

children; rehabilitation and support of victims without limbs; and provision and rehabilitation of medical and educational services. Discussions between the SRep and government leaders, the leadership of ECOMOG and the leadership of CDF (Kamajors) resulted in a number of important commitments, including: recruitment and demobilization of children, noting CDF agreed to stop the recruitment and initiation of children under the age of 18, and to begin the process of demobilization of child combatants currently within their ranks; treatment of Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) and Revolutionary United Front (RUF) child combatants, noting both ECOMOG and CDF agreed to provide special protection to AFRC and RUF child combatants who came into their custody through surrender, capture or escape; establishment of a joint task force for demobilization and reintegration of child combatants; recruitment and training of a new national army, noting the government's agreement not to recruit children under the age of 18 and to receive assistance from UN agencies in providing training materials on humanitarian and human rights standards concerning the protection of civilians, particularly women and children; establishment of a coordination group in order to realize a more coordinated and effective national response to the needs of children affected by conflict; and establishment of an all-party parliamentary caucus for children to serve as parliamentary advocates for the rights, protection and welfare of children affected by conflict in Sierra Leone.

The SRep stated that while the challenge of children in Sierra Leone was serious, it was not overwhelming and the situation could be turned around with carefully organized and targeted assistance.

SECURITY COUNCIL

Reports of the Secretary-General

The reports of the Secretary-General (S/1998/103, S/1998/112, S/1998/112/Add.1, February 1998; S/1998/249, March 1998; S/1998/750, August 1998; S/1998/960, October 1998) recall that in December 1997 the Security Council approved the dispatch of a technical survey team to, and the reopening of a small liaison office in, Sierra Leone. In January 1998 a technical survey team went to Sierra Leone to: (a) assess the political, military and security situation; (b) discuss with the junta the implementation of the peace agreement signed in Conakry on 23 October 1997; (c) consult with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS); and (d) examine installations and infrastructure in the subregion, including airports and seaports, medical facilities, engineering works and the availability and reliability of equipment, supplies and services that might be used by a future UN military presence, should the Security Council decide to deploy one.

The humanitarian situation was described as deteriorating, marked by, *inter alia*: an absence of new supplies of food aid; an increasing scarcity and the cost of commercial food in urban areas; difficulties in food distribu-

tion in the southern and eastern provinces because of the deteriorating security situation resulting from intensified conflict between the Kamajors and the AFRC/RUF, now known as the People's Army; looting and more frequent incidence of rural "food taxes" imposed on civilians by armed elements; hoarding by farmers rather than risking transporting their harvests to market; and a shortage of supplies impeding a much-needed child immunization campaign.

Subsequent assessments of the humanitarian situation found that: the primary health care system had been devastated by lack of supplies, looting and the exodus of medical personnel at all levels; there was widespread neglect of water and sanitation facilities, which increased the exposure of hundreds of thousands to disease; the normal distribution of food to vulnerable groups had been disrupted, affecting children in particular; many children had also suffered exposure to acts of violence by being sent into battle as combatants; the public education system had collapsed, and all schools had been closed since the coup d'état in May 1997; the combination of fighting and looting had led to extensive damage to housing and infrastructure in the provincial towns; the number of internally displaced people had increased, and the welfare of some 14,000 Liberian refugees remained a matter of concern.

The UN office in Freetown was reopened in March 1998. The report notes that over time the office will be staffed by civilian political and humanitarian officers, a military adviser and human rights and civilian police advisers as well as public information personnel. The function of the office is to liaise with the government, the ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations, and to act as the overall authority for all UN activities in the country.

The August 1998 report is the first one related to the deployment and activities of UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL). On human rights abuses, the report refers to: atrocities committed both during and after the period of junta rule; evidence of the systematic and widespread perpetration of multiple forms of human rights abuses against the civilian population, including rape; continued shelling of population centres such as Koidu and Daru by elements of the former junta and the use of civilians as human shields in their military operations; numerous instances of arbitrary execution, including of women and children, followed in some cases by mutilation of the bodies; hundreds of war-related civilian deaths and war-related injuries in at least nine of Sierra Leone's 150 chiefdoms, noting that a significant percentage of the dead were women and children; evidence indicating that the rebels were holding several thousand civilian captives, including women and children, and using them as porters, human shields and for forced sexual activity; continued abductions in the north; destruction of property and homes by rebel forces; and, as a result of the rebel campaign of terror, the displacement of at least 350,000 people since February 1998.