

## INTERNATIONAL

## Sierra Leone civil war could end soon

LOME, Togo (AP) — Amid new signs that Sierra Leone's bloody civil war soon could end, Nigeria and Togo issued a solemn call Saturday for "national reconciliation" between the rebels and the government.

A source close to Togo's Foreign Ministry told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity, that peace talks now in their fourth week here were completed and a draft peace plan had been prepared.

The draft was presented

to Togolese President Gnassingbe Eyadema, whose government has been mediating between the rebels of Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front and the regime of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. It was not known Saturday when the warring sides would respond to the draft, the source said, but they planned to meet again Monday.

As the peace negotiations wound down, Eyadema and Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo called on both sides

in the conflict "to make an ultimate effort to reach peace and national reconciliation... to assure peace and the reconstruction of their country."

Although Kabbah's government and the rebels both have made key concessions, the rebels have not yet publicly responded to an offer by Sierra Leone President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah's government to give them four Cabinet posts and four other vice-ministerial positions.

Nigeria leads the ECOMOG regional intervention force that has fought in support of Sierra Leone's government, and it has rebuffed rebel demands that ECOMOG troops pull out of the country once an accord is reached.

But in four hours of consultations that began late Friday night and continued into early Saturday at Eyadema's birthplace of Pya, 250 miles north of Lome, Obasanjo and Eyadema

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## U.S. embassies in Africa now reopened

WASHINGTON (AP) — The State Department reopened five embassies in Africa on Monday but said terrorists directed by fugitive Saudi millionaire Osama bin Laden still may be preparing attacks on U.S. facilities.

Declaring the protection of American diplomats a top priority, spokesman James P. Rubin said the embassy in Madagascar would remain shuttered, with daily evaluations of the situation in the Indian Ocean island republic.

Security at all six

embassies has been enhanced since operations were suspended last Thursday, but they remain the targets of "suspicious surveillance," Rubin said.

He would not say whether U.S. intelligence knows bin Laden's whereabouts but called him "a wanted man" "day will come."

Last week, Rubin gave no details about suspicions that led U.S. authorities to suspend operations at the embassies in Gambia, Togo, Liberia, Namibia, Senegal and Madagascar.

He did not explain Monday why intelligence and other officials who consulted over the weekend decided to reopen all the embassies except the one in Madagascar.

At the same time, Rubin renewed a warning that bin Laden may be preparing to strike as the Aug. 7 anniversary of bombings last year of the American embassies in Kenya and Tanzania. The blasts killed 224 people, including 12 Americans in Nairobi.

"We have seen an increased activity indicating

continuing planning for terrorist attacks by members of Osama bin Laden's network," he said. Bin Laden is accused in a trial in New York of masterminding last summer's twin attacks in East Africa. Nine of the 15 defendants are fugitives, including bin Laden.

U.S. embassies worldwide were placed on a heightened state of alert last week due to increased security worries. Bin Laden, who was put this month on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list, is believed to be in Afghanistan.

## Beninois women unable to pay maternity bills held

Michee Boko

Special to Sentinel-Voice

COTONOU (IPS) — Mothers without the means to pay for their maternity bills are being prevented from leaving hospital premises and are forced to sleep outdoors until they settle them.

One woman, who prefers to be called Jane Doe to conceal her identity, says she has spent three weeks at Lagune de Cotonou, Benin's main maternity hospital, for failure to pay her 30,000 CFA franc bill. One US dollar is equal to 566.42 CFA francs.

Her husband, a chauffeur, ran out of money after spending all his savings on medicine and medical tests. Doe occasionally works as a street peddler. A family member promised to help them, but he never came through.

"For three weeks, my husband and I have tried to come up with 30,000 francs to get out of here with my child. I've had it. I can't stand all the visitors looking at me. Sometimes they are compassionate, but others make fun of us. I'm so ashamed," she said on the verge of tears.

Each week, between five

and six mothers wait in hopes that the hospital will write off their debt.

Julienne Dossouvi, the director of Lagune de Cotonou, said they admit the women "without formality and care for their health, and that of their unborn babies."

Once the birth is over, however, the women find themselves unable to come up with the money, which varies between 21,000 and 50,000 CFA francs. "After two or three days of waiting, the hospital's management is forced to ask them to free the beds up for new patients," said Dossouvi.

While waiting for their husbands or parents to come settle the bill, the women are allowed to stay in straw huts meant for visitors, or in the hospital's corridors. They are not allowed past the hospital's gates. The guards are given strict orders not to let them go home, under any circumstances.

"In the past, some got away with their babies without paying the bill. Now, we have a checkpoint at the gate, so no one gets away," said Dossouvi. But, she denies that the women are prisoners. "We resort to such

measures just to get their parents to come and pay their bills," she explained.

Dossouvi acknowledged that the hospital is subsidized by the government, but that the amount given is not enough. As a result, the management charges a modest fee to prevent the institution from closing down.

"What we ask of the patients is just a one-third contribution toward the actual cost of their care. Pregnancy lasts, after all, nine months. These women could've put aside at least a little something toward their hospital costs," she said. The hospital also takes in women from Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo. Sophie Agbidi, a social worker there, said there's only a small budget allotted for the needy

and the poor. "The hospital's social service department decides to help, after some investigation," she says. "But, we cannot do it for everyone." Jerome Loko, another hospital official, said the budget earmarked for the needy and the poor is only 500,000 CFA francs a year.

To help ease this situation, Dossouvi said she is forming a charitable group, "Association of Friends of the Hospital," to help those mothers unable to pay their hospital bills. "People of goodwill, Beninois or otherwise, with a little extra money to spare, will be asked to contribute toward this noble cause," she said.

The 1997 Human Development Report, published by the U.S.

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## WORLD BRIEFS

## THREE-MEMBER PANEL INVESTIGATES U.N. ACTIONS IN RWANDA

UNITED NATIONS (IPS) — Five years after the Rwandan genocide, a three-member panel began work on June 21 to answer the question that has perplexed United Nations officials: Did the world body do enough to prevent the massacres of as many as one million people? Former Swedish Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson, leader of the three-member team that includes delegates from South Korea and Nigeria, said: "We will have full access to all materials. We hope to draw conclusions about why this could happen." Several nations, including France and Belgium, have conducted their own inquiries about how the U.N. and other forces responded to the massacres that followed the April 6, 1994, death of Rwandan President Juvenal Habyarimana in an unexplained plane crash. "What is new, is that this is an independent panel, not tied to one particular country," said former Korean Foreign Minister Han Sung-Joo, a member of the body. The panel — which also includes Nigerian Gen. Rufus Kupolati — is scheduled to report to U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan by the end of the year.

## FOOD AID NEEDED TO AVERT MALNUTRITION IN ANGOLA

LUANDA (IPS) — Hundreds of thousands of Angolans are at an increased risk for malnutrition due to the impact of armed conflict on the nation's food supply, poor health and inadequate sanitation, said a new U.N. report. The report, issued recently by the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization and the World Food Program, said international emergency food assistance estimated at 180,000 tons of grains will be needed through April 2000. Of this total, 56,000 tons have already been pledged, leaving a shortfall of 124,000 tons. "Hostilities have been experienced in virtually all provinces but the areas worst affected have been the main maize growing central provinces," according to the report. Aid agencies say more than three million Angolans can be classified as displaced or war-affected.

## SURINAME'S EMBATTLED PRESIDENT MAY STAY IN POWER

GEORGETOWN (IPS) — Embattled President Jules Wijdenbosch may well end up running the country for at least another year despite the fact that the National Assembly voted for his removal from office earlier this month. When the 51-seat Assembly managed to muster enough votes to pass a no-confidence motion against Wijdenbosch, the country was in an upbeat mood because it believed that real "people power" had prevailed for the first time in many years. The preference of many here is for a Cabinet dominated by business persons, rather than career politicians. But, Wijdenbosch, a Dutch-trained political scientist and president since May 1996, maintains that the Assembly vote was illegal because the Constitution does not give it the right to remove a head of state on the basis that the economy has declined drastically under his leadership. "I don't see anything happening at the moment to elect a new president. I think everything will fade away and we will have to go for new elections as the president has been proposing all the time," said Dr. Humphrey Hasrat, Suriname's Caribbean Ambassador. If the Assembly fails in the coming weeks to get enough votes to elect a new president, it would represent a stunning blow to efforts by the opposition and civil society to change the political status quo in Suriname, a country of 405,000 people on South America's Caribbean coast.



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