



## **IPI's Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Series Presents:**

### **“Peacebuilding in Liberia: Challenges and Opportunities”**

#### **Featuring Ellen Margrethe Løj**

*Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations  
Mission in Liberia*

**Chair:**

**Warren Hoge**

**IPI's Vice President for External Relations**

**When:**

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*Transcript edited by IPI*

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**Warren Hoge:**

I'm Warren Hoge, IPI's Vice President for External Relations, and I'm happy to welcome you to this SRSG series event entitled “Peacebuilding in Liberia: Challenges and Opportunities.”

Our guest today is Ellen Margrethe Løj, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the United Nations Mission in Liberia, UNMIL.

Now I remember well when Ellen left her position as Denmark's Permanent Representative to the UN in 2007, because I went to a particularly festive and well-attended farewell party for her at the home of the then-South African ambassador, who a lot of us remember as a festive guy himself, Dumisani Kumalo. And I want to assure you, it wasn't because she was *leaving* that all those people showed up in a celebratory mood, it was rather an indication of what a highly regarded person she was around the UN during the seven years she led her country's mission here, including the period when Denmark was on the Security Council.

Proof of that continuing high regard came a year later when the Secretary-General chose her for the very demanding job of being his representative in Liberia and head of the UN mission based in Monrovia, and proof of her ongoing reputation in the UN community is evidenced by the standing-room-only audience here today.

Now did I say “very demanding job?” It's described as restoring stability and peace to a country that was convulsed by a ruinous 14-year civil war that killed

150,000 people and forced 850,000 more to flee to neighboring countries. Here are just four elements of it.

One, the UN is providing support in preparing for Liberia's upcoming elections, now scheduled for this October. Voter registration was conducted in January and ended on February 6. The UN mission provided hands-on support, such as transportation of registration materials and voters to remote areas, clearing roads, and helping with election planning. At the end, 1.7 million of Liberia's 4.1 million people have registered to vote.

Two, Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, has warned that the fraught situation next door in Côte d'Ivoire poses a risk to Liberia's stability and to the upcoming elections. More than 30,000 Ivorian refugees are now in Liberia, and another 100,000 may follow in the coming months, and there is cross-border movement in the opposite direction, with some Liberians being wooed to Côte d'Ivoire as mercenaries.

Three, the Security Council has asked to redeploy UN troops from UNMIL to the mission in Côte d'Ivoire. While this has been classed as a temporary solution, it has been extended twice, and there is concern that it could weaken UNMIL's ability to implement its own mandate in Liberia.

And four, another thing relevant to our audience, to IPI's research program, and to the title of today's event is that Liberia is on the agenda of the UN peacebuilding commission. The chair of the PBC Liberia Configuration is another eminent UN figure, Prince Zeid of Jordan, and he visited Liberia last month to meet with the government and key stakeholders.

We're eager to hear Ellen's views on the role of the PBC and the progress with implementing its priorities in Liberia, like strengthening the rule of law, supporting security sector reform, and promoting national reconciliation. So Ellen, let me conclude where I began by saying, on behalf of IPI and many people in this neighborhood, welcome back to Turtle Bay, and the floor is yours.

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:**

Thank you very much, and thank you to all of you for showing up here. I'm getting a little worried, both by seeing the number of people, including all of you who have to be standing, but I'm also getting worried because so many people in the audience who know Liberia very well, and even better than I, so I hope I will not disappoint you.

Warren, I'll get very quickly to the challenges today and in the foreseeable future for Liberia, and thereby, for the mission, but I think for those of you in the audience who are not experts on Liberia, but who have an interest nevertheless in Liberia, I think I want to give you just a tiny little bit of the history, where we came from, and where we are today, because I think—I feel, at least, every so often when I come here to New York—that colleagues do not fully understand the pieces that the peacekeeping mission and the government of Liberia, of course, had to pick up after the peace agreement in 2003.

First of all, I want to recall, once again, that we talk about Liberia going through 14 years of civil war, from 1989 to 2003, but with all due respect to the ambassador of Liberia, I actually say that they went through a very turbulent period already from 1979-80 when the coup happened. The result of all that was that the country was totally devastated. The civil war is probably about one of the worst, if not the worst civil war we have seen anywhere around the world, where atrocities were committed to a degree that is simply unbelievable. People

were killed, we always have discussions as to how many were killed during those 14 years, but it is probably closer to 250,000 than to 150,000. It's probably somewhere around there, a lot of Liberians took refuge abroad, including in neighboring countries, and those who didn't manage that were internally displaced in their own country, because there were so many various factions that were fighting for power.

And if anybody asked me, and many has done so after I went to Liberia, why did they have a civil war? And I have... I don't know the answer. My answer is that the people of Liberia didn't want a civil war, but there was a lot of Liberians living in very dire circumstances, and they could be bought for money to commit anything, and unfortunately, there were a number of warlords who wanted power and access to resources, because Liberia is, compared to other countries in the region, extremely rich in natural resources. So those warlords, they paid young people, men and women alike, and a lot of them children, to commit those atrocities, they gave them money, but they also gave them easy access to drug and alcohol and so on.

So the country was totally destroyed, not only in terms of human capacity and moral values, but also in physical infrastructure. I went to Liberia the first time in 2006 as chairman of the Liberia Sanctions Committee of the Security Council, and I remember, I came back to New York, and I said, colleagues asked me, how is it? And I said, well, I've been around in many countries in Africa, I've only seen one country worse, destroyed more than Liberia. And everybody, of course, wanted to know what that country was, which is beyond the point, but the fact was, you know, all infrastructure, all buildings, water supply, electricity supply, you name it, it was destroyed.

Finally, in 2003, will—pressure, first and foremost—from the regional countries, ECOWAS, that had deployed an ECOWAS force into Liberia to get the war to stop and the worst atrocities stopped, a peace agreement was reached in Accra in August 2003, and part of that peace agreement was to deploy a UN peacekeeping force to Liberia. The task of that peacekeeping force in the beginning was basically to pick up the pieces, to try and disarm and demobilize all the combatants, and they managed to disarm above 100,000 combatants, and a transitional government was installed, and the UN had also, as its main task, to keep the peace, to make sure that they didn't start fighting again and to support in the preparation of the elections that was held in 2005.

There was not much focus on rebuilding the country in those two years. That was basically about sort of holding the situation and paving the way for an election and a legitimate government to be installed, and the armed forces of Liberia was totally dissolved as part of the peace agreement because they had taken part in many of the atrocities in the country, so they came to the conclusion that they had to build a whole new army. The police, you couldn't sort of get rid of the police, because you had to have some kind of law and order on the street, so the decision was taken to retrain the police force, and that was a task that was given to the UN and the mission started already at the outset the task of recruiting, vetting, and training the new armed forces of Liberia was, United States took upon them to do, and they have been active in that since.

In 2005, as I said then, elections were held. It's very interesting about those elections that they were, to a large degree, they were run by the Liberians in name, but they were heavily orchestrated by the international community, United Nations played a major role in peacekeeping mission in making sure that those elections took place, and the international community in the form of the

international contact group from Liberia, consisting of the main partners, including the UN and the neighboring countries were the ones that were overseeing and monitoring, and they actually set aside provisions in the Liberian constitutions in order to get these elections through. The elections took place, and you all know that in the second round, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, she was not in the lead in the first round, but in the second round, she won, and she was inaugurated in 2006, and then started the work about building the country.

Sometimes in peacekeeping and in conflict countries, we always talk about rebuilding the country. I would say that in Liberia, it's not a question of rebuilding the country. In Liberia, in many respects, it's about building the country from scratch, because the fact of the matter is, even before 1980, when the coup took place, Liberia never had an inclusive government, and by inclusive, I mean a government that ruled the whole of the country, and included all ethnic groups in the affairs of the country. So in many respects, they had to build up the country from scratch in terms of infrastructure, in terms of policymaking in the way they designed the policies to benefit all the people of Liberia, and that they had to do taking into consideration that most people with an education had left the country; it was difficult to attract them to come back, because education during that time, 14 years of civil war, had been very limited, so there was not a big human resource base to pull from.

There was a huge challenge, the lack of human capacity, and we see it to this day. You do not educate a lawyer or a doctor overnight. So it was a huge challenge, but the government also had to decide how to make priorities in their development, because, as I said, the country was totally destroyed. You were lacking everything from roads, electricity, water, health clinics, schools, teachers, agricultural production—you name it, they lacked it. So it doesn't help a lot that you have the resources, you have huge tropical forest resources, you have gold, you have diamond, you have land well-suited for rubber production, for palm oil, etc. etc.; a lot of those resources have been used by various warlords during the civil war to finance the war, and it was very clear to not only the Security Council but also the government wanted to make sure that in the new Liberia, the resources of the country benefited the people of Liberia and not individual rulers. So it took some time for them to put their policies and put their house in order and to develop their poverty reduction strategy with their priorities for the development. It is one of the few developing countries I know where infrastructure is always mentioned, regardless of where, who you talk with from the Liberians. If you talk with the President, the ministers, or if you talk with the market woman in the most remote village, the first thing they say they need is roads, roads, roads, and you will... it is really surprising. It was at least to me the first few months I was in Liberia, because they kept... I came in January, and they kept talking, and Jordan can confirm it, they kept talking about the rainy season coming, and you know, after a couple of months, I got tired, and I said to myself, "For heaven's sake, I come from Denmark, I know what rain is!" And I just want to tell you, I didn't. It rains, it rains an average 5,000mm a year, which is, I think it's only somewhere out in the Himalayas in Asia that beats Liberia in terms of annual rainfall, and when all the roads are dust road, then you can imagine how they look.

So infrastructure—but not only infrastructure. And somebody won't believe me when I say to this day, we hardly have electricity in Liberia. And then you will say, hey, how do you get light, how do you get—everything works by generators. It's still an enormous challenge, even six years on.

So what did the UN peacekeeping mission do in those years from 2006 after the new government was installed until today? Well, first of all, we created the security framework for the government to develop those policies and to start implementing them. That, I think, is our main role with our force, with our police, we created that security framework, we trained the police, we walked side by side with the Liberian police when they were investigating crimes when incidents occur, Liberians going through the civil war, and even to some degree to this day, but especially then, do not believe in the system, and by that, I mean that if something happens, and a person is arrested, suspected for committing a crime, they, the local people say, you know, nothing is happening, because the rule-of-law system doesn't work. Give us that guy, and we will do instant justice. They don't trust the system. So the challenge was to educate, to train, to develop the police, but not only police, the whole rule-of-law system, because the best trained police officers have said over and over again, cannot function unless he or she has the equipment, the communication, the vehicles and so on, mobility to function, but he can't function either, he or she, if there's not a prison to put the suspect in, they can't function if there's not somebody to prosecute and take the case to the court if there's not a judiciary that functions, and that is, to this day, a huge challenge in Liberia to get the rule-of-law sector fully up and running. So a lot of the security incidents we had in those years were internal security incidents.

The presence of the UN peacekeeping force and the military on the streets, I think, also served as a deterrent for what we call violence, mob violence, but it certainly occurred. Luckily, with decreasing number, because gradually, some kind of development took place. Let me also say, we worked a lot with the government in assisting them in building their structures, first and foremost in the security sector. We assisted them in developing a national security strategy, encompassing not only the police, the army, the immigration and the other security incidents, agencies, but trying to get them to develop those policies necessary for building the peace, and that's why I get very upset in New York when I come back five years after I left, or four, and I hear people in New York talking about the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding, and that, I really hit the roof every time I hear it, because especially in a country like Liberia, it is abundantly clear, yes, you do peacekeeping, but while you keep the peace, you have to start building the peace. You cannot keep the peace and then stop having peacekeeping, and then say now we have to build the peace. It doesn't make sense. We have to keep the peace while the peacebuilding takes place, and when peacebuilding had not finished, but at least reached a sufficient level, then the peacekeepers can leave, and the development people can fully take over and finalize what has been started. So that has been taking place between 2006 and 2010. Liberia reached the HIPC [Heavily Indebted Poor Countries] completion point. They managed to get their foreign debt cancelled, they have spent a long time making, negotiating concession agreements for their resources, but it hasn't really yet created the employment opportunities, so there's a high level of—ILO [International Labour Organization] gets mad at me when I say there's a high level of unemployment—but there's certainly an extremely high level of underemployment, because I do not consider those women or men on the street who buy a bag of candy, open the bag, and sell the candy five pieces a time for generating employment. But a lot of people are getting along by that.

Before Côte d'Ivoire happened—and if you permit me one, could I put potential spillover from Côte d'Ivoire a little bit aside? Because I think all our focus has been now on the upcoming elections in Liberia. Liberia is going to have elections in autumn this year, and everybody believed that Liberia, while there's still a lot to

do, that these elections would be a test case for the Liberians' willingness to continue on the road to sustainable peace and development. Furthermore, these elections have to be run 100% by the Liberians themselves and in accordance with the Liberian constitution, not without support from the international community.

First and foremost, you need financial support to carry through the elections. The budget for the needed assistance is, for the needed funds for carrying through those elections, I think, is just below \$50 million, and I think we have mobilized most of what is needed, except \$4 million, so the sum is still needed, so those elections are perceived as a test case for the Liberians to demonstrate, as I often say in Liberia, to the international community that they have used this window of opportunity that the UN has given—and the international community has given them since 2003—to get their house so much in order that they are ready to assume responsibility for their own future and are ready to continue on the road to sustainable peace. We still have to be there, because there can still be security fallouts and, with all due respect to the Ambassador, Liberians, the hat blows off quite easy in Liberia.

So I'm also, all the time saying to the Liberian press and so on, in the political debate, it's sound and healthy and good that you have verbal discussions and verbal disagreements, but keep it on the verbal level. Don't start fighting. But that, we still hope.

So we have all been preparing and looking forward to those elections. It's not going to be easy. They need the support, as I said, also from the peacekeeping mission, but the situation had improved so much that during the last three years, it has been possible for the peacekeeping mission to reduce its size from 15,000 troops to 8,000 troops. We are just below 8,000 today, and the Council decided last September, we would stick to that level until after the elections, and then the expectation and the hope was, if everything went right, then the peacekeeping mission could be reduced quite quickly. How quickly remains to be seen.

Then a lot of people, when I was appointed to this job, started asking me, why is Liberia not on the peacebuilding commissions agenda, especially since I'm emphasizing this link between peacekeeping and peacebuilding so strongly in Liberia, and because I spent some time myself in the discussions on the establishment of the PBC [Peacebuilding Commission] when I was in New York. In the beginning, I started saying, well, it's not for me to decide, it's for the government to decide, but for me to discuss it with the government with a positive approach, you have to tell me what I can, what's in it for Liberia, especially in terms of money, of course, because they are heavily dependent on international partners in getting this development agenda to move forward. Let me just say that in 2006, I think the annual government budget was less than \$50 million. Today, this budget here is \$360 million, but \$360 million is not a lot to finance the running of a whole country. So there's a huge need for international support if we want to quickstart the development. Otherwise, development takes a long time.

So I said, I have to be able to tell the government and Madame President what's in it for her, and I have to make assurances to her that it doesn't entail a lot of paperwork, because Liberia has spent a lot of time in developing their poverty reduction strategy, and their priorities don't come from PBC and come and ask them to do something special for them; they simply do not have the human capacity. There's very few educated people, I mean, highly educated people in the government and administration when you go below the top levels. So they

don't have that human capacity, and whatever human capacity they have, they want to focus squarely on the development of their country, and not on paperwork. They are under tremendous pressure for delivering the peace dividend. I think all Liberians, all over the country are happy for the peace, are happy that the kids can go to school, but they want jobs, they want an income, they want to be assured of a better future. So we had a long discussion, as you know, and the government and the Ambassador discussed it here in New York, and finally recommended, and the government then requested then in spring to get on PBC, and PBC also after the review decided to apply a slightly different approach.

What was interesting was also that the government, in requesting to get on the PBC agenda, did not say anything, we need help with everything. They said we have some, we have three key priorities where we really need more support: security and rule of law, security sector, rule of law, and national reconciliation. It doesn't mean that the education and health and so on is not important, but they said specifically for Peacebuilding Commission, these three priority areas is what we would like you to focus on, and that is the work that's going on now, and the priorities being identified.

Let me then say that since the crisis arose in Côte d'Ivoire in the end of November, we, and when I say we, I talk both about the peacekeeping mission and the government of Liberia have been slightly distracted from this key priority on the election and PBC, and even preparing UNMIL's transition or eventual withdrawal by the events in Côte d'Ivoire. And let me first say, the events in Côte d'Ivoire, inside Côte d'Ivoire, is horrific, horrific, unbelievable, and every morning, you hear a new report about what's happened the day before. You don't believe it. No doubt about it. The reason why we in Liberia are worried is that Ivorians are fleeing to Liberia, and we have now over 90,000 refugees in a very limited area bordering Côte d'Ivoire. They are coming in a number further and further south, 700km border, they've been hosted by Liberian host communities, they have shared their rice, but Liberians don't have a lot. They only eat once a day, and they are without... it's becoming a huge problem, and we are now getting reports about tension building between the host communities and the refugees. The rain is coming, the famous rainy season has already now started to destroy some of the facilities, and I have to say also that in terms of delivering of services to refugees, we have not been as quick as we would have hoped, partly because maybe it was underestimated in the beginning how huge a problem it would be, but also because there are so many other humanitarian crises right now competing for funds, and unfortunately the flash appeal for Liberia is sort of lost, really, well, the response has not been very good, and we really have to get more focus on that.

The other reason why we have been distracted is not only the humanitarian part of the situation, but also the potential security challenges it will pose. One thing is tension between the community and the refugees and crime and disorder following from that.

Another is the border and the nature of the border, which is basically a river with very few official crossing points, and people can take a canoe and come back and forth, and disarmament has not taken place in Côte d'Ivoire; there is a lot of weapons around in Côte d'Ivoire. We have had a few incidents where somebody wanted to come over with weapons into Liberia and so on, and the, furthermore, rumors are we haven't caught any of them. We knew some Liberian ex-combatants were in Côte d'Ivoire, rumors are that more have been recruited and are participating on both sides in Côte d'Ivoire in committing atrocities, and the

question is, whether they will want to go back, and whether they will want to go back with weapons, and already now, in all the press support, the talk around mercenaries coming from this rebel group and that rebel group from the time of the civil war, so that border needs to be monitored very carefully, because if a lot of weapons come in, we have been very lucky in terms of disarmament, and furthermore, the rainy season has its benefit in that you cannot bury an AK-47 in the ground in Liberia and pick it up a year later and it's still functioning as you can do in Somalia, because then it's rusty. So you know, we find a lot of weapons in Liberia, but they are all unserviceable due to the geographical situation. But if they bring fresh military weapons in from Côte d'Ivoire, then I don't know what, then we will get worried.

So what the peacekeeping mission has done, we have reinforced our presence along the border points--so has the Liberian police--and we are working very closely with them so that they are the ones who are trying to monitor and disarm whoever might want to come over, and we are their backers and supporters and take charge, so we sort of, but we can't be all over that border, so a lot can happen. So the sooner a solution can be found in Côte d'Ivoire, the better. First and foremost for the Ivorian people themselves, but certainly also for Liberia. As for our support to ONOCI, yes, of course, they need support, and we have supported them, and they have had some of our helis, and luckily, we have some civilian helis instead, so we are managing. We are managing up to now, and we don't have soldiers over there right now, but it's clear that we have, the challenges we are facing have increased in the last couple of months. A year ago, we were all worried about what would happen in Guinea, and what potential spillover that would have for Liberia, but luckily, that border is quiet at the moment, and we hope and pray it will remain so.

I have used my time, and I will be ready to answer your questions, because for most of you, I probably said something you already know, but I want to underline in conclusion that we need all the focus we can have on finding a political solution in Côte d'Ivoire. We need that for the people of Côte d'Ivoire, but we need it for the whole West African region, because if you go back in history, everybody knows how intertwined the countries in West Africa are, how in ethnicity, religion, and so on, how closely interconnected they are, and the crisis in one country very quickly spills over in a neighboring country, and we have seen that before, so we should do everything in our power to avoid that happening again. Thank you very much.

**Warren Hoge:**

Ellen, I'd like to ask you one question of my own before we go to the floor, and that is going back to your original point, which is on the elections. Are you, and your belief that these elections is a real test for Liberia's future, for its progress into a new future, are you encouraged by the registration program, which did register 1.7 million Liberians, it was done through a national commission, I'm sure with a lot of guidance from the UN, but did that experience make you believe that actually the election itself is going to happen, and the Liberians will pass that test that you mentioned?

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:**

Well, I'm encouraged that the registration process went peacefully and without major incidents. I mean, there are a few reports about double registration and foreigners having tried to register, but basically, it went very well, and probably better than we had expected, especially in logistical terms. Of course, we tried to support them, but they really did quite a bit, and I was very tough in saying, no, no, we don't fly the material out. You'd better find a way of getting it out on your own, and only when the places' registration centers where you couldn't reach by car and so on, then we helped them. My point being, they have to learn to stand

on their own feet, and they'd better practice while we are there to back up and support. Okay. But the registration took place over four weeks. It's a completely different thing when you have to have a referendum one day in August, when you have to have an election one day in either August or November. One thing.

Secondly, when we get to the election, then we have all the political actors in there trying to get people to vote for them and have the political debate. This time around, the political actors were only interested in getting people to register so that eventually, they could vote for them come election day. You get a whole different dynamic come to the election, and I would say the political debate, although formally not commenced, is still underway in Liberia, and it's clear that the opposition, 22 parties have been registered, and I guess we already have seven or eight candidates who say they want to run for president. That's, of course, unrealistic, but it's also clear that some, a lot of efforts have been made on the opposition side, because the President is, as you know, running again, so the opposition parties have tried over and over again to make all kinds of alliances, because they see clearly that one party running against one will not sort of be a guarantee for success, but up to now, major alliances have not been formed, because, in the final analysis, they have not been able to agree who should be the front runner, and who should be the runner up, but we still have time. They don't have to register formally until this summer, so something can still happen.

You also have to remember that Liberia is no different from any African country, but very--as all African countries, or the majority of them--they are very different from European or North American countries, because most of the employment and to a large degree, also economic development is centered, focused around the government. So this thing about being in power, being on the side of those in power to a degree is also a guarantee for getting jobs and so on and so forth, so there's a lot of focus on that. There are a couple of them, and one of them, a big opposition party who is already now going to court complaining that the National Election Commission has to be reconfigured and so on, and we will, I'm sure, see a lot of court cases. I'm always saying, I'm not quoted in the press on this, I'm always saying there is a very close relationship, also historically, between Liberia and the United States. It's good, it's healthy, but unfortunately, the Liberians learned a bit too much from the United States. They go to court for anything! [Laughter] And they have too many lawyers practicing private law, so we don't have enough lawyers, neither in the mission nor in the Ministry of Justice or in the judiciary, because they all earn much more money in private practice and go to court for anything. And we will have a lot of court cases. I'm confident we will have an accusation of the elections being rigged, and we'll have to see on the results, but we'll monitor as best as we can and try and support those organizing it.

**Warren Hoge:** All right. If you raise your hand, right here in the second row, and just wait for the microphone please.

**Roma Stibravy:** Roma Stibravy. I would like to know if there's any official organization to mobilize all the Liberians living abroad. I've had a very good experience at the request of the President working with some of the Liberians abroad, and we have been successful in getting some global environment facility funding to start a project, we still have to get matching funds. I found that there are some very willing and able Liberians here in the United States who are very anxious to help their country.

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:** Yeah, there are a lot, I mean, there's a very, very close connection with the Liberian community here in the United States, and they are organized, I mean, the Ambassador of Liberia will be able to tell you much more. They are organized politically. They are organized according to the county they come from, and they are organized. I don't know enough about it, but there is the Maryland Association, and there is this Sino Association following the counties, and I think there's no Liberian politician who visits United States without talking to the Liberian communities wherever they are all over the country. It's a formidable force, and many of them are also, of course, trying to get them to come back home, let alone to invest in Liberia and not keep their money in the United States. So there is a lot of those kinds of associations. I don't know enough about them.

**Warren Hoge:** You know, I have a wonderful colleague from *The New York Times*, Helene Cooper, who wrote a book two years ago called *The House on Sugar Beach*, and she's from the so-called America-Liberian background, so I learned a lot at that point about that whole part of Liberia.

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:** Let me, about that book, say that it's not a scientific book, but it's very easily read, and it gives a very, very good illustration of the history and the challenges in Liberia. Not that I'm supposed to do book promotion!

**Warren Hoge:** Well, I did, so you can! Please, all the way in the back raising your hand, just wait for the microphone, and please identify yourself.

**Ken Johnson:** Sure, my name is Ken Johnson, principal of Devconia, which is an international diaspora development firm. First of all, thank you very much for the briefing. My question is, you mentioned peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and you also differentiate with the development aspect. It seems to me that the problem along the coast of West Africa is one of economics. When I walk the streets of Freetown where I'm originally from, it mirrors the streets of Monrovia. You have young men, unemployed, disaffected, and outside of the mainstream. Now it seems to me that any sustainable peace has to incorporate significant economic development, and the answer is quite simple. Much of that region produces a lot of raw materials. In the case of Sierra Leone: gold, diamond, that value added processing, cutting and polishing would be useful. Liberia: cocoa, coffee. A lot of times, what I call value-added processing along the supply chain is the answer to sustainable peace. I'd like you to comment on that, please. Thanks.

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:** I totally agree! I mean, it reminds me once, President Museveni of Uganda was over here in the UN, and he held a speech, and he talked about how unfair it was, and how the international economy was, because those Ugandans, they produced the cotton, and then it was exported, and every successive step, the value added benefited somebody else, and Ugandan women then had to import this expensive cotton cloth for their dresses.

Yes, I totally agree, but I think in Liberia, you first have to start utilizing, getting a big benefit out of the raw materials they have. We are not there yet. We lifted, in the Security Council, the sanctions on forestry, tropical timber in 2006, and the government is still not getting the expected income from the tropical timber industry. We also have to create jobs. I totally agree with you, and I hope in the plantations, in the mines, the iron ore and so on, jobs will be created that can also be an impetus to the rest of the economy. There are some discussions now with a couple of the rubber conditioners for the rubber plantation of doing a value added processing in Liberia, but it's still only the first step. But I totally agree with you.

I would also agree if you say, in terms of comparing to Sierra Leone, another challenge the countries in West Africa have is protecting their coastline and thereby protecting their resources. My colleagues wonder why I eat fish when I'm in New York, it's because I hardly get any fish in Liberia because the fisherman in their canoes cannot get out and get the fish, and the fish doesn't come sufficiently close because the trawlers are lying out there taking it, and I think that is a problem for all the countries in the region, so yes, I agree with you.

**Warren Hoge:** Gentleman on the aisle here?

**Jorge Tagle:** Jorge Tagle from the Chilean mission, and I would like to know your experience and your work with the regional and subregional organizations for the peacebuilding process in Liberia. Thank you.

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:** Let me say that ECOWAS, as an organization, played a crucial role in the early days in Liberia, no doubt about it, and for quite a while, on the more political side, in the peacebuilding side, it was some of the individual members of the ECOWAS, the Nigerians were quite, were in on some of those issues, both in relation to the police and the army, the chief of staff of the armed forces of Liberia today is still a major general from Nigeria, so yes, the countries in West Africa, and I think ECOWAS played a role in relation to establishing the peace, not only in Liberia, but also in Sierra Leone. I think ECOWAS played, from, where I had been watching it, a fantastic important role in relation to a peaceful political transfer of power and elections and so on in Guinea. ECOWAS has also tried in Côte d'Ivoire, yet without success. From where I have been watching ECOWAS in the last three years, I have been encouraged, but a lot, of course— also now they are changing the commissioners and so on—and a lot was very much on the president of the ECOWAS commission, Dr. Chambers, it was the same with the AU. But again, they lack a lot of capacity, and goes for both of the organizations. I think, but I think the AU, and we see now also, again, still without success, we see how the AU has taken tough decisions in relation to Côte d'Ivoire, for instance. So yes, definitely progress in terms of, as I see it, the regional organizations compared to 15 years ago. It's moving forward, and they are taking responsibility, they're taking a very tough stance. I mean, on Guinea, I have to say, they were very tough. Coups are not acceptable, and they introduced sanctions, ECOWAS and AU copied those sanctions, and the EU, and United States and others, the Security Council never said anything about sanctions and Guinea at the time of the coup in Guinea, after President Conté's death. It's really quite interesting. So yes, there's a lot, but there's a lot to be done yet in order to build the capacity of those organizations.

**Warren Hoge:** Anybody else? Yes, back here.

**Bernd Beber:** Hi, I'm Bernd Beber, political science professor at New York University. You mentioned reconciliation, and I was interested in what your take is on the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission] report and its impact, potential impact on the election.

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:** I don't think it will have an impact on the election. But it's also clear that there hasn't been much progress in implementing the recommendations of the TRC report. Primarily because all the focus has been on the more political elements of the report, and in that discussion, and that discussion has, in itself, become a political discussion, and it's played into the political pre-campaign. So a lot of focus has been lost on many of the other recommendations in the TRC report.

It's very clear that the TRC act says that all recommendations have to be implemented, but it doesn't say anything about the speed in which they have to be implemented, if you see what I mean, but I would hope that after the elections, the work will start in more earnest. The Independent Commission for Human Rights was very late in being established, and you also know that many of those who have been named for atrocities in the report are members of the legislature. Those who have been named for not being, who shouldn't stand for public office for 30 years come from the highest positions, including the President and so on, and the focus has been on all that, but not so much so, and many of the suggestions for reconciliation, so we'll see how it plays out. I don't think, I hope it will not be a big issue during the election campaign. Someone might want to use it. If you note, in the Secretary-General's reports, since the TRC came out, he has written over and over again, it's up to the Liberians to decide how to move forward.

Of course, the international community within the outer limit of saying impunity is not acceptable, I take it, and I have actually had Liberian civil society organizations, because they are as diverted in opinion as all Liberians, asking me, why do you, UN international community, not tell us how to do? And I have tried to tell them that you can't just leave us alone, and I've tried to tell them that we monitor very carefully and monitor carefully and watching what you are doing, but if you are going to have achieved true reconciliation in a country, reconciliation cannot be imposed from abroad. It can be encouraged from abroad, but it has to be owned by the various actors on the ground. So I think it's important that the TRC report and its recommendations are kept alive and kept up on the agenda, and then we'll see how we can move forward, or they can move forward on it.

**Warren Hoge:** Shamina?

**Shamina de Gonzaga:** Hi, Shamina de Gonzaga. I'm just wondering about how all of your efforts are being communicated to the populations, especially in remote areas, as you mentioned yourself, the major infrastructure challenges, it seems like in many instances, even when you have important efforts that are ongoing, people, regular people beyond even civil society organizations don't always know, and that lack of knowledge in itself can lead to further disenfranchisement, so I'm wondering, any thoughts on that, and as naïve as it may sound, even including younger people, perhaps those who were themselves victims in the past, but as involving them even in some observatory capacity so they can feel some sense of involvement or ownership in this rebuilding or building process that you were referring to.

**Ellen Margrethe Løj:** Well, as of course a huge, huge challenge in communicating throughout Liberia; in fact, the only radio that has brought coverage in Liberia is UNMIL Radio, and we don't even cover the whole country, but we have the broadest coverage, and then there's a lot of... then we work a lot with local radio stations in order to get, facilitate some of those messages getting across, but then, since 2006, local administration in the counties have also been built up, and we are still not there, there's still a lot to be done, but it is taking place. Kids go to school, the quality of the education they get is not as could be desired, because there's a lack of qualified teachers and so on, but I have to tell you that Liberians are very, very proud of getting their kids to school, and you can meet 12-year-old boys or girls that go in the first grade. I mean, that doesn't matter, as long as they get the chance to go to school, and you have projects with market women where they're learning to read and write, and you see a 40-year-old market woman writing her name on the blackboard, and being extremely proud, so there's a great

eagerness to acquire that knowledge. Then there is a huge cell phone coverage in Liberia, and it's still not being used, but it could be used to communicate positive messages.

Unfortunately, it's also being used to redistribute rumors, and I was, when we had some disturbances a year ago up in Lofa County, northwest of Liberia between two ethnic groups are pretty violent. I was quoted after a press conference in Liberia, in a Liberian newspaper, and the headline was "Modern Technology Beats the SRSG." The point was people acting violently based on rumors that were communicated by cell phone, so I had said at the press conference, sometime I wish you didn't have cell phones all over Liberia, because we wouldn't have so many disturbances, but of course it's good, but it is a challenge, and civil society organizations are primarily active in Monrovia, which of course, also, is home for one third of the population plus. But it is a challenge, and that's why I talk about, not about rebuilding, but building the country. It's a very clear policy that you want to decentralize and have facilities and institution and offers for the citizens all over Liberia, but that is a challenge in terms of infrastructure and equipment and so on.

**Warren Hoge:**

You know, I said at the outset that this is part of our SRSG series, and indeed it is, and in a couple weeks, we have Ibrahim Gambari, another old friend, coming here. But I'm particularly glad that Ellen focused on elections because there are seventeen elections in Africa this year, and while we haven't really inaugurated a formal series at IPI, I think it will end up being that, because we've got four or five in the works. We've already done Sudan, and so you've managed to combine two things: our SRSG focus, and this focus on elections in Africa that we wanted to do.

Ellen, as I said at the outset, you're a cherished person around here. I'm glad you came back, and I'm particularly glad that you came back to IPI. Thank you.