

February 2, 2004

Liberia Needs \$500 Million, Report Says

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DAKAR, Senegal, Feb. 1 — Liberia will need nearly \$500 million in stabilization aid after 14 years of nearly relentless war, the United Nations and the World Bank reported last week in preparation for a donors conference in New York this week.

Advocacy groups have urged that particular attention be paid to disarming and reintegrating an estimated 50,000 former soldiers, a great many of them children, with a warning that a failure to invest heavily in peacemaking in Liberia would bring further bloodshed to West Africa.

The International Reconstruction Conference on Liberia, to be held at United Nations headquarters in New York on Thursday and Friday, is to bring together officials from international lending institutions and donor countries to discuss aid efforts.

Liberia, the West African country founded by Americans in the mid-19th century, is facing its first chance of genuine peace since 1989, when Charles G. Taylor, an American-educated rebel leader, plunged his country into war.

Mr. Taylor, who later became its elected president, was himself confronted by two separate rebel insurrections. Last August, Mr. Taylor left his country for exile in Nigeria. The country is now run by a transitional government composed of Mr. Taylor's former loyalists and former enemies. That fragile government is plagued by rivalries.

A United Nations peacekeeping mission is responsible for restoring order; it is still 6,000 troops short of its mandate of 15,000 soldiers.

Among the mission's most crucial tasks are ridding the country of armed factions, reintegrating former combatants into their communities and cobbling together a national army and a police force. That effort, which began last December, was delayed when disgruntled fighters rioted in Monrovia, Liberia's capital.

The assessment of Liberia's needs by the United Nations and World Bank, released last Thursday, found that Liberia would need \$487 million in stabilization aid during the next two years.

In a report to be released Monday, the New York-based Human Rights Watch called for United Nations officials and donor countries to focus on rehabilitating child soldiers, including girls, who have been raped, conscripted as sexual slaves and enrolled as fighters.

The report urges donors, particularly the United States, to devote "sufficient funding" to rebuilding schools, paying teachers salary arrears and restoring the country's battered educational system.

Human Rights Watch is also pressing the United Nations Mission in Liberia to investigate the recruitment and use of child soldiers by all three of Liberia's armed factions, in an effort to seek accountability in the future, including through a war crimes tribunal.

In a separate report published Friday, the International Crisis Group, a research and advocacy organization, similarly urged donor countries and international financial institutions to provide enough funding to finance education and vocational training for the former combatants.

It also urged donor countries to commission an audit of Liberian government funds said to have been diverted by Mr. Taylor. That proposition is likely to cause political waves in a country with a fragile transition government.

The United States government has promised roughly \$200 million to rebuild Liberia. Secretary of State Colin L. Powell, is expected to attend the meeting this week, as is his French counterpart, Foreign Minister Dominique de Villepin.