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PRESS BRIEFING (Near Verbatim)

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LT. GEN. MARTIN LUTHER AGWAI, Chief of General Staff, Nigerian Army
Comments upon arrival during his visit to UNAMSIL HQ helipad, Freetown, 24 July 2003.

Gen. Martin Agwai: My visit is connected to the troops for Liberia, that is true, there's no doubt about it. I had just come back from the ECOWAS defense staff meeting that took place in Dakar, Senegal. On my way back home, there is a development. After what happened in Dakar, Senegal, I had to stop here and see what we can do together, the US, UNAMSIL, ECOWAS and Liberia.

Q.: How soon can these troops be deployed in Liberia?

Agwai: After this visit I'll return to the question.

Q.: (unintelligible)

Gen. Agwai: I am now a commander in the Nigerian army. I have to have concern of whatever the Nigerian army is doing.

Q.: (unintelligible)

Gen. Agwai: Were you there?

Q.: (unintelligible)

Gen. Agwai: When was that?

Q.: During the first intervention of ECOMOG in Monrovia.

Gen. Agwai: Nigeria is not going as part of ECOMOG now. Nigeria is going as part of the international community now. So we're not going alone.

Q.: Where is the command coming from?

Gen. Agwai: ECOWAS headquarters will decide that but I think, I learned they have appointed a Nigerian.

Q.: And finance?

Gen. Agwai: Finance? International community. I've said so we're going in together as international community. It's not only Nigeria and ECOWAS. It's the whole international community which is concerned with what's happening in Liberia that wants to do something about it.

Q.: (unintelligible)

Gen. Agwai: I said so. I've been made to understand that a Nigerian brigadier-general has been appointed as the Force Commander.

Q.: How many battalions from Nigeria?

Gen. Agwai: As of now, Nigeria is providing two battalions--one from Nigeria and one in UNAMSIL.

Q.: (unintelligible)

Gen. Agwai: I know I'm having a meeting. I don't know all the composition but I know that there's going to be a meeting and we're having the meeting here with UN, ECOWAS, US, Nigeria and all the stakeholders.

Q.: Can you confirm that you're discussing the logistics for these troops?

Gen. Agwai: I'm discussing everything that is at stake in this (unintelligible) everything.

Near-verbatim transcript of comments made by Gen. Martin Luther Agwai, Nigeria Chief of the Army

Staff, after talks held at UNAMSIL HQ, Freetown, 24 July 2003.

Q.: (unintelligible)

Gen. Agwai: The US military attaché, UNAMSIL and those of us from Nigeria and the ECOWAS force commander, we had a very good meeting. This is just a first stage of the meeting. There's going to be another meeting in Accra, you know Ghana is now the chair for ECOWAS. That's going to be the final meeting in Accra on Monday and after that meeting I'm sure you'll be able to know exactly the day that the first troops of ECOWAS will arrive in Liberia.

Q.: Within next week?

Gen. Agwai: Within the next couple of days.

Q.: Have you decided whether it's going to be an intervention force or a peacekeeping force. Which one?

Gen. Agwai: Unfortunately, that is not my job. My job is to provide the Force. There is a planning team made up of ECOWAS secretariat. The Heads of States will decide the final mandate to be given to the Force. This is my personal view. I'm not expecting it to be an enforcement thing because we hope the current ceasefire agreement and current discussions in Accra under the auspices of ECOWAS will give fruits.

Q.: But there's still fighting taking place?

Gen. Agwai: We believe that.... Sometimes things have to get bad to get better.

Q.: But they're getting very bad.

Gen. Agwai: They'll get better, I'm sure very soon.

Q.: But the question is really there's another meeting. They must be able to make a decision than another meeting on Monday.

Gen. Agwai: Let's be very clear about this. What is better, to rush in there and make a lot of mistakes? Or to really make sure that everything is done and done right, and once we go there, we deliver? And we think the best thing is to put... Remember also that ECOWAS has not got the capacity to do everything. So we also have to look to our international partners. And they also have their system. We have to be patient and wait for them. So it is now a business with ECOWAS with our international partners working together in partnership to make this thing happen. And we hope it's going to be very soon.

Q.: (unintelligible)...before the vanguard troops?

Gen. Agwai: They were discussing with the Americans. They have already put down \$10 million. And I'm made to understand that there are more discussions. The Americans will be with us with ECOWAS, UN, and the Force Commander of ECOWAS in Accra on Monday and I think that may be the final (unintelligible) of the meeting.

Q.: Part of the delays is the (unintelligible)

Gen. Agwai: That is part of the delay. But I can assure you that ECOWAS had the political will but we don't have the resources to do it. And that is our problem.

Q.: How much so?

Gen. Agwai: Unfortunately, I'm not very good in calculating dollars.

Q.: Do you already have a timeline, how long will the forces stay in?

Gen. Agwai: The Force will stay as long as it is possible to have peace, stability, elections, disarmament—everything that happened in Sierra Leone we want to see it in Liberia. So that we can put behind all the instability and look forward to a sub-region that is peaceful. And with security and stability, there can be development.

Q.: Do you see the possibility of the rebels to accept ceasefire?

Gen. Agwai: I hope in the spirit of West African, my brotherhood, we will be able to find a compromise. When I first came to Sierra Leone, everybody said the RUF will never agree, they will never do this, they will never do that. Now it's history. We hope the groups that are fighting in Liberia will soon see the light and accept that the best way is not a military solution but a political solution.