

# UNMIL FOCUS



Vol. 4, No. 01

September - November 2007



## Towards a National Agenda

No to Arms, Yes  
to Development

Forestry Reverses  
Civil War Role

# Farewell Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

**T**his will be the last column I write for UNMIL FOCUS as I shall be leaving Liberia soon to take up my new assignment as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the Democratic Republic of Congo and head of the UN peacekeeping mission, MONUC.

It has been an eventful time since I arrived in Liberia in August 2005. The first job was to ensure free and fair elections. Those successful elections brought President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Africa's first elected female Head of State to office. Since then the Government, with the active support of UNMIL, the UN country team and other partners, has made substantial progress on rebuilding the economy, improving state administration, restructuring the security services, overcoming the debt burden and extending the rule of law throughout the country. Only a few years ago such a transformation would have been almost unimaginable.

In extending UNMIL's mandate in September for a year, the Security Council took account of the significant strides that Liberia has made since the end of the civil war but also recognised the daunting challenges that still face the country.

We all agree that we must not put at risk the achievements made so far. This is why the Security Council has adopted a gradual, step by step approach to the draw-down of UNMIL forces. We shall monitor the situation carefully, especially the development of Liberia's capacity to take over the responsibility for its own security, including the fight against crime. We recognise, however, that lasting security and stability lies in a broader definition of security that embraces respect for the rule of law, the protection of individual rights, the reduction of poverty, the promotion of gender equality and in healing the wounds inflicted by the abuses and violence of the past.

The Secretary-General's decision in early October to declare Liberia eligible for the UN Peacebuilding Fund is a timely boost to our efforts to achieve this wider vision of security. UNMIL has already begun consultations with the Liberian Government and local civil society partners to devise a priority plan to push forward the consolidation of peace in Liberia.

As I move to another African country that is struggling to emerge from its own chapter of war and division, I will take with me many very helpful lessons from Liberia together with the memory of many good experiences.

In particular I am thankful to President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, her government and the people of Liberia for the excellent cooperation extended to UNMIL and the UN country team. Without that support we cannot fulfil our mandate in Liberia.

I am especially grateful to all the civilian, military and police personnel working here as a part of UNMIL and the UN country team. It is your exemplary dedication and tremendous hard work, often in difficult and dangerous situations, that have made the difference. I have learnt over the years of my professional life that you are only as good as the team around you. And I have enjoyed the support of a great team. I know that you will extend the same support to my successor Ellen Margrethe Løj.

So to each and everyone of you and to your families I say goodbye and good luck. I wish you every happiness and success in the New Year.



**Alan Doss**

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



# New Special Representative of the Secretary-General

**U**nited Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in October announced the appointment of Ellen Margrethe Løj of Denmark as his new Special Representative to Liberia. Løj replaces Alan Doss, who moves to the Democratic Republic of Congo as the Secretary-General's Special Representative and head of MONUC.

Currently, Denmark's ambassador to the Czech Republic, Løj has more than 30 years experience in the diplomatic service. She was the Permanent Representative of Denmark to the United Nations from 2001 to 2007 and served as a chairperson of the UN Security Council's Sanctions Committee on Liberia. Between 1977 and 1986, she served as Secretary in her country's Permanent Mission to the United



Nations and then as Counsellor within the European Commission in Brussels. From 1986 to 1989, she was Head of Department in the Foreign Ministry. In addition, she was State Secretary of the South Group in Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 1996 to 2001. Løj was also her country's ambassador to Israel from 1989 to 1992.

In addition to her diplomatic appointments, the Danish diplomat has served on the supervisory board of Scandlines AG and Scandlines, a Danish shipping company. She was a member of the advisory boards of the Industrialization Fund for Developing Countries and the Investment Fund for Central and Eastern Europe.

Born on 17 October 1948 in Gedesby, Denmark, Løj graduated from the University of Copenhagen in 1973 with a Master's degree in political science.

## IN THIS ISSUE

- 4 Towards a National Agenda
- 6 No to Arms, Yes to Development
- 8 Forestry Reverses Civil War Role
- 10 Justice Sector Makes Progress
- 12 Treating Prisoners as Humans
- 14 Confronting Cholera
- 16 Malnourished Children Battle Legacy of War
- 18 Why Gender?
- 20 Interview: Alan Doss
- 22 Where is Home?
- 24 The Quest for Shelter
- 25 Humanitarian Appeal Launched
- 26 At least the World Will See...
- 28 Emergency Response Unit Takes Shape
- 29 Army Training Gathers Steam
- 30 Small Grants, Big Relief
- 31 Mentoring the Media
- 32 German Chancellor Lauds UNMIL
- 33 New Sierra Leonean President Visits Liberia
- 35 Immigration Workshop in Gbarnga
- 36 "We Are Always Beside You"
- 38 Liberians Speak

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

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance  
**Jordan Ryan**

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law  
**Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu**

Chief of Public Information  
**George Somerwill**

Editor and Head of Publications  
**Mathew Elavanalthoduka**

Staff Writers  
**Sulaiman Momodu**  
**Rebecca Bannor-Addae**  
**J. Wesley Washington**

Design and Graphics  
**Paddy Defoxy Ilos, II**

Published by the Public Information Office, United Nations Mission in Liberia

[unmilfocus@unmil.org](mailto:unmilfocus@unmil.org)

Printed by Buck Press Ltd., Accra, Ghana





Massive poverty and unemployment haunt many Liberians

# Towards a National A

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

**E**merging from the 14-year civil war that cost more than 200,000 lives, tore apart the country's social fabric and all but destroyed its infrastructure and economy, Liberia today is busy picking up the pieces and heading for a national revival.

Four years after the end of the war, the Liberian government is moving beyond interim policy strategies to embark on a five-year national agenda -- the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2008-2012. The PRS significantly differs from past practices of narrow inclusiveness and inequity that led to the enrichment of a few at the expense of the vast majority of the popula-

tion. The government is acknowledging that in order for Liberia to enjoy sustainable peace and prosperity, all Liberians must take ownership of the country's development.

"The current government is recognising that part of what caused the conflict could be attributed to the marginalisation existing at the time. People did not feel part of the government. Decisions were being made for them as opposed to involving them in the decision making processes," says Ambulai Johnson, Minister of Internal Affairs. "For 160 years Liberia has operated with an overly centralised government structure and, as we can see, the development impact has not been balanced."

The PRS embodies decentralisation as

a policy strategy. Part of the decentralisation process includes production of the first county-specific development agendas (CDAs), developed by the people, for the people. By gathering information on their development status such as access to clean drinking water, schools, clinics and roads, and identifying unexplored resources for progressive development, the CDA process will encourage communities to systematically think about their problems and possible solutions.

The PRS, of which the CDAs feed into, is not a welfare programme, as President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf pointed out at its official launch in August. "Poverty reduction is not a reinforced and broadened safety road for the poor. Reducing poverty is not something this



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

# genda

government can do alone. It is something we all must do,” said the President.

The government’s decentralisation efforts emanate from the belief that economic and social growth requires public ownership. The CDA, which will be subject to regular updating, is developed from consultations in the counties, evolving from district to county consultations. Community stakeholders such as county legislators, commissioners, paramount chiefs, clan leaders, civil society, social and religious groups and business interest groups are involved in these consultations. As the drivers of development, they will formulate the needs, interests and visions of their respective counties.

The CDA is intended to be the blueprint for development activities in each of

the 15 counties and will further inform the framework of national development strategies in the PRS. “A donor will be able to pick up the CDA and locate that, in this particular county, they are in dire need of clinics or, for instance, an investor will be able to identify that in River Cess they have excellent opportunities for water transport, River Gee is rich in forest reserves and so on,” says Minister Johnson. “The CDA is a county reference document not only intended for donors and investors but for the people. It is a roadmap for the people in the sense that they themselves have formulated their needs and their vision. Instead of ad hoc development, counties can soon lay out a structured development plan referencing



“It is about tomorrow. What do we, Liberians, want our future to look like?” - President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

the CDA.”

In August, the 15 County Development Superintendents, government ministers and members of the UN family met for a workshop in Gbarnga to prepare for the CDA process. Development Superintendents are the leading facilitators in the process as consultations move from district to district and finally end at the county level. “This workshop gives us the tools and techniques to go back to our county districts and sit down with the people, to share ideas and together construct the CDA,” said Ophelia Williams Draper, Development Superintendent of Maryland County.

Apart from providing an opportunity to raise questions and suggest adjustments, the workshop included sessions on information management, conflict resolution,

methodology, the PRS framework and a breakdown of the CDA formulation process to ensure that everyone was on the same page.

“Many of our citizens are illiterate but it doesn’t mean that they cannot be part of the CDA process,” said Draper. “This is a participatory exercise and all levels of our society will be engaged. I feel that our discussions and the tools we get in this workshop will further enable us to include all actors in formulating our needs and addressing our future.”

The decentralization efforts draw significant support from the UN County Support Teams (CSTs) composed of UNMIL and UN agencies. CST facilitators who generally work with the office of the county Superintendent offer guidance as well as technical and logistical support to the CDA process.

Each of the 15 counties are expected to have completed the CDA by December. The findings will then go to the Ministry of Planning for eventual input into the PRS. It will be the first time that Liberia embarks on a development agenda in the interest of the entire population. What is now a participatory process can, with determination, develop into a practice of accountable and transparent policy making and as the President remarked on the official launch of the PRS: “It is about tomorrow. What do we, Liberians, want our future to look like?” ♦

**T**he Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) revolves around four strategic pillars: security and peace, economic revitalisation, governance and the rule of law, and infrastructure and basic social services.

The decentralization efforts draw significant support from the UN County Support Teams (CSTs) composed of the UN family in Liberia. The CST mechanism is a process fashioned as a coherent UN approach to strengthen the government’s recovery and development processes. It assists in rebuilding of administrative buildings, capacity building amongst local leadership and information and data management capacity at the county level.



# No to Arms, Yes to Development

By Sulaiman Momodu

At the UNDP headquarters in Monrovia, Napoleon Abdulai reaches out for his drawer, pulls out a small box and empties its contents on the table. The sight is extraordinary and even shocking. What lay on the table are several bullets.

"These bullets can kill hundreds of people," says Abdulai, Programme Manager of the UNDP Small Arms Control Programme, holding one of them meant for an AK-47 rifle, a killing machine widely used in Africa's civil wars. "We have collected over 45,000 pieces of ammunition and about 500 guns so far." In exchange for surrendering these weapons, UNDP is offering development projects in post-war Liberia under the aegis of its Arms for Development programme (AfD).

Despite the successful completion of the Disarmament and Demobilization (DD) phase of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme in November 2004, there are still some small arms and light weapons in circulation throughout the country. Beyond the arms and weapons, there is also the added menace of numerous unexploded ordnances (UXOs) littering the communities following Liberia's 14-year civil war that claimed hundreds of thousands of lives. In Zota, Nimba County, a seven-year-old child was seriously injured recently after stepping on a bomb that exploded. "UXOs are all over ...lots of bullets, guns and bombs had been left behind during the country's war," says the UNDP officer.

Currently, 19 projects are being implemented under the AfD programme, including the construction or renovation of administrative buildings, town halls, clinics, schools and the implementation of

micro-credit schemes in places like Foya, Kolahun and Ganta. Some of the projects are in progress while two projects in Nimba and River Gee counties have been completed. Most of the projects are funded by Japan but UNDP also puts in some core funds. The agency also monitors the projects to ensure that the resources are not misused. All arms and ammunition collected as part of the AfD programme are handed over to the UN mission.

"Violent conflict in Liberia has come to an end but the struggle for development is just starting. Our goal must be to promote and maintain a secure environment that makes development possible. Making Liberia safer for development is, therefore, at the core of UNMIL's mandate and sums up what we and our partners in the international community are working to achieve here in Liberia," notes the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss.

The AfD programme involves the UNDP officials going into communities and meeting with traditional leaders, women's and youth groups, former fighters and government officials. A committee is then formed with emphasis on the inclusion of women in the executive. UNDP provides logistics assistance such as stationeries and motor bikes for mobility. The community then comes up with a list of projects from which one is identified according to the scale of preference and how it will help improve the lives of the people. Each community is then given between US\$ 25,000-40,000 based on needs and the number of arms collected. However, if a community comes up with an innovative but costly project, the small arms programme works together with other units of the UNDP to raise the resources. UNMIL peacekeepers provide assistance in the implementation of the projects as the need arises.

The AfD programme was first

launched in January 2006 in Ganta, Nimba County, where an administrative building, which is expected to enhance the presence of government, has been recently handed over to the community.



All projects are implemented in close collaboration with the government, UN agencies, UNMIL and civil society in Lofa, Nimba, Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Bong, Maryland and Grand Kru counties. Areas of the country along the borders with Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone are given particular focus. In Kolahun alone, near the border with Sierra Leone, 10,000 bullets were collected as part of the AfD. "We think that we are just touching the tip of the iceberg," says Abdulai, and notes the programme is to be extended to the remaining eight counties.

On discovering UXOs, a red tape or red piece of cloth is placed at the site and UNMIL peacekeepers are immediately informed. At the Voinjama Multilateral High School premises with a student population of over 1,000 pupils, a bomb was recently discovered and was quickly detonated by UN peacekeepers from the Pakistani contingent. "We are very grateful to the UN Mission and the UNDP for removing the danger from our school. We would like them to thoroughly look in and around our school. We may have bombs all over," says the principal, Addis M.

#### Weapons surrendered in exchange for development projects



Kutu Acquoi.

"In Voinjama District, we have discovered UXOs in trees, in school compounds, market places, in ditches and at office premises. From 2006 to October 2007, we have discovered over 200 UXOs in Voinjama District alone including grenades, bombs and rockets. We have over 50 rifles that have been surrendered and thousands of ammunition...people are willingly surrendering weapons to us," says Lyndon B. Gibson, the UNDP Small Arms Field Officer.

Urban centres are also being given special attention. The AfD programme is expected to take off in Monrovia, Buchanan, Tubmanburg and other urban areas in collaboration with the communities come next year. Already, UNDP is working in close collaboration with the Liberia National Police (LNP), UNMIL and communities to reduce armed violence in crime prone areas in Monrovia and its environs. UNDP has provided motor bikes to the LNP, and is currently revamping the police garage where the motorbikes could be repaired when broken down.

As part of the AfD programme, a National Commission on Small Arms in Liberia comprising eight government ministries has been established and equipped with computers, a photocopy machine, a generator and a small conference room. Currently the country's obsolete 1956 Firearms Strategy Act is being reviewed to enact a reformed law in tune with the times. An ongoing public awareness campaign, involving radio announcements, billboards, traditional communicators and drama, explains why people should turn over their weapons in return for development projects in their communities.

Notwithstanding the fact that AfD is impacting positively on communities, deplorable road network, weak capacity of implementing partners and the dearth of funds are among the challenges being faced by the programme. But for how long will the arms collection last? Experiences from other parts of the world show that one cannot put a limit on arms collection. "But it is also not timeless," says Abdulai. Throughout West Africa, National Commissions for Small Arms are expected to take over the job that the UNDP is performing in the areas of small arms control in the coming years. ♦



# Forestry Reverses Civil War Role

By Sulaiman Momodu

**T**he forestry resources once used to finance the brutal civil war in Liberia are now reversing their ignominious role in the past, much to the delight of the people of the war-weary nation. With the restoration of peace and the assistance of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the country's Forestry Development Authority (FDA) is regaining control over the resources leading to the use of the rich forestry assets for development that would benefit the people.

The trade in timber once accounted for 50 per cent of Liberia's exports, worth an estimated US\$ 80 million, and contributed to about 20 per cent of the gross domestic product. But during the country's protracted conflict, forestry resources were mismanaged and exploited, forcing the UN Security Council to impose sanctions on the country's timber exports in July 2003 for three years.

Although exportation of the forestry

resources is yet to begin, the FDA says over the past one year a total of US\$ 1 million has been realized in revenue. UNMIL has created an enabling environment for the Authority's personnel to work at their checkpoints. The Mission has also built three inspectorates for the Authority at Mount Barclay, Schieffelin and Iron Gate on the outskirts of Monrovia, through its Quick Impact Projects to assist in monitoring and curbing illegal logging operations. Two other inspectorates are being constructed by UNMIL in the counties. FDA personnel are deployed at eight checkpoints en route to the capital, Monrovia, helping monitor forestry resources transported to the city.

At the handover of the three constructed offices in August, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss, hailed the work of the Authority and welcomed the ending of sanctions on Liberian timber but added that "the bounty of the forest must benefit all Liberians." He recognized the crucial

role of the FDA in ensuring that the richness of Liberia's bio-diversity is preserved while the country benefits from the economic gains accrued from the reviving timber industry.

The Managing Director of the FDA, John Woods, says the forests of Liberia are "an ecological storehouse of worldwide significance" and acknowledged UNMIL's contributions to the forestry sector by helping to curb illegal logging before







Rebecca Bamor-Addae/UNMIL

#### Forestry resources fuelled civil war

sanctions were lifted. He also sought further assistance to establish additional inspectorates in more remote areas of Liberia.

For a long time, most of the people involved in the timber business were ex-fighters who did not want to pay any taxes or even give statistics on their transactions. "With FDA workers deployed at UNMIL-manned checkpoints, forestry products are now being monitored," says

Moses G. Kopodolo, Manager of the Chain of Custody Division at the Authority.

The trade in timber itself is illegal technically, according to the FDA, although it is tolerated as all timber industries were vandalized and people need to rebuild their homes, schools and other infrastructure. The dealers are also not registered as registering them will be interpreted as legalizing the trade.

Revenue from forestry resources is not handled by the Authority's staff and none is a signatory to the accounts in line with the government's efforts to minimize corruption. A minimum fee of 60 Liberian dollars (US\$ 1) is charged per log while non-forestry products like charcoal, rattan, bamboo pay 400 Liberian dollars per trip. The procedure in generating the revenues involves the timber owners informing the FDA about pieces of timber they have in the counties. A bill is then given to the dealer who goes to the Liberia Central Bank and pays. The dealer brings the Bank's cheque to the FDA in return for a waybill stating the ownership of the timber and where it is coming from. At the checkpoints, while transporting the timber, the dealer presents the receipt and the waybill, and the timber is allowed into Monrovia.

Liberia used to have some 23 logging companies, but according to Executive Order Number One, no individual or company now owns any concession in Liberia as all concessions were cancelled. "Most of the logging companies did not even have the legal papers or concession agreements and had no proof of honouring their taxes. Imagine we had 64 million dollars that could not be collected, that was outstanding in taxes," says Kopodolo. "When

the UN imposed sanctions on Liberian timber, one of the pre-conditions set was that we should make sure that we are capable of monitoring the forest resources. This was the first challenge that we had – now the sanctions are lifted but we couldn't have done it without the assistance of UNMIL."

Between four to six uniformed FDA personnel assigned to an office work on a shift basis as most timber dealers travel at night. "We are here to monitor forest products by receiving way bills from timber and permits from charcoal dealers. We collect and inspect the documents, file and record in our ledgers on a daily basis and submit our monthly report," explains Margaret Jallah, FDA Supervisor at the Mount Barclay checkpoint near Monrovia.

Although some gains have been made, challenges remain. "The office that UNMIL built for us, for which we are very grateful, is several metres away from this checkpoint. But we still prefer working at this checkpoint because the drivers don't respect us. When we are at the inspectorate that UNMIL has built and we stop cars, they will not stop. In fact, they have threatened that if we stand on the road to stop, they will kill us. Only UNMIL can help us to stop cars. Without UNMIL we will not be able to carry out our job, so we want an 'iron gate' where our offices are," says Jallah.

"Our people are now dignified. They have good office space but they do not have the command to stop vehicles especially in areas where UNMIL has dismantled checkpoints. We want the authorities to please help us in this regard," pleads Kopodolo. Added to the unwillingness of drivers to stop and the Authority's lack of vehicles to conduct patrols, timber dealers occasionally forge way bills and receipts and carry excess timber beyond what they state on the way bills.

Forest resources in Liberia account for 47 per cent of its land. The Forestry reform law, which the Food and Agriculture Organization, World Bank and other partners contributed to develop, has been enacted and the Authority has come up with regulations to open the industry. Doing so means job opportunities for the teeming unemployed population. But more importantly, it means more gains for the war-torn nation which badly needs money to tackle its myriad challenges. ♦

#### An Inspectorate Booth constructed by UNMIL's Quick Impact Project



Sulaiman Momodu/UNMIL

# Justice Sector Makes Progress

By J. Wesley Washington

Assisting the government to rebuild the country's security and rule of law sectors is a strategic priority for the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). As the country makes the transition from lawlessness to respect for the rule of law, Liberia's judicial system faces phenomenal challenges in the administration and delivery of justice across the country.

The lack of qualified judicial personnel, poor or non-existent infrastructure, people's lack of confidence in the judiciary, and a culture of corruption and impunity are just a few of the myriad challenges facing the judicial system. To assist in tackling these challenges, UNMIL, through its Legal and Judicial System Support Division (LJSSD), is currently engaged with the Judiciary, Ministry of Justice, and other legal institutions in developing and implementing a variety of initiatives, in collaboration with other international partners.

Accurate information and data on almost all aspects of the justice system, including the number of staff in all the courts and the types of cases handled, are unavailable. From 2006, UNMIL has been working with the judiciary and UNDP to establish a comprehensive database of institutional information on all courts. LJSSD conducted an assessment of record-keeping practices in the Magistrates' Courts in order to assist the judiciary in designing a simple and effective

case registration system. Data on the progression of all serious criminal cases from arrest to resolution in 2006 have been gathered to accurately assess the caseload of individual courts and the judiciary as a whole.

As courts receive substantial amounts of money in the form of fees, fines and bail

---

UNMIL has also assisted the government in legislative reforms covering, among others, rape, human trafficking, juries, and financial autonomy of the judiciary. In 2006, UNMIL provided consultants and technical expertise for the establishment of a Law Reform Commission, which would provide a sustainable mechanism for the progressive development and reform of the law.

---

bonds, the financial accountability of the judiciary is at stake without proper records. LJSSD is now assisting the judiciary to develop procedures under which bail bonds would be held in bank accounts and not left in the custody of court staff.

Serious shortage of qualified staff, especially in the lower courts, is a major

impediment. The prosecution service faces a similar problem. As a short-term solution, in 2006, UNMIL engaged the services of 12 qualified Liberian lawyers for a six-month period to assist the Ministry of Justice by prosecuting cases and providing support to existing prosecutors. UNMIL also hired the services of 11 qualified Liberian lawyers to represent indigent defendants charged with criminal offences in the Circuit Courts to strengthen the capacity of the public defence system. Two of the prosecutorial consultants have now accepted permanent appointment as County Attorneys. The programme came to an end earlier this year, but it is hoped that it will recommence in November 2007.

For longer-term solutions, LJSSD participates in a technical committee established by the Chief Justice to assess the options for establishing a judicial training institute for Liberia. In 2006, UNMIL submitted a project proposal to the Open Society Initiative for West Africa



Mathew Elavanathoduka/UNMIL





**Alan Doss hands over a newly renovated courthouse in Maryland County**

(OSIWA) for a scholarship scheme for law students. This has now been funded with US\$150,000 and, over the next three years, is expected to produce 50 law graduates to work for the Ministry of Justice.

LJSSD has provided training for magistrates, justices of the peace, court clerks, prosecutors, legal aid providers and senior law students to enhance their capacity. In 2007, training was also provided for senior staff and officers of the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. Training for hearing officers of the Ministry of Labour on due process and adjudication procedures is set to begin soon. These training programmes are conducted in collaboration with national partners (primarily the Ministry of Justice and the Supreme Court) and draw on national legal experts as facilitators in conjunction with personnel from LJSSD.

The urgent need to renovate and rehabilitate the dilapidated judicial infrastructure is yet another major challenge. Through its Quick Impact Projects,

UNMIL is currently reconstructing and rehabilitating court houses, and police and prison facilities throughout the country. Nine court house projects have already been completed in Tubmanburg, Gbarnga, Greenville, Caryesburg, Bensonville, Ganta, Bopolu, Kakata and Maryland. The Magisterial courts in Cestos City, Sanniquellie, Zwedru and Zorzor, the Circuit courts in Rivercess, Grand Gedeh and Nimba and the Buchanan Court Complex are currently at various stages of construction.

UNMIL has also assisted the government in legislative reforms covering, among others, rape, human trafficking, juries, and financial autonomy of the judiciary. In 2006, UNMIL provided consultants and technical expertise for the establishment of a Law Reform Commission, which would provide a sustainable mechanism for the progressive development and reform of the law. The bill, establishing the Commission, has since been presented to the President of Liberia.

As there is significant uncertainty over the legislations actually in force in the country, UNMIL is working with the Ministry of Justice to ascertain which laws were passed or published during the conflict period with a view to eventually publishing a comprehensive listing. LJSSD has also provided advice on specific legislative reform proposals, such as on drug trafficking and money laundering and on amendments to the Labour Law.

UNMIL has deployed its legal staff in all the counties except Rivercess, River Gee and Gbarpolu, which are covered by officers serving Grand Gedeh, Grand Bassa and Bomi respectively. These field officers assist in building and strengthening the capacity of the local judicial and prosecutorial systems by providing on-the-ground advice and assistance to judges, magistrates, court officials, prosecutors and defence counsel to enhance their knowledge and skill. They also monitor major trials. ♦



# Treating Prisoners as Humans

A renovated detention facility: most of Liberia's prisons need urgent rehabilitation

By Neeraj Bali

**L**ocated on Harper's main street, Maryland County's prison could easily be mistaken for a well-secured housing compound. Inside, seven Corrections officers, including one volunteer, are charged with looking after 48 inmates, many of them ex-combatants. A Kenyan Corrections Advisor of UNMIL oversees the work, stepping in with advice on even seemingly mundane matters.

When UNMIL FOCUS visited the prison, one inmate was handcuffed to a steel door. The prison superintendent said the prisoner had tried to hurt himself with a sharp object. Since the prison has no medical facility, he had to be transported outside for treatment. He violently resisted being taken to the hospital and was being restrained to keep him from doing further harm to himself. "That is not the way to deal with this situation," George Okumu,

UNMIL's Corrections and Advisory Unit's mentor in Harper, tells the prison superintendent in a polite, respectful tone.

Locks missing on many a cell door, no equipment to deal with riots, lack of sanitation materials, and absence of medical care on the compound -- the list of woes facing the prison is almost endless. Okumu acknowledges the shortcomings but is quick to add that Liberia never had a proper prison system. "The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation was formed only in 1978, and war broke out soon after. It will take a while before facilities and standards are up to a minimum level."

The Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation is the direct custodian of all inmates once they are charged or sentenced. The task the Bureau faces is a difficult one. To help re-integrate inmates in their communities after release, convicted criminals should be detained in facilities within the county they have been convict-

ed in. After the war, however, all the prisons were shut, with the exception of Kakata. When UNMIL arrived, Monrovia's prisoners were being kept in the cellar of Liberian National Police (LNP) Headquarters, under inhumane conditions.

As part of its efforts to assist the government to reform the security sector, UNMIL is helping to build a functioning and humane prison system. The Mission's Corrections Advisory Unit (CAU) provides substantive assistance in three principal areas -- prison reform, prison monitoring, and training and development of prison service personnel.

Since 2005 CAU, along with the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation, has trained 105 correction officers, and 69 are still under training. "The graduates undergo a year's training, which includes field training. They learn everything from report writing and inmate administration to conflict management and penal rules,"





Neeraj Bhatti/UNMIL

says Fatumata Sheriff, Assistant Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation.

Jeremiah Weah is one of the new Corrections Officers. He completed the first three months at the training academy in the capital and is now undergoing an eight-month field experience in Monrovia Central Prison. "A lesson that is constantly stressed at the academy is that inmates have to be treated humanely. Although they're in prison, they're still human beings and they have human rights," says Weah. "An important part of the job is that I should help maintain the dignity of inmates."

His sentiments are echoed 500 kilometres away among Corrections officers at the spacious but yet be opened National Palace of Corrections in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County. "People in the community fear criminals who have just finished time. Our challenge is to reform them, to give them trade skills to become productive members who can reintegrate into the

community," says Victor Dolue, a recent graduate. His colleague James Dweh agrees that the training changed his life. "From not knowing much, I went to being a confident person who can manage conflict. We learned how to control people when they make *palava*, and to placate them."

Currently in the final stages of refurbishment, the detention facility is meant to accommodate 240 convicted prisoners. "We hope to offer skills training in agriculture, masonry, carpentry and tailoring, to name a few," says Sam Tarley, Director of the National Palace of Corrections.

The National Palace of Corrections is located some five kilometres outside Zwedru city. Close to the high prison walls, tented accommodation is being erected for UNMIL's Jordanian Formed Police Unit, which will support the Liberian National Police to reinforce security at the facility. The cell doors are regulation steel bars, and each cell holds between only one to three prisoners. It is the most modern of all of Liberia's prisons, with separate blocks for men, women, juveniles, and high risk offenders.

Juveniles, though, should not be in the same detention centres as adults. According to Marjo Callaghan, head of CAU, juvenile offenders fall under the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. "Since there are no other facilities to house them, they get sent to prison. It is a horrible situation in all counties," she says.

That, among other concerns, is high on the reform agenda. "UNMIL has commissioned a task force to see what we can do along with UNICEF to re-establish the juvenile justice system," Callaghan informs. Meanwhile, the best that can be done is to segregate juvenile offenders from the adults in the available facilities.

The challenges involved in building a correction and rehabilitation system from scratch are many and UNMIL's CAU is taking an incremental approach. "The training is based on the rights of the individual," says Callaghan. "It is a mentoring programme. It involves a three-month training at the academy, and then we follow the staff's progress for almost a year in the field. We are trying to teach staff how to treat prisoners humanely."

The growing success of UNMIL's cor-

rections reform programme has been recognised with the International Corrections and Prisons Association's Management and Training Award last year. "Our programme's benchmark is to have one detention facility in each county. We have refurbished ten centres in nine counties," Callaghan points out.

Paucity of funds is the biggest obstacle facing the programme. "We don't have enough funding. We received over a million dollars. Our two big supporters are the U.S. and Norway. There are funds coming from Canada, UNMIL QIP, UNHCR, ICRC and others. Everything is a joint effort," says Callaghan, stressing the importance of working closely with other partners.

German Agro Action has provided farming and other equipment, and is supporting cassava farming. The Food and Agriculture Organisation is offering technical advice, farm inputs such as seeds and is assisting in developing a vegetable farm by providing skills training in agriculture. The International Committee of the Red Cross is engaged in projects to ensure the availability of water and proper sanitation. Other organisations involved include Prison Fellowship, which does HIV/AIDS training, and Mercy Ships, Merlin and UN military contingents, which often provide much needed medical care through frequent visits to the prisons.

Wages for prisons staff pose yet another challenge. Corrections officers receive US \$30 a month during training, and are paid US\$ 90 a month after they graduate. All the officers UNMIL FOCUS spoke with say they are happy with their jobs but they feel the monthly wage does not adequately help them deal with the hardships and limitations they face. "But after all, it is our country. If we do not do the job, who will?" asks Zohn Clarideh, a trainee officer in Zwedru.

Such a shift in the attitude may sound a small success but its impact is huge on the long road to building a correctional system in Liberia that meets minimum international standards and treats prisoners humanely. ♦

**Rebecca Bannor-Addae contributed to this report.**



Appalling sanitary conditions contribute to cholera outbreaks

# Confronting Cholera

By Sulaiman Momodu

**C**ome rainy season, Liberia invariably faces cholera outbreaks that often claim several lives. Frantic efforts that follow succeed to contain the spread of the disease but it is only a transient victory. The next rainy season cholera is back again with a vengeance. This year is no exception.

The Ministry of Health (MOH), World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF, and some non-governmental organisations, such as MSF-Belgium, have been battling to put under control the epidemic that broke out in September leaving hundreds of patients admitted to the Cholera Treatment Unit (CTU) at the main John F. Kennedy Hospital in Monrovia.

Cholera is a virulent disease characterised by sudden and acute watery diar-

rhoea, which in severe cases can cause death by dehydration and kidney failure within hours. Entry to the 125-bed CTU, isolated from other wards, is highly restricted. Each bed in CTU is specially designed with a big hole in the middle. The smell of chlorine fills the air.

One day in late September there were 51 suspected cases of cholera admitted to the CTU. Earlier in the day 15 patients had been discharged. Some of the patients





But for emergency preparations by actors in the health sector, the disease would have taken a huge toll. "Usually we have diarrhoea outbreaks during the beginning of the rainy season. This year we prepared for an emergency. Fortunately, it didn't happen so we thought we were not going to have diarrhoea this year. Then, unfortunately for us, during the middle of the rains, we started having floods, so the wells got contaminated and we started seeing cases of watery diarrhoea," Dahn explains.

So far, the counties affected by the outbreak are Bong, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Maryland, Nimba and Sinoe with over 85 per cent of cases reported from Montserrado County (Monrovia and its

With the rainy season lasting nearly half the year, Liberia has no dearth of water. Ironically, one of the greatest challenges the country faces is the lack of safe drinking water exposing people to cholera and other diseases. On the streets of Monrovia and other big towns, vendors selling cold water in plastic bags are a common sight.

were severely dehydrated, reduced to mere bones and sunken eyes. "I am feeling ok now. The frequent stools and vomiting have stopped," said one of the patients who explained that he was taken to the unit almost at the point of death.

MOH authorities say over 900 suspected cholera cases have been reported, most of them in early October. Although it is not clear how many people might have lost their lives as not all cases reach the CTU, Liberia's Deputy Minister of Health who is also the chief medical officer, Dr. Bernice Dahn, says five deaths have been recorded. Three reportedly died before reaching the hospital, while the two that were in very critical condition died of the disease at the CTU.

environs). The cholera hotspots in Monrovia are Central Monrovia, Bushrod Island, West Point, Sinkor, Paynesville, Gardensville and Congo Town.

Outbreak in some of these areas had been exacerbated by appalling sanitary conditions, compounded by the recent flooding during which poorly maintained water wells were contaminated when excrement from latrines emptied into water sources used for drinking and other domestic purposes. Overcrowding in slums, lack of access to safe water and sanitation, improper food preparation and handling, unsafe hygiene practices, population movement as a result of the war, and lack of access to health services during outbreaks are other factors that contribut-

ing to the spread of the disease.

With the rainy season lasting nearly half the year, Liberia has no dearth of water. Ironically, one of the greatest challenges the country faces is the lack of safe drinking water, exposing people to cholera and other diseases. On the streets of Monrovia and other big towns, vendors selling cold water in plastic bags are a common sight. MOH officials admit that it is difficult to deal with petty traders who sell water from unknown sources in plastic bags.

Since MOH does not have the capacity to handle the myriad health problems in the country, UN agencies and humanitarian organisations have stepped in. They have now formed a multi-sectoral task force that addresses diarrhoea issues.

Dr. Peter Clement of WHO says the UN agency is working closely with the Ministry and have stocks of cholera kits which are usually mobilised as the need arises. The organisation generally assists with disease surveillance in the country and has provided motorbikes to surveillance officers in all the 15 counties, enabling the MOH and partners to get prompt reports on diseases. WHO has also provided reagents to test samples in addition to helping strengthen the country's referral system.

In addition to the ongoing management of suspected cases at the CTU, preventive interventions to chase the disease away include awareness messages being aired on UNMIL Radio and other local stations. Already about 430 wells had been chlorinated and phase two of this exercise is in progress. Although efforts to contain the outbreak continue, water and sanitation issues remain a major challenge to be addressed. "If Liberia has to get out of cholera, the infrastructure must be there," Dr. Clement points out.

For her part, Deputy Minister Dahn says the Health Ministry will be working hard with all stakeholders to ensure that the disease does not occur come next year. With humanitarian assistance to Liberia dwindling, including next year's expected pull-out of MSF-Belgium, which is helping with the treatment of suspected cholera cases, "prevention now," she says, "is better than waiting for the disease to occur."

♦

# Malnourished Children Battle Legacy of War

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

**T**hree-month-old Patience is severely malnourished. The little girl's big brown eyes are set in a sunken face, and her clothes hang from her small bony frame. Brought by her mother to a therapeutic feeding centre in Virginia, Montserrado County, the frail-looking baby immediately receives a systematic treatment of folic acid, antibiotics and a check for malaria. But for this critical help from the feeding centre, Patience may not have survived her first birthday.

Patience is among the many acutely malnourished children, some of them suffering from various illnesses, who are brought to the feeding centre almost daily. "Most of the children have malaria since their immune system has completely broken down," says Cynthia Siapha, one of the two physicians at the centre. A number of children also suffer from tuberculosis. In addition to providing systematic treatment, the centre also delivers general medical assistance. The children also receive a protein-rich milk blend called F100 to encourage rapid weight gain.

Liberia is one of the most impoverished countries in the world. Close to 40 per cent of children under the age of five are stunted or too short for their age as a result of chronic malnutrition. Nearly seven per cent of Liberia's children suffer from acute malnutrition.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) supports seven therapeutic

feeding centres and special nutritional units in four counties of Liberia. The Virginia centre is run by a local NGO, Aid for the Needy Development Programme (ANDP). In 2006 the centre admitted 690 acutely malnourished children below the age of five while providing supplementary feeding to more than 1,300 moderately malnourished children in surrounding locations.

The ward at the Virginia feeding centre is airy and clean - a simple open dormitory with mosquito nets suspended from the ceiling and mattresses on the floor. A radio plays music and mothers nurse their babies or chat to one another. "We have a big problem with high numbers of teenage mothers in Liberia. They don't know how to take care of their children and most are single mothers. Many of them don't breastfeed. We teach them the importance of breastfeeding," says the Director of the centre, William Dakel. "Poverty has many faces and education is what these young mothers need. It will take some time but eventually the message will spread."

Malnutrition is caused by improper or insufficient diet. Contaminated water supply as well as poor hygiene and sanitation practices are also contributing factors. Children are generally more vulnerable to diarrhoea, and repeated or persistent diarrhoea makes their bodies unable to absorb essential nutrients from food. In extreme cases, malnutrition can cause irreversible brain damage, muscle and tissue deficiency, and blindness.

Liberia's government, in collaboration







Tommy Jay

with a number of partners including UNICEF, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), published the Comprehensive Food Insecurity and Nutrition Survey in late 2006. The survey revealed that the Liberian population is still highly affected by the consequences of the civil war that left the country with a destroyed infrastructure and a devastated economy.

Today more than 75 per cent of Liberians survive on less than US\$ 1 a day. In 1998 the figure was 55 per cent and the increase is indisputably a consequence of

---

Liberia's government, in collaboration with a number of partners including UNICEF, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), published the Comprehensive Food Insecurity and Nutrition Survey in late 2006. The survey revealed that the Liberian population is still highly affected by the consequences of the civil war that left the country with a destroyed infrastructure and a devastated economy.

---

the 14-year conflict. "No doubt that the war further compounded the already existing problem of inadequate nutrition for a large part of the population," says Jestina Bardue-Johnson, Nutrition Focal Point at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare. "One major problem is access to roads. As we speak, it is close to impossible to reach south-eastern Liberia by road. People have limited access to markets, to selling and buying. Most people do not have sufficient access to health clinics and parents usually don't bring in the malnourished child before it is almost too late."

However, apart from high food insecurity being a contributing factor to malnutrition, another underlying cause is low formal education levels. "If we are to turn things around, access to education needs to be improved," says Ralph Midy, UNICEF Health Officer. "We need to educate parents on homecare and the importance of a balanced diet. Unfortunately numerous myths surround the issue of malnutrition."

Parents often blame the pot bellies, the discolouration of the hair, the swollen body or the skeleton-look on mischievous spirits. "The child is a victim of witchcraft, they lament, and often parents will try breaking the spell by seeking traditional treatment. Coming to the centre is usually their last attempt," says Dakei.

The feeding centre in Virginia has a screening team that goes into communities to identify malnourished children and their families. More than 85 per cent of admissions to the centre are due to efforts by this screening team. If the mother is convinced of the acuteness of her child's condition, both mother and child will be admitted for an average duration of 26 days.

In late September Michael Clarke brought his eight-month-old daughter Princess to the feeding centre. He is one of the few fathers accompanying their malnourished children. "She was so small, almost half of her normal weight. She was very sick and her skin was hard, it was peeling, and she had a running stomach," says the father. Today Princess is astonishingly alert and playful. Shortly the little girl will be back in her community. "We do a lot of counselling. I encourage the parents to find the root cause for their child's poor health. It is important they know the severity of neglect before they are discharged. We don't want to see the children return," says physician Siapha.

If moderately malnourished children are not assisted their case will become severe. Apart from identifying acute cases, the screening team issues referral slips for supplementary feeding to parents with moderately malnourished children. At a distribution point a few miles from the centre, mothers line up three times a week to receive rations of F100. They are also given Vitamin A, folic acid, iron and deworming tablets. The mothers receive advice on how basic hygiene practices such as using latrines and washing hands with soap can make a difference. ♦

# Why Gender?

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

**H**istory was made when Liberia's Ellen Johnson Sirleaf became the first female elected head of state in Africa. She came to power in a climate deeply fractured by 14 years of civil war fought not only with guns but also with sexual violence as an additional weapon. Determined to reverse the plight of Liberia's women, who bore the brunt of the prolonged civil war, Sirleaf, a strong advocate of human rights for all, pledged on her inauguration that women would play an important role in the reconstruction of the country.

Following a period of interim policies, the government of Liberia is embarking on a five-year national agenda -- the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2008-2012. An integral component of the PRS, established in anticipation of meeting the Millennium Development Goals, is goal number 3: Promote gender equality and empower women.

As the new national agenda, the PRS integrates objectives to ensure that women too participate in the process of development. For instance, all data-collecting surveys need to be gender sensitive in design and implementation. The PRS aims to enforce international conventions, and the investment climate is being restructured to include guidelines and policies taking gender issues into consideration. Factories, for example, must employ a certain percentage of women and offer childcare facilities.

ties.

But why is it important to strengthen the role of women in post-conflict Liberia? "The eye alone cannot make it. The hand alone cannot make it. If you want the body to move forward, the feet need to move too," says Zeor Daylue Bernard, Vice President of the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL), an organisation formed during the early years of the

---

Determined to reverse the plight of Liberia's women, who bore the brunt of the prolonged civil war, President Johnson Sirleaf pledged on her inauguration that women would play an important role in the reconstruction of the country.

---

war with the initial aim to assist disadvantaged women. "If we exclude half of the population from the development process, where are we going then? We're going nowhere."

Recently the government together with the UN Gender Theme Group, composed of UNIFEM, UNMIL and the World Bank, amongst others, initiated countrywide workshops on gender mainstreaming. County Superintendents, County Gender Coordinators and representatives from







women's groups gathered to enhance their knowledge on how to integrate gender in the upcoming phases of formulating development plans and policies.

"This workshop deepens my understanding of gender mainstreaming. We come from a discriminatory past but it is clear that if we are to achieve progressive development it will be essential to integrate all partners of society," says Isaac Wea Hne Wilson, Gender Coordinator of Maryland County. For two days the workshop participants engaged in lively discussions and there was plenty of laughter as they explored and dissolved myths regarding the role of men and women in society.

"Mainstreaming gender is not just an issue concerning women and girls. It means that both women and men benefit equally from all policies and activities at all levels of society. Men and boys can be exploited and abused as well," says partic-

---

**UNMIL, together with the government and UN agencies, recently released a 3-year joint programme to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia.**

---

ipant Helena Torh-Turu, a representative from SEWODA, a women's group in south-eastern Liberia.

Achieving gender equality in Liberia is a step-by-step process. President Sirleaf has placed women in key ministerial positions. A girls' education policy has been developed to ensure that girls and boys have equal opportunity for education. Efforts are made to recruit women into the police and the armed forces, and in 2006 the inheritance law came into effect removing discriminatory practices against women married under customary law. The upcoming PRS includes strategies to mainstream gender in all development plans and the government, together with UNMIL, UN agencies and several NGOs, continues to campaign for the empowerment of women.

However, gender equality and empowerment of women cannot be achieved if

sexual and gender-based violence in the country is not dramatically reduced. Such violence was a major feature of the war affecting the majority of women and girls in Liberia. According to surveys conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2004 and 2005 among 1,628 women and girls in six of Liberia's 15 counties, more than 90 per cent said they had been subjected to some form of sexual violence during the war. Another WHO survey in 2006 among 1,200 women and girls in four additional counties showed that 82 per cent had been subjected to one or multiple acts of sexual violence during the war.

"Sexual and gender-based violence is fuelled by culture, tradition and religion; treating women as chattel; and the war in Liberia most definitely compounded everything creating an environment of impunity," says Joana Foster, UNMIL Senior Gender Advisor.

To reverse this trend, Liberia in 2005 passed one of West Africa's toughest rape laws. Women and Children Protection Sections have been established to tackle abuses and crimes against the disadvantaged. Despite such efforts evidence suggests that sexual and gender-based violence is still rampant. Currently rape and other sexual offences top the list of crimes reported to the Liberian police.

UNMIL, together with the government and UN agencies, recently released a 3-year joint programme to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia. The programme is a concerted effort to support the PRS gender strategies and boost progress of the National Gender-based Violence Plan of Action initiated by the government in November 2006.

"The struggles of the past might very well have strengthened Liberia's women and have ensured that they no longer suffer from a crisis of confidence and feelings of inadequacy," says Signe Allimadi Oloya, Country Programme Manager of UNIFEM, referring to the war years that forced women to become breadwinners as men were in hiding or fighting. "Yet, when it comes to sexual and gender-based violence, Liberia's women look set for a long struggle." ♦

## The Message is Always the Same: Peace!

After heading UNMIL during a crucial period of transition, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss moves to the Democratic Republic of Congo in the same capacity. In an interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka, the outgoing UN envoy takes stock of his time in Liberia.

**It was at a critical time that you came to Liberia -- just as the elections were about to take place. What were the major challenges you faced?**

The most important challenge was to complete the transition as envisaged in the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement. Quite a lot of progress had already been made; in particular the disarmament programme had been largely completed. The most immediate task was the elections. When I arrived preparations had begun and I was particularly concerned to ensure that the elections were carried out in a free and fair manner, consistent with UN requirements and acceptable to the people of Liberia as well as the international community.

We also had to handle the security situation before, during and especially after the elections. The situation became quite tense as one of the two candidates who contested the second round of the elections didn't initially accept the outcome. The situation had to be managed in a way that the results of the elections were respected but at the same time ensuring that those who did not succeed were not totally alienated.

It was a very critical moment. There was no significant breakdown of law and order although there were a number of incidents that we were able to contain and control. Our forces, military and police, acted and behaved in a very effective and professional manner.

Then, of course, we had to prepare for the inauguration, which was a major event, and to make sure that it was peaceful and violence-free. There were many security concerns because we had an array of VIPs from all over the world, including a number of Heads of State and the First Lady of the United States.

After that we wanted to ensure that the new Administration had the time and space to get itself organized. That's never an easy task in any country. In Liberia, a country just emerging from many years of war, with a tightly contested election, it was a process of transition that needed to be steered carefully.

**Experience shows that it takes many years of international support for the recovery of a post-conflict nation. Do you foresee a premature withdrawal of UN peacekeepers from Liberia as has happened elsewhere?**

I certainly hope not. The Security Council is very mindful of the situation here. While we've made a lot of progress, this is still quite a fragile country that will need support for sometime to come. The security forces of Liberia are being developed, trained and deployed. That's not going to be completed in a few months or so. So UNMIL will have to remain here in a fairly strong posture until such time that those forces are ready to takeover.

Obviously, this can't be an open-ended commitment. We have to work together with our partners and, above all, the Government of Liberia, to ensure that the country has the capacity to handle the security situation. We'll continue to monitor and track progress and report back to the Security Council on developments as we go forward.

**How will Liberia benefit from the Peacebuilding Commission?**

As we speak, we are developing a proposal for the Peace Building Fund under the direction of Deputy Special Representative Jordan Ryan. We intend to present that proposal to Headquarters very shortly, after discussion and agreement

with the government and partners.

We expect to get some resources from the Fund to continue and expand the work on reconciliation at the national and local levels. We also want to focus on the unfinished tasks of reintegration. Many refugees have returned home. We also have former combatants and communities who were displaced. There's still a lot of work to be done in that area. In parallel with the effort we are making in the security sector, we must also strengthen the rule of law in Liberia, and that covers a number of concerns: the criminal justice system, protection of rights, law reform, corrections and so on.

**After many years of devastating conflict, Liberia now has a functioning but fragile democracy. What needs to be done to strengthen democracy in Liberia?**

For the first time in the history of the country political power is not monopolized by one individual or one small group. That is an important and welcome development but it poses a lot of challenges. How to cope with political diversity is a singular and demanding responsibility, which doesn't fall exclusively on the President or her cabinet. So it's really about deepening the democratic process in Liberia and that involves a number of dimensions such as the devolution of power and constitutional reform.

Strengthening the political parties is important so that they're not simply parties created for an election which then disappear. They should have some continuity and articulate the views and ideas of their members. Strengthening the Legislature to ensure that it plays its role in the system of government is equally important. A strong civil society and media are other actors who have to play a major role in the political process as part of the democratic system.

Democracy is more than an election. The political process should not end after an election. Governments come and go. Whether you are in or out of office, you should still be able to participate in the



political process.

**Ever since the deployment of peacekeepers in 2003, Liberia has been steadily consolidating peace and UNMIL has been a success story. What is the secret behind this success? Can this be a model elsewhere?**

First, I hesitate to claim success when a mission is not yet complete. It's too early to declare victory. There's still a lot of work to be done. So let's be cautious and certainly not complacent.

That being said, yes, there have been some successes and that is due to the hard work of all concerned. Success in these situations is never exclusively linked to one factor. Here in Liberia, regional actors such as ECOWAS and African Union have played a very important and constructive role. Bilateral partners like the United States and other multilateral organizations such as the EU have been essential. And of course the UN Security Council has articulated and coordinated the indispensable political and material support of the international community to back up the Accra Agreement. The fact that we were able to obtain sufficient resources to have a robust

security presence has been critical for the Mission. We

have had the means to do the job. That was extremely important.

At the end of the day, however, it came down to the

Liberians. They were ready for peace and, as a result, the Accra Peace Agreement was largely implemented successfully.

Without that essential element, the true desire for peace, which came after many years of failed peace agreements, it would have been impossible to make the progress we have witnessed. There is no substitute for national will. However, much the international community tries, it always needs that fundamental political compromise among national actors that makes lasting peace possible.

The transition was not trouble free. There were some initial missteps on disarmament. Transitional Government itself had serious problems with economic management, which led to the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP). But politically, the transition was a success in the sense that it led to free and fair elections. And those elections in turn produced a President who has been willing to engage and push forward very energetically with a much needed programme of national reform and renewal.

Is UNMIL a model? Well, models always have to be adapted to the context where they are to be applied although there are some experiences that could be of use elsewhere. I think the level of integration within the Mission and our outreach to partners has been very good. We've understood that many of the problems the country faces can't be solved in isolation. For example we have to deal with security not only as a police or military issue but more broadly within the rule of law and the concept of human security. We've understood the importance of economic reform as a complement to what we are doing with security reform. GEMAP has been successful but it would not have worked without commitment from the Liberian government.

UNMIL has been a cooperative endeavour in the full sense of that phrase and we see the results.

Peace agreements don't necessarily make peace. We have to build on the opportunities presented. To quote Shakespeare, "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune."

That has certainly been the case here.

**You are now moving to the Democratic Republic of Congo, which is also facing many complex challenges. Will this be your most challenging assignment?**

Well, I haven't got there yet. So you'll have to ask me that question in a few months' time. Every peacekeeping mission, every country, presents its challenges, big or small.

I know that there are complex challenges especially right now in the eastern part of the country, where conflict is still taking place and there are massive humanitarian problems and human rights concerns. Protection of civilians is a great worry. MONUC is currently the largest mission in the world but the Congo is a very large country faced with daunting problems.

But there has been progress, too. With the UN's help, they had successful national elections, the first time ever. Many people have returned home. There are signs of economic renewal.

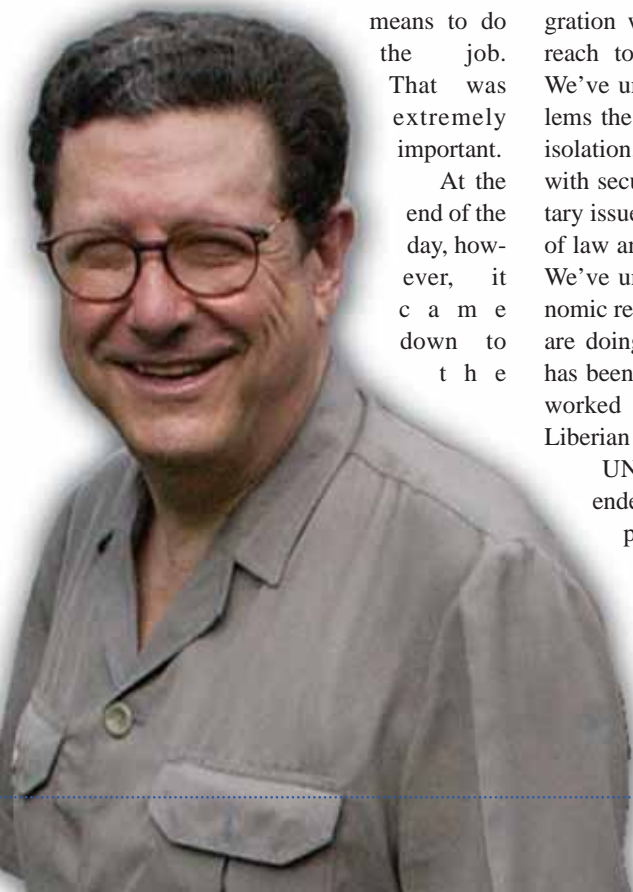
Wherever you go in peacekeeping there are challenges; that's the nature of the business. That's what we do.

**What message do you have for the people of Liberia?**

The message is always the same -- peace! Without peace, without stability, the rest won't follow. The country needs investment, growth and jobs. Without growth and jobs, there won't be stability and without stability, there will be no lasting peace and reconciliation.

Finding ways to overcome conflict and to adjudicate differences in a non-violent manner is absolutely indispensable. That will require strengthening the institutions of the State, in particular those that are responsible for the rule of law, including the Liberian National Police. It means ensuring the security services are effective and efficient but also responsible and accountable, and protect people, not repress them.

Finally the economic tide is beginning to flow in Africa's favour, particularly this part of Africa. The opportunities are there. A few years of stability and good governance will make a big difference. But that can't happen unless there's a genuine desire to learn from the past, to work hard and to move forward.



By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

**M**ore than half a million Liberians have returned home from camps for the internally displaced persons and from refugee camps in neighbouring countries since the 14-year civil war came to an end in 2003. While some returned voluntarily, many others were assisted by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR.

Although the returnees are happy to be back in familiar surroundings, for many of them “home” is not yet a reality. Given the brutality of the prolonged war, numerous returnees have found their homes burned down or looted beyond recognition. Besides, due to their long absences, many families have discovered that the land and property that once belonged to them are already occupied by other citizens equally desperate to resettle.

Housing, land and property disputes are common in post-conflict countries. It is essential to address issues of property rights to avoid igniting possible tension and thus endangering the hard-won peace. As the civil war in Liberia left State authority weak, and in the absence of adequate and functioning police and judicial systems, UNMIL Civil Affairs section initiated a mechanism to peacefully resolve disputes over illegal occupation of property.

“Courts were not functioning, there were no magistrates and no mediation structures in place. In the absence of all these we established Housing and Property Committees in each of the 15 counties,” says Civil Affairs Officer Adriano Cassandra. The Housing and Property Committees included the county superintendent, elders, traditional leaders, representatives from women and youth groups as well as representatives from UNHCR and UNMIL. “The committees were largely successful in creating a space where people could voice their claims and be listened to. The committee members were tasked with mediating in a fair and transparent manner. Many property disputes were resolved peacefully that way,” recalls Cassandra.

Although several disputes have been resolved through the Housing and



# Where is

Property Committees, there is still much to be done. “Land and property disputes are widespread. Hundreds of new cases are coming into the courts everyday and there is not sufficient capacity to deal with the situation,” says Ernest C. B. Jones, Deputy Minister for Operations at the Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy.

The Land, Mines and Energy Ministry is concerned mainly with surveying and mapping and does not have the mandate to regulate land distribution. “There is really no single agency of government responsible for land management,” says Jones. “Who gets what parcel of land and for what purpose is at random. You see a

vacant plot and go to the tribal people or the township people who then agree to whether you can settle amongst them. If so agreed, you go through the deed process eventually ending with presidential approval. It has always been like this or, to be more precise, since the 1850s.”

Another legislated method of acquiring land is by way of the tribal land grant. The deed of this communal grant is usually vested with the chiefs and the respective communities. Individuals or families are then allocated a plot for farming but will not hold a title. Currently only 20 per cent of Liberian farmers have deeds to their agricultural land mainly due to the tradi-





Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

Land and property disputes are potential threats to peace

# Home?

tion of communal land holding.

The parallel systems of obtaining land ownership or land accessibility are not coordinated and Jones admits that this arrangement is susceptible to corruption. The intricacy is compounded in the post-conflict environment of Liberia where a large segment of the population was uprooted and forced to resettle in other areas breaking with generational ties.

Many returnees have flocked to urban centres in search of jobs. The population of the capital, Monrovia, has more than quadrupled since 1989 when the conflict broke out. Today an estimated 1.5 million people scramble for space. Thousands of

people live as squatters in abandoned buildings and makeshift structures built on public land.

Ganta city, the commercial hub of Nimba County, faces a similar predicament with a large influx of people. "When I came back, my three properties were occupied by others," says Mohammed B. Keita, who returned to Ganta in 2005 with his wife and six children after living in a refugee camp in Guinea for several years. "We came back with a sack of bulgur wheat, a can of cooking oil, mats to sleep on and US\$5 for each returnee. We thought we were going home. But where is home? Everything was gone."

Keita belongs to the Mandingo tribe, one of the three main ethnic groups in Nimba County. During the war they supported opposing factions and Nimba experienced some of the fiercest fighting. Tens of thousands of people fled to neighbouring Guinea.

Tensions over land ownership in Ganta led to riots among the three ethnic groups last year. Responding to the riots, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf created a 17-member committee headed by the Minister of Internal Affairs to investigate the incident and make recommendations.

The committee found that the majority of disputes were concentrated in the centre of Ganta city along the main commercial streets and recommended that existing streets be widened and more streets created for commercial activity. "I feel that additional streets could help defuse the problem since the disputes in essence evolve around access to areas of business exchange," says Superintendent for Nimba county, Robert Kamei. "But settling the land dispute in Ganta is a gradual process. Of course disputed land will eventually have to be given back to the rightful document holding owners."

Keita holds legal entitlements to his three properties. His case is one out of 108 disputes in Ganta identified by the 17-member special committee. With the assistance of the committee, Keita recently retrieved one of his properties. "This is a happy day for my family and me," says Keita with a broad smile.

While the government is continuing the process of restoring State authority, including the establishment of adequate and functioning police and judicial structures, Jones encourages the expansion of urban centres: "It is in the cities that we find the majority of land disputes. There is no quick fix solution, but by expanding the cities, adding more land, building new streets, we can reduce the potential for tension. However, eventually we need to reform land administration altogether," says Jones.

UNMIL engineers are currently working with local government authorities to widen and expand the road network in Ganta city. But the road to resolving the land disputes in Liberia by no means is a short one. ♦

# The Quest for Shelter

By Sulaiman Momodu

Where is home?

**M**ariamama Kamara and her son abandoned by his father are soon getting one. For the 26-year old returnee, it is like the light at the end of the tunnel. But her journey this far has been nothing but nightmarish.

With her father killed during the war, the only person that she knew was her mother, who was also killed when war broke out in Côte d'Ivoire where they had sought refuge. Left alone to struggle through life, she sought refuge in a camp in Guinea where she had a child with a man who soon abandoned her. "I was small when me and my ma left Liberia," she recalls.

Returning to war-ravaged Voinjama in Lofa County, Kamara lives in a dilapidated structure on the bushy outskirts of the town. It is the only place she could get upon her return from exile in Guinea where she had lived for many years as a refugee. When she is away from her 'home' to somehow eke out a living, rogues break in and take away her little possessions. They don't spare even the food meant for her child. "My nobody no here, I depend on the UN to help me," she laments.

But Kamara has hopes of a better future as she is among some 200 families that are benefiting from a UNHCR-funded shelter programme in Lofa County. As part of its reintegration activities, the refugee agency's shelter programme caters for vulnerable returnees by providing a two-room structure per family with Peace Winds Japan (PWJ) as the implementing partner.

"Our coverage areas are Voinjama, Foya, Kolahun districts. Beneficiaries are returnees from Guinea and Sierra Leone," says PWJ Field Coordinator Maho Miura.

Based on a list prepared by the refugee agency, PWJ distributes shelter materials and monitors the construction. Although all returnees are generally considered to be vulnerable, some single parents, physically disabled, and unaccompanied elderly are worst off.

The shelter assistance mainly includes three bundles of zinc, nails and other materials. Returnees receive the items after proving that they have erected the walls made of mud bricks. Usually, communities are encouraged to assist in the construction of houses for their own kith and kin. "We don't want to kill the community initiative," a UNHCR official notes. As her situation is desperate,

tance and that anybody who claims to be a PWJ worker should present an identification card. The deplorable road conditions pose yet another difficulty to easily reach the beneficiaries. Notwithstanding these challenges, shelter assistance for this year is scheduled to be completed in December.

The UN refugee agency has assisted 111,466 refugees to return home including 51,263 from Guinea; 29,533 from Sierra Leone; 21,543 from Côte d'Ivoire; 6,655 from Ghana; 2,136 from Nigeria and 316 from other countries. About 50,032 returned on their own or spontaneously. The majority of returnees went to Lofa (60,689), Montserrado (12,824), Nimba (10,079) and Maryland (10,018). The refugee agency has also assisted 325,530 former internally displaced persons to return home.

Hundreds of returnees have built modest houses with UNHCR assistance, especially in areas that saw heavy returns. It is not clear how long the shelter assistance programme will continue. PWJ, which had also provided shelter assistance to returnees from Japanese funds, no longer has funds for shelter programmes. UNHCR intends to continue the assistance but contingent on the availability of

funds. In addition to shelter, the refugee agency assists in areas like the rehabilitation of schools, agriculture activities, clinics, and water and sanitation.

Notwithstanding the enormous challenges of starting life anew, many returnees say they are grateful to UNMIL for the restoration of peace and for ensuring that they can walk freely without the fear of being killed. "Once there is life, there is hope," notes one returnee rather philosophically.

As the construction of her home continues, Kamara could not hide her joy. When will she move into her new home? "Now now sef, if the house is complete, I ready to move in." ♦



Eric Kanstein/UNMIL

Kamara had to provide only the piece of land on which to build. Another 19 families have been earmarked for such assistance.

UNHCR-funded shelter assistance to returnees has been going on since 2004 with PWJ implementing in Lofa and Bong counties. "It is sometimes difficult to get the cooperation of the community to assist but we have Shelter committees in the communities," PWJ's Miura points out. There have also been instances of some unscrupulous people impersonating as PWJ workers and demanding registration fees for shelter assistance from unsuspecting returnees. Communities have been informed that nobody pays for the assis-



# Humanitarian Appeal Launched

By J. Wesley Washington

The United Nations and humanitarian partners in Liberia have launched the Mid-Year Review of the 2007 Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) aimed at raising US\$64million for urgent humanitarian priorities in Liberia.

The CHAP Mid-Year Review is an update of Liberia's Common Humanitarian Action Plan 2007. It is also an outcome of a review process, including a stakeholder workshop that was held in July, examining strategic priorities, objectives and resource requirements for humanitarian assistance in 2007.

Liberia's 2007 CHAP, with an original estimate of US\$117 million, was slightly reduced to US\$110 million to address the country's humanitarian for the remainder of 2007. So far, US\$46 million has been raised leaving an outstanding requirement of US\$64 million for the rest of the year.

Speaking at the launch in early November, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jordan Ryan, who is also the Humanitarian Coordinator for Liberia, said the country still faces many humanitarian challenges despite some improvements in political, security and the socio-economic conditions.

"There is limited government capacity to provide basic social services," Ryan said. "We even have capacity challenges - especially in the health sector - with the early phase-out or drawdown of some emergency NGOs. Although this is understandable, it poses additional challenges in the transition."

The funding needs identified in the mid-year review aim to promote greater access to basic social services for vulnera-

ble populations; provide support for communities to become sustainable, secure and productive; and to strengthen the capacity of civil society and local authorities to support the recovery process. Priority will be given to projects in the areas of water and sanitation, health, and agriculture.

Also speaking at the launch, Liberia's Health Minister, Dr. Walter Gwenigale, said Liberia's health sector was still fragile. He said contrary to claims that the health sector was picking up, most of the work in the sector was still being done by international non-governmental organizations. "We are still not in the development

James Logan, highlighted the importance of supporting the country's agricultural sector. "We join this appeal and we hope the response will be generous and very positive," he said. The Ministry of Public Works' representative at the launch, George Yango, said his ministry was gratified to be a part of the appeal considering the serious problems facing water and sanitation in the country.

The Head of the Norwegian Refugee Council, Carsten Hansen, who is also an executive member of the Management Steering Committee that groups over 50 NGOs working in Liberia, recognized the enormity of humanitarian needs facing

Liberia despite various positive developments. "We sincerely hope that the international community will support the appeal and ensure that the projects outlined in the appeal will be implemented," Hansen said.

Liberia's humanitarian community, through the Mid-Year Review, revised the requirements for a number of projects and reduced the time-frame from 12 to six months for the activities

that had not been funded in the first half of 2007. The US\$64m being requested, also represents the anticipated humanitarian requirements for the first half of 2008. UN agencies and NGOs are requesting funding for 26 projects in health, water, sanitation and hygiene, food security, agriculture, education, protection, human rights and rule of law.

The UN and all the humanitarian partners appreciate the support of donors thus far, and recognize the contribution of US\$42m in humanitarian assistance provided to the 2007 CHAP. This support has greatly facilitated the work of the Liberian Government, which is pursuing the country's recovery and development agenda through its poverty reduction strategy. ♦



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

stage. About 80 percent of our work being done for us is with outside funding by international NGOs, so we cannot say we are in the development stage because as those people leave, unless we have the money to take over from them, we will still go back into crisis," he noted.

Despite the huge needs facing the health sector, the money allotted to it in the budget is very meagre. "Despite all the support, we are still relying on outside donors to be able to do the work that we are doing. So we are part of this appeal. We want to add our voice that we still need help. We are urging people to please respond positively so that we can continue to do the work that we are doing," Minister Gwenigale said.

The Acting Minister of Agriculture,



# At least the World Will See...

Photo taken by Tonny Jay, 13 years

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Why do we take pictures?

"We take pictures around Christmas time."

"We take pictures of our friends and our family."

"We take pictures when we're happy."

"To remember...we take pictures to remember."

**E**ager hands wave impatiently to reveal the motives behind taking photographs. A group of 20 children sit in a classroom in Monrovia, the capital of Liberia. As part of a UNICEF initiated workshop on photography, they are discussing why or if it is important to take photographs of their environment. Most of the children have never held a camera in their hands and only a few own a photograph.

Between the ages of 9-16, half of the children live with their parents and they go to school. The other half are temporarily placed in juvenile transit centres, either

because they have run away from home, have lost their parents to AIDS or have been victims of domestic violence or trafficking.

"I think we can also document things that are not so good," a child says quietly. They all nod in agreement and Giacomo Pirozzi, photographer and facilitator of the workshop, leads the children into further discussion on what exactly it is that is "not so good."

It is not so good that some people live in Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) camps. It's not so good that Liberians don't have proper hospitals or that hundreds of children are forced to sell goods on the streets to support their family. The group also agrees it would be necessary to document that every 30 seconds a Liberian child dies from malaria, preventable if people were able to afford bed nets and improved hygienic living standards.

All these "not so good" things are the legacy of the brutal civil war that consumed Liberia for 14 years. Close to 250,000 people were killed and nearly a million people were displaced, many of

them seeking refuge in neighbouring countries. Infrastructure was destroyed or looted and lawlessness prevailed. Children were conscripted into fighting forces by ruthless warlords. As the civil war came to an end in 2003 thousands of children voluntarily handed in their weapons in exchange for an education. By the end of 2004 more than 12,000 children had laid down their arms.

Like the rest of Liberia's children, the group now discussing photography in a classroom in Monrovia, grew up in a society deeply fractured by war. Interestingly, not one of them mentions the word 'war' during the week-long workshop. Perhaps they want to forget the pain of what must have seemed like an endless nightmare?

Handful, 14, has difficulties sitting quietly. She fiddles with a notebook and gets up to go look out the window. "I think we need to look for fine images," she insists. "Let's take pictures of pretty flowers. Let's go to the Presidential Mansion. It's a fine building," she says, her attention again turned towards what happens outside.



During the next couple of days the children learn the technical aspects of basic photography. Giacomo explains the need to pay attention to the angle of the subject and its composition, and the direction and the quantity of light. Finally, to their utter delight, each of the children receives a small Sony digital camera.

With their prized gadget and pen and paper in hand, the children, divided into

down. A social worker embraces her in a warm hug and slowly her sobbing subsides. "She reminds me of myself," Maima tells the group. "I used to sell bread for my auntie, who I lived with when I was 11-years old. I walked in the streets all day long. Often I couldn't sell all the bread and when I came home in the evening she would beat me." Maima sits down and the nearby girls rush to console her. "At least

perhaps other people equally eager to resettle have taken over their land.

"I just love this picture," says Tonny about a close-up shot he made of a young boy with dreadlocks leaning against a wall in the IDP camp. "Why," the others ask, having become sharp and ambitious in their criticism. "Because it is beautiful." Period.

Johnny, just 12, went to a hospital as part of the team documenting malaria conditions. He had taken a picture of a man in a lab testing a blood sample through a microscope. One of the boys suggests that Johnny's picture is dark and he should have used a reflector. "Well," someone else says to defend, "he couldn't have used a reflector because there was a table in the way and we could not get close enough to the man." Animated discussion breaks out as to what could have been done to improve the light in the image.

All the 20 children presented their photographs. During one week each of them grew at least a few inches. Besides picking up tips to take photographs the children learned to mirror the world from their view. They have raised substantive questions to themselves and to others. "I see things now that I never saw before," says Maima, smiling. ♦

*An international exhibition displaying photographs taken by the 20 children in Liberia will travel to Canada, Japan and the United States through 2008.*

*A national exhibition will be held in Monrovia early 2008.*



Photo taken by Maima Tucker, 15 years

smaller groups, venture out to capture images and take notes of all those not so good things. Their photographs will eventually travel to various countries as part of an exhibition. Together they have decided they want the world to see that life as a child in Liberia can be difficult. "Maybe," someone in the group suggested, "if the adults in the world hear the voice of children, then they will be able to understand."

The children return the following day with plenty of stories to tell and even more photographs to show. Giacomo sets up a laptop and a large screen, and for the next several hours their captivating images fill the classroom. Some pictures are funny while others are sad and moving or simply just compellingly composed.

Maima, aged 15, stands facing her audience to present her photographs. Part of the team documenting children selling goods on the streets, Maima has taken many images of girls and she coherently explains their individual story, remembering their correct name and age. As the photo of a teenage girl selling toothpaste emerges on the screen, Maima breaks

the world will see," one of them whispers to Maima.

Tonny, 13, is next to present his work. He has taken striking images at an IDP camp on the outskirts of Monrovia. Hundreds of people still live in camps across the country not having the means to start afresh in their original communities. Perhaps their house was burned down or



Photo taken by Johnny Lard, 12 years



Eric Kanstein/UNMIL

recourse to the justice system. Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana, in August 2003, reforming the security sector has been a priority for the war-torn nation.

To ensure that the ERU functions at a premium level of tactical and operational efficiency, all candidates will undergo a rigorous series of tests to determine aptitude and suitability. These include physical testing, psychological evaluation, medical screening, background investigation, a lie detector test, and a Board of Selection interview.

The selection of the first group of 100 ERU officers will end by mid-December 2007 and a three-month basic training is expected to begin in the first week of January 2008 with the graduation scheduled for March. The second group of an additional 100 police officers will begin the same three-month basic training in April and graduate in June. From July 2008 through July 2009, the remaining 300 officers would have been recruited, selected and trained.

To reach the required standards, the three-month programme will include basic training in unarmed self defense, basic firearms training, use of force, navigation skills, emergency police operations, vehicle counter-measures, public order training, close quarters-counter measures and tactical command operations. Other courses will include training in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and International Criminal Justice Standard of Law Officials.

Focusing on different specializations in-service training programmes will also be undertaken in order to keep and improve the standards of the ERU personnel. Based on aptitudes recognized during basic training, candidates will be identified and selected for areas of tactical and operational specialization. The specialized training commences after candidates pass the basic training.

Discarding past practices, the new LNP is expected not only to provide security for the people but to also gain their trust, confidence and cooperation. Liberia's recovery will depend significantly on being at peace with itself and with its neighbours. ♦

By J. Wesley Washington

**I**n July this year Liberia crossed the targeted benchmark of training a 3,500-strong new Liberia National Police (LNP), with help from UN Police and international partners, replacing its discredited former police force.

To reinforce the new police force with additional capacity for enforcing law and order, a 500-strong Emergency Response Unit (ERU) is now being established. Five hundred officers are being targeted to constitute the ERU force, which will have a quick reaction capability. Already, the

selection of candidates has begun within the realms of the LNP.

Members of the Emergency Response Unit will be trained to handle violent disorders and internal insurrections, guard vital installations, protect very important persons, and escort high profile prisoners. They will also be trained to arrest hardened and armed criminals, rescue hostages, counter terrorism as well as assist during natural disasters.

Throughout the fourteen years of Liberia's intermittent civil conflict, governments, military and security forces were instruments of oppression and brutality and defenseless citizens had no



# Army Training Gathers Steam



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

By J. Wesley Washington

**W**ith the graduation of 499 soldiers in the first week of October, the restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) is fast gathering steam. The graduates completed twelve rigorous weeks of Initial Entry and Advanced Individual Training that has transformed them from civilians to infantrymen ready to defend the nation. The training included map reading and land navigation, basic rifle marksmanship, troop leading procedures, movement techniques, patrolling, hand-to-hand combat, and other core requirements.

"The infantry lead the way; on the battlefield, in garrison and in remote locales on peace or humanitarian relief missions. Follow me!" said LTC. William M. Wyatt, Chief, Office of Defense Cooperation at the United States Embassy in Monrovia, while addressing the graduates. The infantry in the military is a branch that is exemplified by a sense of courage, sacrifice and above all leadership, he noted.

Emphasizing the two words "Follow Me," LTC. Wyatt reiterated that though the life of a soldier is challenging and entails

great personal sacrifice, the life of an infantryman is often even more challenging. "The most important role of the infantry has traditionally been as the army's primary maneuver force. It is the infantry which ultimately decides whether ground is held or taken, and it is the presence of infantry that allows the military to occupy and control terrain."

Summing up the spirit of the infantry, LTC. Wyatt said, "Wherever brave men fight...and die for freedom, you will find me. I am always ready...now and forever. I am the Infantry – Queen of Battle! Follow Me!" He urged the graduates to be patient and flexible as they become more familiar with life as a soldier.

Of the 499 AFL soldiers who graduated, 371 were transferred to the home of the 23rd Infantry Brigade at the Edward Binyah Kesselley (EBK) Military Barracks on the Robertsfield Highway where they will fill positions necessary to form the first infantry companies of the new AFL. The three companies (Alpha, Bravo and Charlie) will be activated in December 2007.

With the new addition of graduates, the EBK Military Barracks has increased the size of the Liberian military at the AFL's permanent operating base from 102

soldiers to 473, nearly a quarter of the targeted figure of 2,000. The remaining 128 soldiers will be joined by a further 59 soldiers currently at EBK Barracks to undergo the next phase of training, the Basic Non-Commissioned Officers Course, at Camp Sandee S. Ware Military Barracks.

Meanwhile, 19 members of the first group of the AFL graduates have completed the required training as combat medics. They were selected for the training based on their performance in the aptitude test administered to them. The soldiers have been assigned to the John F. Kennedy Medical Center and the Edward B. Kesselley Medical Clinic for practical training.

Private Lulu Nenwon, one of the newly trained combat medics assigned to the midwifery ward of the JFK Medical Center said she could now perform delivery and give medical prescriptions. Norma Pewee, a registered midwife supervising combat medic Nenwon, said at first patients found difficulty in accepting soldiers but now they were happy to be treated by them. "I feel so happy working with Private Nenwon and from her attitude it shows that the new AFL is a well-trained and professional army," nurse Pewee remarked. ♦

# Small Grants, Big Relief

By Sulaiman Momodu

**W**ith only a sewing machine as her most treasured possession acquired during her 17-year stay in Guinea as a refugee, returning home to war-ravaged Voinjama was a very courageous decision for Aminata Silla to make.

During the early part of the civil war, young Silla's father was shot dead in her full view. Her father's crime was that he had pleaded with rebels not to take his daughter away. Aided by friends, Silla later managed to escape and a refugee camp was all she had known as a home until this year when she voluntarily returned as part of a repatriation convoy organized by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. For Silla, who had learned tailoring while living as a refugee, life hasn't been easy since her return. "I was really suffering," she laments.

However, a small start-up grant of US\$70 has come as a big relief to the destitute woman who has a strong will to succeed. Buying materials, sewing and selling, she no longer depends on people for hand-outs to survive.

Silla is among 400 beneficiaries in Voinjama District, Lofa County, who are being assisted with grants and income generation skills by the refugee agency through its partner, the American Refugee Committee (ARC). The Micro Enterprises Development Project seeks to empower vulnerable returnee women and girls to engage in income-generating ventures and assist them rebuild their lives and reintegrate into the society.

Women receive the small grant of US\$ 70 in two installments. Disbursement of the grant follows an intensive training programme in business management, record-keeping, costing/pricing, and business planning. The second installment is disbursed after a recipient shows proof that the first tranche has been properly utilized.

The assistance to returnees is not only limited to those in rural areas. UNHCR

Officer-in-Charge Field Office Monrovia, Henok Ochalla says in Monrovia, Montserrado County, 88 vulnerable families comprising of about 600 returnees have also been assisted with each family receiving between US\$100 - 500 either in cash, equipment or other resources needed for the small ventures. A total of US\$ 27,500 has been disbursed in the capital so far. The amount for returnees in Monrovia is higher than the ones in the counties because of the high cost of living in the city, joblessness, and the lack of land to engage in agricultural activities.

"UNHCR has really done well for us," lauds Miatta Gibson, the Executive Director of the New Liberia Women's Organization Skills Training Centre, which opened only four months ago in the

challenge for Gibson. But a grant of US\$ 1,000 provided by the UNHCR through ZOA, Refugee Care Netherlands to Gibson and a co-returnee was of great help. The centre has baking, beauty care, and tailoring departments in addition to a computer lab. And of the 115 students currently registered for courses, UNHCR is funding 45 returnees.

In addition to assisting thousands of Liberians to return home by air, land and sea, the refugee agency has supported the establishment of many small business enterprises and skills training in line with the expressed desire of returnees. "When I came back from Ghana, I had nothing and life was very hard. But with the US\$ 500 I received from UNHCR, I have been able to set up a small business," says Richie John, who now runs his lock and key duplication business in downtown Monrovia.

Although this year is the first time grants have been given to returnees in Lofa and Monrovia, UNHCR officials say giving out grants is not new to the agency. Vulnerable refugees have benefited from grants as well as from micro credit schemes while living in camps. Unlike grants though, returnees repay the loan so that others too will benefit. "Right now we are doing the impact assessment of the grant, and so far, we think it is making impact on the lives of people," says Ochalla.

The refugee agency's grants and micro credit loans are dictated by the availability of funds, making it impossible to assist all returnees. Beneficiaries of the programme in Voinjama District say one of their main challenges is the lack of a banking facility in their area but they all hail the United Nations Mission in Liberia for providing security in the country that enabled them to return home and start rebuilding their lives in peace.

Peddalling away on her sewing machine at her rented house in Voinjama, Aminata Silla has no immediate plan to marry someone. "I am very proud of my work. With this, no man will fool me."



Sulaiman Momodu/UNMIL

outskirts of the capital, and is attracting lots of attention. Just few weeks after it was opened, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf visited the modest centre and commended the initiative.

Civil war had forced Gibson to flee Liberia some 15 years ago and she ended up in a refugee camp in Ghana together with thousands of her compatriots. Not willing to give up on life, with some assistance from a Liberian woman resident in Ghana and UNHCR, Gibson and others established a skill training centre in the refugee camp which bears the same name and exists till today.

Returning home with computers and other equipment acquired in exile, establishing the centre in Monrovia was a huge



# Mentoring the Media

By J. Wesley Washington

**T**he gruesome photograph of a man who hanged himself, rope and all, stares at you from a Liberian newspaper. Yet another newspaper carries the ghastly picture of a murder victim lying in a pool of blood or the lewd photo of someone engaged in sex. Wild rumours and outright speculations form part of the daily fare of some radio stations. Welcome to Liberia's raucous, free-for-all media scene, where journalistic ethics and professionalism lay in tatters.

But slowly, the attitudes of the Liberian media are changing. More than 50 journalists from Liberian newspapers and radio and television stations recently participated in a series of workshops aimed at enhancing journalism skills to practice ethical and objective reporting.

At the three workshops organized by the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in conjunction with the Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism (MICAT), media managers, experts and specialists critically examined current practices and discussed a number of topics on communication, covering press conferences, interviewing techniques, creative writing, development communication, and research methods, amongst others, to redress the lack of professional skills plaguing the local media.

The first, a one-day interactive forum, brought together 21 correspondents and reporters from various media institutions which afforded them the opportunity to acquire appropriate techniques in covering press conferences and reporting for the print and broadcast media. The second, a five-day training workshop that took place in Liberia's central city, Gbarnga, in Bong County, and brought together 14 News and Sub-Editors, was aimed at improving their creative writing skills in order to report on key national issues.

The third interaction, also held in Gbarnga, brought together 17 journalists who were trained in specialized areas of development reporting. The five-day

workshop enhanced the skills of these journalists to adequately report on specific subject areas under the four pillars of the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy. Specific subject areas discussed included security sector reform, revitalizing the economy, rule of law and governance, infrastructure and basic social services, and poverty reduction campaigns.

Speaking on behalf of the participants, Horatio Bobby Willie of Star Radio announced the formation of an Association of Development Journalists whose primary objective will be to focus on devel-



opment issues. "We are now prepared to face the challenge of changing the popular attitudes of our people as it relates to development. We are now going to tell our editors that development stories should be given priority just as political stories because we are in an era where we're leaving from conflict to development. If development must come to Liberia, the media should play a crucial role and we are grateful for this," Willie noted.

The Managing Editor of Public Agenda newspaper, Gibson Jerue, thanked the UN Mission and the Information Ministry for the opportunity to learn new writing skills and techniques and called on his colleagues to always take advantage of

such workshop to sharpen their skills and perform better. "Workshops are a learning process which you should never feel too big to attend. The knowledge that you acquire will aid you in your professional work and duties. Do take advantage of them," Jerue urged his colleagues.

The Chief of UNMIL Public Information, George Somerwill, termed the exercise as very important as the role that journalists play is very critical to the development of the country. Encouraging more women journalists to take advantage of such training workshops, he expressed optimism that Liberia could forge ahead with support from journalists committed to reporting on development issues.

The Deputy Minister of Information for Technical Services, Elizabeth Hoff, said her ministry was grateful to work along with the UN Mission in running the workshops for members of the public and independent media.

She suggested that journalists adopt a new approach to reporting issues, especially stories that affect people's lives, rather than resorting to sensationalism. "We feel that if we help build the capacity of the media in this area, they in turn will be able to disseminate the right information to the people who need the information," she noted.

Participants Jallah Griffill of Radio Veritas and Romeo Togba of SKY FM acknowledged the usefulness of the workshops and praised the collaboration between UNMIL and the MICAT to build the capacity of Liberia's media practitioners. "Training plays an integral part of improving the performance of journalists and one thing we got to know is that you'll have to have integrity, perform in a way that people will respect you and this plays a key role in the life of a journalist," one participant admitted.

Since June 2004, several hundred Liberian journalists have benefited from a series of journalism workshops and training on basic skills, media ethics and other aspects of the profession conducted by UNMIL in collaboration with MICAT and the Press Union of Liberia (PUL). ♦



Alan Doss with Chancellor Merkel

Olivier Malvoisin/UNMIL

# German Chancellor Lauds UNMIL

By Sulaiman Momodu

Children sang songs extolling Liberia's hard won peace as German Chancellor Angela Merkel arrived at the National Police Academy in early October during her one-day visit to the country. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss, was at hand to welcome her to the Academy, where Liberia's new police officers are trained by UN police officers drawn from 38 countries, including Germany.

Chancellor Merkel inspected a guard of honour, witnessed a parade by police trainees at the Academy and saw a demonstration of how an unarmed police officer combats crime when confronted by armed criminals. She praised the work of UNMIL and expressed appreciation for the support that the Mission is providing Liberia in its recovery from conflict.

Special Representative Doss thanked Merkel for the generous support the United Nations receives from her country. "UN peacekeeping would be very difficult without Germany's tremendous support,"

he said.

During her visit, the German Chancellor interacted with some of the 75 orphans at the Monrovia Training Academy Orphanage Home that the German UN police officers deployed in Liberia, from contingent to contingent, have been assisting since 2005. Merkel personally handed over footballs and other sporting materials to the orphans and also pledged an assistance of €3,000 to the orphanage. She also had animated conversations with the orphans.

The leader of UNMIL's German police contingent, Peter Horst, described Merkel's visit as an "honour" and felt proud that the Chancellor found time to interact with the orphans.

"We tell God thank you for this visit of the German Chancellor and for the Germans here at UNMIL who have been assisting us and every Saturday visit the orphanage to render one form of assistance or the other to the orphans," said Oretha Langford Cooper, founder of the home established in 1994 to cater for abandoned and orphaned children.

Merkel said her visit to Liberia was an indication of Germany's commitment to the future of Liberia. She announced a donation of 300,000 mosquito nets, and €4 million to help rebuild the country's tattered infrastructure. She told the Liberian president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, that the offer was an illustration of Germany's interest in the future of Liberia and the rebuilding and reconstruction process.

Johnson Sirleaf said the first visit of a German Chancellor to Liberia was in recognition of "efforts being made by all Liberians to move the country forward." She said the visit would enhance the bilateral ties between the industrialized nation and the impoverished West African state and recognized Germany's role in leading the efforts with other G-8 countries to cancel Liberia's huge foreign debt accrued during the civil war.

Merkel also visited the German-led project at the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), where weapons collected from ex-combatants during the disarmament programme are being transformed into farming tools. She was on three-nation tour of Africa that included Ethiopia and South Africa. ♦





# New Sierra Leonean President Visits Liberia

Olivier Malvoisin/UNMIL

By Sulaiman Momodu

Within a few days after his election as the President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma arrived at the Roberts International Airport outside Monrovia in September on a whistle-stop visit to Liberia.

During the visit, Koroma discussed security issues with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the UN Envoy to Liberia, Alan Doss. Emerging from brutal civil wars that devastated the two countries, security is understandably a priority for both Liberia and Sierra Leone, which share a common border that had been used in the past to move arms and ammunition, and for the illegal trafficking of natural resources, especially diamonds.

The two Presidents pledged to further strengthen the cooperation between their countries and agreed to encourage and foster trade and commerce as well as to work cooperatively towards enhancing the peace-building process through the promotion of good governance and democracy. Both Liberia and Sierra Leone are now enjoying relative peace and stability fol-

lowing the deployment of United Nations peacekeepers. The peacekeepers left Sierra Leone in 2005.

Doss assured Koroma of the continued cooperation of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to ensure that the common border is properly monitored. "UNMIL will continue its collaboration and support for the joint border patrols with Sierra Leone and Liberia security forces," he said. He also briefed the visiting President on the protection of the UN-backed Sierra Leone Special Court by UNMIL's Mongolian peacekeepers, which would continue.

The two West African countries are members of the Mano River Union (MRU), which also includes Guinea. The two leaders pledged to intensify efforts to consolidate peace and establish security and stability in their respective countries so as to accelerate the reactivation of the Union. They also urged member states to respect fully the Non-aggression and Security Cooperation Treaty, signed in Freetown on November 20, 1986, and the Fifteenth Protocol on the Declaration of the Mano River Union on Defense, Security, Internal and Foreign Affairs, signed in May 2000 in Conakry, and relat-

ed Treaties.

A joint communiqué issued at the end of Koroma's visit stated that the two MRU countries also pledged to fully support each other on matters concerning their sovereignty, territorial integrity, stability, peace and development.

On the issue of corruption, often a threat to peace and security, Koroma reaffirmed his commitment to fighting the scourge and outlined the measures he intends to take to curb the menace that has contributed to his naturally endowed country being at the bottom of the UN Human Development Index. For his part, Doss outlined the work of Liberia's Economic Governance Programme (GEMAP), which has been assisting the country's anti-corruption campaign.

Members of the Liberian government, traditional leaders as well as members of the Sierra Leone Community residing in Liberia were at hand to receive the new President. Sierra Leone and Liberia have historically enjoyed strong cultural and bilateral ties. President Koroma won the Sierra Leonean presidency following a run-off election held in September. In addition to Liberia, the new Sierra Leonean President also visited Guinea and Burkina Faso. ♦

President Koroma arrives in Monrovia

# UNDP Boosts National Commission

In an effort to strengthen the capacity of the National Commission on Disarmament Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (NCDDRR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Liberia in November turned over five four-wheel-drive vehicles to the Commission.

The vehicles were handed over to the Executive Director of the Commission, Rev. Jervis Witherspoon Sr., by the UNDP Deputy Resident Representative for Programme, Maria-Threase Keating. Making the presentation, Keating said the vehicles were a concrete example of UNDP's support to consolidate national peace and security through the reconstruction and development of Liberia. She expressed the hope that the vehicles would be well maintained and used for the intended purpose.

Witherspoon thanked UNDP for the programme's continued support to the Commission. He said the donation would

boost the performance of his staff in the field conducting psychosocial counselling.

The vehicles are assets from the UNDP Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation Programme, which came to a close in October this year. The National

Commission will be supporting the implementation of programmes to provide reintegration assistance to the residual caseload of former combatants including a nationwide psychosocial counselling programme to address some of the traumatic effects of the civil crisis.



## UNHCR Supports Rice Production

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and its implementing partner in food security, the ZOA Refugee Care Netherlands, recently turned over nine swamp paddy rice projects to community members of Careysburg District in Montserrado County.

Eight communities in the Careysburg District working together in groups of twenties had earlier received materials, technical assistance and training to cultivate 110 plots of swamp. The project started in 2005 with de-stumping, construction of water canals and ridges. In 2006, the agency continued material and technical support. This year's harvest is

expected to yield over 600 bags of seed rice; a sharp increase to 10 bags per plot as compared to three bags per plot last year. The initiative is part of the UN refugee



agency's continued endeavour to empower and hand over reintegration projects to communities.

At the ceremony attended by the Ministry of Agriculture and other local authorities, UNHCR Field Officer Henok Ochalla reaffirmed the agency's commitment to helping Liberia's development process and encouraged the community to work towards the sustainability of the project even after the agency would have phased out its reintegration programme. The Development Superintendent of Montserrado County, Momolu Bass, commended the refugee agency and hailed beneficiaries for working hard to increase productivity. Beneficiaries of the project have meanwhile appealed to UNHCR to assist them with a storage facility, which will enable them preserve their seeds and tools.



# Deputy Special Representative Appointed

**H**enrietta Joy Abena Nyarko Mensa-Bonsu, a Ghanaian national, assumed her duties as the new Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law with the United Nations Mission in Liberia on 29 October. A Professor of the Faculty of Law, University of Ghana, she has been the Acting Dean of the Faculty of Law at the same university until her new appointment.

Prior to joining UNMIL, Mensa-Bonsu had undertaken a number of national assignments for her home country and international assignments for the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the African Union, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). She was Ghana's representative on the Inter-governmental Committee of Experts on the Drafting of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child in 1991. She was also a member of the Advisory Panel of the International Bar Association for the draft-



ing of a Code of Professional Conduct for Defence Counsel appearing before the International Criminal Court.

Mensa-Bonsu has served on the National Reconciliation Commission of Ghana and the Police Council of Ghana. She has been the Vice-Chairperson of the ECOWAS Working Group on the harmonization of commercial laws of non-OHADA (Organization for the Harmonization of Business Law in Africa) States, and an International Technical Adviser to the Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Liberia as a nominee of ECOWAS.

Mensa-Bonsu has published widely on criminal law, juvenile justice and children's rights. She graduated in 1980 with first class honors in law from the University of Ghana and was called to the bar in 1982. She won a McDougal Fellowship to Yale Law School where she obtained an LLM. She is also a Fulbright Fellow, and a Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, where she has been its Honorary Secretary.

The new Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law is married and has three daughters.

Following her recent appointment by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss expressed warm welcome to his new colleague. "I am delighted that the Secretary-General has appointed Professor Mensa-Bonsu, a distinguished lawyer who will undoubtedly make a major contribution to UNMIL's work in strengthening the rule of law in Liberia," he said. ♦

## Immigration Workshop in Gbarnga

By Marjorea Ballada

**T**he Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) and UNMIL's Legal and Judicial System Support Division (LJSSD) held a 4-day training of trainers' workshop in October for the national immigration officers in Gbarnga, Bong County. The workshop, under the theme "Understanding the Key Aspects of Organizing Workshops for Immigration Officers," is part of the efforts to enhance the rule of law in Liberia.

"We are working to improve the immigration service in this country. We're going to re-structure the entire system to make it more professional," said Immigration Commissioner Clarence Massaquoi. Pointing out that all civil wars in Liberia erupted from its borders, Massaquoi said that immigration remains

a priority to the administration of President Johnson Sirleaf. "We will establish an effective border management system to ensure that our citizens and economy are well-protected," he added.

Some international partners have pledged their support to the restructuring of the country's immigration system. The Dutch government recently approved US\$1.9 million for the initiative, establishing specific border posts and computerizing the Bureau's information management system in Monrovia.

The Bureau of Immigration made recommendations to streamline its various sections and endorsed the training and re-arming of border officers who protect most of Liberia's 146 points of entry.

The Head of Legal Education and Training Unit of LJSSD, Boma Jack, said that the essence of the workshop was to sharpen the skills of the BIN training offi-

cers and to prepare them on taking over the responsibility of conducting trainings for the Bureau in the future. "We're handing over the training aspect to Liberians now, while we still supervise them, so that they'll be able to carry on even when UNMIL is no longer in Liberia."

Twenty-five training officers were taught guidelines, skills, and techniques on preparing and conducting workshops on immigration issues. Facilitators from the Liberian National Bar Association and UNMIL also trained the participants on understanding the organizational structure and chain of command of the BIN, immigration offences and civil penalties, ethical conduct of immigration officers, and immigration and trans-national trafficking.

The Legal and Judicial System Support Division of UNMIL has trained more than 300 immigration officers since April this year. ♦

# "We Are Always Beside You"

By J. Wesley Washington

Over and above their discipline, courage and competence, the Bangladeshi peacekeepers deployed in Liberia have consistently shown real compassion and respect for the victims of conflict and violence in the country. With the motto of "winning the hearts and minds of the people," a strategy that successive Bangladeshi contingents continue to employ, they have built a reputation for being courteous and respectful to the local culture. Beyond providing security, they also treat the sick and the injured, share food with the hungry as well as impart vocational and other professional skills to ex-combatants and local residents to enable them lead productive lives.

Bangladesh was among the first troop contributing countries that set up the military component of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), first sending an advanced party of 80 soldiers from neighboring Sierra Leone on 8 October 2003. Since then, with over 3,000 soldiers, Bangladesh has grown to become the second largest contingent among the 48 countries contributing troops to Liberia.

Assigned in Sector III (Bong, Grand Bassa and Nimba counties), the Bangladeshi military reinforces the Sector

headquarters at CARI Complex near Gbarnga with a contingent and deploys infantry battalions in 28 locations throughout the three counties. Also included in the Bangladeshi contingent are two engineering battalions based at the CARI Complex and Ganta, medical teams at the Level-II hospital as well as at five Level-I hospitals spread around, a signal unit, a logistics unit and a military police unit, all at CARI Complex.

Bangladesh, which began participating in UN peacekeeping in 1988, has since contributed over 70,000 men and women to 35 different operations on four continents. Since their deployment in Liberia over four years ago, the Bangladeshi military has scaled greater heights with the successive contingents building on their predecessor's achievements. The peacekeepers patrol Liberia's porous borders with neighboring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire by vehicles and helicopters, or on foot, to maintain security in their area of operation.

When the Bangladeshi peacekeepers were first deployed in Gbarnga, Bong County, on New Year's Eve 2003, they came face to face with the harsh realities in that volatile region of central Liberia. The sound of gunfire still hung heavily in the air. The entire county was in a shambles with properties looted and no power







J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

supply. People who had fled to the bush for safety remained in hiding for fear of the marauding gangsters on the streets.

A lot has changed since then. Among the major challenges the peacekeepers faced included the disarmament of tens of thousands of ex-combatants and providing security and logistical support during the voter registration and the Presidential elections.

However, more challenges remain, says Brig.-Gen Md Monawar Hossain, ndu, psc, G the Sector Commander of sector III. He cites the problems at the rubber plantations in Grand Bassa and Nimba counties as well as the gold mines in Bong County and other areas as potential hotspots. "We prefer to take preventive measures to avoid these problems becoming explosive situations, challenging the security. We remain in close contact with all the stakeholders so that the ongoing peace process of dialogue continues," says the Sector Commander.

Besides maintaining security in Sector III, the Bangladeshis also engage in various humanitarian activities to help develop the communities they serve. The engineering companies rehabilitate and maintain roads and bridges along the Gbarnga-Salala, Gbarnga-Ganta and the Gbarnga-Zorzor highways. They also maintain the Ganta-Tappita highway.

"As the rainy season is expected to end shortly, we are getting ready for massive road rehabilitation work on all our main highways and feeder roads to make them much better for vehicular traffic," says Commanding Officer of BANENGR-8, Lt.-Col. Abu Nayeem Md Jobair Kamal Chowdhury.

The Bangladeshi medics at the Level-2 hospital and five Level-1 hospitals in the three counties provide medical and surgical services to the local population in addition to the military and civilian staff of the mission. Despite the limited resources at their disposal, they have donated medicines to the only referral hospital in the area, Phebe Hospital. They also provide specialists including pathologists to advise and assist Liberian doctors when the need arises, provide tests (X-ray, dental, etc.) to patients who are referred to them by Phebe Hospital due to the lack of equipment there. BANMED runs free medical camps

for local residents every Friday under the slogan: "We are always beside you."

"Health education is most important. Whenever we conduct a mobile medical clinic, the emphasis is on preventive measures. We provide health tips to the locals on malaria, HIV/AIDS, Lassa Fever, Yellow Fever and other diseases, and how they can be prevented," says BANMED-4 Commanding Officer Lt.-Col. Gazi Abu Bakar.

"The Bangladeshis are doing well for us. They regularly provide us medicines and at times food. We are very grateful to them," says Mother Esther Shoniyyin, proprietress of St. Peter's Orphanage Home in Plum Valley, Gbarnga City, that caters to 85 orphaned and abandoned children.

In addition to their humanitarian assistance, the Bangladeshi peacekeepers also undertake small-scale community projects to engage directly with the local population. Some of these include small scale agricultural projects as well as vocational training for ex-combatants and local residents. The rehabilitation of the Gbedin Agricultural Project (one of the largest and oldest agricultural projects in Liberia) and the Bangladeshi-Liberia Friendship Center (vocational skills training center) are just two of these community projects.

An ex-combatant, Towan Kemue, who went through the electrical and generator maintenance training, expressed his gratitude to the Bangladeshis for their efforts to empower Liberians. "I'm overwhelmed with what I've learned over the last few months. This will reshape my life from an ex-combatant to a productive Liberian making my contribution to society," he said.

"Liberians need more than food and shelter. They need the skills that will provide them employment opportunities," says Brig.-Gen. Hossain.

Bangladesh was admitted to the United Nations in 1974. It first began participating in UN peacekeeping operations as a member of the Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group (UNIIMOG) with 15 military observers in 1988. As of May 2007, Bangladesh had major deployments in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Timor-Leste and Côte d'Ivoire. With 9,677 troops deployed, it ranks second in personnel contributions to UN peacekeeping today. ♦

# Liberians

## How Can We Stop Rape and D

"I think we just need to educate more people about domestic violence and rape. Secondly, girls need to dress decently. The dress code is a contributing factor to some of the acts of domestic violence and rape. Girls indecent dress code is too enticing and some men are most times carried by what they see. So we need to get more women involved to train our young girls and boys to dress decently."

**Lurleen Falla (Educator)**



"Rape is a heinous crime. Those who commit such crime should be severely punished. Instead of just serving a life sentence in jail, the person guilty of rape should be castrated. Once they set that example, I think rape would be minimized. On domestic violence, I'm a victim, and it was because of this that I divorced my husband. What if you beat your wife and she dies or is seriously injured? It's not called for in this 21st century. Government should put in place laws to discourage these acts around the country."

**Ruth Peah (Businesswoman)**



"The rule of law is the basis for curtailing the act of rape. Most times in our settings these acts occur and family heads or pastors are called in to talk about it and most times compromise. I believe that the rule of law should take its course. The Bible encourages chastity before marriage. On domestic violence, let's look at the home. The Bible states that the husband should love his wife as he loves himself and in there, Paul, the evangelist, makes an example that if you love your body, you wouldn't beat yourself. So if you wouldn't beat your own body, it does not make sense to beat the one that you love. So it's wrong for a man to beat his wife or vice versa. You are both partners."

**Robert Freeman (Pastor)**



"First, what we need to do is embark on education. We must educate our people on the effect of rape and domestic violence. Domestic violence most often affects women who are vulnerable. Rape also destroys the future of the children who are the victims. So it's necessary to visit the communities and launch education campaigns on the effects of rape and domestic violence. Domestic violence is being taken as a culture wherein some people believe that if you don't beat your wife, then you don't love her. We must tell them that culture is dynamic and the society is moving forward, as such we have to move away from that culture which is very destructive."

**Rapheal Gray (Educator)**



"In my view, the way to stop rape is to involve community members. They should be vigilant and mindful of how their children dress, where they go and when to go. The police should be also supported with the necessary logistics, and both the police and health officials should sensitise communities on what to do in the event of a rape especially in this age of HIV/AIDS. On domestic violence, it's very important that men stop beating their wives and vice versa. Poverty is one of the ways that agitates violence; we must fight poverty to also reduce domestic violence. In homes where there is everything including love, there is always laughter."

**Theophilus Innis (Security)**



# Speak Domestic Violence in Liberia?



"Rape in our country is quite a serious issue. As a Christian parent, we should guide our children in the way they should grow. One important issue to consider is the way they dress. Most children dress indecently. As parents, we should help government and the larger society bring up our children in a right and decent manner. On domestic violence, poverty is one of the main reasons. A man or a woman, who cannot adequately cater to the home, will not be respected by his/her partner which at times leads to some form of violence. The fight against poverty is very crucial. At the same time, the man or woman should be an example for the children to emulate. Equally, Government should enforce the laws that deal with people who commit acts of rape and domestic violence. There should be stiffer penalties against perpetrators."

**Francis Lloyd (Journalist)**



"If we begin early by teaching our children about respecting the other person, then they will grow up knowing that another human being is to be respected and loved and not ill-treated. Usually kids who grow up in homes where there is domestic violence and rape, there is a tendency that they will do the same. So let's try as much as we can to teach our young boys and girls that we need to respect people and treat them with love. Our hands are only to be used to touch, love and be gentle with."

**Alice Reeves (Educator)**

"My suggestion is that anyone judged guilty for committing rape should be jailed. On those that commit domestic violence, they should be punished also. Government should institute severe punishments that would discourage these kinds of crimes in our society."

**Josephus Kollie  
(Petty Trader)**



"I feel that rape and domestic violence are crimes. To combat these crimes, we must report these cases to the police immediately. Specifically, on domestic violence, once there is a problem with a partner, its best that we discuss this indoors, way out of the glare of our children and neighbours. In there we can discuss and reach a common ground."

**Emmanuel Dolo (Security)**



"Some people engage in rape out of sheer wickedness. Others do it for ritual purposes wherein a jujuman may tell a man that his problem will only be solved if he raped a young girl and took the blood to him. Also, idleness is a contributing factor. To stop rape, people will have to get themselves engaged. On domestic violence, hitting someone on the wrong side, you might put yourself in trouble. To stop this, one must be advised, talked to through community initiatives."

**Linus Sayeh (Educator)**



"I would like for government to institute strong measures against those who rape because this is a heinous crime. Once it is established that a person has committed the act, he or she should be put to jail for life. On domestic violence, the same should suffice. The person found guilty for committing such an act should be committed to jail for long periods also."

**Comfort Weni (Businesswoman)**





