

PART 4 - POLITICAL AND PEACE PROCESS

The Two (Three) Track Policy

The situation in Sierra Leone should be viewed as a test of the global community's commitment to democracy, human rights and human security. A last minute reaction by ECOMOG and the arrival of new troops was necessary in early January to prevent the rebels from seizing Freetown and the fall of the democratically elected government of President Kabbah. The official policy of the GOSL and its allies has not changed since the unfortunate events of January 1999. On the one hand, peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and negotiation is encouraged, and on the other, continued military pressure on the rebel forces is felt to be necessary, to force them to negotiate. As has been mentioned earlier, this is the two track policy.

Our delegation is of the view that this policy is sound and should be encouraged. To improve its chances of success, a third track should be added - the determined involvement of the international community. Without external support, be it diplomatic, military or humanitarian, the conflict in Sierra Leone, which actually is a regional conflict, has the potential to destabilize the whole of Western Africa.

Obviously, the GOSL and ECOMOG are now attempting to win points in the field and better position themselves so as not to negotiate from a position of weakness. This suggests to certain doubtful observers that the government is favouring the military solution over peaceful negotiation. Our delegation does not share this view. The recent three day meeting of the National Consultative Conference on the Peace Process (NCCPP) is a further proof, if one was required, that the GOSL is genuinely committed to the double track policy.

The Rebels Agenda

The true intentions of the rebel forces are not clear, but we know that the rebels are diverse and multi-faceted. Composed of the RUF of Foday Sankoh, the AFRC, warlords that are more or less autonomous, foreign combatants (Liberians and possibly Burkinabè), and even Ukrainian mercenaries - it is a complex mix of individuals and organizations. Some of their ranks clearly believe in a military victory, which just eluded their grasp last January. Other rebels apparently see no need to negotiate and are satisfied with the present situation since they control the diamond area, the principal source of the country's wealth. Some would be happy to leave the bush and end the guerilla warfare if only they could be sure they could rejoin the Sierra Leone army or benefit from the rehabilitation program. In short, the rebels are driven by various motives. Apart from a general rejection of a corrupt political class referred to in their only major political statement "Footpaths to Democracy" published in 1995, the rebels appear not to have a formal agenda. Indeed, one could argue that since then the RUF has engaged in such gross human rights violations, mutilations, amputations, sexual assaults, and murders, that they have lost any legitimacy that they might have been able to claim based upon any previous political platform .