

FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

As the title of this book says, governments and international organizations are “bound to cooperate” with the people if they want to avoid conflict and make progress. The peace process binds political leaders to the leaders of civil society, whose voices need to be expressed. This book expresses those voices: it has been written by leaders of civil society in Sierra Leone. Not only the people of Sierra Leone, but the whole of Africa can find lessons here about building peace.

For more than a decade the United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) has been researching weapon collection and grass-roots participation. From this research it emerges clearly that peace and disarmament cannot be achieved without the active participation of civil society and civil society organizations (CSOs). CSOs are vital partners for governments and international organizations undertaking disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform. Without human rights organizations and strong local governance groups, security sector reform will be weaker and the abuse of power will not be curbed. Without the pressure of organized civil society, judges will be weak, police will be venal and there will be no rule of law. Without CSOs, and especially the mobilization of women, disarmament, reintegration and reconciliation cannot succeed.

UNIDIR research and the experience of UN peace operations are creating new perceptions about peace, human security and the state. Many countries have suffered from the failure of post-colonial, centralized regimes—and many have been further discredited by incompetent civil and military regimes. African traditions of decentralized, community governance were suppressed by colonial rule. Then, with the end of colonialism, young political parties repressed civil society in their efforts to build strong, new, one-party states.

But since the early 1990s, countries like Senegal and Ghana and Mali have been creating new mechanisms for decentralized governance. Decentralization strengthens civil society—not just the urban groups that are so often perceived by donors as the most important, but the rural civil

society organizations of Africa: village associations and cooperatives, unions of workers and artisans, women's credit unions, youth groups and a thousand other associative networks.

This new millennium has seen civil society (including inter-faith councils, press associations and the media) become one of five pillars in the modern West African state, alongside the executive, the legislature, the security forces and the judiciary. Civil society has regained its historic African position as the second pillar, second only to the executive. In many countries, civil society is replacing a discredited legislature as the most important representative voice of the people, and supplanting the judiciary as a primary source of conflict mediation.

As our Sierra Leone case studies illustrate, civil society has become the indispensable partner in peace-building and disarmament. While peace agreements may be signed in the plush hotels of capital cities, the real work takes place in the villages, where militias hide and weapons need to be collected. No peace accord illustrates this better than that of Côte d'Ivoire: negotiations in the Parisian suburb of Marcoussis have not yet had an impact either on the rebels in the north or the *patriotes* militia in Abidjan. Perhaps we should be looking for a new approach to peace negotiation, based on the strengths of African civil society and the capacity of grass-roots and women's organizations. The chapters in this book certainly seem to point us in that direction.

The people of West Africa need to build peace more than ever and during this, UNIDIR's 25th anniversary year, we have decided to reprint these voices of civil society. This book is the result of a UNIDIR action-research partnership with West African civil society organizations to promote the Economic Community of West African States' moratorium on small arms and light weapons (SALW) that was signed in Abuja on 31 October 1998. The original edition of the book is out of print, yet people still want it because its ideas are relevant to Africa's current problems. Conflict continues to threaten Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Liberia; these countries can learn from the lessons of neighbouring Sierra Leone. Voices from Sierra Leone also need to be heard in Chad and Sudan, Uganda and as far away as Africa's Great Lakes region, where weapons, and refugees, abound.

Some of the problems raised in these chapters have yet to be settled in Sierra Leone. The corruption described by Abdulai Bayraytay is as damaging as ever: it is threatening to undermine the government of President Kabbah. Looking at Sierra Leone's governance systems today, it is painful to re-read and still recognize the descriptions by Joe Alie, Michael Foray and Abubakar Kargbo of the "failed state syndrome" and the politics of systematic exclusion that destroyed the country's state institutions. The institutional problems analysed by Nat Cole and Chris Charley are as acute now as they were when they were first written. Political protectionism remains pervasive: some Sierra Leoneans are suggesting that senior international cadres should be co-opted for the central bank, the national police, and the offices of Attorney General and Accountant General—as is the case for judges on the Sierra Leone High Court.

From the wreckage of the post-colonial state comes a ray of hope in the form of emerging alternative, decentralized governance systems. The work of civil society organizations is described in the chapters of Isaac Lappia, Michael Foray, Chris Squire and Binta Mansaray as indispensable for reconciliation and disarmament. Village councils, age groups and women's associations emerge as key players for peacemaking, with greater influence than the outside-imported institutions. CSOs offer a way forward in terms of governance.

The disarmament and demobilization process has officially ended in Sierra Leone, but the questions of rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation described by Francis Kai-Kai have not all been solved. West Africa has huge numbers of under-employed young people, who need education and jobs. Education in Sierra Leone is now so run-down that teachers remain unpaid—a sign that the state is still failing. What will replace discredited education models? In the absence of massive state investment in infrastructure and job creation, civil society offers alternative paths to prosperity, and community schools are just one such innovation. Rehabilitation and reconciliation of former combatants must take place at the community level. Rebuilding roads and bridges and markets, restoring families, communities and a sense of confidence between neighbours are the stuff of peace-building. And decentralized governance appears to offer the best means of achieving all these.

Africa challenges us to seek alternative models for building peace. UNIDIR's work on this goes back to the 1994 project *Disarmament and*

Conflict Resolution—Managing Arms in Peace Processes. Since then our research on West Africa has taken us through *A Peace of Timbuktu* (where the first Flame of Peace in 1997 transformed weapon destruction into an act of public confidence-building) and the West African small arms moratorium, to *Implementing the United Nations Programme of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons* and our current work on peace-building and disarmament with civil society in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Two years ago, a UNIDIR seminar in Geneva on participative processes and the evaluation of weapon collection, funded by the Government of Japan, confirmed the importance of establishing partnerships with civil society organizations. This book provides more evidence that civil society is an indispensable pillar of the modern African state. Thanks to Anatole Ayissi and Robin Edward Poulton for bringing together these voices. UNIDIR is also grateful for to the governments of Canada, Ghana, Sweden and the United Kingdom; without their financial help, this work would not have been possible.

Patricia Lewis
Director
UNIDIR