



Karin Landgren

*Special Representative of the Secretary-General
and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia*

***Briefing to the Security Council on the Twenty-Sixth Progress Report of
the Secretary-General on UNMIL
September 10, 2013***

Check against delivery

#

Mr President,

On the 18th of August, ten years ago, in Accra, the last in a long series of Liberian peace agreements was signed. Liberia is celebrating ten years of uninterrupted peace, and commitment remains steady, as described in the Report of the Secretary-General now before you.

Liberia deserves praise and, more importantly, continued support. A decade is a long time to keep the peace. But a decade is a short time to reverse the effects of a war that left the country shattered, and to overturn over a century of social and political exclusion, and poor governance. Many potential drivers of conflict remain to be addressed, through long term reforms coupled with inclusive development.

The past months have seen an increasingly vigorous public discourse among civil society, youth groups, and political parties about how far the country has come and how best to meet its current challenges. In part,

this was driven by contemplation of the tenth anniversary of peace, or coalesced around current events, such as the recent court-ordered incarceration of a prominent newspaper editor. Liberia's stability is sufficient to provide an environment conducive to the reforms being undertaken by the Government. The importance of these reforms to consolidating peace has been recognized by this Council, most notably in the security and justice sectors, towards decentralization, and for more transparent and accountable government. I will say a few words about where these stand.

The Constitution Review Committee has been working, with the support of the UN, to prepare the ground for the necessary national consultation. In the coming weeks, civic educators will begin working to inform and educate the public. The Committee still faces serious financial and capacity constraints, in addition to the broad consensus around the process and the substantive issues that it needs to forge. This could affect its ability to adhere to the timeline, which is tight despite the one-year extension of their mandate through 2015. The United Nations will continue to extend support to the Committee and to the broader constitutional review process.

In July, the Government established a Decentralization Support Programme Board for the overall coordination of the financial and human capital being invested to make decentralization a reality in Liberia. This Board consists of government ministries and international partners,

including the UN family. Decentralization is expected to promote more inclusive, more accountable governance; its full functioning will also take time, both legislatively and in light of the country's limited human and institutional capacity.

Decentralized governance structures also feature in the National Reconciliation Roadmap. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf launched the implementation of this 18-year framework in June, placing it under the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Continued clear leadership of the reconciliation roadmap will be important. It comprises some twelve different initiatives, including towards shaping a common narrative on national identity. Recent discussions on a national history project have opened the door to preparing a national history curriculum for Liberia's schools. As well, a technical team of government, civil society and United Nations representatives is assessing how best to partner with peace committees, traditional leaders and civil society, to make the Palava Hut initiative a reality, as also recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Mr President,

As the report of the Secretary-General notes, land reform has advanced with a new land rights policy, to be followed by draft legislation. Land and the exploitation of Liberia's abundant natural resources remain cornerstones of the country's economic development, as well as powerful

sources of potential conflict. The Government and many development partners acknowledge the need for transparent, responsible management and regulation of concession agreements and of the resources they yield, including those intended for local development. This remains an important area of priority attention for the country.

In August, the Minister of Internal Affairs issued a directive that ten counties are to be audited, including those administering social development funds provided by concessions. And in June, the Forestry Development Authority issued letters of intent to terminate almost half of the 62 irregular Private Use Permits issued in the forestry sector. The lack of adequate consultation with affected communities remains an issue, and a study is underway on citizens' engagement in natural resource management, at the request of the Government. It will be important to institutionalize mechanisms for consistent dialogue between concessions and communities. The report before you notes the good progress by the five Land Coordination Centers, whose staff are being trained in Alternative Dispute Resolution and mediation skills.

Corruption in general remains a very significant handicap, impeding the functioning of national institutions, public confidence in those institutions, and the pace of economic growth. Recent dismissals of senior government officials by the President are described in the Report. Subsequently 18 officers have been dismissed from the Liberia National Police for extortion and excessive absenteeism; numerous others have

been suspended. It is hoped that such resolute steps will send a strong message to those carrying the public's trust at all levels.

Mr President,

One year ago, UNMIL initiated the calibrated, three-phase military drawdown process endorsed by this Council. The Mission has focused on executing a steady, well-planned, and responsible military drawdown, and completed the first phase on 30 June, with all designated personnel and equipment repatriated in good order and on schedule. UNMIL now no longer has a fixed military presence in four of Liberia's counties, and has deployed formed police unit personnel to areas considered potential hotspots for insecurity, and to serve as backup to specialized units of the Liberia National Police. The first of the Mission's three newly-approved formed police units, from Nepal, has been on the ground for six months; the second, from China, is due to deploy in October. This police presence remains essential, both to enable the Mission to serve as needed backup to national authorities, as well as to maintain public confidence in Liberia's security during the transition. The Mission has also retained its civilian and UN Police advisory presence in all counties to continue supporting local government and police structures, which remain weak.

This phased approach to drawdown has permitted the Government and UNMIL to develop close, routine and effective joint transition planning mechanisms. UNMIL has now closed eleven locations, and handed over

eight of these to government entities. However, the Liberian security forces have not been able to scale up their presence and operational effectiveness to assume the increased security responsibilities, and they remain severely constrained by weak mobility, resources and administration.

Demands on the Government will become more acute as this transition progresses. UNMIL military expects to vacate a further three counties by April 2014. This will require the Government to sustain an effective security presence across more of the country and across a broader range of vital duties, including static guarding and cash escorts. However, the 2013-14 national budget reduces allocations for the police significantly from last year, and limited transition-specific funding has been set aside. Even though the Police Academy has been physically expanded to train 600 recruits a year, only 99 officers have graduated in the last 12 months. The graduation of another 148 has been delayed since May in part due to budget constraints, while the current class of 293, which is in field training, is due to graduate next February.

The immediate challenges posed by the UNMIL drawdown, and the long-term importance of the rule of law for a stable Liberia, make it essential that the Government and its partners redouble their efforts to develop capable and accountable justice and security sectors. A more focused, prioritized approach to institutional development is needed. To this end a high-level retreat on the security sector will be held next week, co-

organized by the Government, the United Nations and the Government of Sweden. The Retreat will bring together a wide range of actors involved in security sector development, national and international, including Ambassador Tillander of the PBC. The retreat will consider recommendations of several joint studies, including a baseline capacity assessment of the Liberia National Police, a review of management and accountability mechanisms within the police, Judiciary and prosecution, and a United Nations mapping of gaps in Liberia's security sector.

Mr President,

The Legislature has begun following up on the very many audit reports it has received from the General Auditing Commission over the years. This, and regular dialogue between the Executive and the Legislature, are particularly important for the role of the Legislature in policy development and oversight, as well as in representing the interests of its constituents. In July, UNMIL and the Legislature initiated a periodic direct dialogue on a range of issues central to Liberia's reform agenda.

Mr President,

Looking ahead, Liberia's next Presidential election in 2017 will be a political watershed moment. A foretaste of the tenor of those elections may come in October 2014, when 15 senatorial seats, or one per county, will be contested. As well, Liberia's security remains intertwined with

that of its neighbours. Strengthening regional approaches remains imperative, to security as well as to development.

The situation along the border with Côte d'Ivoire has remained calm for the last six months, and tensions have reduced. Eight Ivoirians suspected of alleged involvement in cross-border attacks from Liberia into Côte d'Ivoire, including the June 2012 attack which killed seven UNOCI peacekeepers, still await a ruling on whether Liberia will accede to an Ivorian extradition request.

Since the second quadripartite meeting in April between the Governments of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, UNMIL and UNOCI, the parties have worked to deliver on agreed commitments, including successful high-level strategic engagement and increased operational cooperation on the ground. The four parties met in June in western Côte d'Ivoire and again last week in Monrovia to plan joint security operations along the border, which will take place this November and in January 2014. Preparations have also advanced for the first-ever cross-border meeting of chiefs and elders, another quadripartite meeting outcome, and the meeting is on track to be held next month.

The April quadripartite meeting also agreed to revive a Tripartite Commission on Humanitarian and Refugee Issues comprising the two Governments and UNHCR. This year, over 11,000 Ivorian refugees have repatriated voluntarily, leaving fewer than 59,000 Ivorian refugees in

Liberia, down from over 200,000 at the height of the crisis. Some new arrivals continue to be registered in Liberia, and continued efforts are needed to create favourable conditions for return to Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr President,

The anniversary of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement has been an opportunity to celebrate just how far Liberia has come. The country should be proud of its significant achievements. And yet it remains fragile, with a sense of a unified nationhood still a work in progress, and small-scale outbreaks of violence still routine. Important underlying cleavages and tensions await resolution. Increased economic activity and growth bring with them new challenges – of management, oversight, judicious use of financial resources and a fair distribution of national wealth.

Speaking at the recent launch of a High Level Panel on Fragile States, President Johnson Sirleaf underlined the importance of going beyond conventional growth-driven poverty reduction and addressing the linkages between peace-building, state-building and governance. It is helpful that Liberia's development partners increasingly employ a fragility perspective in their work. Liberia will need to stay the course, now and for decades to come. The United Nations stands with the Government, partners, civil society and others in our shared dedication to preventing any return to the ways of the past. Thank you.