Envoy for Liberia, and encourage the Commission to pursue its efforts aimed at defining practical steps to support the peace process in Liberia; and
- express its concern at the prevailing humanitarian situation and call upon the international community to render the necessary assistance in that regard.