

# All Eyes on the Borders



**T**he mounting political tensions in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire cast a shadow over Liberia's hard-earned peace, overseen by thousands of UN peacekeepers for over six years now. Going by the history of the West African sub-region, troubles in one country tend to easily spill over to its neighbours and beyond.

Since the death of Guinea's President Lansana Conté and the subsequent military takeover, the political situation in that country remains extremely fragile with

should there be any population influx from neighbouring countries. The Plan is also geared towards rendering humanitarian assistance to the needy.

The Inter-agency Contingency Plan, involving the Liberian government, UNMIL, UN agencies and other partners, is primarily meant to ensure that roles and responsibilities are known to all stakeholders and early response mechanisms are in place in case of a refugee influx. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj and Deputy Special Representative Mustapha

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dozens of protesting civilians massacred. As for Côte d'Ivoire, in February, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced concern about events following the suspension of voter registration ahead of this year's presidential election because of rising tensions. Originally intended to be held in 2005, the polls have been repeatedly postponed. The UN peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire is currently engaging the major political parties to resume the Ivorian political process.

It is against this backdrop that an Inter-agency Contingency Plan has been developed to preserve Liberia's peace and security and to counter any spill-over effects

Soumaré were actively involved in putting in place the task force led by the UNHCR to update the contingency plan both at country and county levels. In line with its international obligations, the Government of Liberia will assume overall responsibility for coordination of emergency response operations through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Liberia Refugee, Repatriation and Resettlement Commission.

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sified border patrols. During a recent visit to the border, she urged Liberians to alert national security agencies and UNMIL of any unusual movements along the border.

"There is no report of influx yet, but we have identified potential primary and secondary crossing points, transit points, way stations, and camps. We have also built up a network of information sharing. We don't want people, including women and children, to cross over the border and there is nobody to help should there be any influx," says Ibrahima Coly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



Border patrol in progress



(UNHCR) representative in Liberia. Coly, who routinely visits the border counties and interacts with key actors, says given Liberia's post-conflict transition status, it is crucial that any eventual emergency response is balanced with the needs of maintaining stability in the country and supporting the people to continue rebuilding their lives.

Reiterating that border monitoring is part of his agency's routine activities, UNHCR's Senior Protection Officer Mamadou Balde says the Contingency Plan targets refugees who may opt to

remain in border areas among communities with whom they have ethnic affiliations. Local communities have already been informed. "However, others may opt to move to areas in the interior where they can receive protection and assistance. We are here to support the Government," says Balde. Currently, there are nearly 13,000 registered Liberian refugees residing in Guinea.

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Programme will be responsible for food while UNICEF is the lead agency for WATSAN, nutrition and education, and will support UNHCR and World Health Organization (WHO) in protection and health. The WHO is the coordinating agency for the health and nutrition sector. There are many other actors with defined roles.

At a recent press briefing in Monrovia, UNMIL Force Commander, Lt.-Gen. Sikander Afzal, reassured Liberians that there are no external threats to the country.

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Various organizations have already been identified for support in vital sectors such as shelter, food, and water and sanitation (WATSAN). "Relief items, including food and non food items have also been prepositioned in the border areas," says Representative Coly. World Food

"We have a comprehensive mechanism in which we regularly have meetings with the security agencies of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire," he pointed out. As the political situation in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire continues to remain uncertain, humanitarian and security actors say the best scenario is that there are no disruptions leading to population influxes into Liberia.

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