

francophone African nations, there could well be an important political role to be played by Canada in both Sierra Leone and in the sub-region.

However, it became quite apparent to our delegation that political support was not going to be enough to stave off a further deterioration in the situation. Indeed, success in the government's second track (security) appears to be almost a prerequisite for success in the first. Our delegation shared the view of the GOSL, and virtually every other government visited, that there is no military solution to the conflict in Sierra Leone. The security track is best dealt with by a regional force such as ECOMOG which is responsive to the problems of the region. If ECOMOG is to succeed in doing what is expected of it, however, it will need both the political and logistical support of the international community. To that end, Canada should continue to support ECOMOG and seriously consider expanding that support to include some form of lethal support as well.

Security issues are not restricted to military matters. There is a serious need for all types of support for civilian police activities, both in Sierra Leone and in neighbouring Guinea. Canada was involved in the Commonwealth police initiatives in Sierra Leone last year, and should this initiative be reactivated, future Canadian involvement might well be both warranted and desirable. As well, the expertise resident in numerous Canadian police forces and the ability of Canadian police forces to provide training in French puts Canada in a good position to investigate the feasibility of providing equipment and training to police forces in Guinea.

The scope of the humanitarian dimension of the conflict in Sierra Leone is huge, and the potential for it to expand is even larger - there is so much to be done. In the short term, shelter, food and medicine are the most immediate needs, and of special note is the desperate need for both physical and psychological treatment of the non-combatant victims of the Sierra Leone conflict, particularly the children. Short term assistance will not be enough, for the very infrastructure of Sierra Leone society has been severely damaged. The country must have the ability to absorb and make best use of the assistance provided, so to that end there is a need now to begin rebuilding the capacity to implement long term activities in areas such as agriculture. Lastly, long term development aid is not often considered at the forefront of peace negotiations. In Sierra Leone, however, there is considerable potential for longer term aid to be used as an effective tool in the ongoing peace process.

The scale of suffering and the needs of Sierra Leone are truly astounding, particularly when experienced first hand. One does not have to be there long to realise just how fragile the situation is in both the nation and indeed the region. Yet, despite all the dangers, there is hope among the people of Sierra Leone that peace and stability may be within their grasp.

Canada has the potential to play an important leadership role and to make a significant contribution to the peace and security of this impoverished and war torn part of West Africa.