

Conflicts in Africa - a shared responsibility



On July 7, 1999, the Government of Sierra Leone signed a power-sharing Peace Agreement with the rebel force, Revolutionary United Front (RUF), hopefully bringing an end to an eight-year war. President Kabbah has now been joined in government by Foday Sankoh, leader of the RUF, one of the most vicious rebel groups Africa has known, which has been responsible for the killing, rape and disabling of tens of thousands of innocent civilians, many of them women and children. To add insult to injury, the Peace Agreement stipulates that there will be an amnesty for the perpetrators of these crimes.

The Government of Sierra Leone signed the Peace Agreement under considerable pressure, but it saw no other feasible option. Western powers were not willing to give meaningful financial and military support to the democratically elected government. Sierra Leone no longer had an army to speak of and relied on the only partially effective West African force, ECOMOG, for its defence. The rebel forces had powerful backers - the governments of Liberia, Libya and Burkina Faso - and their support for the rebel groups proved decisive.

Sierra Leone civil society organizations had concluded that an imperfect peace and an uncertain future was better than continuing conflict, to which the world paid scant attention.

The rebel war and accompanying atrocities in Sierra Leone have been underpinned by the smuggling and sale of Sierra Leone's major mineral resource - diamonds. Other parts of Africa are facing similar tragedies - Sudan, Congo, DR Congo, Angola, to name but the most extreme examples. These conflicts have much in common, for at their heart is a struggle for power and resources - oil, diamonds, gold and other minerals. Western companies play a key role in these tragedies, by providing the capital and expertise for the oil and mineral exploitation. Part of the proceeds from these investments line the pockets of those governments and rebel forces perpetuating the wars and provide the new weapons to continue fighting. Civilian populations are more and more the targets in these conflicts, with women and children being under particular threat. The continuing involvement of mineral exploitation companies and the accompanying inaction of most Western governments makes them accomplices in

these tragedies. Moreover, governments that react vigorously to crises in Kuwait and Kosovo, but turn away from the growing emergencies of Africa, cannot continue to occupy the moral and political high ground.

Speaking to the UN Security Council in April 1998, Secretary General Kofi Annan stated:

*"The time is long past when anyone could claim ignorance about what was happening in Africa, or what was needed to achieve progress. The time is also past when the responsibility for producing change could be shifted on to other shoulders. It is a responsibility that we must all face. The United Nations must stand up to play its part. So must the World. So must Africa."*¹

It is no coincidence that the 1990s have seen the unfolding of these numerous tragedies in Africa. The end of the cold war and the acceleration of globalization has been accompanied by a return to conservative economic policies in the North that stress private investment rather than government to government aid. Eliminating budget deficits in the North has become more important than helping to eliminate pover-

ty, hunger, disease, illiteracy and conflict in the South. As a consequence, aid levels have tumbled, with sub-Saharan Africa being particularly hard hit. There is little sign yet of a significant policy shift. Donor countries and the International Financial Institutions continue to insist on fiscal orthodoxy and good governance, but fail at the same time to address such essential economic questions as debt cancellation, more favourable trade policies and adequate aid levels. Civil society organizations in the North and South have a major task ahead to influence public opinion and bring changes to these policies.

In November 1998, Partnership Africa Canada organized a Conference in Hull (Quebec), entitled Countries in Crisis in Africa and Canadian Responses, which explored the evolving situation in Sierra Leone, Somalia and other regions in Africa and how Canada is responding. During the past year, PAC has placed a special focus on these two countries, which lie at the very bottom of the UNDP world human development rankings.

Through the Ottawa-based Sierra Leone Working Group (SLWG), PAC has lobbied consistently for Canada, the

Commonwealth and the United Nations to take decisive action to stop the conflict in Sierra Leone. The Canadian Government has reacted positively and in February 1999 called for the UN to broaden the mandate of peacekeeping forces in order to defend civilians in situations of conflict such as in Sierra Leone. With support from the CIDA Peacebuilding Fund, PAC and the SLWG have supported a peacebuilding programme in the Bo region of Sierra Leone, in collaboration with two Sierra Leonean NGOs, the Network Movement for Justice and Development and the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone. Running parallel with this programme, we have undertaken an important research initiative into the Sierra Leone Diamond Trade. With support from 13 NGOs and the Department of Foreign Affairs, a research team under PAC has begun exploring the depths of an extraction industry that has brought wealth to rebels, smugglers and to officials in Liberia but nothing but misery to the people of Sierra Leone. The study and its recommendations will be completed in late 1999.

During 1998, PAC became concerned about the continuing inaction with respect to Somalia. As a result, it collabo-

rated with the Som-Can Institute for Research and Development to assess conditions in Northern Somalia in 1999. The two northern regions of Somalia (Puntland and Somaliland) are peaceful, with increasingly effective administrations, numerous civil society organizations and a dynamic private sector. It's a powerful example to the parts of southern and central Somalia where conflict between militias continues. Yet despite this very positive situation, the northern regions remain largely ignored by donor countries, which have difficulty adapting to the idea of dealing directly with decentralized governments in what is essentially a federal country in the remaking. This means that Somalia has been effectively placed in quarantine. The Som-Can Institute and PAC have appealed for this quarantine to be lifted and call on civil society organizations to take a lead and renew partnership links with Somali organizations. The joint assessment report is now available. ■

¹ UN Secretary General, The Causes of Conflict and the Promotion of Durable Peace and Sustainable Development in Africa, Report to the UN Security Council, April 1998

Making connections

Tokyo International Conference on African Development - TICAD II

The TICAD II Conference took place in October 1998, five years after the first Tokyo Conference on African Development. Co-organized by the Government of Japan, UNDP, UN-OSCAL and the Global Coalition for Africa, it brought together African governments, donor countries and major UN and international institutions. PAC had participated in the first event in 1993, establishing close links with a new Japanese NGO group, the Africa Japan Forum. In the lead up to the second TICAD conference, PAC worked with

the Africa Japan Forum and many African NGO Networks to ensure African NGO voices would be well represented in preparatory meetings in Africa and at the Tokyo International Conference itself. PAC's President attended the conference, where African NGOs presented a major statement on their views on African development. The full NGO Statement can be found on the Africa Japan Forum web site: http://www.zzz.or.jp/~kazutiyo/english/ticad_e.html The final Conference document, African Development Towards The 21st Century: the Tokyo Agenda For Action, can be found on the Japanese Foreign Ministry web site: <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/africa/ticad2/agenda21.html>

Canada-Japan Peacebuilding Symposium

In the wake of the TICAD II Conference, the Canadian and Japanese Governments agreed to launch an initiative to encourage closer relations between the Canadian and Japanese NGO peacebuilding communities. PAC joined a Canadian NGO/Government steering committee, whose immediate task was to help organize a Peacebuilding Symposium that took place in Tokyo in September 1999. PAC hopes that a second phase of this programme will include bringing to Africa Japanese and Canadian NGO representatives to learn from and also share skills and experiences with

African communities and NGOs on issues surrounding conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

African-Canadian Dialogue

PAC was very pleased to be associated with an important initiative that was launched in Canada in October 1998 called the African-Canadian Dialogue. The initiative seeks to bring together people of African origin in Canada and be a catalyst for their advancement. The first Dialogue Roundtable meeting launched task forces to examine issues such as poverty, public policies and commerce. PAC shares the Dialogue's belief that a stronger African-Canadian community in Canada will lead to stronger

relations with Africa, including development cooperation links. The Dialogue's web site is: <http://www.pso.net/adialogue>

Visit of Canada's Governor General to Africa

PAC's Executive Director was part of a small NGO delegation that accompanied Canada's Governor General, Roméo LeBlanc, and the Minister for International Cooperation, Diane Marleau, on a state visit in February 1998 to four African countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Morocco and Tanzania. The visit gave PAC and other NGOs many opportunities to meet with African civil society organizations as well as with political leaders and government officials.

Since the visit, Morocco and Tanzania have lost two revered leaders, King Hassan and former President Nyerere. Very positive changes have been taking place in Morocco in recent years at the level of human rights and freedom of expression and association. There are now many strong human rights and development organizations and it would seem important that NGO networks across Africa establish links with them. In Tanzania, some members of the Canadian NGO delegation met with former President Nyerere and he shared with us his vision of a peaceful and economically integrated continent. He had dedicated his final years to bring peace to troubled Burundi. ■

Financial Statements 1998-1999

Year ending March 31, 1999

Revenue

Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA):	
Partnership Branch	\$ 135 000
Peacebuilding Fund	106 000
PAC Members' contributions and interest	11 291
Total	252 291

Expenditure

Programme expenses	\$ 145 973
Special Initiatives in Africa: (Policy Work Resources, Great Lakes Study, Training Workshop)	65 879
Special Projects: Sierra Leone Peacebuilding Workshops	28 960
	240 812

Communications

Policy Work Resource Bank

PAC has been collaborating with Development Innovations and Networks (IRED-Harare) to help set up a resource bank on the work of policy and research organizations in Africa. The resource bank, which will be based at IRED, will be much more than a directory and will contain information on the current and future programmes and publications of participating organizations. This will be a significant networking tool to help build movements and networks on specific issues and promote collaboration and solidarity.

The resource bank is expected to be available via the web sites of IRED and PAC in early 2000. The two partners also plan to publish the information as a resource book.

PACNET

During 1998, PAC began an e-mail information service, whereby documents in English and French are distributed to a growing network of recipients in North America, Africa and elsewhere. The documents, many of which originate with NGOs, are analyses of current development questions and events affecting African development. The Africa Policy Information Centre (APIC) in Washington DC gave much helpful advice on this initiative. ■

The PAC Annual General Meeting

In its early years as a special Canadian fund for Africa, the PAC Annual General Meeting was a major event in the Canadian NGO calendar, attracting participants from across Canada and Africa. With its new mandate of policy research and advocacy work, PAC now has a membership spanning Africa and well as Canada. However, its resources for institutional

events are limited and it is no longer possible to organize annual general meetings as before. Members accordingly agreed in 1998 to a process whereby AGM business would be carried out by mail and this has been put into effect. A positive side of this evolution is that all members are now able to participate on an equal basis in elections and other decision-making. ■

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The following resource persons have supported the work of PAC:

Francisca Alencar Sousa, Mark Foss, Cryspin Isenge, Heni Pellerin, Alice Iddi-Gubbels

Tributes

Flora MacDonald, a Board Member of Partnership Africa Canada, became a Companion of the Order of Canada in April 1999. It's an honour that recognizes outstanding achievement and merit, especially in service to Canada or to humanity at large.

David Haslett, a member of the PAC Sierra Leone Working Group, died suddenly in December 1998. He worked for many years with CUSO and was a former Board Member of Partnership Africa Canada.

New Publications in 1999

Peace and Development in Northern Somalia - Challenges and Opportunities

This is an assessment of conditions in the two northern regions of Somalia - Somaliland and Puntland - where peace has been created and maintained by traditional and civil society leaders. The assessment was carried out in May 1999 by PAC and the Som-Can Institute for Research and Development. The report calls for the quarantine on Somalia to be lifted so that current peacebuilding and development programmes can be strengthened. The report is published in summary form (16 pp) in English, Somali and French. A longer version in English is available in limited numbers.

Initiatives dans le Grands Lacs - parole locale, actions durables

This is a study of local initiatives by civil society organizations in Rwanda, Burundi and Congo. The study is based on a visit to the region in November 1997 and seeks to show the involvement of local communities in reconstruction and conflict resolution. The author, Eugénie Aw, visited some 50 organizations in the three countries, many of which were women's groups given the important role they play in the region today. The study gives them a voice and gives the reader a good insight into the new realities of this troubled region. The study is published in French, with a summary in English.

The Sierra Leone Diamond Trade (provisional title, publication expected January 2000)

During the latter part of 1999, a study will be made of the Sierra Leone Diamond Trade. The study will research the diamond industry in Sierra Leone and how it relates to the world market. Analysis will be provided of the legal and illegal trade in diamonds and the effects of this trade on the rebel war in Sierra Leone, which has terrorized the population and devastated the country. Can the diamond trade, which has been the scourge of the country in recent years, become a source of prosperity and hope? The study will be published in English, with a summary in French. ■



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PAC Year in Review 1998-1999

A Message from the President of Partnership Africa Canada



Coping with Crises

We are on the verge of a new century and a new millennium, a moment in time of immense significance and hope. Yet the world seems far less peaceful today than a hundred years ago, or even a decade ago at the end of the Cold War. The unfolding of events throughout the world during the 90s has dashed the hopes for peace and development of so many people.

Africa has had more than its fair share of hardship, much of it sadly brought on by internal conflict. Although, however, such conflict may be internal to a given country, rather than between countries, some of the causes of the conflict often extend well beyond its borders. UN Secretary General Koffi Annan has repeated this message frequently in his reports to the UN Security Council.

In general, western countries have been slow to respond to the Secretary General's calls for action on such questions as debt reduction, increased aid levels and humanitarian assistance. It is difficult to understand, let alone accept, that a humanitarian crisis in Africa does not seem to deserve the same attention as one in Europe, Asia or Central America. If there is a message that needs to be repeated and repeated, it's that crises in Africa, as elsewhere, are a shared responsibility, no matter what the causes.

Perhaps Africa's greatest crisis in recent times is the aids pandemic, which is undoing so many years of successful economic and social development in parts of eastern and southern Africa. One of the social impacts of the aids crisis is that the elderly increasingly find themselves taking on parental roles as part of a whole generation of adults succumb. In some countries, life expectancy levels are tumbling dramatically, children are orphaned and the workforce is decimated.

NGOs speak out

I have had the good fortune to have represented Partnership Africa Canada at two major conferences in Tokyo during the last 12 months. At the Second Tokyo International Conference of African Development in 1998, I joined African and Japanese NGO Networks in addressing African and donor country governments about priority development issues. It was a step forward that we managed to help African NGO voices be heard at that level. A year later, I joined Canadian NGOs in a symposium with Japanese NGOs, with both governments participating, where issues of peacebuilding were discussed. This was another step forward that brought both Japanese NGOs and Government into open dialogue together and also with their Canadian counterparts.

These were two promising steps in the right direction. At one level, they auger well for increased government-civil society dialogue and collaboration. NGOs as critical members of civil society are becoming much more aware of their responsibilities and potential for influencing policy decisions that affect ordinary people. Networks and coalitions on thematic issues are emerging across Africa, Canada and elsewhere - on issues such as debt, globalization and trade, women's rights, child soldiers, corporate responsibilities, child workers, to name but a few.

Recently, thirteen NGOs agreed to support a piece of practical research that the Partnership Africa Canada Sierra Leone Working Group decided to undertake on the Sierra Leone Diamond Trade. A crucial piece of work indeed, whose findings and recommendations will have ramifications that will go beyond the borders of Sierra Leone and which will be relevant to other parts of Africa and the world. That thirteen very different groups joined forces to address a question of major economic, social and political importance to Sierra Leone and Africa is a big step forward and it's one that really does give me hope. As we go into the new century, Partnership Africa Canada will approach with renewed enthusiasm its role of facilitating collaborative work between Canada and Africa. I urge you to join us in our endeavour. ■