

The first speaker, Dr. Adekeye Adebajo, reviewed the role of outside governments and institutions in West Africa's 'tragic twins' – Sierra Leone and Liberia. Civil conflicts in these two West African countries in the 1990s have left over 200,000 dead and 1 million refugees. The conflicts pose security threats to the region, as the conflicts themselves have had external implications. For example, in March 1991, the war in Liberia spilled over into Sierra Leone. There are many linkages between the rebel movements in the two countries. This becomes an important consideration in peacebuilding as it forces one to look at the regional context and consequences of civil wars. The response of the regional peacekeeping operation ECOMOG (Economic Organization of West African States [ECOWAS] Ceasefire Monitoring Group) was primarily drawn from one country as 80% of the force was made up of Nigerian troops and 90% of funds came from Nigeria. The Nigerian regime not only had a genuine interest in stopping the conflict, but it also used the operation to funnel money to the Nigerian government through corrupt practices. This sort of financial and material support may be more difficult to sustain under a civilian, elected government as Nigerian troops also experienced about 400 deaths. Nigeria's concern was not merely to assert hegemonic power in the region, nor was Nigeria the only state interested in peacebuilding in the region. Other states, such as Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, also had an interest, as among other problems they received many refugees on their borders and their regimes worried about their own stability. As far as outside powers were concerned, only the United States in Liberia and the United Kingdom in Sierra Leone had any significant interest, with the latter being the more significant interest.

In discussing the peacebuilding tools that were used, Adebajo noted that interventions must be provided with timely resources if they are to achieve their goals. He also said that the role of regional hegemons is important, and that international efforts to contribute to peacebuilding could be built around pillars of regional hegemons. The role of the UN then would be to come in to share the burdens and costs of such operations. As can be seen in the West African experience, peacebuilding must adopt a sub-regional approach to the conflict. One cannot deal with these conflicts in isolation.