

11. THE SITUATION IN SIERRA LEONE

INITIAL PROCEEDINGS

Decision of 7 February 1995: letter from the President of the Security Council to the Secretary-General

In a letter¹ dated 1 February 1995 addressed to the President of the Security Council, the Secretary-General informed the Council that the Head of State of Sierra Leone, by a letter dated 24 November 1994, had formally requested his good offices to facilitate negotiations between his Government and the forces of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). To that effect, the Secretary-General dispatched, on 15 December 1994, an exploratory mission to Sierra Leone. The mission noted the serious deterioration of the situation in the country and warned that if it continued, the conflict in Sierra Leone would further complicate the problem of bringing peace to Liberia and could have a general destabilizing effect in the region. Based on the mission's findings, the Secretary-General decided to appoint Mr. Berhanu Dinka (Ethiopia) as his Special Envoy for Sierra Leone for an initial period of three months to work with the parties concerned towards a negotiated settlement of the conflict.

Decision of 7 February 1995: letter from the President of the Security Council to the Secretary-General

In a letter² dated 7 February 1995, the President of the Security Council informed the Secretary-General that his letter concerning the appointment of Mr. Dinka had been brought to the attention of the members of the Council and that they had welcomed the decision contained therein

Decision of 27 November 1995 (3597th meeting): statement by the President of the Security Council

1 S/1995/120

2 S/1995/121

On 21 November 1995, pursuant to a number of requests from members of the Security Council, the Secretary-General submitted to the Council a report³ on the situation in Sierra Leone covering the period since the Government of that country had formally requested his good offices in November 1994.

In summarizing the events that had occurred in Sierra Leone, the Secretary-General recalled, in his report, that the conflict in Sierra Leone had begun in March 1991, when the forces of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had launched attacks to overthrow the Government of the All Peoples' Congress (APC) headed by President Joseph S. Momoh – causing the death of thousands of civilians, while thousands more were internally displaced and were refugees in Guinea and Liberia. Later, on 29 April 1992, the Government of President Momoh was overthrown by a military coup and the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) had been established with Captain Valentine E.M. Strasser as the Chairman of the NPRC and Head of State. After the coup, the RUF had nevertheless continued its conflict with the new government and attacks on towns, villages and major highways had escalated to unprecedented levels and spread throughout the country. The Secretary-General further recalled that on 24 November 1994, Chairman Strasser had formally requested his good offices to bring the Sierra Leone Government and the RUF to negotiations, with the United Nations serving as an intermediary in that process.⁴

In his report, the Secretary-General further emphasized that in spite of the raging internal conflict, some positive trends were emerging which, if assisted, would contribute to the re-establishment of peace and stability. He referred, in particular, to the democratization of the political process, including transition to an elected civilian Government within a fixed time frame, which he deemed worthy of the international community's support. Since the Government of Sierra-Leone had set out a programme of transition towards democratic constitutional rule in November 1993, a number of steps had been taken, including the establishment of an Interim National Electoral Committee (INEC) and the holding in August 1995 of a National Consultative Conference on Elections with the participation of all political parties, representatives of the Government and the civil society. As a result of the decisions of

³ S/1995/975

⁴ See S/1995/120

the Conference, INEC was ready to begin voter registration and to finalize preparations for the elections to be held on 26 February 1996. Serious financial constraints, however, endangered that process. Concerned that the postponement of the elections might result in escalating violence and halt the process altogether, the Secretary-General urged Member States to respond generously to the appeal that would be made at a donors' conference on 30 November. For his part, he had instructed the Electoral Assistance Division to work closely with other United Nations agencies and programmes, in particular the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to assist INEC in coordinating international observers during the elections and in strengthening national observer groups.

The Secretary-General also reported on the negotiation of a settlement with the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which was the second element of the two-track political approach of the Government of Sierra Leone. He noted that, since the meetings of 24 November and 4 and 7 December 1994 between representatives of the Government and the RUF, the peace talks had not resumed. He stressed that his Special Envoy had spared no effort to establish contact with the RUF in close coordination with the Organization of the African Unity (OAU), the Commonwealth and other organizations. The OAU and Commonwealth delegations and his Special Envoy had issued a joint statement in February 1995 calling on the RUF to meet with them. Although his envoy had been able to communicate with the RUF, he had not yet met face-to-face with its leader, Mr. Foday Sankoh. The Secretary-General therefore recommended that the international community urge the RUF to take advantage of his good offices and to initiate a process of negotiation. Meanwhile, he intended to retain his Special Envoy whose efforts to establish a dialogue between the Government and RUF and to support the democratization process would be closely coordinated with the OAU and the Commonwealth.

The Secretary-General also dealt in his report with the economic, security and humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone. With respect to the security situation, he pointed out that the Government had expressed its desire to demobilize part of its army, whose strength had increased from 3,000 to around 14,000 as a result of a massive recruitment drive. That was imperative, but it was also vital to reintegrate the demobilized soldiers into society as productive citizens. The Secretary-General had instructed the Department of Humanitarian Affairs and

UNDP to field a team of experts to prepare, in collaboration with the Government, an action plan for the demobilization and reintegration of combatants. International assistance was required to accomplish that task. As to the humanitarian situation, the Secretary-General noted that it remained critical. Nearly 2 million people out of 4,477 million had been internally displaced and only about 1.1 million received assistance with any degree of regularity, owing to security constraints. The gap between the resources made available by the international community for humanitarian assistance and the needs of the affected population was widening. Moreover, delivering relief assistance became almost impossible when humanitarian convoys were targeted. The Secretary-General therefore suggested that members of the Council might consider admonishing those responsible for attacking relief convoys and urging them to refrain from such deplorable actions.

In conclusion, the Secretary-General reiterated his call on Member States to provide the fullest possible material and financial support to INEC so that the elections could be held on schedule. Although there were legitimate security concerns, experience had shown in other places, such as Cambodia and South Africa, that the democratic process should not be held hostage to the intransigence of any particular group.

At the 3597th meeting, on 27 November 1995, the Security Council included the report of the Secretary General on the situation in Sierra Leone in its agenda. After the adoption of the agenda, the Security Council invited the representative of Sierra Leone, at his request, to participate in the discussion without the right to vote.

At the same meeting, the President (Oman) stated that, following consultations among members of the Council, he had been authorized to make the following statement⁵ on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council has considered the report of the Secretary-General of 21 November 1995 on the situation in Sierra Leone. It is deeply concerned at the conflict in that country, and at the suffering resulting from it, in particular that of the nearly two million internally displaced Sierra Leoneans. It calls for an immediate end to the fighting.

⁵ S/PRST/1995/57

"The Council expresses its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his offer of good offices in Sierra Leone and urges the Revolutionary United Front to take advantage of that offer, thus enabling both parties to enter into negotiations. It thanks the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for his efforts to that end, in close coordination with the Organization of African Unity, the Commonwealth, the Economic Community of West African States, and other organizations and neighbouring States supporting the negotiations and the process of democratization in Sierra Leone, and welcomes the Secretary-General's decision that his Special Envoy's mission should continue for the time being.

"The Council stresses the importance it attaches to a coordinated international effort to alleviate the humanitarian situation in Sierra Leone. It welcomes the Secretary-General's efforts in this regard and his initiative in preparing, in collaboration with the Government of Sierra Leone, an action plan for the demobilization and reintegration of combatants.

"The Council underlines the need for generous humanitarian assistance in a situation in which nearly half the population of the country have been internally displaced, and calls upon Member States to provide such assistance. The Council commends those humanitarian agencies active in Sierra Leone. The Council deeply deplores attacks on humanitarian convoys and demands that those responsible cease such actions immediately.

"The Council welcomes the programme of transition to democratic constitutional rule set by the Government of Sierra Leone, which is crucial to the restoration of peace and stability in that country. It expresses its strong support for the work of the Interim National Electoral Commission in preparing for the elections to be held on 26 February 1996. It welcomes the assistance being given by the United Nations to the Commission at the request of the Government of Sierra Leone, and calls upon Member States to provide the fullest possible material and financial support to the Commission in order to ensure the success of the elections, with the broadest possible participation.

"The Council urges the Secretary-General to continue to monitor closely the situation in Sierra Leone."