

## 6. David Tocun-Dolo Flomo

### *“The Precipitation of Corruption in Civil War Situation –the Liberian Experience”*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Webster’s third new International Dictionary defined corruption as a language change in such a way that a standard form becomes different from earlier forms regarded as better or purer- not used technically. It also defines corruption as morally debased, perverted from the right principles, weakened or unsound.

Corruption is tantamount to the abuse of public office for private gain. Rampant corruption, nepotism, tribalism, class discrimination, and exploitation in all spheres of the Liberian society caused the civil war in Liberia. However, the civil war led to more corruption, which affected the socio-economic, political, religious and psychological fibers of the Liberian society. After the war, the language, perspectives of life, lifestyle and perception of the Liberian people changed or eroded. It changed from “tomorrow” to “today”.

This paper is intended to highlight the wrong approach Charles Taylor<sup>1</sup> used to justify his corrupt behavior, to assess the impact of his behavior on the Liberian people, as well as the whole of West Africa. Hence, the aim of Charles Taylor was to eliminate injustice, corruption, nepotism and mismanagement of government funds and resources, but the civil war he waged on the country fueled and yielded more negative effects than his anticipated expectations, which he is also aiding to perpetuate through his economic policies and reforms.

#### **II. THE PRECIPITATION OF CORRUPTION IN A CIVIL WAR SITUATION-THE LIBERIAN EXPERIENCE:**

Civil war actually enhances massive corruption in a country, as well as internationally, which is perpetrated by all classes of citizens. Local and international businessmen and women also take advantage of the conflicts, confusions and intimidation to engage in illegal deals and to inflate prices of commodities. Very high on the list are those who benefit from the conflicts in Liberia through illegal arms and mineral deals. The control and exploitation of diamonds, timbers, gold, iron ore and other materials was one of the principal objectives of the various warring factions, and it gave them the means to sustain the conflict.

War situations can be extreme- leaders can use murder, terror, and atrocities as a control technique for both combatants and non-combatants to conform to their atrocious behavior. Civil war can thus weaken people’s moral values, and they can break their own values, norms or cultures, as well as moral dignity. Rebel leaders can use war situations as a corrupt end, using atrocities as a means for others to participate. Warfare and trauma of warfare has a generational effect, which has led to post traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) in the ex-combatants, including me. Men and women who are trained to kill, extort, rape, intimidate, torture, rob and exploit others using force, a small percentage of them cannot change to normal life. The ex-combatants who are in the present government of Charles Taylor, as well as Charles Taylor himself will remain corrupt until their generation is dead and gone.

Civil war can and does enhanced corruption in diverse ways and situations. For example, the acquisition of arms and ammunitions and other military hardware and equipment by the various warring factions are all done through dubious means. The recruitment of combatants, the use of force, hypnosis and drugs, as well as the indoctrination of the combatants (mostly children), which gives them a negative and evil perspective of the world that we live in.

---

<sup>1</sup> Former leader of the National Patriotic front of Liberia from 1990-1997, and present president of Liberia.

The civil war in Liberia has also precipitated corruption at the international level. It has brought prosperity to other countries and individuals such as Burkina Faso, France South Africa, and the Lebanese merchants who are trading in diamonds and gold in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Civil war worldwide is a phenomenon that ruins the profitability, reputability and legitimacy of organizations, and governments wherever it occurs (Roussouw, 1999).

### ***THE PRECIPITATION OF CORRUPTION IN A CIVIL WAR SITUATION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL:***

*“We all thought that civil war in Liberia would change the attitudes and behavior of the Liberian people, but it made it worst than ever before” (Mr. Dauda Massaquoi, EDP Statistical Officer, UNV, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees-Kenya Office).*

The Liberian civil war has had diverse effects on the Liberian people. In the face of civil war, rampant destruction, mass killings and lawlessness, humanity seized to be important in the concreteness of hunger, disease, nakedness, shelterlessness and the complete ignorance of the choices that maybe open to him or her. In the midst of all these, people’s attitudes and perspectives changed in order to search for common means of survival. In searching for that can usually lead to corrupt practices, which is mostly caused by civil war, instead of eradicating it.

Misuse of human labor, “exploitation of the flesh” was a common scene in the Liberian civil war. Child abduction and abuse, as well as forceful enlistment of children as young as 10 years old, and drug abuse was a common method that Charles Taylor and other rebel leaders used to propagate their rebellion against Liberians and Liberia. I was abducted, drugged and forcefully enlisted at age 15, against my wishes, into the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, which Charles Taylor headed from 1990-1997, before turning it into a political party to contest the 1997 presidential elections. I was made to fight for the “freedom and liberation” of my country from the tyrannical rule of Samuel Doe. I was hailed and made to believe that I was a “freedom fighter”.

In the Liberian civil war, children were the main perpetrators of the war in all areas, especially in the frontline. They were also the most abused (especially the girls), most fierce (due to the impact of the drugs), and most dreaded “warriors” because they could disguised themselves to be anything or anybody. If children for instance, turn out to be not such good soldiers, or (are) wounded or maimed and cannot continue in the in the front line, they are turned into slaves, to dig diamonds. Some of us were made to run other errands such as transportation of illegal arms and ammunitions, or were sent on reconnaissance missions to spy or gather information on the “enemies”. Rebel commanders and various high-ranking rebel leaders used the girls as sex slaves.

In a civil war situation, hosts of less visible people play key parts in design, threat assessment, military strategy, manufacture and financing. This can lead to corrupt use of power by concentration of power in the non-elected hands. That is, at the end of the war (as it is the present situation in Liberia), everyone becomes “somebody” and they always command recognition of their personalities or position. This has seriously undermined professionalism, accountability and the chain of command in the present Charles Taylor government. My trip

to Liberia in 1999 to locate and establish ties with my family members and to obtain a new passport, brought me face-to-face with “live” display of corruption, which exhibited a clean evidence of negative behavioral changed due to the civil war. At every checkpoints (there were the police, immigrations, and military checkpoints), whether my travel documents were correct or not, I would be asked to give “something”, likewise the driver; which I had no choice, but to pay before continuing my journey. At the passport office in Monrovia, the guard at the door asked me for “something” before allowing me in to submit my passport application forms. No other way out because “where the goat is tied, there it is going to eat from”. So is the common saying of almost all Liberians after the brutal and senseless war.

Just like other rebels in Africa, Charles Taylor and his rebels were and are motivated by lust for power and loot. They used atrocities (horror and terror) as a corrupt way of threatening and frightening people out of the diamond, logging, rubber, iron ore, and gold areas so that they can mine with impunity. The rebel diamonds helped to pay for weapons, logistics, among other things. Liberia exported more than six million carats a year between 1994 and 1998, according to records of the Belgian Diamond High Council, but Liberian own diamond mining capacity is between 100,000 and 150,000 carats. This means that the additional diamonds came from the Sierra Leone diamond fields, which indicates that Charles Taylor involvement in the Sierra Leonean civil war and his close alliance with Foday Sankoh<sup>2</sup> has a business undertone in terms of illegal diamonds deals.

Generally we were not paid as rebels to fight (except mercenaries and other experts who were contracted by the rebel leaders); so whatever we obtained or looted from the frontline became our “legitimate” properties (even women). Due to this, the Liberian civil war has led to the “eat” culture (you chop, I chop), unlike the “national contribution” culture (we work, we chop). The post civil war Liberians has the tendency to satisfy first their personal desires when it comes to national affairs (except for a few), instead of seeking the interest of the nation. At the moment, there is nothing like “national pride” in Liberia, but “me first, before you”, which is called the “me-now syndrome”.

Consequently, when the civil war is over, the new regime seeks allies with other countries, organizations and individuals that contributed to the enhancement of the civil war. This can open up the channels of corruption once again in awarding of contracts and concessions for mining and logging. It can also undermine development as the government would use all of its resources to repay the debt it incurred during the civil war as Charles Taylor is currently doing for Muammar, Qaddafi<sup>3</sup> of Libya and Blaise Compaore<sup>4</sup> of Burkina Faso, France and Ivory Coast. Generally, civil war does negatively affect performance, accountability and integrity, thus paving the way for massive and “varied dimensional” corruption. Bribery and corruption at all levels of our national life are taken for granted. They have become a dangerous social cancer that is eating its lethal way into the fabric of almost all areas of the Liberian society (Osei, 1999).

### **III. THE WAY FORWARD (DESIGNING STRATEGIES) AND CONCLUSION**

*“War has become too dangerous to be a reliable instrument of nation-building and state formation in the future. Conflict prevention requires greater sophistication in diagnosing conflict prone situation (Mazrui, Ali, A. 2001).”*

---

<sup>2</sup> Leader of the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF). He is presently in jail in Freetown, Sierra Leone for human rights violations and for breaching the peace accord between the rebels and the Sierra Leone government.

<sup>3</sup> Libyan Army colonel and political leader; chief of state since 1969, and present advocate and forerunner of the African Union.

<sup>4</sup> Present president of Burkina Faso and a close friend of Charles Taylor.

Given the high frequency of civil war and the fact that outside countries often support one or both sides, it follows that internal war is a concern of the international community. One of the way best ways that the international community can get involved is by ensuring their neutrality to all parties, warring factions and countries involved in a conflict. That is, by treating all countries equal and supreme, by respecting their sovereignty.

The creation of a permanent global police force would help set the institutional stage for gradually curtailing the rampant looting of resources of civil war countries and to protect human lives. To succeed in curbing corruption and mass looting in war torn countries, it is essential to increase incentives for governments to honor both customary constraints and formal agreements.

The creation of an international monitoring agency under the auspices of the United Nations or Transparency International could help to bring the weight of the entire world community into the process of encouraging and enforcing compliance and assuring that no country or group could avoid detection if it violated international limitations.

Non-military means for determining wars, like muscles in the human body, gain strength from frequent use, and atrophy without it. If we seek to reduce the role of military power as a means to ensure human security over the long run, we must take seriously the need to exercise, strengthen and institutionalize the available procedures for resolving disputes without violence.

If civil war begins in the minds of men and women, then, to establish peace requires us to learn not only how to build procedures for resolving disputes non-violently, but also how to accept such procedures ourselves, and how to induce others to accept them. Individuals, churches, governments and international organizations can help to teach essential lessons routinizing non-violent conflict resolution by undertaking independent initiatives in their own behavior to implement the above proposals.

The universal declaration of human rights reaffirms that all people have “the right to a social and international order in which the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration can be fully realized”. We have reached the stage in which a new international order, with some minimal degree of representative global governance to curb corruption, is not only a recognized human right, but also a practical necessity and a moral duty (Johansson, 1990).

In conclusion, civil war in Liberia is likely to distort its public expenditures. That is, corrupt countries appear to spend less on education. Corruption also slows direct foreign investment; thus, it is negatively associated with developmental objectives. It goes hand-in-hand with lack of economic reform. To curb graft, governments should set up a new budget monitoring and price intelligence unit. The unit should constitute the nucleus of the budget office. For example, in Uganda, when Yoweri Museveni<sup>5</sup> came to power in 1986, he implemented a strategy that encompassed reforming the civil service, strengthening the auditor general’s office, empowering a reputable inspector general to investigate and prosecute corruption, and implementing an anti-corruption public campaign.

#### ***IV. REFERENCE LIST.***

This study used various methods, which included my personal experience and participation in the Liberian civil war from the period 1990-1997, interviews with prominent Liberians, library research and daily news from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio, as well as other international radio, television, newspapers and magazines.

---

<sup>5</sup> Current president of Uganda since 1986. He came to power through a rebel movement.

Annan, Kofi, (1998). The sources of conflict – report of the United Nations Secretary General to the Security Council. New York: United Nations.

British Broadcasting Focus on Africa magazines, January-March, April-June, July-September 2001 editions, Bush House, London.

Girls are used as sex slaves. (2001, June 13). **Daily Nation-Kenya.**

Liberia, (1996). The world book encyclopedia. Chicago: World Book Inc.

Mazrui, Ali A. (2001, January 28). The genesis of conflict around Africa. **Sunday Nation-Kenya, 17.**

Ochieng, Philip. (2001, May 20). Human rights' a disguise for human wrongs. **Sunday Nation-Kenya.**

Osei, Joseph, (1999). **Fraud and traditional ethics.** Fraud and the African Renaissance. 24-41.

Politics, Social and cultural series (1997). **Africa Research Bulletin.** New Jersey: Blackwell Publishers Limited.

Rodney, Walter, (1998). How Europe underdeveloped Africa. Nairobi: East Africa Educational Publishers.

Roussow, Deon, (1999). **Defining and understanding fraud.** Fraud and the African renaissance. 13-24.

Todaro, Michael, P. (1985). Economic development of the third world. New York: Longman.