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The Honorable Richard L. Armitage
Deputy Secretary of State
Department of State
2201 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20520

December 16, 2003

Dear Secretary Armitage,

We, the undersigned CEOs of InterAction member organizations, seek your help in addressing the urgent humanitarian and security needs in Liberia.

Many of our agencies are attempting to provide life-saving services to displaced and war affected communities throughout Liberia. Our efforts however are severely restricted by the absence of security in more than 85% of the country. Armed gangs continue to murder, rape and loot villages at will, terrorizing the populations and preventing efforts by aid groups to reduce suffering.

Despite UN resolutions authorizing a peacekeeping force of 15,000 troops, only 5,000 have arrived and full deployment is not expected until next spring. Some countries that have pledged troops lack the logistical means to rapidly deploy them. Unless UNMIL is brought quickly up to full strength and deployed to implement its mandate, humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts will remain restricted to a small geographical area and to limited populations.

While we support the disarmament, demobilization, reconciliation and reintegration (DDRR) of combatants, the plan for Liberia can only succeed if there is a safe and secure environment and if adequate resources and programming are provided. The failure to have all these critical elements online at the same time in all major regions will result in further death and conflict, as we witnessed last week. Private voluntary organizations are present on the ground and ready to implement DDRR related programs. While a review of the DDRR plan is underway, security must be improved for a successful restart and needed resources provided.

Although the situation has improved since former President Charles Taylor left, humanitarian needs are massive. There are an estimated 500,000 internally displaced persons and 300,000 Liberian refugees in bordering countries. Services for the most vulnerable populations in Liberia are still inadequate, camp management is inconsistent, there is rampant sexual abuse, and material resources are lacking, all of which causes grave protection and health concerns. Liberia has been decimated by 14 years of war and the physical infrastructure has been largely destroyed. Crops have not been planted, and this fact, combined with an 85 percent unemployment rate, severely limits the ability of the Liberian people to earn a living.

Recent Congressional appropriations of \$200 million for humanitarian and reconstruction needs in Liberia, and \$245 million for peacekeeping demonstrate

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U.S. commitment to assist Liberia and we hope other nations will contribute similarly. While we applaud efforts for long term reconstruction and support the upcoming donors' conference and the Secretary's role in that regard, immediate needs are not being met.

We appeal to you for two immediate actions. First, funding shortfalls for humanitarian needs within Liberia and for refugees in border countries can be quickly met by the release of a sufficient portion of the \$200 million appropriated by Congress specifically for Liberia's relief and recovery. We trust that you will help to ensure that such funds will be used only for Liberia's humanitarian and reconstruction needs. Given the steps required to release and utilize funds and the approaching holiday season, it is imperative that you take action quickly to make these funds available to private voluntary organizations. Second, we further urge you to use your good offices to redouble efforts to secure the rapid deployment of all UNMIL peacekeepers by those countries that have pledged troops and to engage other parts of the U.S. government that are able to facilitate resolution of logistical and equipment difficulties.

We thank you for your continued commitment to humanitarian efforts and for your help in improving the security situation within Liberia.

Respectfully,

Stuart Willcuts, President and CEO
Air Serv International

Hugh Parmer, President
American Refugee Committee

Curtis R. Welling, President & CEO
AmeriCares

Paul Montacute, Director
Baptist World Aid

Ken Hackett, President
Catholic Relief Services

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Richard E. Stearns, President
World Vision

Cc: Andrew Natsios, USAID Administrator