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Liberia: Issues for the United States

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Liberia: Issues for the United States

SUMMARY

The Liberian civil war that eventually toppled President Samuel K. Doe has caused over half of Liberia's 2.5 million people to become refugees or displaced within their own country. Widespread malnutrition existed in 1990 as the civil war drastically reduced food production in the rural areas and cut off international trade. It was not until the West African peacekeeping force known as the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) occupied the capital city of Monrovia in August that foreign humanitarian assistance was able to reach the population.

The United States, a longtime provider of assistance to Liberia and leading trade partner, has supplied the major portion of international humanitarian assistance in response to the food and refugee situation. A total of $131.6 million was provided in humanitarian assistance during 1990 and 1991. Other forms of assistance had been cut off in 1990 because of the Doe government's failure to pay its debts to the United States. The large amount of U.S. aid that was provided in the early years of President Doe's rule was gradually reduced after 1985 because of widespread human rights violations and mismanagement of the Liberian government's revenues.

Although the U.S. Government refused to intervene militarily in the civil war or provide a peacekeeping role in cease-fire arrangements, it did support the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in its mediation efforts. After several attempts, ECOWAS was able to mediate a cease-fire between the guerrilla factions that continued to fight after the death of President Doe in September 1990. The organization also promoted a peace agreement that would lead to elections for a permanent government. ECOWAS was heavily involved because it sought to prevent the Liberian hostilities from expanding into a regional conflict involving surrounding countries.

In mid-1991 two governments existed in Liberia. One was an interim government headed by interim President Amos Sawyer who first was appointed by ECOWAS and then elected by most of the delegates to an All-Liberian Conference in March 1990. The second was the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) government, with its self-appointed president, Charles Taylor, the guerrilla organization's leader. The two "presidents" met at Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire, in July and agreed to work toward elections, to be held in January 1992. In September the interim government and the NPFL further agreed that all factions would disarm and encamp their guerrillas under ECOMOG's supervision. The composition of ECOMOG was changed to include Senegalese troops and to reduce the number of Nigerian troops. By late October the NPFL had agreed to a timetable for disarming and encamping its forces. In early January 1992, ECOMOG peacekeeping forces were starting to deploy into Taylor-held territory, and January 10 was set for the formal opening of Liberia's roads.

Several bills have been introduced in Congress to ensure that adequate humanitarian assistance continues to reach Liberia and Liberian refugees in neighboring countries.

ISSUE DEFINITION

Because of the historically close relationship between the United States and Liberia, the United States has been a major donor of humanitarian assistance to Liberians during the civil war. Congress and the Administration have been concerned that adequate assistance be given to help refugees and those displaced by the war. Factors in the current debate on Liberia involve human rights considerations, how committed the Liberians are to a democratic future, and whether the Brooke amendment that cut off aid in 1990 should be waived to permit assistance in Liberia's reconstruction. Both Congress and the Administration believe the United States should encourage Liberia to follow through with planned multiparty elections that are part of West African mediated negotiations.

BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS

Liberia in Brief

Population: 2.7 million
Size: 43,000 sq. mi. Slightly larger than Tennessee
Religion: 70% traditional, 20% Muslim, 10% Christian
Literacy: 35%
Per capita income: $395 (1988)
GNP: $988 million (1988)

Liberia

Introduction

The state of Liberia was founded in 1822 when a group of freed slaves from the United States settled in the coastal areas, particularly around what became the capital city of Monrovia. The settlers were financed by the U.S. Government under President James Monroe and were assisted by that Administration in negotiating with Liberian chiefs for land. The country became independent in 1847 with a constitution modeled after the U.S. Constitution and, for 133 years, as Africa fell under European colonialism and subsequently the throes of the liberation struggle, Liberia remained independent and stable.

Over the years, the population became polarized between Americo-Liberians and indigenous ethnic groups, and this polarization continues today. The Americo-Liberians live in the urban areas and hold jobs in the modern economy, while about 80% of the population live in the rural areas, are engaged in subsistence agriculture, and have a lower standard of living than people in the urban areas. The Americo-Liberians controlled the government until 1980 when Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe ousted President William R. Tolbert in a violent coup. President Tolbert was killed, and the new Doe regime suspended the constitution, established martial law, publicly executed 13 officials of the former Tolbert government, and established an authoritarian government similar to that of his predecessor. The country was returned to civilian rule in 1985 when Master Sergeant Doe was elected President in elections that were widely regarded as rigged. Under Doe the country was ruled by indigenous Liberians, but the Krahn people, the small ethnic group to which President Doe belonged, were the greatest beneficiaries. The Doe government, which was notorious for human rights abuses, mistreated non-Krahn indigenous ethnic groups along with the Americo-Liberians.

These ethnic hostilities increased with the onset of the civil war. Two guerrilla groups have fought with the soldiers of former President Samuel Doe. The National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor crossed Liberia's border with Cote d'Ivoire into Nimba county in December 1989. The second group is the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL) led by Prince Johnson. After guerrillas invaded Nimba County, Doe's soldiers, who were mostly Krahn, committed atrocities against the Gio and Mano people living there who the government believed were assisting the rebels. These ethnic differences appear to have greatly contributed to the support given by the Liberian people to the guerrilla effort to topple the Doe government. Failure of the Doe government to economically develop the country and raise the standard of living for average Liberians and the guerrilla leaders' pursuit of personal power are other factors that ended the Doe government.

Humanitarian Situation

Refugees and Displaced Persons

Liberia's civil war has caused over half the country's population of 2.7 million to become displaced or to flee to neighboring countries as refugees. In October 1991 an estimated 600,000 people were refugees in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, the Gambia, and Mali. An additional 500,000 people were displaced inside Liberia, according to AID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA). Total U.S. humanitarian assistance provided to Liberia since the beginning of the civil war was $131.4 million as of Oct. 22, 1991. Of this amount $127.9 million was U.S. Government assistance and $3.5 million was assistance from U.S. private agencies. Of the total Liberian relief as of October ($222.4 million) the international community contributed $91.0 million.

Most of the U.S. Government aid was contributed as food and the remainder was in cash contributions. Food supplies were distributed mostly by the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Medecins Sans Frontieres/Belgium (MSF/Belgium). The United States has also funded the reactivation of Monrovia's municipal water system, and the International Red Cross has pledged to continue its operation. MSF/Belgium has

reactivated health clinics in Monrovia with U.S. funding and medicines donated by U.S. pharmaceutical companies. In 1991 United Nations programs are emphasizing recovery in the rural areas. The United States is contributing to the U.N. program in Monrovia, but, according to AID, rural recovery can only occur when the country is at peace.

By July 1991 the State Department's assessment of the Liberian refugee situation was that the basic life support needs of refugees were being met. There are some remaining problems, however. More clean water is needed, food deliveries need to be more reliable, some refugees are still crowded and without adequate shelter, refugee children's education has been interrupted, and nutritional needs should be monitored regularly according to the Department of State's Bureau for Refugee Programs. Although the United Nations and other observers agree that Liberia is on the road to recovery because of foreign emergency assistance, they argue that "nearly all displaced persons, refugees, and returnees live in destitution, lacking the basic necessities of life." These observers ask that in addition to food aid Liberia be given help in water sanitation and health care; education; agricultural tools and seeds; restocking of poultry, farm animals, and fish; repatriation; and treating children traumatized by violence and brutality of the civil war.

Because of the invasion of Sierra Leone by Charles Taylor's guerrillas in March, 107,000 people have fled into Guinea; 97,000 of these are Sierra Leoneans and 10,000 are Liberians. Inside Sierra Leone 80,000 people have been displaced. An additional 12,000 Sierra Leoneans have fled to Liberia. Relief operations have been terminated in the border area that was invaded, and relief agencies have been forced to set up a refugee camp outside the capital city of Freetown. As a result of the invasion some host countries (Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Cote d'Ivoire) now perceive Liberian refugees as a threat to their own security and, consequently, their generosity toward the refugees has been reduced.

Neighboring countries have been generous in helping the Liberian refugees, and without this aid many Liberians could not have survived. Nevertheless, the host countries have reaped numerous benefits in return. In Guinea, for example, roads and health services have been improved. Host villages in Guinea have received additional school supplies to compensate for the presence of refugees in their classrooms. In some cases, food rations received by refugees have been shared with their local hosts, and some refugees have helped their hosts work the fields.

The United States is now preparing to help the Sierra Leoneans affected by Taylor's invasion. Donors are beginning to think in terms of repatriation of the Liberian refugees, and the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is now preparing for an eventual repatriation program. The United States, however, believes that Liberia is not peaceful and secure enough for massive repatriation even though about 20,000 Liberians have returned to Monrovia from Freetown, Sierra Leone, and there are reports of other Liberian refugees returning to Taylor-held areas.

Food Situation

One of the most devastating effects of Liberia's civil war has been widespread famine. In Monrovia at the end of 1990, 50 to 60 people a day were dying of starvation and disease, and between 55% and 80% of the population was severely malnourished. By July 1991 malnutrition in Monrovia had been reduced to less than 4%, while in the

rural areas it is now 3%. This dramatic development was the result of assistance from foreign donors, with the United States being the largest. International food relief efforts in Monrovia made use of a local Liberian organization called Special Emergency Life Food (SELF). SELF began distributing U.S. and U.N. food supplies in October 1990. It was widely agreed that this food distribution was made possible by ECOMOG's presence in Monrovia.

The United States not only provided food supplies generally but also provided funds to aid orphans and farmers. The Liberian civil war severely cut food production in the rural areas, and 70% of Liberian farmers reportedly lost both their crops and seeds. Most of the farmers missed a part of the 1989 harvest season and the 1990 planting season. An ongoing "Seed for Rice Program" uses U.S. and U.N. funds to trade edible rice to local farmers who had a good harvest in exchange for seed rice. The seed rice is then distributed to farmers in areas of need. Distribution is made by CRS and MSF/Belgium. In the last planting season in Liberia 56% of the farmers had rice seed to plant because of these efforts. The United States hopes to raise that level in 1991 through new grants to provide seeds and tools.

Human Rights Violations

During the civil war thousands of civilians have been killed and abused, both by soldiers of the former Doe government and by guerrillas of both factions. Some civilians were killed because they were regarded as collaborators with the other side, but many were killed because of ethnic hostilities. The Liberian military under President Doe, controlled by the Krahn, killed, detained, beat, and tortured many opposition leaders. An attempted coup in 1985 led by Thomas Quiwonkpa, a Gio, caused Doe's soldiers to seek retribution against Gio and the related Mano peoples, as well as other ethnic groups. All these groups were from Nimba County, the area from which Taylor's supporters are drawn. These ethnic tensions, which already existed during Doe's period of rule, were exacerbated by the civil war. The total number of civilians killed is estimated by AID to be between 10,000 and 13,000, although some estimates appearing in the press are considerably higher. The most widely publicized example of civilian abuse in 1990 was the killing by Doe's soldiers of at least 200 to 300 civilian refugees in a church in Monrovia in July 1990. There were also unverified reports of Taylor's rebels killing 200 civilians in August of the same year. Some have attributed the civilian killings to the poor training and lack of discipline both of soldiers of the Doe government and of the guerrillas.

Torture and execution of captured combatants was widespread. Doe's government tortured and systematically executed suspected sympathizers with Taylor's NPFL, while both guerrilla factions beat and tortured prisoners to extract information. President Doe himself became a victim of such treatment in September when Prince Johnson's INPFL captured, tortured, and killed him. Charles Taylor reportedly executed two leaders in Nimba County who were competing with him for leadership. Although he denies the charge, he has failed to produce either man alive, according to reports.

Events of the Civil War

The guerrillas opposing President Samuel Doe's government entered the northern county of Nimba in late December 1989. The invading guerrillas, led by Charles Taylor, are known as the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Taylor reportedly gives no ideological rationale for seeking leadership of Liberia and according to many observers simply wants power and money. As a former official of Doe's government he was blamed for financial mismanagement. He was specifically charged with embezzling between $900,000 and $1 million of government funds. Later, one of Taylor's deputies, Prince Johnson, broke away to form a separate faction, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL). The Doe government's response to the December invasion was a scorched earth policy that included the killing of hundreds of civilians and the burning and looting of villages in Nimba County. The government's measures caused many formerly uncommitted citizens to support the guerrillas against President Doe. As the civil war continued it degenerated into ethnic killings, and atrocities were committed by both Doe's army and the rebel factions. Doe's soldiers killed not only guerrillas but their civilian supporters as well, most of whom belonged to the Gio and Mano ethnic groups. INPFL rebels in turn killed not only Doe's soldiers who belonged to the Krahn and Mandingo, but also civilians from those ethnic groups. The hostilities eventually forced half the population to flee to neighboring countries or be displaced within Liberia's borders.

As the two guerrilla forces moved closer to the capital city of Monrovia in May 1990, the United States ordered nonessential personnel and dependents to leave Liberia and strongly advised private U.S. citizens to depart because of deteriorating conditions. U.S. Marines evacuated over 1,000 Americans and other foreign nationals in June and early August. The United States offered to evacuate President Doe, but he refused and remained in the country.

The first peace talks attempted were between the Doe government and the guerrillas and were facilitated by the United States in June. The rebel factions, however, were not interested in peace at that point. Instead they began offensives against Doe's forces in Monrovia in early July and later in the month killed 200 to 300 refugees who had taken refuge in a church in the city. West African countries, fearing for the safety of their nationals in Liberia, called a meeting of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Banjul, the Gambia, in early August. At the meeting ECOWAS drafted a peace plan and agreed to send a joint military force, the Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), to implement it. ECOMOG was sent into Liberia in late August specifically to impose a cease-fire, to help Liberians establish an interim government until elections could be held, to stop the killing of innocent civilians, and to ensure the safe evacuation of foreign nationals. Some ECOWAS members, however, did not support the West African peacekeeping force. Mostly Francophone countries, these members saw Nigeria's military dominance within ECOMOG as a means of extending Nigerian influence in the West African region. The two guerrilla factions also were divided on support of ECOMOG with Johnson's INPFL cooperating with the West African force and Taylor's NPFL refusing cooperation.

To the embarrassment of ECOMOG officials, Prince Johnson's rebels captured President Doe while he was visiting ECOMOG headquarters in September. Johnson's troops tortured and killed President Doe. Despite his death, Doe's soldiers continued to defend Monrovia against the guerrillas, but eventually sided with ECOMOG and

Johnson against a takeover of the capital city by Charles Taylor's forces. For weeks the city was in turmoil with widespread killings, destruction of basic facilities such as the electric power plant and water system, and an extremely malnourished population. ECOMOG helped install an interim Liberian government in Monrovia in November 1990, and appointed a Liberian intellectual, Dr. Amos Sawyer as interim President.

Because Taylor's group continually violated agreements, two cease-fires were signed by the hostile guerrilla factions and the remains of Doe's army: one at Bamako, Mali, in November 1990, and another in February 1991 at Lome, Togo. An All-Liberia Conference was held in March and April of 1991 that failed in its objective to persuade all parties to agree on a peace plan. Taylor's representatives walked out of the conference, but the remaining delegations elected Amos Sawyer as the interim President. Sawyer, a political scientist and former university dean, helped draft Liberia's constitution under Doe, but he was imprisoned in 1984 for criticizing Doe's policies and for establishing an opposition party. As interim President, Sawyer has the responsibility of running Liberia's government until elections are held and supervising those elections. A date was not set, but it was hoped that elections would be held by October, if Charles Taylor could be persuaded to participate.

The danger of the Liberian civil war becoming a regional conflict became evident in late March 1991 when Taylor's forces attacked villages in Sierra Leone and clashed with Sierra Leonean troops. Taylor's forces are thought to include many non-Liberians (Sierra Leoneans, Gambians, Ghanaians, Togolese, and others). These supporters reportedly expect Taylor's help in overthrowing their own governments. Charles Taylor's motivation for such invasions is thought to be deestabilization of those countries that support ECOMOG, which he regards as being responsible for preventing him from taking military control of Monrovia. When its territory was invaded, the government of Sierra Leone appealed for outside help in repelling the guerrillas. Nigeria and Guinea reportedly sent forces, but the United States so far has supplied only humanitarian assistance.

Several agreements at Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire, were made in 1991 between Charles Taylor's NPFL, the interim government of Amos Sawyer, and the ECOWAS countries. Under an agreement made in June a committee was appointed to work out details for peace and free and fair elections to be held in January 1992. Former President Carter's International Negotiation Network was invited to help monitor the elections. Under an accord made in September all factions agree to disarm and encamp their forces under ECOMOG's supervision. They also agreed to change the composition of ECOMOG by reducing the number of Nigerians and adding Senegalese forces. This was done to create a peacekeeping force perceived by Charles Taylor's NPFL as more neutral. In addition, the second accord set up an electoral commission to organize and supervise elections and established an ad hoc supreme court to settle disputes relating to the electoral process. The weakness of the September accord was that no timetables were set for the disarming and encampment of military forces or for the opening of roads so that Liberians could return home and an election campaign could get underway. A third accord was agreed to in late October in which Charles Taylor's NPFL agreed to disarm its forces within 60 days from November 15 and encamp them at ECOMOG-supervised camps. The accord also called for elections within 6 months and an expanded role for ECOMOG. ECOMOG would occupy seaports and airports, create a buffer zone between Liberia and Sierra Leone, and occupy checkpoints throughout the country to ensure free travel for returning Liberans. Although Taylor's

NPFL stalled for two months on opening roads, the roads were finally opened on Jan. 10, 1992. In early January 1992 ECOMOG forces were finally deployed into Taylor-held territory, and they reportedly occupied Taylor-held ports.

U.S. Policy Issues

U.S. Interests

In the past, the United States had important strategic, diplomatic, and economic interests in Liberia. It was the only country in sub-Saharan Africa that granted landing and refueling rights for U.S. military aircraft and ships on 24-hour notice, and it was the location of several telecommunications facilities. One such facility was the Omega navigational station that emits signals for guiding ships and aircraft sailing the Atlantic Ocean. This installation also served as a backup guidance system for American nuclear submarines. Other facilities were communications relay stations that transmitted Voice of America radio programs and diplomatic and intelligence messages in sub-Saharan Africa. These facilities were ransacked after the United States evacuated its personnel in 1990, and U.S. officials do not know when their operation will resume.

Former President Doe's government provided diplomatic support for U.S. interests in Africa. For example, Doe eliminated the Libyan presence in Monrovia and he gradually decreased Liberia's relationship with the Soviet Union until he broke relations with the Soviets in 1985.

The United States has been Liberia's largest investor and trading partner, importing $106.9 million worth of rubber and diamonds from the country in 1989. Before the civil war more than 5,000 Americans lived and worked there, and Firestone operates the world's largest rubber plantation in Liberia. Firestone's interests were sold in 1988 to the Japanese company, Bridgestone. Liberia was a market for U.S. goods, such as aircraft, rice, and a wide array of other U.S. products.

Some believe because of the historically close American relationship with Liberia, the United States has a special responsibility to provide for Liberia's humanitarian needs. According to this view, Americans should not only provide relief when it is needed, but should also promote a democratic system there, and should work to stop human right abuses. Another view is that Liberia is not of major significance to the United States and that the United States has no special responsibility to get involved there.

U.S. Involvement

The United States declined to become militarily involved in Liberia's civil war, and preferred that ECOWAS provide the monitoring forces that most observers agreed were needed to stabilize the situation. At one time the United States attempted to get the United Nations involved, but since that was unsuccessful the United States has supported the attempts of ECOWAS to mediate a peace agreement leading to a cease-fire, an interim government, and democratic elections. U.S. officials believe Charles Taylor wants to be the next leader of Liberia at almost any cost, and because he has

violated cease-fire agreements before, they are skeptical that he will follow through with the Yamoussoukro agreement of June 1991.

Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Herman Cohen said in July 1991 congressional hearings that elections cannot be free and fair until Taylor's forces are disarmed. He called on all factions to disarm and confine their fighters to camps so that Liberians can participate in the electoral campaign without fear or intimidation. He specifically called on Charles Taylor to open the highways and borders of the areas occupied by his forces so that Liberians may return to their homes. Cohen also warned that Liberia's continued civil war threatens the regional security of West Africa, citing Taylor's invasion of Sierra Leone in March.

While Liberia's civil war rages the United States has granted safe haven to an estimated 20,000 Liberians living here. The Immigration and Naturalization Service in July 1990 granted extended stays of 6 months to Liberian nationals in the United States on a case-by-case basis.

Some criticize the U.S. response to the Liberian conflict as inadequate, and they point to the United States intervention in the Middle East on behalf of Kuwait by comparison. They worry that sending marines into Liberia just to rescue Americans and other foreign nationals conveyed an unfortunate image. Others, however, believe U.S. interests in Africa are peripheral; therefore, it should not get involved in the internal matters of Liberia. Others note the difficulties of outside powers intervening in civil wars.

U.S. Assistance

Between 1980 and 1985 Liberia received $402.3 million in economic and military assistance from the United States. After 1985 the United States began reducing assistance to Liberia because of irregularities in the election that returned Doe to office. By 1987 human rights abuses and financial mismanagement caused Congress to reduce aid even further, and to condition continued aid on the Doe government's acceptance of an American team of experts to help the government manage its finances. The team of Operational Experts (OPEX) arrived in late 1987 for a 2-year stay, but left in 1988 because it could not limit the Doe government's spending or the disappearance of revenues from Liberia's public corporations. By 1990, the year U.S. aid was ended, Liberia had received $579.2 million in economic and military assistance. U.S. aid was suspended in 1990 because of the Brooke amendment, which requires a cutoff of aid when a country does not pay its debt to the United States. Security assistance was ended in May 1990, and development assistance about September. Only humanitarian aid continued during the remainder of 1990 and in 1991.

Efforts are underway in Congress to ensure that adequate humanitarian assistance reaches Liberia and Liberian refugees in neighboring countries. Three bills (H.R. 994, H.R. 1328, and S. 413) have been proposed that would authorize $45 million in FY1991 for Liberian relief. The conference report (H.Rept. 102-225) for the foreign assistance authorization bill for FY1992 and FY1993 (H.R. 2508) waives the Brooke-Alexander amendment to allow assistance to Liberia. This amendment requires that U.S. assistance be ended to any country that falls behind in repayment of its debts to the United States. Title X, Section 1044 of the revised version of H.R. 2508 authorizes foreign military financing assistance (FMF) and economic support funds (ESF) in the

pipeline but not expended to support ECOWAS peacekeeping efforts in Liberia. The revised bill also authorizes disaster assistance and provides that priority be given to restoration of water and power services, health care, education, and development. Assistance for FY1992 and FY1993 may be provided only if Liberia makes progress toward reconciliation and it holds free and fair elections that are monitored by international observers. The foreign assistance appropriation bill for FY1992 (H.R. 2621) as passed by the House would appropriate $1.0 billion for the Development Fund for Africa (DFA). This is $200 million more than the Administration's request for DFA. In a hearing on July 16, 1991, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Cohen said the Administration would use some of the extra funds for Liberia if Congress waives the Brooke amendment. Specifically, the Administration would help the Carter Center assist the interim government in Liberia with planned elections. In H.Rept. 102-108, which accompanies H.R. 2621, the Committee on Appropriations recommended higher refugee assistance than recommended by the Administration because of additional refugees in Africa, including Liberian refugees. The committee also recommended renewing previous restrictions on IMET funds and prohibiting military assistance to Liberia.

Prospects for the Future

Political System

At the ECOWAS conference held in Banjul, the Gambia, in August 1990 an interim legislative assembly and cabinet were appointed to administer Liberia until elections could be held. This unofficial interim government operated out of Banjul. After President Samuel Doe's death in September 1990 and the demise of his government, the interim government was officially installed in Monrovia during November with the support of ECOMOG. At his swearing-in ceremony interim President Amos Sawyer, who was appointed by ECOWAS, said that his mandate was to end the civil war, to resettle displaced Liberians, to work toward national reconciliation, and to hold free and fair elections. Sawyer was then elected to the interim President's position by Liberian representatives to the All-Liberia Conference that ended in April 1991. As interim President Sawyer was prohibited from running for President in the campaign that was planned to culminate in elections in October. Charles Taylor and his NPFL supporters, however, did not recognize Sawyer's legitimacy. Taylor felt his rightful place as leader of the new Liberia had been usurped by the West African countries, whom he regarded as invaders because of ECOMOG's occupation of Monrovia. He believed he deserved to be the next President of Liberia since he initiated the guerrilla movement that eventually ousted Doe and since he controlled all of the country except the capital city of Monrovia. He set up a parallel government at his guerrilla headquarters, and his followers referred to him as President Taylor. In effect, then, Liberia had two interim governments and two interim Presidents.

Many Liberian organizations other than Taylor's NPFL, however, had worked to free Liberia from Doe's oppression, and the leaders of these groups did not want to see the next leader of Liberia take power by force. They wanted a multiparty system and a new President who was freely and fairly elected. Apparently African leaders of the Organization of African States (OAU) agreed because they seated Sawyer at the summit meeting held in early June 1991 at Abuja, Nigeria. At the summit Sawyer told the African leaders that his interim government had restored basic services, had begun

reopening schools, had repaired damaged facilities, and restored central government functions. Regarding Charles Taylor, Sawyer said that the guerrilla leader had the right to compete for the presidency in elections, but he did not have the right to replace the repressive Doe regime with a repressive government of his own. He hinted that, if Taylor did not agree to negotiate, a military solution to the current situation may be necessary; some Liberians were already calling for a new Liberian army. Should the Yamoussoukro agreement between Sawyer and Taylor to work toward the elections be implemented, then a military collision between the two would-be governments will be avoided.

Little is mentioned in reports on the Liberian situation about the writing of a constitution. Nevertheless, many observers agree that to prevent a recurrence of past political and human rights abuses, Liberia under a new government needs to have checks and balances on presidential power and possibly a decentralization of the government. Most observers and many Liberians further agree that Liberia needs to find ways to resolve its ethnic divisions if there is to be permanent peace and stability.

Economic Reconstruction

Liberia's economy is one of subsistence agriculture, and 80% of the labor force makes a living from agriculture. Before the civil war the modern sector of the economy was based primarily on the export of iron ore, rubber, and timber. Other exports were coffee, cocoa, gold, and diamonds. The rubber industry was the largest employer in the country, and Firestone -- which introduced rubber production in 1926 -- managed the largest rubber plantation in the world in Liberia. For many years the United States has been Liberia's major trading partner and foreign investor. U.S. direct investments in 1989 were $149 million.

Despite years of foreign assistance from the United States and other donors such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, the economy has been declining since the days of the Tolbert government. The decline began in the recession of the 1970s due to falling demand for Liberia's exports and the rising cost of oil. Although President Doe inherited $686 million in debt from the Tolbert regime, his government also received unprecedented amounts of foreign aid. Nevertheless, the Doe government failed to reduce the foreign debt or to economically develop the country. In fact, government revenues continued to decrease and the debt continued to increase because of government mismanagement and corruption. In 1989, just before the onset of the civil war, the foreign debt was $1.7 billion, more than double the 1980 level. In 1991 the debt was $1.8 billion. Because of the Doe government's failure to pay its debt, the World Bank suspended its disbursements in 1986; the same year the IMF declared Liberia ineligible for further funds and in 1990 declared it a "non-cooperating country"; and in 1990 the United States ended all but humanitarian aid.

Although most economic activity was halted in 1990 as a result of the civil war, after ECOMOG established a presence in Monrovia some export/import activity resumed. In May 1991 the banks began to open, and the interim government started preparations to get the economy functioning, including drafting a plan for the IMF. Although officials working for Sawyer's government were receiving no pay, they planned a future government payroll reduced from the levels under Doe. They also reportedly planned to end certain tax breaks and increase accountability, and recognized

that the government can no longer afford subsidies for rice and fuel. Regulations were changed to encourage the flow of food and manufactured goods through Liberian ports.

Assuming that elections take place and some semblance of stability is reached, Liberia's economic future holds much potential. Former investors, such as Firestone and others, are ready to return to Liberia. New multinational investors want to build a railroad from iron ore fields in Guinea across Liberia to its port of Buchanan. Preparations for this project were interrupted by the civil war. There are possibilities for developing gold and fishing resources, and timber will be commercially exportable through the late 1990s that could replace the decline in Liberia's iron ore exports. Investors, however, need skilled labor, and 80% to 90% of Liberia's skilled population have left the country. Many are living in the United States. Others have been displaced in the civil war. For the economy to grow, conditions must be created within Liberia that will persuade these people to return, according to observers. Even if the economy manages to achieve growth, development does not necessarily follow, as demonstrated by Liberia's past pattern of growth without government services or education and the Doe government's failure to raise the standard of living for the majority of the population. Some observers believe that, to accomplish economic development and reduce its ethnic problems, the future government must privatize its 30 public corporations. Others suggest that, for Liberia to attract both foreign investment and foreign assistance necessary for development, the future government must spend less, eliminate subsidies, and adopt a democratic form of government. Most agree, whatever their proposed solutions for economic problems of the country, that economic policy cannot be made until a political settlement is achieved.