

The Abidjan Accord

A document prepared by the government in consultation with the NGOs will be submitted to the attention of Sankoh and his supporters. It is reasonable to believe that this document will reiterate the essential elements of the Abidjan Accord, for all agree that the latter must constitute the basis for any new agreement, especially since Foday Sankoh accepted the legitimacy of President Kabbah. But that was in 1996. Given recent developments, it is unclear whether Bockarie will continue to support Sankoh's position on recognition.

Moreover, the Abidjan Accord has many flaws that will have to be addressed. As it is now, it is almost a dangerous document. It has no implementation, monitoring and dispute resolution mechanism. One will have to be incorporated in any new deal. Given the enormous mistrust between Kabbah and Sankoh, it will also be necessary to provide for a series of confidence-building measures. President Kabbah has said that he expected a peace accord to be reached before the end of April. This statement appears overly optimistic.

Striking a political deal with the rebels will not be an easy task. The situation can be resolved ultimately only by a negotiated settlement. That the RUF has to be a party to the solution is self-evident. This does not mean, however, that they will want to be part of it; more so in the light of the conclusions of the recently held NCCPP. Indeed, at this meeting, the NCCPP reaffirmed the resolve of the population to oppose any idea of power-sharing with the rebels before the next election. They also insisted that RUF leader Sankoh's appeal should go through the due process of law. The debate around the amnesty issue will also prove to be a delicate balancing exercise to manage. Some are of the view that the RUF could, in a first instance, be cooperative if it had the promise and the support to transform itself into a political party. But, as seen above, the RUF is but one component of the conflict.

Moreover, most of the NGO's our delegation met have insisted on the necessity of not setting any artificial deadline for the talks. They believe a sustainable peace will require all the protagonists to take a hard look at what has happened in Sierra Leone, what has gone wrong, the type of values that should guide reconstruction of the country, and the nature of the institutions the country will want. From their perspective, the best that can emerge from the Togo talks is a cease-fire agreement combined with a commitment to undertake (a) an in-depth examination of the real, deep-rooted causes of the conflict, and (b) a dialogue on the type of country desired.

The Regional Dimension of the Conflict

Concurrently with this national effort, it is clear that a sustainable peace cannot be achieved in Sierra Leone without the involvement of the countries in the region, both those that support President Kabbah (Nigeria, Ghana and Guinea) and those that support the rebels (Liberia and Burkina Faso). In fact, without Liberia collaborating actively with the RUF, the rebels would have undoubtedly faltered after the ECOMOG offensive in February 1998, which resulted in the restoration of the Kabbah government. The rebellion has certainly benefited from important