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## LIBERIAN AID AGENCIES FIGHT TO GET TO CIVIL WAR VICTIMS

*by Peter da Costa*

BANJUL, Aug 3 (IPS) - Aid agencies are struggling to reach the weak and hungry in Liberia, despite a ceasefire and high hopes among West African peacemakers that the country's four-year civil war is finally over.

According to representatives of more than 30 international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Liberia, thousands of displaced people -- especially children and the aged -- are dying as the warring factions haggle over how aid should be disbursed.

"It's a problem of who will let relief agencies pass through their territory," International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Liberia chief, Paul Bonard, said in a radio interview Tuesday monitored here. The most critically-affected region is Lofa county in the north-east bordering Guinea, where fighting between the National Patriotic Front (NPL) and Ulmo shortly before the weekend ceasefire forced relief agencies to virtually abandon their work.

## U.S. TO SUSPEND MILITARY AID TO NIGERIA

*by Jim Lobe*

WASHINGTON, Aug 3 (IPS) - The United States will not resume military aid to Nigeria at this time despite the decision in Lagos to create an interim government, the State Department said here Tuesday.

Washington still insists that President Ibrahim Babangida and other military leaders step down in favour of a new civilian government by Aug. 28, according to a Department official, who asked not to be identified. "General Babangida has repeatedly said he would relinquish power on August 27," said

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The U.N. High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) puts malnutrition rates in Lofa between 20 and 30 percent, but says the figure is higher among some elderly and the young. Before fighting abated five weeks ago, the agency says 15 people were dying a day.

Humanitarian sources say a mass of refugees and displaced people thought to number more than 100,000, are now attempting to make their way home along the road from Gbarnga, the stronghold of the main armed faction the NPL, 180 km north of the capital Monrovia. Aid chiefs now warn that unless provisions for humanitarian work under the latest accord, including a "corridor of tranquility", are put into action, more displaced Liberians could die needlessly in the chaos.

"Every one of the factions has different propositions for how aid agencies should do their work, and they are saying 'you do things our way'," complained the Geneva-based ICRC's Bonard.

According to Bonard, the 500 truckloads a month of food and relief supplies aid agencies had positioned for the immediate relief effort cannot begin rolling into the countryside until a blueprint is agreed on with the factions.

They, despite agreeing to stop fighting, now see aid as a potential tool in the expected political process. "Everyone is responsible for what is happening in Liberia, and it is unbearable. People are very weak and it's not easy for them to go back to their villages," Bonard added.

Nicholas Hinton, director of the UK-based Save the Children charity who last week visited Liberia, said in a radio interview Tuesday it was a matter of

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urgency that the consequences of war be addressed. "The thing that struck me most was the appalling psychological damage done to thousands...Of children who have seen things that children shouldn't see," said Hinton, stressing the need to fight child killer diseases such as measles by prioritising basic health services in the hinterland.

NPFL leader Charles Taylor, who began the civil war in December 1989 and has reneged on four previous ceasefire accords, told his fighters over NPFL radio: "Some of you were shoeshine boys, carpenters and farmers. We ask you to return to your villages, towns and cities and begin to rebuild your lives".

Officials of ecomog, the five-nation West African military coalition sent to stop the war in August 1991 which is based in Monrovia, say the ceasefire, which began midnight last Sunday, is holding, with NPFL fighters crossing the lines to surrender. Under the terms of the accord, agreed two weeks ago in Geneva and signed Jul. 25 in Benin, all factions are to be disarmed and encamped by an enlarged version of the 16,000-strong peace force.

The emphasis will be on repatriation, resettlement and rehabilitation before plans can be refined for countrywide elections early next year. The immediate concern is the 85 percent of Liberia's 2.4 million pre-war population thought to have been displaced at one time or another during the conflict, during which some 150,000 people are estimated to have lost their lives.

UNHCR figures released in June spell out the vast scale of the task facing Liberia's relief NGOs. In addition to some 100,000 Liberians displaced inside the country, there are 150,000 Sierra Leoneans who fled across the border to escape a related conflict in their country. The operation officials say will be among the biggest of its kind ever will have to cater for 450,000 Liberians and 150,000 Sierra Leoneans in Guinea, 250,000 Liberians in Cote d'Ivoire 10,000 in Ghana, 8,000 in Sierra Leone and 1,500 in Nigeria.

A 25-member UNHCR team left Monrovia over the weekend to set up operations at Vahun, a border town in Lofa county bordering Guinea and Sierra Leone. The team is equipped to build shelters to house up to 100,000 displaced people. Most aid agencies now hope the end to fighting will lead to conditions being created for the implementation of an emergency relief operation that has been in place, with constant revisions, for two years.

"The peace accord in Benin will add to our operational capacity, but we were planning for this even before the peace accord was signed," said UNHCR Liberia chief, Augustine Mahiga.

Liberia's three main factions are due to hold a technical meeting later this week to thrash out logistical problems in the aftermath of the ceasefire.

The meeting, due to be held Friday, is expected to tackle the issue of relief supplies. Observers say a joint committee through which the U.N. Special Coordinator for Liberia (UNSCOL) will coordinate aid distribution may be set up.

Most Liberia-watchers now see peace, however problematic, as inevitable, as much because people are tired of war as because the United Nations and Organisation of African Unity (OAU) broadened the mediation effort spearheaded by West Africans.

The Monrovia-based interim government (IGNU) is reported to have ordered the release into Ecomog disarmament centres of all NPFL fighters captured during Taylor's abortive attempt to dislodge the military coalition last October.

According to radio reports monitored here, president Amos Sawyer, has also named legislature speaker Bismarck Kuyon as the IGNU's nominee to a five-member transitional council of state which under the accord will rule Liberia in the seven-month period leading to elections.

Eagerly awaited is the arrival in Liberia of additional ECOMOG contingents from non-ECOWAS African states, as well as the arrival of a force of 200 Blue Helmets, whose role -- pending a U.N. Security Council decision -- will be to monitor the disarmament process. The race is now on to mobilise the resources needed to guarantee the peace plan's implementation. A 161-million dollar U.N. appeal launched earlier this year has yet to be filled by donor pledges.

"It's...critical that the international community play their part," said Save the Children's Hinton, adding that unless the European Community, British government and United States take the lead, "I have fears for peace."

## LET'S SAVE THE CHILDREN FROM WAR, SAYS AID GROUP

*by Moyiga Nduru*

LONDON, Aug 3 (IPS) - The ugly scars of one of the world's most vicious civil wars were portrayed for all to see at a London hotel Tuesday when an aid group presented drawings done by Liberia's children, depicting the ravages of war in their homeland.

There was a drawing for example, showing how soldiers loot, torture and kill helpless civilians. Another portrays chaos in the wake of a bombing by ECOMOG, the West African Peace keeping forces, of an area controlled by the main rebel leader Charles Taylor. A plane drops a bomb on a house, setting it ablaze, leaving one child dead.

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The pictures were brought to Britain by Save the Children, a British charity which on Tuesday launched a special appeal to relieve the desperate plight of children facing conflicts across the globe. "What children experience in conflict is at times literally indescribable," explained Nicholas Hinton, director of Save the Children.

"The children can remain silent for months reliving the horrors they have witnessed, like the death of parents, the loss of siblings, the devastation of landmines and the violence of economic deprivation all take a destructive toll on their lives," he added.

Save the Children fears that in this post Cold War era, an increasing number of human emergencies are being created in countries tragically falling prey to internal conflict.

The organisation says non governmental agencies like itself which are shouldering the burden of providing emergency aid are being stretched to the limit. The organisation said it spent more than 100 million pounds (150 million dollars) in 1992/93 on programmes to relieve the suffering of children in countries across the world -- the children of Liberia, Somalia and Iraq the most visible victims.

"This figure is symptomatic of the ever increasing load falling on the shoulders of non-governmental organisations (NGOs)," said Mike Aaronson, the organisation's overseas director.

In Liberia alone, the civil war has caused massive disruption throughout the country. It is estimated that there have been more than 150,000 casualties. Up to 700,000 people have fled the country, straining refugee facilities in neighbouring Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Monrovia's population has more than doubled from 400,000 to 850,000, placing the capital's limited resources under immense pressure. "Thousands of children now in Monrovia have lost or been separated from their parents," said Hinton who has recently returned from Monrovia.

He said many children had been traumatised. "Children have also been used as soldiers by factions fighting in the conflict," he claimed, referring to the country's bloody civil war which began in 1989.

UNICEF estimates that 250,000 children died of starvation in Somalia in 1992. At that time, Save the Children was feeding 30,000 children a day at the height of the famine.

According to UNOSOM, the United Nations Operation in Somalia, one million Somalis are in urgent need of relief and rehabilitation assistance.

There are still more than 100,000 displaced children in the capital Mogadishu alone, and the vast majority of these are dependent on food aid and are still extremely vulnerable to any interruption of aid supply, says UNOSOM. The Kurds in northern

Iraq are also suffering -- on the one hand from the embargo imposed by the U.N. on Iraq, as well as from Iraqi aggression and Baghdad's own embargo against the minority group.

According to Save the Children, there are more than 100,000 children in the region living in appalling conditions without clean water and proper sanitation. Hinton stressed the need for the international community to respond to this situation in a more committed and coordinated way, and to make sure that the humanitarian agenda is not lost and the children's needs not forgotten in putting pressure on the Saddam Hussein regime.

Children who play no part in bringing about conflict, should be helped to avoid them always being on the sharp end of conflict, Hinton emphasised. "We have always believed that childhood is precious and that we must protect the rights of the child as enshrined in the U.N. convention." ■

## MOBUTU IS NOT INVITED TO BELGIUM'S ROYAL FUNERAL

*by Alecia McKenzie*

BRUSSELS, Aug 3 (IPS) - Heads of state and royalty from all over the world will gather in Belgium this Saturday for the funeral of King Baudouin I, but there will be one notable absence -- that of President Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire, the former Belgian colony.

The Zairean leader is not being invited to the funeral of the king, Belgium's Foreign Affairs Minister Willy Claes said Tuesday. "It's not purely a personal matter," Claes said on local radio here. "It's a judgement on who is responsible for the degeneration of the situation in a country, and therefore at the same time responsible for the political relations between the two countries."

Excluding Mobutu from the funeral of the king, who died from a heart attack Saturday while on holiday in Spain, marks the nadir in the tense relations that have existed between both countries for years. Since 1990, following the massacre at Lumbashi, Belgium has been putting pressure on Mobutu to relinquish power he has held for almost 30 years. The European Community (EC) and the United States has also suspended aid to Zaire because of human rights abuses.

Ironically, Zaire was the first country to offer condolences to the Belgian state. On Sunday Zaire's

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ambassador to Brussels, Kimbulu Moyansowa Lokwa, declared that Mobutu had been personally informed at around 1.30 AM. on Sunday of the king's death and had gathered his closest and highest-ranking officials to inform them of "this tragedy".

The ambassador said Mobutu remembered with emotion the gesture made by Belgium's royal couple when his first wife Maman Mobutu had died.

King Baudouin and Queen Fabiola had visited him to offer their condolences and support. Mobutu often referred to the king as "Mon Cousin" (My Cousin). On Tuesday, after funeral rebuttal of Mobutu was announced, Zaire's embassy officials could not be reached and the embassy phones were not answered.

King Baudouin, initially a supporter of Mobutu, was insulted on at least one occasion by the Zairean state, and now political observers are noting the irony.

"It's all rather funny," says Veronique Kiesel, an expert on Zaire who writes for 'Le Soir' newspaper here. "Still, this means a total rupture between the two countries. It's the end."

The countries had been linked for more than 100 years beginning in 1885 when Baudouin's great grandfather, Leopold II, was declared absolute monarch of the Congo Free State. The region became the Belgian Congo colony in 1908 and was ruled brutally by Belgium.

By 1951, when King Baudouin inherited the monarchy at the age of 21, the people of the Congo thought their lot would improve, and they gave a

rapturous welcome to the young king when he visited in 1953. But little changed, and in 1959 conflict broke out in the Belgian Congo, as Zaire was then called. Against the advice of his government, Baudouin went to Leopoldville (Kinshasa) and was jeered by demonstrators.

The following year he granted independence to the colony, returning to Leopoldville the day before the official proclamation of independence on June 29. This time, the welcome was warm but the king gave a speech that the Congolese considered paternalistic.

Since then, relations have see-sawed, characterised mostly by tit-for-tat moves and repeated cases of Belgians fleeing from Zaire for their lives after outbreaks of violence.

Throughout the upheavals, King Baudouin and Mobutu maintained an amicable relationship, with the king going to Zaire in 1985 to celebrate the country's 25th anniversary of independence. But in 1989, the palace broke off relations with Mobutu, after a Zairean delegation publicly read a letter from the palace recommending that a contract be given to a Belgian firm.

The king felt betrayed and he never forgave Mobutu, according to political analysts. This year, when the Belgian Foreign Ministry held its New Year's reception, Zaire's ambassador received no invitation. Now it is Mobutu's turn. He had ordered that all flags in Zaire should fly at half-mast throughout the week to mourn the king's death. It is likely that the order will be rescinded. ■

## U.S. TO SUSPEND MILITARY AID TO NIGERIA

*(continued from front cover)*

the spokesperson. "We hope that he and the National Defence and Security Council will respect that commitment and ensure that Nigeria has an unhindered civilian government August 28."

Officials of the two legal political parties created by Babangida's government to contest the Jun. 12 presidential elections agreed at a meeting in Abuja over the weekend to create an interim government with Babangida and the military. The decision reportedly caused a deep split in the Social Democratic Party (SDP) whose presidential candidate, Mashood Abiola, won a strong majority in the June poll.

Abiola's supporters, human rights groups and civic bodies have reportedly protested any move to form an interim government and deny the SDP candidate the presidency.

The State Department noted that under the agreement reached over the weekend, a government will consist of representatives of the military and the two parties. The interim government will replace the transitional council which currently rules the country, according to the State Department.

The Department said its decision not to suspend sanctions it imposed on Nigeria after the military refused to recognise the elections does not mean that it supports Abiola alone.

"The United States has always supported the democratic process, not individual candidates," a spokesperson stressed. But the Department said it had "no intention of lifting" the sanctions imposed on Nigeria at this time. Those sanctions include suspension of the U.S. military training programme for Nigeria, the expulsion of Nigerian military attaches from the United States, and the termination of all U.S. aid, except humanitarian assistance or aid channeled through non-governmental organisations or local authorities. ■



## NEWSBRIEFS...

### WOMEN IN THE PHILIPPINES URGED TO BREAK SILENCE ON RAPE, INCEST

MANILA, Aug 3 (IPS) - Traditionally used to suffering in silence, Filipino women are now being encouraged to speak up and organise to defend themselves against the sudden rise in crimes against women.

"We are encouraging women victims of rape, incest, spouse abuse and sexual harassment to come forward and speak up," said Imelda Nicolas, head of the National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW), at a press conference here Tuesday. "We want to rectify the persistent belief that women are always at fault because of their sexual history, clothes and behaviour. It cannot be their fault since the men are the ones who do the raping," she added.

In response to the recent spate of rape-murder cases here, the NCRFW, a governmental agency, is cooperating with the Philippine National Police (PNP) to set up women's desks in police stations nationwide. Non-governmental groups had earlier launched a pilot project in Quezon City to test the feasibility of such an effort.

"We are trying to build a career for police-women. A woman victim of violence can relate more to a policewoman who in turn can empathise with her and investigate her case," said PNP Senior Superintendent, Col Reynaldo Wycoco. "But this should be a joint collective effort by the police, the judiciary and the community. The PNP will be very active in the campaign against crimes against women, but there are cases when our hands are tied," said Wycoco.

For instance, he said, the police cannot interfere with domestic violence unless the victims themselves ask for help. In crimes against chastity, victims must first file a complaint before any investigation can be done. There are now 230 policewomen in Metro Manila, and a new batch of 66 is being trained to be investigators. But financing is needed for training, Wycoco said.

According to Maj Ernesto Arcellana, head of the PNP's Community Inter-relations Office, women are given less dangerous jobs, but can join elite PNP groups if they qualify.

In Manila, majority of the crimes committed are against property, followed by crimes against persons, and crimes against chastity. Last year, reported rape cases totalled about 1,130 -- the same number

of rape cases for the first half of 1993 alone...

### SPAIN'S AMBITIOUS EMPLOYMENT PLAN FOR IMMIGRANTS FAILS

MADRID, Aug 3 (IPS) - Spain's ambitious plan to provide employment for 20,500 immigrants is a complete failure -- because businessmen have not made the job offers the Spanish government said they were committed to make.

Government and union sources are blaming it on the deep economic crisis in the country but Hamid Beyuki, president of the Association of Moroccan Immigrant Workers in Spain (ATIME) asserts that "there are political reasons involved". In April the Council of Ministers approved a new programme to provide jobs for the immigrants, on the basis of estimates that 20,500 jobs were available to them in Spain. These posts include 10,000 permanent and 10,500 temporary jobs.

This figure was based on the official calculations that there are 45,000 jobs per year that the Spanish refuse to accept. After the so called quota plan was approved, an avalanche of people assailed the Spanish consulate in neighbouring Morocco, wanting to apply for one of the jobs offered in Madrid.

However, three months later, none of these jobs have become a reality, since they depended on concrete offers to be made by local businessmen, who have not come through with their offers. "It has been a badly designed plan, that raised hopes without any basis," Beyuki, who is also a member of the General Workers Union (UGT), stated.

"The idea in itself was not bad, because it was an attempt to regulate immigration and prevent the desperate attempts of thousands of Magrebi and Africans who try to cross the strait of Gibraltar and reach Spain," he added. "However, all this has been badly staged. Obviously no job offers should have been made while there were still no concrete offers from the employers," he pointed out.

The government approved plan stipulates that the Spanish businessmen must pay for the trip made by immigrant workers to Spain, as well as the return ticket in the case of temporary employment. Analysts agree that this was the main obstacle to the cooperation of the businessmen in the initiative, since they could easily fill their quota with foreigners, including the 300,000 illegal immigrants who are already in the country....

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