

## Struggling Towards Peace

by Terry Pyne, Liberia

Today, there is relative peace in Liberia after fourteen years of civil war. The woman who is president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is doing extremely well. Our economy is now taking an upward trend. The livelihood of people is gradually picking up. We can now see the peace of Jesus Christ being shared, especially among the former warring tribes through intermarriages, dialoguing, sports, and at intellectual forums. We have realized that we are all created in God's image and likeness, and as such we should live together as brothers and sisters.

This new-found peace did not come easily or quickly. It was preceded by the needless deaths of over two-hundred thousand people. On the over-all ramifications of the war, we can conclude that the actual cause of the war was because of greed for power and wealth. Liberia is a country that is endowed with deposits of natural resources. All of the leaders were in the business of selling these resources with the proceeds been placed in their personal accounts in foreign countries, leaving the poor masses living conditions very deplorable.

Liberia is considered Africa's oldest independent country. It is situated on the West coast of Africa, is home to three million people, and has a land area of 43,000 square miles. It was founded by free slaves from America through an organization know as America Colonization Society in 1822. All of the leaders (Presidents) were American/Liberian except the 20th President, Samuel K. Doe, who was indigenous. Doe came to power through the barrel of a gun April 12, 1980, when he and thirteen of his colleagues-in-arms overthrew the government of William R. Tolbert. Regrettably, all of President Tolbert's ministers were placed on poles and gunned down for rampant corruption and misuse of public offices. Doe then ran a military junta for ten unbroken years which was polarized by rage, execution, and torture.

In 1985 a general and presidential election was held which was rigged by Doe. After the election, Life during the civil war was horrifying. There were two different warring factions and both were accusing the civilians of belonging to the other group. People who lived between the warring factions would need to move around to get food or water, and they would be accused of being a spy for the opposing faction. Many were killed or hands and legs were amputated, and the victims were told to "go tell your people." During one uprising, I and others lived because we were able to lie down in the dirty areas and use the dark of the night to make our way to the diplomatic enclave of the Embassy. If you were not lucky, you were caught and killed. I did not join one of the factions. To do so would have meant that I would have had to kill people on the other side. Why should I take someone's life just to be safe?

At the end of the civil war, Charles Taylor went from being a war lord to the elected president of the country, but did not stop the madness in Liberia. In fact, he extended it into Sierra Leone where he launched a full-scale war, killing thousands of people and amputating the arms and legs of thousands more. He is presently being investigated by The Hague for crimes against humanity.

The end of war was brought about when the factions realized they were only killing one another—brothers killing brothers. Key leaders of the different warring factions went to the dialogue table, which resulted in power sharing. The West African Intervention Group came as peacekeepers, and the Economic Countries for West Africa Monetary Group (ECOMOG) helped with regional security.

After witnessing first-hand the many atrocities, I needed to learn how to forgive. When I started really thinking of Jesus' love that he shared for all of us—that he died for all of our sins—I thought about the redemption of sin. I reasoned that if God can forgive, why as a human being can't I, so I made the decision to forgive those who had done horrible things.

The people of my country needed to learn how to forgive. They did this gradually, because fourteen years of fighting had left many scars. Tribes never see eye to eye, but slowly they began to befriend one another and then have confidence in one another. Peace came about naturally by people lending a helping hand to someone who was in need. Marriages between warring factions began to be planned, and forgiveness started to come about.

When thinking about current genocide, as a survivor of such horror, I have the following advice to offer others who care.

- \* The countries that manufacture arms need to stop trading the arms to those involved in the conflict. The trading of arms only serves to further desecrate the country.

- \* People and governments need to be taught about relinquishing power in a peaceful manner. No president wants to leave office when the term is over. In Liberia, there were democratic tenures and norms, but there was not a peaceful transfer of power when the terms were over.

- \* All factions should be encouraged to come to the dialogue table where different groups will be represented through government office.

After trauma, people need help to rebuild their lives. I have found that when people love one another and live up to the biblical principles the way God, our Creator wants us to, then all can have happy lives.