



# World Chronicle

UNITED NATIONS

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**GUEST:** Jacques Paul Klein  
UN Special Representative in Liberia

**JOURNALISTS:** Betsy Pisik, The Washington Times  
Celine Curiol, BBC Afrique

**MODERATOR:** Abderrahim Foukara

## **"Liberia: Can it emerge from the Ashes?"**

After a more than a decade of civil war the West African nation of Liberia ranks among the world's poorest and most dysfunctional: a place where the average life expectancy today (41 years) is lower than it was in 1975.

Can the new UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia finally bring a peace dividend to the long-suffering people of that country? How will its rebel armies, including thousands of child soldiers, be disarmed, healed, and reintegrated into society? Will ousted strongman Charles Taylor undermine the efforts to create a new political culture?

These are just some of the questions explored in this edition of World Chronicle, featuring Jacques Klein, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia.

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**ANNOUNCER:** From the United Nations in New York, an unedited interview programme on global issues. This is **World Chronicle**. And here is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**FOUKARA:** Hello, I'm Abderrahim Foukara and this is **World Chronicle**.

After more than a decade of civil war, the West African nation of Liberia ranks among the world's poorest and most dysfunctional – a place where you could expect on average to live to the ripe old age of 41.

Can a UN peacekeeping mission in the country – 15,000 men and women from around the world – finally bring a peace to the long suffering people of Liberia ?

Our guest today is the head of the UN's Mission in Liberia: Jacques Klein, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in that country.

**FOUKARA:** Mr. Klein welcome to the programme. First of all, what are the tidings for the UN in Liberia at the moment - good, bad, mediocre?

**KLEIN:** I think they're excellent. In fact, when you think back, the Accra Accords were signed in 18 August. By the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> of September, I presented a draft to the Security Council. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September they passed a resolution creating the mandate and 1 October we actually stood up a mission. So, it's remarkable that in three months we have the presence we already have and have done what we've already done.

**FOUKARA:** How are the Liberians reacting to you compared with the beginning?

**KLEIN:** Well, I think the mistake that was made was ignoring these poor people for 24 years. I mean they have been despoiled, they have been abused, and they have been exploited. And the worse thing you can say for people like Charles Taylor is that - as a psychopath, he also totally criminalized his society, he corrupted his society. For three years no one has been paid, which means you survive by bribery, corruption - if you want to open a business, buy a car, everything is corruption, and he did that to his own people. Yet, it's an immensely wealthy country potentially, it has the natural resources, and historically, as you know, Liberia has done quite a bit for...let's call it the Western World - as the founding member of the UN and many other things, which we can get into later on. So the people have welcomed this. I think they sense that the war is over. They are war weary. They want to get on with it. And this, I think, will be Liberia's last chance.

**FOUKARA:** Well, joining us in the studio are Betsy Pisik of the Washington Times, and Celine Curiol of BBC Afrique.

**CURIOL:** You're supposed to get 15,000 men, troops by the beginning of February. Do you think you'll be able to get them? What kind of role the United States which was a little bit involved at the beginning of the conflict, what kind of role these countries playing out to?

**KLEIN:** I think we'll have the 15,000, not by the beginning of February, but by the end of February. And it's a very interesting composite because you have to mention we're taking Liberia and dividing it into 4 parts, so there will be a brigade in each part of Liberia with an engineering battalion and with a hospital. Now, my force makes this Bangladeshi, Pakistan, Namibia, Ethiopian, Senegalese, Ghana, Nigeria...

**CURIOL:** Is it sure that that you have all these troops already?

**KLEIN:** Oh yes, most of them are already in place or planning to come. And this week we actually received for the first time our helicopters - helicopters to lift things, and what we call helicopter gunships that have firepower from the Ukraine. So the force will be in place because what we are responsible for is creating a safe and stable and secure environment, taking the weapons away from LURD, MODEL and the government forces because that's what basically undermines the whole concept of stability -- young people many of them under the age of 18 with weapons terrorizing the population.

**CURIOL:** What about the United States? How do they....

**KLEIN:** The United States doesn't play a role in this; we have a few U.S. Military Observers. The U.S.'s role came before the UN Mission was activated. So that when the ECOWAS troops came in, ECOMIL, the Nigerians, Congo, Senegal, Ghana, Benin, etc... the U.S. paid for that - and that included the airlift from Nigeria. But that ended as of 1 October when we took over. Now I think what the U.S. government will do is do bilateral. I think in the long term, one of things they're looking at is restructuring some kind of Liberian civil defence force. I would argue Liberia doesn't need an army. Armies sit around playing cards, watch Rambo movies, plot coups and all think they can be president -- we don't need that. What we do need in Liberia is a state border service - 5, 6, 7 battalions who work 24 hours a day preventing smuggling, illegal migration, etc., two or three frigates that prevent illegal shipping - illegal fishing, which is going on off the coast of Liberia. So then I see the U.S. role, bilaterally, and then the monies they put up as you know they're paying full peacekeeping costs for two years, 245 million and for the U.S. ambassador, 200 million. And now, also I saw in that resolution, two million dollars for Taylor.

**CURIOL:** What do you mean for Taylor?

**KLEIN:** Well, it's a reward, which I found very positive for the following reasons -- as one Liberian said to me, "You know, it shows me for the first time that African lives are also worth something", it's not just Vlodjic and Karadjic and Milosevic, African lives are worth something. Now it's not 10 million, but it's 2 million.

(Inaudible) But let me finish this because what happens is now it gives President Obasanjo a very powerful weapon because he can say to Taylor, "by international agreement,

we took you in. Now we have hospitality here and we're granting you that. But should you ever think about leaving, remember now, there's a 2 million dollar reward on your head. So don't think about going to the border of Sierra Leone, or the border of Cote d'Ivoire, and Liberia and starting something." So it gives the president in Nigeria a powerful weapon. It makes Taylor cautious I think because we have ongoing rumours that at some point he might decide that Nigeria is no longer as welcoming him as it was, and then he's not as secure there as he'd like to be, and go back out into the bush somewhere.

**PISIK:** You have said in the past very memorably that Charles Taylor with a cell phone is a government in exile? I'm curious to understand how the two million works. Is it effectively a bounty on his head if he chooses to jump exile? Or is it knocking around money?

**KLEIN:** The State Department are the ones who have to define exactly how it will be used. There was some concern that this might engender mercenary groups to go after him - you know that isn't really the issue. I think what the message here we're sending [is] that this is symbolic as I said. And he is, I must say, a problem, but less so. In other words, the government now, if you imagine the assembly are Neo-Taylorites, LURD and MODEL. So you have all his former partners, cronies, ministers who are working with us being fairly constructive and saying, "that was then, this is now." And they know he's not coming back. So I think that is a very positive development, I think if we exaggerate his importance, we only give him a stature, which he probably shouldn't have anymore.

**FOUKARA:** Obviously Mr. Klein, there was some sensitivities when the issue of putting Taylor on trial, there was some sensitivities with the Nigerians who are hosting him at the moment. Where do we stand on that?

**KLEIN:** I think what the Nigerian government has said, if the government of Liberia asks for his extradition, they would do so. But I don't see that happening in the near term because I think with the assembly structure between government, LURD and MODEL, no Liberian government is going to ask that he be extradited. Now remember the crimes we are talking about here are related to Sierra Leone, because the first question I asked when I arrived in Liberia I said, "Give me the rest of the indictments and I'll arrest these people immediately." There are no indictments. So the only indictment in Liberia was Taylor, no one else.

**FOUKARA:** And earlier, if I may just go back to the point that you started about disarmament or demobilization, many people in Liberia and in other countries around Liberia in West Africa are saying that, "Now with the way the situation has turned out you're paying money to these guys to come and surrender their arms", a lot of people are saying, "Well the best way to become a minister is to tote a gun".

**KLEIN:** Well, it's not quite that simple. You see you have a choice here. You can either do a very slow long term, 2-3 year process. I bring you into a cantonment area and camp. I take your weapon away. I give you 75 dollars at the beginning, 75 dollars at the end. We process you for 3 weeks, etc. etc. etc. My concern is weapons. You have to understand, 70% of these fighters are young children, by UN definition under the age of 18 or younger. They speak, many of them, no tribal language that any of us know, and certainly no English. Most of them are functionally illiterate. They're on drugs. Many of them have high anxiety; they don't know where they come from in terms of family, tribe or background. All they know is what most teenagers operate under - peer pressure and charismatic leaders, and killing is simple. And I need to get those weapons out of there quickly. We're not buying the weapons because that's not the whole process. I'm giving you 75 dollars for your weapon now, but that's only part of the money if you want the rest of it you got to come back. And second, if you want the high school education, or the college education in Liberia, you've got to come back. If you want the vocational training, you've got to come back.

**FOUKARA:** Mr. Klein what's the... precisely that's the point; I mean what's the UN got in store for these young guys in terms of preparing their future?

**KLEIN:** Okay. This is very complex because we have a number of problems. We have an 85% unemployment rate in the country as a whole. We have sanctions, which means we cannot generate the income or the jobs, lumber industry and elsewhere, that we need to actually put people to work. Now Ambassador Blaney, who is a very skilled diplomat said to me, "You know, what we need here is something like the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930's, which built in the United States the park, all national park infrastructures, Appalachian Trail, etc. That can put 25, 30 thousand people to work -- roads, parks, infrastructures, bridges, crossways, etc. That's what we need to think about. Now, the way the process is really supposed to work is -- you come to the cantonment area or the campsite. I take your weapon. I take your picture. You get an ID card. We identify you. We debrief you. And you get a little bit of this money, then psychological counselling, a certain amount of literacy training. This is supposed to be a short period, 3 or 4 weeks. The goal is to get you back to your native county that you came from. And then you get a little more money and resettlement. But that's where the training comes in, whether it's clerical training, whether its cabinetry, whatever it may be, that's the goal. And then working with the tribal chiefs, the 16 paramount chiefs, because in Liberia line is tribal, it's national, it's private -- to get the paramount chiefs to re-integrate these people back into the structure of society. Now don't assume that each little mother is going to be waiting for her little boy, because as one of them told me, "We don't want to see him again

in this village, he killed our neighbours and he's persona non grata." So all these simplistic ideas that people have, just aren't there.

**CURIOL:** You're also setting up police forces for Liberians. So how do you make sure that the people you recruit in this police force are going to act correctly in terms of respecting the population and human rights?

**KLEIN:** Same thing we did in Bosnia. In Bosnia we took 40,000 policemen down to 16,000, and we vetted them. You're not an economic criminal. You're not a war criminal. Your educational credentials are what you say they are. New police academy curriculum, we process you. Now Liberia is a little easier, they're only about 3500 heavily criminalized, heavily militarized during the war. So we would disband them, tabula rasa.

**CURIOL:** How do you know that the people that you have in front of you...(inaudible).

**KLEIN:** Now, wait a minute. As I said, these are all dismissed, they're gone – finito. Now, we put an ad in the newspaper saying, "Starting 1 April, we are going to begin recruiting for a new Liberian police force. Please bring yourself, your birth certificate, your educational certificates". And then we have to make sure, as we do this, that we have representation from every ethnic group and tribe, because that has always been the problem in Liberia. There's a certain group of tribe dominates the government to the detriment of others and the others go into opposition. The judiciary: the same way. Now the Supreme Court Justice, how did you get this job? Now I won't say this on public television, but we know that job was gone. Where did you get your degree? Did you buy it? Did you earn it? And we'll do the whole judiciary from top to bottom. And we will pay them by the way, as we will the police - because unless I pay, you don't work for me.

**FOUKARA:** Is that creating any resentment among the populace by the way?

**KLEIN:** No, there's nothing yet because we're just starting the process, in fact I think the population will welcome, you know, a police force that's honest, that is cross-cultural, that grows across ethnic and tribal lines, because I think that is what we need to do - and the same thing with the judiciary. Now we do have a prison there, we also have to inform the prison system or penal system. Now, in rural areas normally the police station will beat you up and let you go. But we did have one prisoner in the prison in Monrovia, and they looked at his record, you know, and it says he's a murderer, but he served X number of years, he seems to have a very good record. So based on good behaviour, time served, we could probably let you go, and he said, "I'm not going out there, it's much too dangerous". So, he's in prison now, repairing the roof of his cell with thick plating.

**PISIK:** I hear you talk about what is effectively building a country from scratch, and there are echoes of everything from Bosnia to Iraq, which is ongoing as a process. How effective is the international community in stepping in and saying, “Okay, this is nation building from the dirt up”, I mean how do you do that? You got a shattered society from one end to the other.

**KLEIN:** It is shattered; I mean there’s really...Taylor took everything with him. Archives, furniture, presidential vehicles, there’s nothing left. The ministries are gutted in Monrovia. As I said, it’s a city with a million people without running water and electricity. Now, there is a Transitional Government lead by Gyude Bryant, who is a very able businessman. He imports heavy road construction materials. He’s done some shipping, etc. During the Taylor years he did business and laid low – didn’t involve himself in politics. He cannot run for president. So he’ll be the transitional government, until 2005.

**FOUKARA:** Mr. Klein, if I can just interrupt you there for a quick break and then we can start, we can continue the discussion. This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Jacques Klein, the UN Special Representative in Liberia.

You’re basically talking about John Taylor, and I would like you to tell us a little bit now about the ramifications, or the repercussions if you will of what’s going on in Liberia at the moment as far as the UN is concerned for the larger area.

**KLEIN:** When I got out there I immediately...first of all, the goal at first was get people out of Monrovia. You have to understand that in July, August, you had several million people in Monrovia. Hypertension, anxiety, malnutrition. And there’s no media here, there’s no television here turning on, telling you what’s going on, or even radio. So our goal was get these people out of the city. So we put the food processing, food distribution points around Monrovia, the UN agencies and the NGOs. Then we brought in water from White Plains - the pipe - started distributing water. Now once that was done then we have around an IDP camps in out of the city. The questions in the long term – how does it fit into the region? No one cared about Liberia in the past 24 years until Sierra Leone and other places were destabilized. No need that someone focus on this and say, “Until Taylor is gone we can’t fix Liberia and until we fix Liberia we can’t fix the rest of West Africa”. So I went up to Sierra Leone, spoke to the President, spoke to the Prime Minister in Guinea, and went to see the president of Cote d’Ivoire, and they all said to me, “You need to first of all stabilize and demilitarize Liberia. You need to capture the belligerents within a Liberia, don’t just push them up to the border and then cross the border so they become mercenaries”. We can’t do that because it will come back to haunt us eventually. And we have elements from all those countries by the way. We have Sierra Leoneans, we have Guineans, we have Cote d’Ivoirean, somewhere in this pool of LURD,

MODEL and government troops as mercenaries. And those we'll eventually have to send home through the International Office of Migration. So we understand the dilemma in the region and what we're trying to do among the UN missions is establish what amounts to a 24 hour command post position in each of the missions where there is one person whose only job is to liaison with those other missions on cross-border activities, arms smuggling etc. And also when you look at a border, let's say Cote d'Ivoire especially, and speaking to the French, I said, "What is the logic of you guarding the whole border and we guarding the border?" "Why don't you take 200 kilometres, we'll take 200, you take 200; we maximize the assets we have, in that sense."

**FOUKARA:** Mr. Klein before I bring in again my colleagues, just a quick question on the... you mentioned one aspect of bringing peace back to Liberia which is basically the UN operation. Another aspect is obviously powersharing which we seem to have in abundance in Africa these days. We have it in Liberia. We have it in Cote d'Ivoire. We have it in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have it in Burundi. What's going on with power sharing? Has it proven to be so successful that, you know, people are willing to try it up and down the continent?

**KLEIN:** As long as there's something in it for them. I mean the three parties now in the assembly -- you see, this is their way of maximizing their power by working with together. But what I'm afraid of is a long-term problem in West Africa, which has to a national leadership and chieftains. In other words, I've had two or three people now walk into my office and say, "Here shake hands with the next president of Liberia", and then I say, "Tell me, what is your economic platform and what is your political philosophy?" Because as you know, if you go to Germany you have the SPD, you have the CSU, you have the Greens in here somewhere and what have you. If Schroeder drops dead then someone else replaces, it was the head of the party if Kohl leaves someone replaces him as the head of CDU, why? Because each of those parties are grounded in some philosophy whether it's Marxist or Kantian or something else, and each of them, also then has an economic platform: strong central government, you know, etc, weak central government, you know, etc., and more freedom of enterprise, etc.. We don't have that. And what I'm afraid of, unless we develop that, we will fail. Because someone will win the election, of a given tribe or ethnic group, and the others will immediately hold an opposition. Now in Nigeria, as you know, they basically cobbled together two parties, a left and a right. We need to try to figure how to do that in Liberia, otherwise as I said with 18 parties, many of them based on some kind of tribal origin or ethnic origin, and we're not going to make it.

**PISIK:** Just to follow-up on that point, one of your many responsibilities in Liberia is to start the electoral process. Any optimism there?



**KLEIN:** Oh yeah. In other words I'm not at all....you see, I'm not worried about that, we will run that. So the first stroke...

**PISIK:** When? Is...when are they scheduled?

**KLEIN:** It's 2005. It's the Fall of 2005. First there will be a census; we know about how many Liberians there are: three-million-six-hundred-thousand, three-million-seven. We have about three-hundred-fifty, four-hundred thousand on the other side of the border, in Guinea, Cote d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. So we need to register everyone. Now then, to get on the ballot in Liberia is fairly complex. You need a certain number of signatures from every canton, excuse me, every county - because that's what we use there. So consequently, you have to have fairly broad national representation. So we will print the ballots, we will monitor the election, everything will be fair and square. I mean, no one will be intimidated, they vote anyway... you know, the problem will be, after we count the ballots – who won? What personality won? Or was it really a political party? And that's going to take time, because 24 years of mayhem, bloodshed, warfare, intimidation, exploitation has destroyed you know, a large part of whatever political psyche was there. And yet as I said the country is enormously wealthy.

**CURIOL:** I just want to come back in Cote d'Ivoire, you mentioned earlier, which is also destabilized. And if there's a peacekeeping mission deployed in Cote d'Ivoire, how much coordination can you do? Because...

**KLEIN:** A lot. We're doing it already, we're doing what General Joanna in UNICORN, I mean, you know, this is where we worked together. So, what I said earlier, "Why should you take the whole border and guard it? You do 200 kilometres on your side; I'll do 200 kilometres on my side."

**CURIOL:** Is that what's going to happen?

**KLEIN:** Well that's the goal, the kind of thing we have, to maximize the limited number of personnel we have. So that really is the long -term goal. And we also have to be careful in Liberia because I think some elements of LURD and MODEL would like to stake out and balkanize Liberia. We have the alluvial diamonds, you have the gold, etc., etc., etc. Do we really need a central government? That's why Chairman Bryant keeps pushing us. He said, "You need to gain control of this country, physically, militarily, so we have civil magistrate so I can say, as the chairman of Liberia, Liberia is governed. Every county has a magistrate and civil administration. They're not controlled by LURD or MODEL warlords or some chiefs who are exploiting and robbing and taking the..."

**FOUKARA:** Mr. Klein you had been talking of President Bryant. Obviously one...I imagined one of the main reasons why he was chosen to be president at this time is that he

was thought to be neutral. That was the general feeling, even here at the UN. Is that still the feeling today?

**KLEIN:** Oh yeah, because he was perceived as not having a political agenda of his own. One, he can't run for president, neither can a Vice Chairman. So, I'm sure he has his political biases, but per se right now he's very much focussed on doing what needs to be done in terms of transparency, audits, a budget, etc. Remember, Liberia has gold, it has diamonds and has 8-1/2 million rubber trees. You can take 10 million board feet of lumber out of there every year without doing ecological damage. Fifteen percent of the arable land is utilized, eighty-five percent of the land is laid fallow all because of mismanagement and war. And so for 3.7 million people, it's nothing. This is not like Central Africa where people are killing each other for 5-1/2 meters of soil, you know. The potential is there. It's going to take strong management to put it back together.

**FOUKARA:** And if I may ask you to do a big jump back in history from the present to the past, obviously 5% of the population in Liberia are descendants of slaves who were subsequently freed. How does that play into the current mechanisms that you've set in place now for keeping the peace there?

**KLEIN:** Well, you have a real dilemma here. In other words, it's probably a little more. We had two groups. We had actually Liberians or Africans who went to the new world, whether it was in North America or Central America, and were brought back. After all Sierra Leone was founded for the same reason, that's why the capital is called Freetown. All brought back to Liberia. Then there was a second group, where they were on ships to the new world but were intercepted on high seas by the British or American, or French navy and brought back. So those are the two groups, but they were never more than 7-8% of the population. And the mistake they made was, insisting that the culture they brought with them was the proper one, and therefore anything that had to do with indigenous Liberia – customs, dress, food, language, was anathema. If you want to become a Liberian you become one of us, which means starched hat, which means top hat, which means white shirt, wing-collar, etc. And that lasted until 1980. I think Tubman realized time was running out because many of the rural tribesmen were also going to Europe and North American, and being educated, and saying, where does it say that these people dominate the agenda? By the time Tolbert was president it was too late, and then Sergeant Doe and Crown and others killed him and then we know what happened. But what is interesting is there's no residual animosity toward the Liberian Americans. And by the way, there are 450,000 Liberians in the U.S. and Canada. It's an enormous number of people. So I'm pleased that there's no animosity but I think the day where the Liberian Americans dominate the agenda, it's fairly well passé. What the world needs to

remember is yes this was a state founded in 1847, etc., etc. But when the world was the Western World, the democracies were in trouble, Liberia played its part. I mean in 1939, Franklin Roosevelt desperately wanted to send war materials to Great Britain and to France. In fact Jean Monet was the French agent here buying war materials. But the Congress had passed the Neutrality Act, so that American ships could not be used to send war materials to Europe. So Secretary of State Stettinius went to Liberia and said, "Could we create a flag register and flag American ships under the Liberian flag to take war material to Europe? Done". And today there's still some 2,000 ships registered.

**FOUKARA:** That's amazing how history – the past now shapes the present.

**KLEIN:** Oh yeah. It's more important than that. In '42 you asked them to declare war on NAZI Germany – which they did. In '42, you said, "Can we build Roberts Field?" Now why? If you look at a map of Brazil and Liberia, the closest point across the Atlantic is right there, which means that if I build a plane in California, a B-17 or a B-24, and ship it to Europe, I put it in a crate and I run German submarine paths. If I fly it from California to Brazil to Monrovia, to Morocco, to England, then it's safe. And by the way, most of the pilots that did this were women, Women Ferry Pilots, that flew them to Morocco. And then the Army Air Corp took over. When the Japanese overran Southeast Asia and you ran out of rubber, think about it, Burma, Malaysia, etc. The rubber that was put on the jeeps and trucks that won the allied victory in World War II came from Liberia. And that's the reality.

**FOUKARA:** Mr. Klein that's a great run through politics and history. And that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this special edition of World Chronicle.

Our guest has been the head of the UN's Mission in Liberia, Jacques Klein. He was interviewed by Betsy Pisik of the Washington Times, and Celine Curiol of BBC Afrique.

I'm Abderrahim Foukara, thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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