



Armed Conflicts Report

Liberia (2000 - first combat deaths)

Update: January 2005

Summary

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Summary:

2004 The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement held through 2004 as fewer than 25 people were killed in conflict-related violence. There were few reported clashes between the warring parties although violations of civilian human rights and attacks on villages continued and LURD rebels experienced leadership turmoil that turned violent mid-year. The UN peacekeeping force, UNIMIL, reached its mandated strength of 15,000 troops and expanded into many rebel-controlled areas. Despite delays, the UN demobilized over 100,000 former combatants and many refugees returned to their homes ahead of UN plans for repatriation.

2003 Fighting escalated in mid-2003 as Liberian rebels took the offensive, with Monrovia suffering the greatest onslaught when over a thousand civilians were killed in a two month campaign. As a result of the siege of Monrovia, President Charles Taylor was forced to resign and subsequently fled the country. A West African peacekeeping force was deployed to the capital in August and was replaced by a United Nations force in September. Although these deployments increased security within Monrovia, other areas of the country continued to experience clashes between rebels and pro-Taylor fighters for the remainder of the year.

2002 President Charles Taylor imposed a state of emergency in February as LURD fighters moved closer to the capital, Monrovia. The two sides fought for control of a number of key cities, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of people. By October, the government had regained much of the territory lost to the rebels.

Type of Conflict:

State control

Parties to the Conflict:

1) Government, which was led by Charles Taylor until October 2003 when Cyude Bryant, member of the Liberia Action Party, was sworn in as president:

a) The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL)

"The national army, which fought against Taylor's faction during the civil war, has yet to be downsized and restructured as required by the 1996 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)-brokered Abuja Peace Accords." [US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2002, March 31, 2003]

b) The Liberia National Police (LNP), responsible for internal security.

c) The Antiterrorist Unit (ATU), an elite special forces group made up of combatants from Burkina Faso and The Gambia, as well as former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) fighters from Sierra Leone.

"The ATU absorbed Taylor 's most experienced civil war fighters, including undisciplined and untrained loyalists." [US State Department, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2002, March 31, 2003]

d) The Special Security Service (SSS), a large and well-equipped executive protective force.

2) Rebels:

a) Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) which is comprised of Liberian dissidents and Sierra Leonean militia members and led by Sekou Conneh. LURD experienced turmoil in 2004 when estrangement between chairman Sekou Conneh and his wife Aisha led to a struggle for the command of LURD. One civilian leader and several military commanders issued a January statement calling for Skou's replacement with his wife Aisha. Aisha declined the role even though Sekou was indefinitely suspended, and Chayee Doe, the younger brother of former Liberian president Samuel Doe, was appointed chairman. Doe, however, died two days after being appointed leader. In August 2004, supporters of Aisha took to the streets to call for the replacement of Sekou with Kabineh Janneh, another member of LURD's executive.

"A long-running power struggle for the leadership of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel movement has spilled over into violence on the streets of the capital Monrovia , forcing UN peacekeeping forces to send in tanks and step up street patrols." [IRIN, August 4, 2004]

"The row threatens to cause a split between LURD's political leadership in Monrovia , which backs Sekou Conneh and the movement's senior commanders who have rallied behind Aisha." [IRIN, January 21, 2004]

"Forty commanders of Liberia 's main rebel group, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) have signed a statement calling for the replacement of LURD chairman Sekou Damate Conneh by his influential wife, Aisha Keita Conneh." [IRIN, January 8, 2004]

"LURD is a ganglike group of fighters. Many of the small units on the ground are only very loosely under control of the political leadership,' said Terrence Lyons, an Africa and conflict analysis expert ... Although the rebels published a statement at the end of June saying they would no longer recruit children under 18 ... they still use children... LURD was founded in 1999 in Guinea , which shares the northern border with Liberia . It emerged from the ashes of the 1990s civil war and the ethnic persecution that followed, particularly against ethnic Mandingos and Krahns, who are now serving at LURD's commanding level even though they have been rivals for decades." [The Washington Times, August 12, 2003]

b) Movement for Democracy in Liberia (Model) is a new party to the conflict, emerging in April 2003.

"Among Model's fighters are many people from the Krahn tribe of late dictator Samuel Doe." [Reuters, July 30, 2003]

3) International actors:

The government of Guinea is suspected of providing direct support to LURD. Sierra Leone , the US and Great Britain have been accused of providing indirect support to anti-Taylor forces.

[Source: International Crisis Group, Liberia : The Key to Ending Regional Instability, April 2002]

Status of Fighting:

2004 Although fighting declined dramatically, early in 2004 there were incidents of attacks on civilians when ex-combatant rebels looted and raped in villages that UNIMIL forces had yet to reach. After UNIMIL reached its mandated 15,000 troops and spread across the country much of the violence subsided. However, rebels remained in control of many main border crossings.

"But ominously, fighters of the LURD and MODEL rebel movements still control the main frontier crossings." [IRIN, August 17, 2004]

"More than 1,000 former fighters of the LURD rebel movement are holed up in Liberia 's second largest rubber plantation and are refusing to turn in their guns to UN peacekeepers, a member of Liberia 's transitional parliament said on Tuesday." [IRIN, August 10, 2004]

"The fighting in Liberia has been over for a year but girls are still facing rape, violence and neglect in the west African country, an activist group said here on Wednesday." [IRIN, June 30, 2004]

"Fighters who took part in Liberia 's conflict have been raping and looting civilians in areas that lack international peacekeepers, despite a ceasefire and peace agreement in the country." [Human Rights Watch, January 21, 2004]

2003 Fighting continued between LURD rebels and government forces, culminating in the former's two month siege of Monrovia beginning in June, which resulted in over a thousand deaths, most of which were civilian. The high number of casualties was largely due to the indiscriminate shelling of the city by rebel fighters. A second front to the conflict was opened in April, with a new rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (Model) mounting attacks in the southeast. An August power-sharing agreement between the rebels and the government brought an end to the siege, and the deployment of international peacekeepers returned some degree of security to the capital city; however, for the remainder of the year there were reports of clashes between rebels and fighters loyal to Taylor, particularly in the country's northeastern region. The rebels and the government continued employing child soldiers throughout 2003.

"At least 12 people were killed in the rioting in Monrovia, which had been declared weapons-free in October by UNMIL." [Agence France Presse, December 15, 2003]

"A UN fact-finding team travelled Wednesday to restive northeastern Liberia to investigate clashes between rebels and militia loyal to exiled former president Charles Taylor, the United Nations said. ... "Nimba remains the scene of sporadic clashes between the former militias and both of Liberia's main rebel groups, despite a ceasefire and power-sharing pact in place since August ..." [Agence France Presse, November 19, 2003]

"With almost 70 per cent of both the government and rebel forces made up of boys under 17 who were snatched from their homes and forced to fight ..." [telegraph.co.uk, September 14, 2003]

"On Tuesday, rebels armed with mortars and automatic weapons attacked and overran Kakata, said Col. Theophilus Tawiah of Ghana, the peace force's chief of staff. At least 200 civilians fled the city, aid workers said." [Associated Press, September 10, 2003]

"New fighting raged in Liberia Tuesday a day after former President Charles Taylor flew into exile ... Liberia's government and a rebel faction called Model accused each other of starting the latest bloodshed as the rebels made a big advance to just a few miles from the international airport outside the capital Monrovia." [Reuters, August 12, 2003]

"Dozens of civilians have been killed in fighting between rebels and President Charles Taylor's forces for control of Liberia's second city of Buchanan, residents said on Wednesday. ... Rebels seized the strategic port city on Monday, tightening the noose around Taylor ..." [Reuters, July 30, 2003]

2002 Government forces and LURD combatants engaged in a number of battles for key towns, with both sides killing, raping and abducting civilians. A state of emergency prompted by an intensification of rebel attacks close to Monrovia was imposed by the Taylor regime in February and lifted in September. By October, the government had re-occupied most of the territory seized by the LURD.

"In the northwest of the country, government troops and pro-government militias were responsible for summarily killing, torturing and abusing civilians, raping women and girls and abducting civilians for forced labour and combat." [Human Rights Watch, World Report 2003: Liberia, January 2003]

"LURD rebel forces also carried out serious abuses, although to a lesser extent than government forces, including summary executions of alleged government collaborators, rape, and the forced recruitment of civilians, including child soldiers. LURD forces subjected hundreds of civilians to forced labor, restricted those wanting to flee the country, and abducted refugees who had recently crossed into Guinea." [Human Rights Watch, World Report 2003: Liberia, January 2003]

Number of Deaths:

Total: Various sources estimate that the total number of conflict deaths ranges from 1,500 to 2,500. Over a hundred thousand people have been displaced since the current phase of fighting began in July 2000.

"Some 2,000 people died and hundreds of thousands fled their homes in the most recent bout of bloodletting around the capital of a country where a civil war killed 200,000 in the 1990s." [Reuters, August 21, 2003]

"Tens of thousands of Liberians fled their homes, and hundreds if not thousands of civilians were killed, either deliberately or in crossfire." [Human Rights Watch, World Report 2003: Liberia, January 2003]

2004 There were several violent incidents, but fewer than 25 people were reported killed.

"The UN refugee agency UNHCR told AFP on Tuesday that reports ethnic Mandingo members of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) had been killed in the capital Monrovia triggered weekend gunbattles in the northeastern town of Gbarng ... Clashes in the LURD headquarters town of Tubmanburg were also reported, leaving two fighters and three civilians dead. Fighting in the northern stronghold Voinjama killed one civilian and sent thousands fleeing over the border into Guinea, a LURD source told AFP." [IRIN, August 18, 2004]

2003 According to independent media reports, possibly as many as 2,000 people were killed as a direct result of the conflict in 2003. Civilian deaths during the siege of Monrovia accounted for the vast majority of fatalities.

"Fighting has split Monrovia into rebel and government sides, killed well over 1,000 civilians outright and left hunger and epidemics raging among the 1.3 million residents and refugees." [Associated Press, August 7, 2003]

"Early Thursday, Health Minister Peter Coleman told the Associated Press that the past two days of fighting in the city had killed between 200-300

civilians and injured 1,000. There was no word on government or rebel casualties." *Associated Press*, June 26, 2003]

2002 Independent media sources claimed that hundreds of people, mostly civilians and rebels, were killed this year.

"Security forces continued to commit extrajudicial killings. Human rights organizations estimated that such killings increased during the year as hundreds of civilians died in the fighting which occurred in Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties ." [*US State Department*, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2002, March 31, 2003]

"There were credible reports that government forces as well as members of the Lorma ethnic group continued to harass, intimidate, and kill members of the Mandingo ethnic group in Lofa County . Human rights monitors reported that hundreds of Mandingos were killed during the year. In May, Amnesty International reported that security forces, especially the ATU, committed widespread abuses, including killings, torture, and rape, against civilians suspected of supporting armed dissidents in Lofa County ." [*US State Department*, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - 2002, March 31, 2003]

"The streets [of Tubmanburg, 60 kilometres north-west of Monrovia] were littered with shells of ammunition, and government commanders said 10 bullet-riddled and mutilated bodies lying in the outskirts were those of some of the more than 100 rebels killed." [*BBC News*, July 21, 2002]

Political Developments:

2004 The UN peacekeeping force reached its mandated 15,000 troops during the year and gained control of a significant portion of Liberia , including several rebel strongholds. Despite delays, the UN disarmament program restarted in April and made significant progress, although only a third of the demobilized troops turned over weapons, leading to fears that weapons are hidden throughout Liberia . When it wrapped up in October, a month behind schedule, and was believed to have disarmed over 100,000 former combatants (twice as many as anticipated) but only 26,000 of the disarmed combatants have begun retraining because of a lack of funding. The prospect of peace in Liberia caused thousands of Liberian refugees to return home ahead of UNHCR plans to repatriate them after the rainy season and the disarmament program. The official repatriation plan began in November and was well under way by the end of the year. According to observers, without more funds there is a danger that peace in Liberia will not last. Liberia's current transitional leader, Gyude Bryant, bowed to rebel pressure and appointed more rebels as assistant Ministers but he defied rebel demands when he announced that former president Charles Taylor would remain in exile until a new administration is installed in 2005. In October, the government froze all the assets of Charles Taylor relatives and associates including several former members of the government, but no members of the current government. The government also initiated the replacement of Charles Taylor's police force with a newly recruited and trained force of 3,500.

"UNMIL said on Wednesday that its 15,000-strong peacekeeping force had so far disarmed 72,652 former combatants, all of whom will receive a cash resettlement grant of US\$300. However, fewer than one in three have actually handed in a weapon." [*IRIN*, September 8, 2004]

"The head of the UN mission in Liberia said on Wednesday that the war-scarred country's disarmament programme would officially end on October 30 and any former fighters found with weapons after then would be prosecuted." [*IRIN*, September 1, 2004]

"UNHCR estimates that about 50,000 refugees have already spontaneously made the journey home since Liberia 's three warring factions signed a peace deal in August 2003." [*IRIN*, July 20, 2004]

"The United Nations will begin the orderly repatriation of more than 300,000 Liberian refugees dispersed in other West African countries in October once the rainy season is over, Abou Moussa, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Liberia , said on Wednesday. Moussa said that would allow time for the disarmament of an estimated 40,000 to 50,000 former combatants to take place beforehand. " [*IRIN*, April 14, 2004]

" Liberia 's transitional government and the United Nations launched a drive on Wednesday to recruit and train a new police force, whose 3,500 officers would be untainted by accusations of human rights abuse." [*IRIN*, May 5, 2004]

"The UN peacekeeping force in Liberia extended its deployment to the rebel-held towns of Tubmanburg and Tapeta at the weekend. A UN spokesman said on Monday that the blue helmets would soon reach Zwedru near the eastern border with Cote d'Ivoire . [*IRIN*, January 5, 2004]

2003 The military success experienced by the rebels throughout the year, in particular the campaign against Monrovia , severely weakened the authority of President Taylor. As a result, Taylor stepped down as president in August and fled to Nigeria , accepting the country's offer of asylum. However, Taylor 's resignation was conditionally based upon the deployment of an international peacekeeping force to stabilize the country. Accordingly, the Economic Organization of West African States (ECOWAS) and the United Nations both deployed peacekeeping missions to Liberia towards the end of the year, with the former being replaced by the latter. By the end of the year approximately 5,000 peacekeeping personnel, out of an authorized total of 15,000, were deployed as part of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and had begun disarming ex-combatants. Following Taylor 's departure, a peace agreement was reached between the LURD and Model rebel groups, and the

government. Under the agreement, Cyude Bryant was named president for a two year interim period, leading up to elections in 2006. In June, Charles Taylor was indicted by the War Crimes Tribunal in Sierra Leone for the role he played in that country's conflict; however, he remained protected in Nigeria .

"The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established by Security Council resolution 1509 (2003) of 19 September 2003 to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process; protect United Nations staff, facilities and civilians; support humanitarian and human rights activities; as well as assist in national security reform, including national police training and formation of a new, restructured military." [UNMIL website, accessed on December 19, 2003]

"More than 11,000 Liberian fighters have given up their weapons, including 8,555 guns, since the start of a disarmament scheme meant to end 14 years of war, the United Nations said on Wednesday. ...

"Fighters once loyal to former President Charles Taylor have flocked to Camp Schieffelin to hand over their guns in exchange for \$75 – the first instalment of a full payment of \$300 under the disarmament scheme for the West African nation." [Reuters, December 17, 2003]

"The U.S. Joint Task Force that participated in stability operations in Liberia is pulling out, Defense Department officials said....At its greatest, U.S. presence in Liberia was about 300, U.S. officials said." [US Navy, September 30, 2003]

"The Liberian government and two rebel movements signed a peace agreement headed by an independent civilian to take power in October to rebuild the nation and prepare for elections in two years' time. The deal was signed two and a half months after peace negotiations began in Ghana on June 4 and just one week after former president Charles Taylor stepped down and flew into exile." [IRIN, August 18, 2003]

"West African peacekeeping forces drove into Liberia 's rebel-beseiged, famished capital on Thursday to deafening cheers from the city's people." [Associated Press, August 7, 2003]

"The West African deployment was approved last week by the U.N. Security Council, which also approved a U.S.-proposed resolution to speed a broader U.N. peacekeeping force within months." [Associated Press, August 5, 2003]

" Liberia 's besieged President Charles Taylor renewed on Friday his pledge to step down but stressed he would only leave after an international peacekeeping force is deployed to his west African country." [globeandmail.com, July 4, 2003]

"The [ceasefire] deal, signed Tuesday in Ghana and brokered by the 15-member Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), calls for the formation of an interim government that excludes Charles Taylor ... The warring parties have also called for an international military force to help stabilize the nation ..." [Christian Science Monitor, June 19, 2003]

"The indictment, made public yesterday, charges Mr. Taylor with 'bearing the greatest responsibility for war crimes, crimes against humanity and serious violations of international humanitarian law.' The war crimes court issued a warrant for his arrest in Ghana , where he was travelling yesterday. But Mr. Taylor reportedly fled the country ..." [washingtonpost.com, June 5, 2003]

2002 The government further militarized Liberian society by remobilizing ex-combatants, encouraging the proliferation of militia groups, and recruiting hundreds of young men to fight the LURD rebels. It also intensified efforts to repress the Mandingo, Krahn and Gbandi ethnic groups, accusing these groups of backing the rebels. The conflict threatened to further destabilize the Mano River Union region and disrupt the peace recently achieved in Sierra Leone . Hundreds of former Sierra Leonean rebels joined the civil war in Liberia as mercenaries for both sides. In May, Charles Taylor rejected an appeal from ECOWAS for an immediate ceasefire between government and rebel forces.

"Human Rights Watch accused Taylor of playing the ethnic card by accusing people from the Mandingo, Krahn and Gbandi groups of backing the rebels, leading to a crackdown on them." [Agence France Presse, January 14, 2003]

"The renewal of war in Liberia threatens to further undermine prospects for sustainable peace in the wider region, known as the Mano River Union, encompassing Guinea , Sierra Leone , and Liberia . Over the past decade, the governments of these three countries have frequently harbored each other's rebel groups and supported cross-border incursions, causing widespread instability." [Human Rights Watch, Back to the Brink: War Crimes by Liberian Government and Rebels, May 2002]

"As efforts continued to consolidate peace in Sierra Leone , hundreds of former fighters in Sierra Leone 's civil war, both former rebel and government combatants, crossed into Liberia to fight as mercenaries either for the Liberian government or for LURD... As a result, the border area between Liberia and Sierra Leone became more unstable." [Human Rights Watch, July 2002]

Background:

Elections held in 1997 in Liberia , which ushered into power former warlord Charles Taylor, marked the shaky end of a seven-year civil war in the country that claimed close to 200,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. However, in February 2000, rebel groups opposed to the Taylor regime united to form Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) with direct support from Guinea and indirect support from Sierra Leone , the US and the UK . Although anti-government forces had launched a number of attacks against the government after the 1997 elections, the country was plunged back into full-blown civil war in July 2000 when LURD invaded northwest Liberia from Guinea . This sparked a sequence of reprisal attacks involving the Liberian government, LURD, and the government of Guinea . This external support for insurgencies is not uncommon within western Africa . Ex-President Taylor had been accused of supporting rebel movements in many neighbouring countries, in

particular Sierra Leone . The government of Liberia is under a United Nations arms embargo and international sanctions for its support of the RUF rebels in Sierra Leone .

"Insurgencies in neighbouring Sierra Leone , Ivory Coast and Guinea , can all be traced at least partly to Liberia 's anarchy." [*Reuters*, August 21, 2003]

Arms Sources:

Despite a UN arms embargo imposed in May 2001 - and extended in successive years - on all armed groups in Liberia , the Liberian government has received arms from Slovakia , Krygyzstan , Ukraine , Libya and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia . The Guinean government has been accused of supplying logistical support and some military equipment to LURD forces, while the government of the Cote d'Ivoire has reportedly supported the Model forces.

[Source: Michael Renner, *The Anatomy of Resource Wars*, World Watch Paper 162, 2002; UN experts' panel referenced in *Afrol News*, November 5, 2001]

" Cote d'Ivoire to the east, is said to be the main supporter of the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), another rebel group which controls most of eastern Liberia ." [*IRIN*, December 17, 2003]

"The government of Guinea violated the United Nations arms embargo on Liberia and supplied weapons that Liberian rebels used to commit atrocities, Human Rights Watch charged in a briefing paper released today. ...

"The former government of Charles Taylor and a second rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), both of which like LURD have a dismal human rights record, also were able to obtain weapons despite the arms embargo, often with the help of regional allies." [*Human Rights Watch*, November 5, 2003]

"The surprise discovery of the weapons shipment, which is widely believed in Monrovia to have come from Taylor 's Libyan allies, raised fears that the former warlord Taylor might be planning a dramatic counterattack." [*Agence France Presse*, August 8, 2003]

"... vote yesterday by the UN Security Council, which unanimously agreed to extend a one-year arms embargo against Liberia , along with other sanctions. The Security Council further threatened to step up the pressure by outlawing Liberia's lucrative timber trade unless Mr. Taylor's government stops supplying support and weapons (often paid for in diamonds) to rebel groups in the region." [*globeandmail.com*, May 7, 2003]

"The [UN Panel of Experts] investigation revealed that over 200 tons of surplus small arms and ammunition from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) Army had been supplied to the Liberian Government in the summer of 2002." [*SIPRI Yearbook*, 2003]

"Despite the fact that a UN arms embargo is in place for Liberia , this appears to have deterred neither the government nor the LURD from gaining access to supplies of weapons. President Taylor adamantly insists that Liberia has a UN-mandated right to self-defence and that 'any nation would do that' given such a 'clear and present danger.'" [*Human Rights Watch*, Back to the Brink: War Crimes by Liberian Government and Rebels, May 2002]

Economic Factors:

Resources have played an important role in this conflict. During the recently-ended Sierra Leonean armed conflict, Charles Taylor supplied arms to the RUF in exchange for diamonds. Many of these armed rebels have since joined the LURD to overthrow the Taylor regime. The Liberian government also has been accused of using the revenue from Liberian timber sales to fund paramilitary units and to buy arms. Despite repeated requests from the transitional government in Liberia , the UN refused to repeal its ban on certain exports from the country, although MODEL troops are still reportedly using illegal timber exports to fund their activities. Much of the violence in the past year has involved robbing and looting by ex-combatants, generating new economic concerns about the conflict. In December 2004, the UN voted to extend timber and arms sanctions until after the elections scheduled for October 2005. A UN ban on the selling of raw diamonds was extended for 6 months, and would be reviewed at the end of March by representatives of the Kimberly Process.

"The United Nations recently renewed its ban on Liberia 's exports of timber and diamonds, saying the government still did not have proper control over the diamond mines and forests of the interior. The country has few other resources with which to generate foreign exchange other than its international shipping register." [*IRIN*, August 17, 2004]

Last week the Save My Future Foundation (SAMFU), a Liberian environmentalist group, reported that illegal logging was still being carried out under MODEL supervision in Maryland county near the border with Cote d'Ivoire . The UN Security Council banned Liberian timber exports last year to prevent former President Charles Taylor from using timber revenues to buy arms. [*IRIN*, February 17, 2004]

"Charles Taylor, for six years the warlord president of Liberia, stole or diverted nearly \$100 million of his country's wealth, leaving it the poorest nation on earth, according to a close review of government records, an investigation by United Nations experts and interviews with senior Liberian officials." [*The New York Times*, September 18, 2003]

"To the degree that international sanctions succeeded in clamping down on the trade in conflict diamonds, the importance of timber rose in Taylor 's calculus... Most of the money instead went directly to Taylor , into patronage payments, to Taylor-connected paramilitary units that terrorize the population, and to pay for arms purchases." [Michael Renner, *The Anatomy of Resource Wars*, World Watch Paper 162, 2002]

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