

## CONCLUSION

Although in the region for a relatively short time, two facts became readily apparent to our delegation. First, the crisis in Sierra Leone parallels in many respects the crisis in Kosovo in terms of the scale of the human tragedy. Regrettably, it has received little international attention.

The precarious nature of the situation and its potential impact on the entire region of West Africa cannot be stressed enough; the country is on the brink of becoming a West African version of Somalia. If this happens, there is every chance that it will drag the rest of the region down with it. Urgent action is required by Canada and other members of the international community now.

Second, despite the seriousness of the circumstances, there is in fact a glimmer of hope for the country and the region as a whole. There exists now a narrow window of opportunity for the international community to assist Sierra Leone to back away from the abyss. The breadth and depth of assistance required is daunting but not unattainable, and it will require a concerted and coordinated effort in the political, security and humanitarian arenas on the part of the international community. It but remains to galvanize that support so desperately needed by the people of the region to start Sierra Leone and its neighbours back on the path of democracy, reconstruction and long-term stability.

The degree of destruction in this tiny West African nation (the poorest on the face of the Earth according to the UN Human Development Index) and the depth of suffering of its people alone are enough to merit our collective global compassion. There are, however, other equally compelling reasons for continued and even expanded Canadian involvement in the region.

Like Canada, Sierra Leone is a member of the Commonwealth and, in fact, traces its origins back to 1792 when freed slaves from Nova Scotia helped establish Freetown. Like Sierra Leone, we share a colonial past and many similar traditions and institutions in terms of our legal, political and administrative structures. Moreover, as the top-ranked nation of the UN Human Development Index, Canada has a certain special obligation to help those at the opposite end of the scale. The protection of civilians in conflict and the plight of women and children in war torn societies, both serious issues in Sierra Leone, are two pillars of the human security agenda championed around the globe by Canada and reflect the fundamental values and respect for humanity that characterize Canadian society today.

The GOSL's two-track strategy is the only realistic option under the circumstances. With the necessary commitment from all parties concerned, it has some chance of success. This report has tried to outline a third supporting track involving the more active, concerted and direct involvement of the international community. Whether it is the provision of financial support to those regional organizations involved in the negotiations for peace, political support for the Government of Sierra Leone's first (or negotiation) track through international organizations such as the United Nations Security Council or acting as a link between the anglo- and