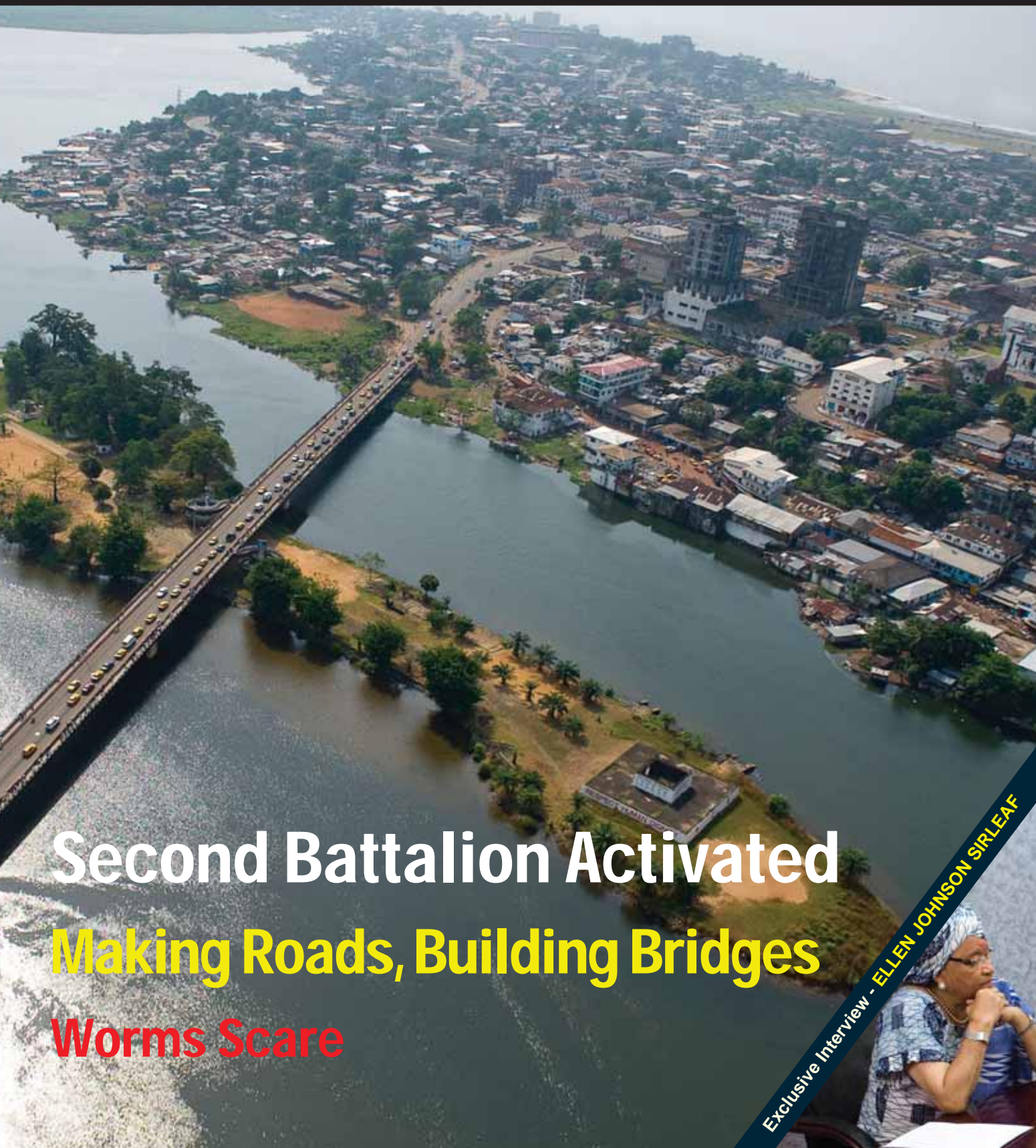


# UNMIL FOCUS



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## Second Battalion Activated Making Roads, Building Bridges Worms Scare

Exclusive Interview - ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF





# Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

**F**ive years after the civil war came to an end, Liberia continues to face daunting challenges in many areas. In line with the “One UN” concept, UNMIL and all the UN agencies, funds and programmes in the country are accelerating their joint collaboration to support the Liberian Government in meeting these challenges.

The Government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the blueprint for the country’s recovery efforts, outlines the overall vision and key initiatives for the next three years. UNMIL and the UN Country Team provided joined-up advice and support during the preparation of the PRS and this collaboration has since been intensified through the joint development of the UN Development Assistance Framework 2008-2012. The UN family’s response to the PRS outlines six joint programmes that would boost development of the counties and address issues related to food security and nutrition, sexual and gender-based violence, gender equality, youth employment, and HIV/AIDS.

UNMIL and UN country team have also collaborated actively in assisting the rule of law sector to develop strategic plans for the Police, Ministry of Justice and Judiciary, and with plans for similar efforts for Corrections and Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. The UN

family’s collaboration with the Government of Liberia will also include efforts to implement these plans including through the solicitation of donor support.

Further efforts to enhance the UN family’s joint collaboration and integration are currently under way in line with the principle of “at work together”. These include practical ideas to improve joint mechanisms and to strengthen communication across the board. In this regard, the UN country team and senior managers of UNMIL held a retreat from 25-26 September 2008 in order to find ways to improve cooperation and integration of the UN in Liberia. The retreat reviewed existing planning tools and previously defined goals of the UN, identified mechanisms to increase delivery results, developed a more integrated mission-wide architecture; and recommended mechanisms to ensure continued UN impact on Liberia while UNMIL draws down.

My message to all UN colleagues and the Liberian public is that in spite of UNMIL’s drawdown and transition planning, the UN will continue to actively support Liberia’s recovery efforts, as we recognize that Liberia’s recovery is still unfinished business. I also urge the international community to stay the course and continue to support the country’s development efforts. Liberia can and should be a post-conflict success story.

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





## Second Battalion Activated

The second battalion of the new Armed Forces of Liberia comprising 657 soldiers was activated recently, marking a key milestone in Liberia's security sector reforms. With this, the total number of AFL soldiers activated now stands at 2074.



Much needed repair works on roads and bridges are being carried out across Liberia by UNMIL's contingent engineers to get major supply routes opened before they leave the country as part of the drawdown of the mission.



Reports of an attack on crops by army worms turned out to be a false alarm but the caterpillar invasion has helped mobilize the government and its partners to devise plans to stave off any potential threat.

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Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia  
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By Jordan Ryan

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## Farewell to Liberia

I leave Liberia with a sense of hope. Hope that peace will hold. Hope that Liberia will prosper. Hope that the Liberian people will emerge from the chaos of war, with a greater sense of self-reliance, more united and ready to meet the challenges the future will bring. I also leave with the expectation that the peace and security that we have all worked so hard to establish will be the foundation for the long overdue growth, development, and prosperity of which Liberia is capable.

I first arrived in Monrovia in early November 2005 during the period of the run-off election. I had been chosen by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to be his Deputy Special Representative in the UN Peacekeeping Mission. Landing at RIA on that first day, I glanced out of the plane window and saw UN soldiers and all those UN helicopters at the ready. Peacekeeping was a new face of the UN for me, and it was my new family. (My wife and daughter had to remain in New York, not allowed to join me.)

That first evening I took that long drive into town. I recall even now how deep the potholes were on the road and the darkness over the countryside. There simply was no electricity in the villages on the way into Monrovia. I saw an occasional fire that provided light and heat. I had arrived in a nation devastated by war.

Upon awakening that next morning, I saw the consequences of conflict. The dawn revealed a capital city plundered, many of its buildings barely standing, marked by mortar and ammunition barges. Electricity was only provided by generators and city-supplied running

water was unavailable. But today, a little more than three years from my arrival, Monrovia is bustling with considerable economic activity. And throughout the land much has changed.

Change can in large measure be said to have originated with the desire of all Liberians for peace. It was advanced by the election and inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. With the election, Liberians not only got the first woman president in Africa. They had also elected a dynamic, hands-on and passionate advocate for development.

I have known the President from her days as an Assistant Secretary-General in UNDP where she headed the Africa Bureau. I knew that the Liberians had selected a person with abundant energy, a forceful personality, and the knowledge of development to get things moving. She never hesitated to call me whenever the need arose, sometimes early in the morning and other times late at night. I can assure you she'd always let me know squarely how the UN could do better. But from the very first days sitting around the President's kitchen table listening to her vision of a nation at work and at peace, I have been excited and honoured to be part of a UN team at work in partnership with the President, her able team, and the Government of Liberia.

Liberia is blessed. I have flown over the length and breadth of this country and journeyed along its bumpy roads to visit distant villages and districts. I have seen the wealth of this nation, from its forests to farm land, its rivers and sea coast (and been deluged by its great, pelting rains). I have seen its potential. Liberia's future

will draw upon this wealth, but realizing its potential will truly require the efforts of its greatest treasure, its people.

My hope for Liberia is based on the change I have seen in each of the 15 counties. With Liberians at work, recovery is now underway everywhere. It started early with an emphasis on getting people back to their homes. The Government and the UN made every effort to treat each refugee and internally displaced person with dignity and respect. And much was done for the re-integration of ex-combatants, to train them, and to turn them into a force for the collective good of the nation. Looking forward, I hope as Liberia confronts the effects of the global economic crisis that important international support and private investment will continue to be forthcoming.

On all my journeys I've enjoyed the chance to meet and talk with leaders and the very poor, chiefs and school children, farmers, market women and youth. They have shared with me their dreams and aspirations. And I have experienced warmth and hospitality, from the traditional greeting with a white chicken and kola nuts, to the taste of local dishes served up with my favourite, hot pepper sauce.

And my hope is that the Government and the nation's leaders will continue to approach development from the people's perspective, responding to their needs by assigning the highest possible priority to accountability. I am pleased that the UN, through our innovative County Support Teams, has been able to assist the Government to listen to and learn from the people in ways unimaginable a few short years ago. The County Development

Agendas mark a new beginning of people-driven and people-oriented development.

Liberia's broad agenda for reform, known as "Lift Liberia", has been highly effective in helping the general public understand what needs to be done to revive the economy and develop the nation. It has been hailed by donors for helping to focus national efforts necessary for the country to recover. It is heartening to see progress created by all Liberians – those who never left and those returning home – keen to live their lives in the homeland. Each Liberian has a role in contributing to a better tomorrow.

I have been enormously privileged to be part of the United Nations team in Liberia and serve under the leadership of two remarkable SRSGs. I have enjoyed outstanding support from the many agency heads and colleagues: civilian, police and military, staff and volunteers. Their dedication and devotion to duty are extraordinary. I am also grateful to the many member states of the UN that strongly support our work here and to the active NGO community, a trusted partner.

Many armchair critics around the world make a habit of disparaging the UN and our work. I urge them to visit Liberia and witness for themselves what we are accomplishing here. So much is now underway by committed, principled and innovative individuals: from training the police to restoring national authority at local levels, addressing the food crisis, putting an end to gender-based violence, and securing the rule of law. UNMIL and the many UN agencies, including the World Bank, are "at work together", helping Liberians to rebuild their nation.

Most of all my hope for Liberia rests with its youth and children. I fervently hope they never experience the scourge of war. I hope they will inherit a land at peace that provides them with the opportunities that enable them to realize their full potential. Liberia has come a long way in a short time. It has every chance to transform itself into a peaceful and prosperous nation. And by so doing, it will once again be that beacon of hope, that bright star of Africa, a land of liberty. ♦

*See interview with Jordan Ryan, page 36*

# Liberia Needs More International Aid, says Ban

**T**he overall security situation in Liberia remains relatively stable but is characterized by "an underlying fragility", according to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's latest report on Liberia. Recovering from a brutal 14-year-long civil war, the country has made strides in slashing poverty, but significant challenges still remain in meeting security benchmarks, adds the report released in February.

Since last August, Liberia has continued to make "steady progress" towards achieving its four-pronged poverty reduction strategy which focuses on security, economic recovery, rule of law and infrastructure and basic services, Mr. Ban wrote in his latest report to the Security Council, calling for international partners to continue supporting Liberia, especially in its efforts to curb poverty.

"Despite the sharp increase in food and fuel prices in 2008, many of the potential negative effects were mitigated by proactive policy initiatives," the report said, adding that the government has also tried to guarantee advances in several key areas, including the fight against corruption and public financial management reforms. "However, limited national institutional capacity across all sectors remains a serious constraint, not least since most public institutions, at national and local levels, have had to be completely rebuilt after the conflict," including national security agencies, the Secretary-General said.

Stressing the ties between peace and development, Ban highlighted the importance of ensuring simultaneous progress in all four pillars of the poverty reduction strategy, "particularly given the potential link between high youth unemployment and security." The report also drew attention to the challenges Liberia faces in meeting its main security and rule of law benchmarks.

The country's media and public opinion surveys consistently show how law and order are a primary concern, it said.



**Ban Ki-moon**

"This partly reflects a continued lack of public confidence in national security institutions and the criminal justice system, leading people to take justice into their own hands, frequently resulting in serious injury, death or property damage."

The presidential and legislative elections slated for 2011 will be a key test of progress made in Liberia since it emerged from its civil war that killed almost 150,000 people, mostly civilians. The Secretary-General called for the development of a comprehensive electoral plan, including financial and technical requirements, as soon as possible.

Delayed polls in bordering Côte d'Ivoire and the recent military coup in Guinea have exacerbated the unpredictability in the sub-region, he said. "Any negative trends in the security situation in these neighbouring countries will have a major impact on the situation in Liberia and its peacebuilding efforts."

Given the tasks ahead for Liberia, the Secretary-General said he recommends that no further adjustments to the military and police components of UNMIL be made for the mandated period. ♦



# Second Battalion Ac

By J. Wesley Washington

**N**eatly dressed in green camouflage military uniforms with caps and black boots to match, over 650 newly trained soldiers of the reorganized Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) stood “at ease” on the green turf of the Barclay Training Center (BTC) as they attentively watched the formalities of the “Guide-on” being presented to the AFL Command Officer-in-Charge by the battalion’s Sergeant-Major. After unfurling it, the Command Officer-in-Charge, in turn, presented it to the Battalion Commander who later returned it to the custodian of the battalion, the Sergeant-Major, thus signifying the activation of the AFL’s 2nd Battalion, 23rd Infantry Brigade.

The AFL Command Officer-in-Charge, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Alao

Abdurrahman reiterated that the activation of the 2nd Battalion marked another milestone in the country’s march towards the formation of a well respected and professional AFL but warned that it will require the collective support of everyone for the newly trained soldiers to carry out their responsibilities. The 2nd Battalion of 657 soldiers comprises of five units including the Alpha, Bravo, Charlie and Head Quarters and Head Quarters companies as well as the Combat Support Unit.

“The trust reposed in you by the Liberian people must be jealously guarded both collectively and individually as a battalion and during your everyday duty as you prepare yourself in carrying out your constitutional roles,” Maj.-Gen. Abdurrahman cautioned the activated battalion.

The Keynote Speaker, Deputy Director for Operations and Logistics at the US-

Africa Command, Brig.- Gen. Frederick Martin termed the 2nd Battalion’s activation as a significant step for the AFL and another momentous leap for Liberia. He reminded the battalion to be guarded by three core values – integrity, service and excellence. “Integrity is the core of a strong and professional military which entails respect for human rights and the dignity of each individual. Integrity embodies the core of your character,” he warned. “Service before self,” he cautioned, noting that they must ensure excellence in all they do as these three values are embodied in the spirit and pride of the military.

The US General noted that this battalion is shaping the future for security reform and together with the 1st Battalion, will help provide security which ensures stability, a strong economy and a strong region where the rule of law is respected,



# tivated

civilian control of the military pre-imminent, and there's respect for human rights and protection of civil liberties.

Liberia's Defence Minister, Brownie Samukai, disclosed that the AFL's Commander-in-Chief, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, has authorized the AFL's Command Officer-in-Charge to seek support from the international community, especially the United States of America, to activate a Liberian National Coast Guard Battalion this year. Already, a US Coast Guard team has completed an assessment while 40 officers are currently undergoing screening to be recruited for the training of a new corps of coast guard officers.

The Defence Minister noted that the AFL still faces numerous challenges as it is being developed. He cited young officers and officers' candidates who are yet to complete officers' training. Non-commissioned officers have not had the opportunity to travel to complete their training.

However, he was optimistic that the government is taking steps, with the assistance from international partners, to provide training opportunities for the AFL soldiers. Samukai announced that the governments of Ghana, Rwanda and neighbouring Sierra Leone have agreed to train nearly 50 soldiers in various areas. The soldiers are expected to depart to the various countries shortly.

Minister Samukai praised the efforts of the UN in providing security for the country while the AFL and other security entities are still under development. "We believe that the sacrifices of these men and women in the UN Mission in Liberia have been very crucial in giving us the opportunity to be able to develop the AFL at this time," he said, adding that overtime, it is his conviction that the experience from the UN will be passed on to the AFL as part of the consolidation and drawdown of the UN mission.

Both the 1st and 2nd battalions of the 23rd Infantry Brigade now have a total of 2074 personnel. Of this, there are a total of



Brig-Gen. Martin, Defence Minister Samukai, Special Representative Loj at the ceremony

79 commissioned officers, 20 officers' candidates (still awaiting commission), 72 1st and 2nd Lieutenants, and 37 non-commissioned officers.

Though it will take some time, probably years, to develop the command and control structures of the AFL, currently a number of key positions are filled by seconded military officers from the sub-

region, notably, Benin, Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone.

The 1st Battalion, activated on 29 August 2008, is expected to be operational by September 2009 while the 2nd Battalion is anticipated to be operational by the end of the year. Initial integrated training with UNMIL could begin during the first quarter of 2010. ♦

Maj.-Gen. Abdurrahman and Brig.-Gen. Martin







# Making Roads,

By Sulaiman Momodu

**O**n 26 January, as the world's most populous nation, China, celebrated the Lunar New Year ushering in the Year of the Ox, members of the Chinese Engineering Contingent in Zwedru were busy out in the jungle contributing to ensuring that roads in Liberia remained passable.

The Deputy Commander of the contingent, Maj. Liu Xiangyoung, says the engineers were working along the 81km long Zwedru - Greenville road and in areas where there was no mobile network to even call their loved ones back home to wish them a Happy New Year. The rehabilitation of critical sections of the road was completed in just 18 days enabling normal vehicular traffic unlike before when only four-wheel drives could survive the journey. Crushed stones were trans-

ported in trucks from a distance of over 150 km for the repair work.

The Chinese engineers who are responsible for the maintenance and rehabilitation of the Zwedru - Fishtown, Zwedru - Tappita, and Zwedru - Greenville roads are part of a bigger team of UN peacekeeping engineers from various contingents who are today a regular feature of the road network rehabilitation scenes in Liberia.

Currently, much needed engineering work is being carried out especially in the south-eastern part of the country in an effort to get major supply routes opened all year round before the contingent engineers leave Liberia as part of the draw-down process. The Ministry of Public Works (MoPW), which is in possession of as many as 27 "Bailey" bridges donated by World Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is looking into installing these "bridges in a

box" over the dry season using a mixture of UNMIL military engineers, the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) engineers, and private contractors funded by either the ministry or USAID.

The first project was a bridge connecting River Gee and Maryland counties which was damaged during the war and recently became impassable. The engineers from the 7th Chinese contingent worked with the Public Works ministry to restore the important link. AFL also performed their first bridge launching as a military civic action project recently in River Cess County while UNMIL Pakistani engineers are all set to launch a Bailey bridge to replace the Quinean Bridge in Royseville, Bomi County. Many of the road rehabilitation projects funded by the World Bank, UNDP and the African Development Bank are executed by UN peacekeeping engineers. The UN refugee agency, UNHCR, and USAID are among





Chinese engineers at work



# Building Bridges

other agencies involved in road works.

Chief of UNMIL Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC), Col. Christopher Holshek, says although plans are afoot to undertake large scale road rehabilitation during this dry season with the World Bank and MoPW projects led by the Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery Section, funding may not be available until very close to the rainy season. "After this dry season there would be substantial reduction in troops. By June 2009 about 40 per cent of the military engineering capabilities in Liberia will have gone," he says, pointing out that Liberia does not have the capacity to undertake road projects which are gradually being undertaken by private contractors at very exorbitant costs. During the country's civil war, many professionals left the country some of whom are yet to return creating a market of mostly incapable contractors. To mitigate the impact of the

gradual drawdown, peacekeepers have been providing capacity building for the local population.

Liberia's Information Minister Dr. Laurence Bropleh stresses the need to ensure connectivity throughout the country before the rains come. As roads reopen and Liberia gets more connected, many Liberians, some of whom use to hardly see vehicles in their towns and villages, are full of praise for peacekeepers. In January this year, a road accident along the Ganta – Zwedru road resulted in the loss of life of two members of the Multi-role Bangladeshi Engineering Contingent (BANENGR-9) who were returning from a road assessment mission in their deployment area in Nimba County. Contingent Commander Lt. Col. Sheheed Islam says they were very shocked by the accident but maintained that they remained committed to their engineering duties. "Liberia needs engineers now more than ever

before," remarks UNMIL Chief Force Engineer Col. Azmal Kabir, adding that they are doing their best to make roads passable.

Since the commencement of the mission in 2003, UNMIL's military personnel have been supporting various recovery and development efforts under CIMIC. The peacekeepers collaborate with government ministries, agencies and local authorities to render assistance in various humanitarian and development programmes all in an effort to ensuring that Liberians enjoy lasting peace and stability.

"Through this joint, collaborative approach, we can help the government close a number of the capacity gaps in the Poverty Reduction Strategy," says Col. Holshek. "It's largely up to the government to get the ball rolling and take advantage of our ability to assist while we still have the means." ♦

# Liberians in the Lead

By Carly Learson

**I**n the hills above Tubmanburg in Bomi County the Pakistani Level 2 Hospital is gaining a reputation throughout Liberia as a centre of excellence in capacity-building and providing services to the local community.

For the past year the Pakistani medical team has been running the only UNMIL hospital to provide services not just to UNMIL staff but to the civilian population as well. With specialist services including radiology, pathology, ophthalmology and surgery, as well as dental and psychiatric care, the hospital is attracting people from well outside Tubmanburg, including Monrovia.

After a year of operations the Pakistani medical team is now handing over its operations to local staff, many of whom they have trained. They will shortly be joined by some doctors from Cuba. The Pakistani hospital is now going to move to Harper, where UNMIL has determined there is a greater need because of the remote location.

The hospital has been a project conceived under the principles of Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC). Since the beginning of the military drawdown in January 2008 the CIMIC team has been concentrating on building the capacity of local civilians in the areas where the military has been filling the gaps – including crucial public services like the hospital at Tubmanburg.

The CIMIC team is working closely with other sections of the UN, including the County Support Teams and Civil Affairs towards an eventual withdrawal of the force altogether. The CIMIC strategy states as its end goal that success is an eventual drawdown with no debilitating civil-military impacts, 100 per cent civilian lead in all civil-military initiatives. In other words, the peacekeepers are handing over the lead to Liberians in the areas where they had once taken the lead.

Commander Mohammed Arif Magray heads the team in Tubmanburg and will return to Pakistan in a few weeks. He is





proud of the work his unit has done, but also sees it as a responsibility. “When we go back we wish the Liberian staff can stand at their own stretcher,” he said. “This is the only way to help people here.” His team of doctors and nurses have spent the past year providing medical services to the local community, but also training local staff.

The Liberian staff at the hospital are generally confident that they can handle the increased workload and take the drivers seat when the Pakistanis leave. Sarah Tengbeh started working at the hospital in 2007 after leaving the MSF hospital. She said the training has been extremely useful to her professionally. “I’ve learned so much working with the Pakistanis,” she said. Some of the new skills she has as a physician assistant include ultrasound, x-ray, kidney test and general laboratory skills.

Janet Howard is a nurse who worked in Tubmanburg before the war, but fled to Monrovia, leaving her job. Now she is happy for the opportunity to return to the well-equipped and professionally-run hospital. “People come here from Gbarnga, Kakata and other towns,” she said. “Many pay their own way to get here because it’s the only place to get medicine for depres-

sion.”

Charles B. Quaye is a social worker who has used the resources the Pakistanis have provided to go out to local communities and provide information and materials to assist people to deal with HIV/AIDS prevention, as well as preventing diarrhoea and malaria. “Prevention is much cheaper than treatment,” he says.

The hospital is well equipped to deal with most complaints and injuries as well as surgery. Some of the most common illnesses treated at the hospital are anaemia, usually related to malnutrition, diarrhoea, respiratory illnesses and skin diseases. They are also seeing an increasing prevalence of depression as well as river blindness – where worms enter the blood and find their way to the victim’s eyes.

One of the major tasks of the doctors is dealing with women with labour complications. Major Ali Kashif, one of the Pakistani surgeons, finds that many of the emergency operations he is called on to perform relate to ectopic pregnancies and emergency caesareans.

Ibrahim Cooper is one of the Liberian paramedics who has been trained specifically to operate equipment like x-ray and ultrasound. He is becoming an expert in dealing with complicated pregnancies and

ectopic pregnancies, but has also gained experience in diagnosing tuberculosis, liver disease and kidney stones.

In the children’s ward of the hospital, Captain Khushboo Adeel talks with some of the mothers staying with their babies. The ward handles up to 60 patients each month, with most children admitted for malnutrition, mumps and respiratory infections. Titama is a mother who has travelled to the hospital with her severely malnourished son. He whimpers as Dr Khushboo examines him. She says it will take 10 to 15 days in hospital before the baby is healthy enough to leave.

The Pakistani medics have made a huge impact in Tubmanburg and the surrounding regions. By going beyond the

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**The hospital is well equipped to deal with most complaints and injuries as well as surgery. Some of the most common illnesses treated at the hospital are anaemia, usually related to malnutrition, diarrhoea, respiratory illnesses and skin diseases. They are also seeing an increasing prevalence of depression as well as river blindness – where worms enter the blood and find their way to the victim’s eyes.**

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requirements of the military in setting up a hospital to care for not just UNMIL staff but the local population as well, and co-locating in the public hospital, they have built strong connections with local staff and set an example of excellence in caring for patients. As a CIMIC project the success of the hospital will be seen in how well the local staff can continue providing the services to the community. To date the project has set an example to the rest of the contingents on how to sensitively and effectively implement CIMIC principles.

♦

Pakistani doctors at the children's ward



# Children's lot improving but huge challenges remain

By Carly Learson

**L**iberia's world ranking in under-five mortality has dropped from 5th in the world to 20th, a sign that services are improving, according to UNICEF's recently released annual report, the State of the World's Children. While the number of children dying is decreasing worldwide, the decline in infant mortality is faster in Liberia than in other developing countries.

Given Liberia is one of the least developed countries in the world, the trend is encouraging. However, for every 1,000 children born in Liberia 133 will not live past their 5th birthday. Liberia still has the world's highest rate of neonatal deaths – where a baby dies within one month of being born.

Although things are improving for Liberia's children, the situation is still dire for the country's women. The country is one of the top ten riskiest countries in the world for giving birth. Indeed a major finding of the annual report is that women in West and Central Africa are a whopping 470 times more likely to die as a result of childbirth than women in developed countries. This region accounts for 30 per cent of maternal deaths worldwide, while it has just 10 per cent of the population.

In developing countries like Liberia, a woman has a 1 in 76 lifetime risk of maternal death, compared with a probability of 1 in 8,000 for women in developed countries. Approximately 99 percent of global deaths arising from pregnancy and related complications occur in the developing world, where having a child remains among the most serious health risks for women. The vast majority of such deaths occur in Africa and Asia, where high fertil-

ity rates, a shortage of trained personnel and weak health systems spell tragedy for many young women.

UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman said every year more than half a million women die in childbirth. "Since 1990 complications related to pregnancy and childbirth have killed an estimated 10 million women," she said. "Saving the lives of mothers and their newborns



requires more than just medical intervention."

UNICEF estimates that 80 per cent of maternal deaths could be avoided if women had access to basic health care. Many women in Liberia do not have access to trained midwives, or they prefer to be assisted by a traditional midwife who may not have the medical training to deal with complications. Veneman says the high rates of illiteracy are also an issue for

women in many developing countries. "Educating girls is pivotal to improving maternal and neonatal health and also benefits families and societies," she said.

One of the major challenges holding back Liberia's children is malnutrition. Malnutrition is not simply about being hungry. The quantity of food eaten may make a child feel not hungry but that is not necessarily enough to ward off malnutrition. With malnutrition contributing to 35 per cent of child deaths, and causing maternal health problems, tackling malnutrition is one of the keys to improving the lot of Liberia's children. Most malnutrition is caused by a combination of diet and infection. In Liberia malaria and malnutrition go hand in hand, with one increasing the likelihood of suffering from the other. Malnutrition can take a variety of forms depending on the kind of nutrient that is missing such as proteins, iron, iodine or vitamins.

In West and Central Africa 6.6 million children have acute malnutrition that leads to the body starting to waste away. Almost 24 million have chronic malnutrition. Liberia's children are suffering, but the situation is worse for children in desert countries like Mali and Niger where most children are not getting the nutrients they need to be healthy.

The UNICEF report finds that health services are most effective in an environment supportive of women's empowerment, protection, and education. With continued investment in education and health, and infrastructure like water and sanitation, in an environment of women's empowerment, the problems that plague Liberia – malnutrition, disease, maternal and infant death, can become a thing of the past. ♦





## LIBERIA TODAY

- Nearly 40 per cent of children are stunted from malnutrition
- Nearly 40 percent of children don't have access to safe drinking water
- 75 per cent of children don't have access to sanitation facilities
- 230,000 children have been orphaned by the war and disease
- 500,000 children don't go to school
- Two thirds of children are being taught by teachers who are not qualified



## UNICEF IN LIBERIA

UNICEF in Liberia is working towards improving health care and giving children better opportunities. Some of their achievements include:

- 1 million children have been vaccinated against polio
- Working with the Government to establish 185 health facilities
- Treated 100,000 women and children in IDP camps
- Installing water and sanitation facilities, and providing education kits in 1,000 schools
- Supporting 100 teachers in completing primary training
- Demobilised 12,000 child soldiers
- Trained 1,500 police in child rights and protection

# Who Answers to Women?

By Carly Learson

In the lead up to the International Women's Colloquium to be hosted by Liberia in March, the country is focusing on women's rights and accountability. With a major legislative reform in the pipeline, the first National Action Plan for Women on resolution 1325, the Liberian government is showing the rest of the world that it is committed to improving opportunities for women and ensuring they have equal rights to men.

A benchmark report from the UN agency for women, UNIFEM, shows just how difficult this task is. The Progress of the World's Women report for 2008/09, called "Who Answers to Women? Gender and Accountability," assesses the challenges and achievements in holding governments accountable to women. With the first ever elected female President in Africa at the helm, and huge gains in the reduction of corruption, Liberia is emerging as a country where women have a voice and can influence government to ensure their needs are met and their rights respected.

At the launch of the report, held at Monrovia City Hall, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf praised the fact that so many men were present and highlighted some of the achievements of her government, including the establishment of Criminal Court E dedicated to rape crimes and headed by a female judge. "Liberia is the first African country, and the first post-conflict country, to have a National Action

Plan on 1325," she said. "Let us all join in and celebrate the achievements of women, and find the means to address the challenges of women."

UNIFEM Regional Programme Director for West Africa, Cecilie Mukarubuga said that while many governments make commitments, the challenge is in translating those commitments into reality. "Accountability requires not just women in leadership, but a gender focus across all government programmes," she said. Statistics expert Hanny Cueva-Beteta from UNIFEM in New York said that in both national governments and multilateral organizations accountability systems need to be changed and oriented to answer to women if commitments to gender equality are to move from rhetoric to results. "It is time to move from lip-service to real results," she said.

Accountability refers to the capacity of citizens, and of women in particular, to question government decisions and access information, initiate investigations, seek compensation and to see officials sanctioned if they fail to respond to women's needs or protect their rights. Accountability can be improved through the law, by changing procedures, putting incentives in place and removing barriers. UNIFEM in Liberia is highlighted in the report for its work driving women to polling stations so they could vote in the 2005 election. But a big part of the process is changing attitudes, and in particular targeting men's attitude to women.

Liberia was held up as an example for its 2006 reforms making rape a criminal,



WOMEN 2008/2009





Women in sub-Saharan Africa collectively spend 40 billion hours each year collecting water



Cecile Mukarubuga, UNIFEM Regional Programme Director for West Africa, and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at the launch of the report

non-parole offence and for the way Liberian women are engaging with the justice system through the police force. However, in Liberia, where the formal justice system is still developing, informal justice still plays an important part in the society. Informal justice, where a community decides on convictions and punishments according to traditional methods, doesn't take into account human rights and gender bias.

In cases of sexual violence in particular, without a formal justice system victims can be disinclined to report rape if there is no guarantee of protection. In addition, where there is no specific law against marital rape, community bias may tend towards blaming the victim if she reports a rape.

cation in Africa. With challenges that stem from ingrained discrimination such as sexual harassment and violence in schools, discrimination against pregnant girls, prioritization of boys' education over girls' as well as a lack of sanitation facilities, most sub-Saharan African countries have a long way to go to achieve the UN's Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education. The good news is that enrolment rates have increased for primary school children. However the rates for high school are not increasing as much – indeed only 23 per cent of girls in the region finish high school – the lowest number in the world. Enrolments in tertiary education are 40 per cent lower for women than for men.

Many countries the world over have

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**Liberia was held up as an example for its 2006 reforms making rape a criminal, non-parole offence and for the way Liberian women are engaging with the justice system through the police force. However, in Liberia, where the formal justice system is still developing, informal justice still plays an important part in the society. In cases of sexual violence in particular, without a formal justice system victims can be disinclined to report rape if there is no guarantee of protection.**

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African women are working largely in agriculture, contributing 60 to 80 per cent of the labour that goes into producing food and cash crops for the region. Women in sub-Saharan Africa collectively spend 40 billion hours each year collecting water – more time than the entire French population spends working.

Africa shares with other developing regions a phenomenon that women who are highly educated are more likely than men to migrate. With the talented women leaving there are fewer voices left to speak on behalf of those women who don't have a voice – women in remote areas, children and those without access to government. Worldwide it is still the case that men are more likely to be in top positions in the private sector – 1 in 8 men can expect to be in senior management, while only 1 in 40 women can.

In general, women struggle for an edu-

seen women's participation in politics as a key step towards providing greater accountability for women. There have been major improvements around the world, with women now occupying 18.4 per cent of national assembly seats, up from eight percent in 1998. The report notes the value of women's groups in political participation, and with their strong history of collective action Liberian women are well aware of the power such groups can have in the fight for women's rights.

Women in Liberia are among the best represented in politics and the public sector in the region, but President Johnson Sirleaf is determined to ensure that this power is institutionalized. "Let us join hands at all levels – national, county, continental, global – and recognize that enhancement of women's rights adds to development overall." ♦



# Civil Society is the W

By Sulalman Momodu

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are no doubt vital to post-war Liberia's recovery and development. During Liberia's divisive conflict, civil society groups were vocal in denouncing the war lords and rejecting the rule of the gun. Following the restoration of peace and democracy, some civil society leaders were offered positions in the government.

As UNMIL gradually draws down, Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj and other senior UN officials in

February met with CSOs in Liberia in an effort to enhance their role in decision-making processes. As the peacekeeping mission scales down its strength, the need for Liberians to be in the "driver's seat" is increasingly evident, and civil society groups are looked upon as potential agents to drive forward the momentum of democracy and development in the country.

The drawdown was one of the key issues discussed at the meeting held at the UN mission's headquarters in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Reiterating that the UN will continue to support Liberia, UN Envoy Løj informed the CSO representatives that although the strength of UNMIL

military will be decreased, the imminent deployment of Indian and Jordanian Formed Police units will enhance the number of police personnel to complement the efforts of the Liberian National Police.

Although much progress has been made to stabilize the West Africa sub-region once devastated by civil conflicts, the region may not be completely out of the woods yet. Løj presented the drawdown from the regional perspective, highlighting the recent coup in Guinea and the postponement of elections in Côte d'Ivoire.

In February last year, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon declared Liberia





Members of civil society meet at UNMIL headquarters

# Way Forward...

eligible for funding under the second window of the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF), which is meant to establish a crucial bridge between conflict and recovery. The PBF helps to address the most immediate needs facing post-conflict countries to minimize the risk of a relapse into conflict. The fund of US\$15m for Liberia vis-à-vis the role of civil society organizations was discussed. The fund is managed by the Peacebuilding Secretariat hosted in the Ministry of Internal Affairs under strict guidance from the Joint Steering Committee made of representatives from Government, UN, donor community and civil society. Most of the peacebuilding

fund projects are expected to start in the first quarter of this year and will run for another 18 months. The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the Liberian Governance Perception Index, which assesses national governance against the pillars of the PRS, gender, and the correction and justice systems were also issues of deliberations.

UNMIL's Chief of Civil Affairs Francis Kai-Kai says the United Nations family is working to strengthen the country's civil society and developing a common strategy to enhance the participation of civil society organizations in national discourse and the consolidation of peace.

It is envisaged that greater involvement of civil society in public discourse would stimulate more democratic, transparent and accountable local and national leadership.

UNMIL is currently collating data on civil society groups throughout the country to gather information on their location, areas of intervention, organizational needs, and their strengths and weaknesses. Many CSOs lament their lack of capacity and resources to properly function. Kai-Kai, however, notes that a better understanding of the realities of civil society operations will help the UN family to address their challenges which also include sustainability and accountability.

"We have been scattered and not unified. But with our collaboration with the UN, we are in the process of forming a National NGO Council – our meetings with the UN are very useful," says Lancedell Matthews, the Chair of the National Civil Society Organization Advisory Committee, adding that previous efforts to form a national body of NGOs had not been very successful. Matthews, who is also the head of the New African Research and Development Agency, says the UN is engaging now with CSOs more than ever before.

Although the UN mission has been working with CSOs, the February meeting is the second Løj and members of the UN family have had with the group. Last October, the UN Envoy had the first meeting with 34 CSOs during which the representative leaders were briefed on UNMIL's mandate, their concerns heard and views exchanged.

Civil Affairs Officer Gilbert Ngesu says UNMIL and the UN Country Team have supported the Government, through the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, to draft and launch the policy guidelines on non-governmental organizations operating in Liberia. The United Nations provided financial, technical, and logistical support for the national consultative process leading to the draft of the policy, which, among other things, seeks to improve NGO accountability. "I think a very effective and accountable civil society is the way forward for Liberia," says Ngesu. ♦



# Advancing Workers' Rights

By Carly Learson

**L**abour relations are difficult to govern in a country like Liberia. Conventional rules governing employment are not quite adequate in a country where informal employment makes up the majority of income generation for its citizens.

In light of this inadequacy, the Liberian government is reviewing the country's labour laws which govern all

relations between employees and employers, to take into account informal employment and expand the reach of the law to cover 1.2 million workers. The new laws will include minimum wage levels for all the workers as well as mechanisms to ensure wage increases taking into account inflation.

The International Labour Organization (ILO), the UN agency promoting full employment and decent work for all, is a key partner in Liberia's efforts to carry out labour reforms that should incorporate the

informal labour sector. ILO runs a training centre in Turin, Italy, and the success of its training courses led the agency to bring its trainers to Liberia in order to reach a larger and more diverse audience and to more efficiently use limited resources.

The two week-long training sessions for 70 participants were held in February at the Liberia Chamber of Commerce, covering labour administration and mediation and conciliation techniques. The training was attended by officials from the Ministry of Labour, trade union leadership





Liberia's new labour laws will include protection for workers in the informal sector

and employer organizations. From the training the ILO will develop a strategic plan to address the needs of workers, employers and the Government of Liberia.

The three groups are brought together in Liberia under the National Tripartite Committee. This cooperation between Government, employers and employees is crucial to the success of good labour relations. Wendell Addy, who works for the Committee, said its formation last year is in recognition of the fact that dialogue and mediation are the key to successful relations. "In the past Liberians have relied too much on lawyers," he said.

The training was conducted by Sylvain Baffi of the Training Centre at ILO in Turin and Sharon Wakeford, an expert in dispute resolution who has experience in a number of African countries. Wakeford agreed that a major challenge in Liberia was in moving away from an adversarial system to a culture of negotiation and mediation. She thinks one of the biggest issues for Liberia is in dealing with the informal employment sector. "Some groups fall outside the net, and they are

very vulnerable," she said. "As time passes there will be more need to formalize employment."

Rosetta N. Jackollie, Assistant Minister for Labour Standards, agrees. "Right now there is no protection for workers in the informal sector, but we are trying to bring them on board," she said. Collecting data on Liberia's informal sectors is a major project of the labour ministry. The largest numbers of informal sector labourers are in agriculture and mining.

Jackollie, who trained as a lawyer, says the government wants to formalize their employment and ensure they have adequate safety mechanisms, particularly in mining. It is also important to strike the right balance between promoting Liberia to foreign investors and ensuring Liberians are not exploited. The development of the union movement is crucial in this process. Jackollie says with the increasing credibility of the union movement the rights of workers will be better protected. "Historically unions were just a cosmetic thing – they were very political," she said. "But now gradually we have more women

coming on board, those in leadership are seen as legitimate."

One woman taking a lead in the union movement is Elitha Manning, who was one of the workers' representatives to attend the training. Manning is the first woman elected as Vice President of the Liberian Labour Congress. A former janitor and a union member for 20 years, she decided to run for an elected position. She was able to attend ILO training in Turin in November last year, but is now pleased that some of her colleagues too can benefit from the training.

Massa Lansanah is the Acting Secretary-General of the Liberian Chamber of Commerce, and one of four representatives of the Chamber at the training. She says that developing a strong private sector in Liberia is an incredibly challenging task. "It's taking time," she said. "That's why we need to continue to have dialogue with the Government."

Other private sector representatives were also pleased with the quality of the training and the new ways of thinking that were presented to them. Theresa Jordan, Recruitment Manager at Mittal Steel, said that it was always possible to find a win-win solution. "You have to focus on what both parties want, and work out what's needed to find a solution, rather than focusing on just holding your position," she said. She is optimistic about the future of the private sector in Liberia but thinks people need to change their attitude. "A lot of people depend on the Government to look after them," she said. "The private sector requires people to take responsibility for their own destiny."

Abel F. Ngigie is the Grievance Chairman for the Firestone Workers Union of Liberia, and responsible for mediating disputes at one of the nation's biggest employers, with more than 10,000 employees. He says he has learnt a lot from the training. "We have very low skills," he said. "When our brothers from ILO come and develop our minds we can mediate better between the workers and management." He says ILO has been engaged with the Firestone workers to try and improve conditions. "ILO came to the plantation and showed us how to do inspections and ensure workers are not being exploited." ♦

# The UN has gone beyond peacekeeping

Since winning the multi-party Presidential election in 2005, Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has completed three years and is half way through her term. In an exclusive interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka and Staff Writer J. Wesley Washington, Africa's first ever elected female President discusses her achievements, the impact of the global economic crisis, the role played by the United Nations in Liberia and the challenges to reconciliation and democracy in the country.

**Three years now since you became President -- half way through your term. You had set out a number of goals when you were inaugurated. What progress has Liberia achieved since then?**

First of all we have put forth a vision for the country and we have formulated a development agenda. That agenda has four pillars which we consider the basis for recovery. Under those pillars we have put our economic policies in place. We were able to get our debt relief programme well underway after completing the staff monitoring programme with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). We've reached a decision point under the HIPC [Heavily Indebted Poor Countries] Programme. We expect that the US\$4.7 billion debt will all be a thing of the past sometime toward the end of early next year.

We've been able to attract investment. Already, we have renegotiated certain concession agreements, for example, Firestone, Arcelor Mittal. We're in the process of negotiating four other concession agreements two of which have already been concluded and are with our legislators. That's going to mean a lot of jobs.

We've started to rebuild the infrastructure, road systems throughout the country, that's an ongoing process. Schools and clinics are being rehabilitated. We've enforced compulsory primary education and that has resulted in [an increase of] 40 per cent enrollment at the primary level in the public schools.

We've been able to attract back several bilateral partners that had left the country. Today we have resources coming from

partners that's averaging about US\$300 million a year and that's used to supplement our own budget which was US\$80 million when we came in. It's now close to US\$300 million.

Agriculture has become one of our main activities. We've been trying to revive our rubber industry with some difficulties now that the price has fallen.

What I think we've also done is change the image of the country from a failed state to one that now has the potential to be a successful post-conflict story.

I should also mention the security sector where the new army -- some 2000 -- has completed their first training after a very vigorous vetting process. The rest of the security apparatus still has some problems but are on the way to being trained.

We've been able to get the UN Security Council to keep the UNMIL arrangement in place with the peacekeeping force even though they're reduced and have a drawdown plan, but still they're here. They're providing security for the country. Our partnership with UNMIL has gone very well. So all in all, we think in three years we've made all the important first steps right across the agenda that we put forth to the nation and we still have challenges.

**Reconciliation was among the major challenges you had promised to tackle. Have Liberians found reconciliation?**

Not totally. That's still one of our challenges. We've had a fractured country for a long period of time; many types of conflicts. We've had dictatorships for many years, either military or benevolent civilian dictatorship. Today, we have multipar-

ty democracy that was tested for the first time in the country's history from which I emerged. We still have problems with the opposition who still say an opposition is a person that always must take government to task.

We still have some ethnic problems.



We have problems of land that's causing a lot of divide in the society. We're still waiting to get the legislation on the Land Commission to try to tackle that problem. So reconciliation, some of it has taken place, some of it is ongoing. There's a lot more to be done on that.

On the other hand, we have had peace for over five years and we still talk to each other. We meet on the football field and we act as though we're one big happy family until we go back to our own corners and our own agendas.

The Truth and Reconciliation



# keeping...

Commission was meant to be a healing process. That also has run into some problems because of the lack of honesty, accusations, even divide within the Commission itself. All of that have taken away from the reconciliation goals, so we need to work at it.

## **How do you describe the support the United Nations has given you in achieving these goals?**

The support of the UN has been critical. In the first instance, the safety of the nation, the security of the nation has rested primarily on the UN forces and they have done a very good job. They've been deployed all over the country. They've



also been very centrally involved in the training of our police force.

The UN has also gone beyond peacekeeping. The engineering contingents of the peacekeeping forces have made their skills and their equipment available to the government. They've done well in many of our rural areas doing secondary roads that have enabled our farmers to be able to get our goods to market. Our own Public Works has been able to work more efficiently in rest of the infrastructure work through their help. So they've been a tremendous partner to the government.

## **UNMIL is now downsizing. Are you worried that the peacekeepers will be gone too soon? How long do you like to see the UN peacekeepers stay in Liberia?**

I'm not worried about it because I continue to engage our partners to make sure that there is an appreciable peacekeeping force here through our next elections in 2011. If, as I believe, our next elections go smoothly and we have a transition and between now and then we have more of reconciliation and development, then I would say the country is now safely on course. Then one can talk about a rapid drawdown of the UN forces. By that time I also hope our own security forces would have completed their training and be able to take on the responsibility for security.

## **There was this coup in Guinea recently. Do you think it will have any significant impact on Liberia?**

As it stands now, I would say no. Because we are holding the new military leaders to the promise they've made to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) that they are going to move towards elections and on to multi-party democracy by the end of this year.

If the coup were to go wrong and we've seen so many examples of that around the continent, in which the military leaders don't choose the path of democracy but were to begin to reinforce all the elements of military rule – suppression – if that happens then we'll have problems.

## **Are you worried about the ongoing global economic crisis? Is it impacting the lives of Liberians and the development goals of the government?**

Yes, Liberia is beginning to feel the effect of the global financial situation. For one thing, the prices of some of our major commodities like rubber have dropped considerably and that's affecting all the small farmers who were beginning their replanting programme. It's going to affect our revenue because our major concessions are going to have less profit as a result.

Another major source of our foreign exchange is remittances -- the money that comes in from Liberians abroad. Already we've seen a 50 per cent reduction in the

level of those remittances and those remittances come to poor families here, so it means that those families will be out of those resources.

Investments -- so far we're keeping our potential investors engaged in discussion. Already there is a slowdown even in those who have started their operations. They have indicated that because of the global crisis they're going to stretch out their period. So the whole world is in for a tough ride and Liberia will not escape it.

## **Would you say that democracy has taken root in Liberia? Do you think that there are major challenges facing democracy?**

Democracy has taken root in terms of the freedoms that people now enjoy -- freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of worship, some of the things that were not available to the public before. But we have not built the institutions. For example, our political system is very much still centralized around personalities rather than political institutions. So we need to do more.

Democracy also carries with it certain responsibilities. I say your freedom ends where my freedom begins. So that responsibility has not been built into our system but we're on the road. We're going through a transformation in that regard. I believe there is no escaping the fact that we are going to face these kinds of obstacles until we have strong institutions that function in society and provide the kinds of checks and balances that are required in a democracy.

## **One last question. During the election campaign you said you will serve as President if elected just for one term. Any second thoughts now?**

I'm still thinking about that subject. Like I said, my main concern now is continuity in the development effort -- to ensure that the agenda that we have now embarked upon is carried out.

If there are any second thoughts, it's that how do I ensure that continuity is there so that we progressively go towards the goals that we have set and we don't have any reversals.

**Thank you, Madam President.**



# "Sexual Offences Court"

By J. Wesley Washington

To counter the increasing number of sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia, the government has established a new court within the First Judicial Circuit of Montserrado County known as the Criminal Court "E" or the "Sexual Offences Court".

Established under Chapter 25 of the Judiciary Law of 1972, this court has exclusive original jurisdiction over the crimes of rape, gang rape, aggravated involuntary sodomy, involuntary sodomy, voluntary sodomy, corruption of minors, sexual abuse of wards and sexual assault. Sexual offence cases pending before other criminal courts that had not commenced trial when Criminal Court "E" was established will now be transferred there.

The court rehabilitation project for which Denmark provided nearly US\$212,000, was executed by the United Nations Population Fund in collaboration with the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, in

welcoming the establishment of the Court during the dedicatory ceremony at the Temple of Justice, observed that governance and the rule of law continue to pose challenges to the government's overall efforts to meet its development priorities.

"We cannot attract the investors or keep them here if they do not have confidence that when they go to the courts, there will be justice and the judgment they will receive will be fair and in accordance with our laws. So if there's anything that's holding Liberia back today, if there's anything that prevents us from getting the maximum from the great partnerships that we have all over the world, it is because we Liberians are not doing what we ought to do to build the confidence of others in our processes and our procedures of governance and the rule of law," President Sirleaf said. She noted that unless concrete actions are instituted to embed the rule of law, delays are inevitable in the country's development.

Liberia's justice system faces enormous challenges. They include the lack of adequate funding, shortage of qualified judicial officials, the lack of infrastructure

including courts and prisons, archaic rules of procedure, poor case management and low salaries.

Chief Justice Johnnie Lewis expressed his appreciation to the Danish government for its support in rehabilitating the facilities. He noted that Denmark's continuous support, which focuses on protecting and safeguarding the rights of women, has been crucial in the government's efforts to strengthen Liberia's justice system.

Danish Ambassador accredited to Liberia, Stig Barlyng, said the project is about justice for women and in a national perspective an important contribution to national priorities set out in the Poverty Reduction Strategy and the National Plan of Action against Gender-based Violence. He noted that the rehabilitation of the court is intended to send a strong message to perpetrators of rape and other gender-based violence that this scourge has no place in the Liberian society. "Rapists will be prosecuted and judged. Time for impunity is over," he emphasized.

Equipped with closed-circuit televisions, Liberia's new Criminal Court "E" is a novelty in Africa. Victims of rape and





President Sirleaf at the opening of the court

# Dedicated

other sexual related offences are shielded from the public during trials and allowed to testify in camera. Although witness protection is known in other African countries, its use in rape cases will be introduced in Liberia for the first time.



Another significant feature of this new Sexual Offences Court is its “fast track” nature. Cases will be handled and judgment rendered expeditiously. The chambers of the judge and offices of the staff assigned to the court were also rehabilitated and furnished.

2008 statistics show that of the crimes under the jurisdiction of this court, statutory rape, rape, corruption of minors, in descending order, are quite prevalent. The LNP also notes with grave concern the rise of other crimes outside this court’s jurisdiction that affect women and children.

Assistant Commissioner Bennetta Holder Warner, head of the Women & Children Protection Section of the Liberia National Police, expressed her joy at the establishment of Criminal Court “E” and the introduction of its fast track process. “I think this court will help to ensure justice to the aggrieved and this will be done speedily,” she said.

Cllr. Ceaneh Clinton-Johnson, appointed and commissioned as one of the judges of this Court, has cautioned Liberians that Criminal Court “E” will not be a court of sentiments. A former Deputy Justice Minister who developed a passion for pursuing issues of sexual offenses while in that capacity, Clinton-Johnson said she is going to this new Court to dis-

charge her duties to the dictates of her conscience with transparent justice being the hallmark.

A major challenge, according to the newly appointed judge, is identifying and employing trained personnel to work with this court. “This is a learning experience for the Liberian people and you need qualified and trained people to work in such a system to make it effective,” Clinton-Johnson said adding that though these challenges are not insurmountable.

In an effort to improve the response to the high incidence of sexual offenses and reduce the incidence of sexual violence, the Ministry of Justice’s internal prosecutorial structure has been reformed through the creation of the Sexual Gender Base Violence Crimes Unit (SGBV Crimes Unit). Launching the Unit, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said now is the time to ensure that proper mechanisms are put into place to protect vulnerable women and girls. She noted that Liberia has a Constitution that is of good quality, statutes and laws that can pass the test of time in the protection of people, and sound policies that can match others elsewhere. However, “our challenge is to move from those instruments to action; to implement and enforce those laws and statutes that we’ve created and hold dear,” she said.

Speaking during the dedicatory ceremony of the newly acquired and refurbished premises on Capitol Hill recently, Liberia’s Justice Minister, Cllr. Philip A.Z. Banks said that this is pilot project being implemented in collaboration with international partners including the UN Peace Building Fund for Liberia, UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), UN Development Programme (UNDP), The Carter Center, UN Population Fund (UNFPA) and Pacific Architects & Engineers (PAE).

The project, according to the Justice Minister, will be implemented in three phases beginning with the establishment of the SGBV Crimes Unit in Monrovia. It is expected to later expand to other counties. In Monrovia, the Unit will immediately begin to work beginning with prosecuting all new cases in the newly established Criminal Court “E”. Cllr. Felicia Coleman, a seasoned female lawyer, has been appointed Chief Prosecutor of the SGBV Crimes Unit. ♦



Mensa-Bonsu addresses the Corrections Officers

# UNMIL Trains Senior Corrections Officers

By J. Wesley Washington

**T**he UN Mission in Liberia, in collaboration with the Liberian government and its partners, recently completed an eight-week senior management training for 19 correctional superintendents and senior officers aimed at strengthening the correctional system of Liberia. The training was intended to equip senior officers with the necessary skills and knowledge in handling corrections activities as well as enable them exhibit best practices in prison management.

Addressing the training participants, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, urged the Liberian government to continue supporting its corrections system. She appealed to corrections superintendents and senior officers to keep the government, through their chain of command, well informed about the situation in their facilities including problems for which assistance is required.

The Deputy UN Envoy advised the senior officers to maintain what has been achieved in the system so far and urged them to share the knowledge and skills acquired from the training with their colleagues. She further cautioned the senior corrections officers about prisoners' rights which remain a great challenge to all. "Prisoners are in prison as punishment and not for punishment," she reiterated.

Mensa-Bonsu called on officers to

treat prisoners in a way that will enhance their rehabilitation and facilitate their reintegration into their communities when they complete their terms. "Abuse or torture of prisoners is unacceptable. Prisoners are entitled to air and exercise and it is your duty to ensure that they enjoy these rights," she reiterated.

Liberia's Justice Minister, Cllr. Philip A.Z. Banks, III, serving as keynote speaker, lamented the problem of overcrowded prisons around the country. As a way of resolving the situation and to provide a "fast track" process for prison inmates, Minister Banks disclosed that a strategy is being worked out in collaboration with the Judiciary to carry the court to the prison beginning this year. "Where we cannot take our prisoners to court, we will try our best to see that the courts are taken to our prisoners so that they can be tried expeditiously," Banks said, noting that the Judiciary is supportive in ensuring that prison inmates have access to justice speedily.

A court room is being prepared at the Monrovia Central Prison so cases will now be handled right at the prison compound by judges. On certain days magistrates will come from the various magisterial courts under whose authority the inmates were detained to try them. Minister Banks said this will help the government dispose of a good number of cases at the prison. He also pledged the government's continued support to ensure that corrections remain an important component of its operations.

Banks used the occasion to strongly

warn prisoners against jail breaks. "I want to make it clear that the fact that we have some folks that have escaped prison doesn't mean that we're going to tolerate those kinds of events. If anyone escapes from a prison, we have laws to prosecute him or her. We will ensure that there are no attempts to escape from prisons. If you want to be out of prison, do not commit crimes."

Lengthy pre-trial detentions have led to the over-crowding in Liberia's prisons. This eventually led to a jail-break at the Monrovia Central Prison last December where over 200 prison inmates escaped. Most of them have been recaptured. Concerns have been raised within the human rights community about the right of accused to be tried without unwarranted delay.

In addition to general management training, the 19 correctional superintendents and senior officers (including four females) intensively covered issues on human rights, code of conduct, gender mainstreaming and the treatment of juveniles and other vulnerable offenders. Facilitators were drawn from UNMIL, the Liberian Government and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The participants were selected from eight of Liberia's 15 counties including Bomi, Gbarpolu, Grand Bassa, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Margibi, and Maryland. The next training session will cover senior officers of the remaining counties. ♦



# Ashamed No More



Fistula survivors have acquired new skills

By J. Wesley Washington

**A**t the tender age of 18 years, Zoe became pregnant and was expecting to become a young mother when her nightmare with fistula started after she went into labour. For four long days she was in pain and nearly died in the village which had no health facility. Left at the mercy of untrained and unqualified health workers, the teenager developed fistula. Also, her child was still born.

Without any vocational skills and stigmatized by fistula, Zoe, 27, had every reason to be pessimistic. But not any more. Today, Zoe has hopes of a promising future. Her new hope stems from a very successful fistula operation last year at the John F. Kennedy (JFK) Fistula Center and her acquiring sewing skills at the Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Centre.

“For one year I was unable to walk properly. My mother used to do everything for me even to feed me,” she says. After nine years of searching for solution, Zoe is ready to start life anew and is thankful to United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) for restoring her dignity and giving her a reason to smile. “I thank God for everything,” she says, demonstrating her new skills with the sewing machine.

Zoe was narrating her ordeal during

programmes marking the formal opening and first graduation exercises of the Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center in Jacob Town, Paynesville, in February. She was among 17 fistula survivors that walked out of the walls of the Center with skills in tie & dye, soap making, cosmetology, pastry and tailoring in addition to being provided psychosocial counseling that started their healing process after surgery six months back. These services are provided free of charge.

UNFPA Representative Rose Gakuba said she was elated to be a part of the celebrations marking a milestone in the lives of the 17 women who through their courage and determination had transcended the stigma and discrimination surrounding fistula and had decided courageously to seek help and participate in the skills training programme. “This is also a moment of history in Liberia where today we can say with pride that Liberian doc-

tors, anesthetics and midwives are trained and actually involved in the treatment of fistula at the JFK Maternity Hospital and outreach sites around the country.” Before 2007, expatriate doctors came to Liberia occasionally and did treatment.

The graduates were reminded of the challenges ahead of them as they reintegrate in their various communities and urged to practice what they had learned and eventually become successful entrepreneurs. They were also advised to be advocates and ambassadors for those fistula patients who have not had courage and opportunity to seek help and reminded that fistula is treatable and preventable. The elated graduates received certificates, gifts, starter kits and transportation allowances.

Since the Liberia Fistula Project was launched on 6 April 2007, 332 fistula patients have so far undergone surgery. Implemented by Liberia Prevention of Maternal Mortality (LPMM) in collaboration with the JFK Medical Center and Ministry of Health & Social Welfare, the project’s major sponsor is the UNFPA.

The Programme Manager, Dr. John K. Mulbah, noted that significant progress has been made so far since the project kicked off including the training of over 200 nurses and midwives and 20 doctors in managing common obstetric emergencies such as caesarian section and fistula, among others. Fistula prevention and management has also been included in the curriculum of medical training institutions. The primary cause of fistula in Liberia is the poor socio-economic status of women and girls, especially in rural areas. ♦





# Worms Scare

By Carly Learson

As reports of swarms of voracious caterpillars laying waste to food crops started coming in from the remote regions of Bong county in January, panic spread quickly across Liberia. Army worms are pests that have devastated huge swathes of cultivation elsewhere on the African continent, devouring rice and other crops and leaving farmers with nothing. A similar outbreak could devastate the rice and cassava fields of Liberia and threaten the entire West African region.

As a result a widespread pesticide spraying operation took place and President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf declared a state of emergency. The United Nations, through UNMIL, the FAO, UNICEF and others stepped in to help wherever possible, facilitating a pesticide spraying operation across the affected counties.

Experts from Ghana and Sierra Leone

were brought in by FAO to seek advice on how to manage the pests. However, when they visited the affected areas the experts were surprised by what they saw -- a close examination revealed that the caterpillars were in fact not army worms but a different species, known only by the scientific name *Achaea catocaloides rena*.

Allan Schroeder, a consultant brought to Liberia by USAID, said there was little reason to fear the caterpillars. "They are only going to hit dry season crops," he said. "If you don't have food crops in the dry season you will be ok. But what is at risk are cash crops like cocoa." Schroeder said the caterpillars had been regularly spotted in Benin and Gabon, and were most likely linked to the harmattan winds that have recently blown across Liberia.

Local resident Henry Kolleh of Pelelei in Zota District said the first sign of the pests was when the chickens got sick. "That told us something was wrong," he said. It was soon after that a frightened neighbour fled his house on the edge of the

village as hundreds of caterpillars started coming through his front door. Kolleh said he and his neighbours lit fires on the edge of the jungle which drove the caterpillars back inside. "Now they are gone far away," he said.

The evidence is still visible in a pond where villagers say they used to collect drinking water from. The surrounding ground is covered in droppings, and the water is murky black. But the villagers say the food crops were generally untouched, with the caterpillars staying mainly on the Dahoma tree.

Several hours from Pelelei, along a barely passable road, villagers at Shankpalla don't look overtly worried about the caterpillar onslaught. However John Gborlawaoe says some people are scared to go into the forest to search for bush meat. "When there were many caterpillars the people didn't want to get them on their skin," he said. "They said they leave a mark." Now most of the caterpillars have disappeared because of spraying





Water contaminated by caterpillar droppings

tained. The agency provided 1,000 jerry cans which were distributed to villages where the water supply could be contaminated by caterpillar faeces to help people fetch water from sources further away. UNICEF has also supplied 15 hand pumps to assist villages without a secure water supply.

Sam Treglown of UNICEF says that while there has been no evidence of an increase in diarrhoeal disease in areas affected by the infestation, people whose water sources have been contaminated were being advised to use alternative water sources as a precautionary measure. "The approach being taken by partners is to improve access to unaffected water sources by repairing handpumps, upgrading protected wells, and providing jerry cans to help people collect and store

water," he said.

UNMIL has also been assisting the Ministry of Agriculture with vehicles to take the teams of sprayers from Gbarnga to the villages in Zota district, while the World Health Organisation is providing support to the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

With the potential to destroy not just Liberia's food crops but also those of neighbouring countries, an army worm invasion could seriously threaten food security in the region. In the wake of the worm scare, agriculture ministers from the Mano River Union -- Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire -- met in Monrovia and appointed a technical committee to design plans of action to be implemented immediately to stave off the threat. ♦

around the village. But there are still some who have been left behind. Shankpalla Chief Junior Mekamu has worked out a way to get to them – they hate loud noises. When he makes a high-pitched squeal the trees suddenly begin to shake as the caterpillars are woken from their sleep and throw their heads from side to side.

The invading creatures have barely touched the banana trees that surround the village. There are some bite marks on a lone cocoa tree, but Mekamu says the tree has not been harvested for many years. While farmers in Liberia and neighbouring countries are breathing a sigh of relief that the feared army worm invasion was something of a false alarm, the fact that relatively little is known about the caterpillars and moths that have been spotted is still a cause for concern. The scare has also exposed Liberia's vulnerability and the lack of preparedness should a major pest attack occur. That's why a concerted effort is taking place to ensure the country is prepared if the infestation gets worse.

To assist the Government in handling what was potentially a national disaster FAO provided 1,250 knapsacks to spray the affected areas, as well as eight motorised sprayers to reach higher trees and 15 protective suits. UNICEF has played a major role with the Ministry of Health in coordinating efforts to ensure water and sanitation facilities are main-







# No More Sparkling?

By Carly Learson

**T**he global financial crisis has reached Liberia. And it is biting hard, especially all those involved in the diamond industry.

Liberia's projected diamond exports

for 2008 were US\$12 million. Things went well until October, when sales dropped dramatically to \$250,000 for the month. By November sales plummeted to \$50,000. It is a devastating blow to the industry, and some mining companies have temporarily ceased their operations. The drop in demand for diamonds has

impacted on rural employment in diamond regions, and many miners have had to look elsewhere for work, including in gold mining. The work is tough and dangerous, but many miners have few choices.

Just outside Lofa Bridge, in Grand Cape Mount County, is a small mining town called Weajue, where the shadow of





Weajue Mine in Grand Cape Mount County



Diamond dealers are only buying at a reduced price prompting fears miners are selling diamonds illegally

Bea Mountain covers enormous pits that have been dug out and chipped away over the decades in search of gold. The mine is now teeming with men who once searched for diamonds. The workers divide their labour with one person dedicated to each task on each pit – cutting through the rock with a back hoe, shovelling the rocks up to the surface, pumping water or sorting through the gravel.

From each ton of gravel the miners can extract anything from 1 to 4 grams of gold dust. But to find each gram takes a lot of work when everything is done by hand. Ascending Bea Mountain the evidence of large scale mining can be seen with caterpillars and rusty machinery scattered along the path and the remnants of exploration holes dug with high-tech equipment by American companies in the 1980s, now abandoned.

Brothers Patrick and Jones Sherman moved to Weajue from Monrovia to find work. With a gold tooth glinting in the sun and a Liberian flag wrapped around his head Patrick emerges from the bushes ready to start work. “I look young, but I’m getting old quickly,” he says. The 29-year-old says he is just waiting for the opportunity to leave mining but so far has not had any luck finding work elsewhere. Jones is committed to staying at the mine long enough to make money to go to school and study engineering.

At the top of the mountain the miners have dug almost 100 metres into the rocky ground. The shouts of the miners echo around the bright red cavernous pits. Each day the men are risking their lives climbing down the slippery edges of the holes. One man recently died when a loose pile of gravel was washed onto him during the rainy season.

Not everyone has given up on diamonds. Today the Liberian Government gives out licences to small mining companies, called class c licences. These are mainly Liberians, Guineans and other West African Nationals. The tracts are 25 acres, and operations are not mechanised. Deputy Minister for Planning and Development at the Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, Hon A. Kpandel Fayia, says there is still a lot of interest in diamond mining amongst Liberians. “For many people diamond mining is a tradi-

tion,” he says.

Further outside Lofa Bridge several small companies are exploring the river for diamonds. Prince ‘Sosoboy’ Swaray is employed by a Liberian company to search for diamonds. Using a crude breathing apparatus which involves simply holding a tube in his mouth which is attached to an old industrial machine that pumps air through the tube, he dives into the 25 foot deep river. Sosoboy says he can stay under the water for up to 6 hours digging through the sand under the water.

Dealers in Monrovia are also being hit hard. Last year there were 26 dealers, but since then nine of those have closed down their operations. One dealer said there are plenty of brokers and miners still trying to sell diamonds, but he is unwilling to buy them at the price they are asking. “We’re not buying,” he said. “And if we buy it is at a much lower cost.” If the decline in international demand continues he says he might be forced close his operation. He has no doubt that some diamonds are not even making it to the dealers at all suggesting illegal sales.

Deputy Minister Fayia is also concerned that the downturn in the market may lead miners and brokers to offer their diamonds to buyers not operating entirely within the law. The effect on the market is worrying, he says. “Once people have diamonds they need to sell them,” he said. “And there will always be someone to buy them.”

The Kimberly Process was designed to restore confidence in diamonds through a certification process that would ensure only clean diamonds made it onto the international market. Yet in a global slowdown the temptation to sell diamonds illegally is heightened as legal dealers lower their prices. Liberia is truly part of the world market when it comes to diamonds, and with the support of the UN the government of Liberia will be working to ensure the hard won credibility of resources from this country is maintained.

UNMIL has assisted the government through its Quick Impact Projects to construct diamond offices. This has allowed the government to monitor the diamond trade and ensure that the precious stones are no longer the tainted “blood diamonds.” ♦



# Living Amidst Explos

By Sulaiman Momodu

**U**nexploded Ordnances (UXOs) are explosives such as bombs and grenades that did not explode when they were employed and still pose a risk of detonation years after they were used or discarded. Such devices litter many communities across Liberia. They are the remnants of the country's ghastly civil war.

Although there have been no reported deaths from these UXOs, the potential

risks remain high. The success in preventing any fatalities so far owes a great deal to the UNDP Small Arms Control Programme, which works in close collaboration with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the Liberian security forces and local communities. To date more than 1,500 explosive devices have been cleared by the Programme with Nimba county accounting for the majority of them followed by Bong and Grand Gedeh counties.

UNDP's Small Arms Control Chief Technical Advisor Napoleon Abdulai

names Lofa, parts of Nimba and Bong counties - fierce battle grounds during the civil war - as areas where UXOs are particularly concentrated. "Every week our team in Lofa collects UXOs. We believe that this is just the tip of the iceberg because even in Lofa County, we have just covered only Vahun, Foya and Voinjama districts," says the UNDP officer, pointing out that the Programme is yet to cover several counties.

UXOs have been found in dwelling houses, markets, schools, hospitals, bushes, roadsides, in trees, streams and rivers,



among others. Sensitization activities by UN peacekeepers and UNDP personnel are ongoing to educate people on how to identify the dangerous objects. They are encouraged to put a red tape or red piece

school children took Small Arms staff and UNMIL security personnel to an area in the woods where grenades were found hidden.

With small arms and light weapons

contingent commander of Bangladesh engineers, Lt.-Col. Shaheedul Islam, says since deployment in March last year the peacekeepers have disposed of 22 UXOs mostly discovered in and around Ganta, the county's capital. It was in Nimba that the civil war first erupted on Christmas Eve in 1989.

While UN peacekeepers have disposed of hundreds of UXOs, in Voinjama, a UXO stuck in a tree generated lots of fear among residents as it was very tricky to handle and had the potential to destroy property. "In this particular case, the Pakistani engineers took a lot of time doing a lot of calculation for weeks and we were all very anxious. Finally they gave science the benefit and prayed that nothing happened. So they felled the tree and nothing happened. There was no collateral damage," narrates Abdulai.

In exchange for surrendering weapons, the UNDP offers development projects under its Arms for Development programme.

Construction or renovation of administrative buildings, hospitals, clinics, town halls and the implementation of micro-credit form part of the projects being undertaken. The projects are mostly funded by Japan while UNDP also puts in core funds. So far, nine projects have been completed and handed over to communities while others are in progress. Last December, UNDP turned over a newly constructed Council Hall in Foya, Lofa County. The hall, named in honour of former Paramount Chief Tamba Lamie Taylor, is valued at US\$ 57,000.

This year small arms collection will expand to places like Monrovia, Grand Cape Mount and Gbarnga.

As the UN mission gradually draws down, peacekeepers are assisting to train local police personnel on safety measures during disposal of UXOs. However, many challenges remain such as lack of funds, expertise and gadgetry for the safe disposal of UXOs. As Liberians rebuild their lives in communities littered with dangerous devices, there is a need for more support to prevent people from coming in contact with these deadly remnants of war. "We need more funds to sweep the country of UXOs and other remnants of wars," appeals Abdulai. ♦



A UXO being cleared

# osives

of cloth around the area where the devices are found so that UNMIL UXO experts, mainly from Pakistan and Bangladesh, could easily identify the location for disposal. Within two days following sensitization, local residents in Foya near the Guinea border turned in rocket-propelled grenades, a Bangalore torpedo, five Kalashnikovs, three magazines, and several rounds of ammunition, among others. Also, the following day after a debate in all four schools in Foya about the best ways the youth can help to rid their communities of weapons, two elementary

still in circulation in the country despite the successful completion of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme in 2004, the Arms for Development Programme was officially launched in January 2006. The collection and disposal of UXOs is part of this programme. Recently fishermen detected a huge cache of more than 26,000 ammunition for different weapons dumped in the Morfe River in Grand Cape Mount County. UNDP worked closely with UNMIL to get the ammunition out using divers.

The Pakistani Explosive Ordnance Disposal team leader, Maj. Amjad Ali Ikram, says in 2008 more than 400 UXOs were disposed of. In Nimba County, the

# Peace, not just for Liberia

By Sulaiman Momodu

Until recently, the West African states of Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire all had one thing in common: conflict.

Last December, however, enthusiastic cultural groups and performers from the neighbouring states converged at the Fish Market Sports Football Field in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, for a three-day National Peace and Cultural Festival with the theme: Rebuilding Peace through Culture.

The conflicts that ravaged the sub-region significantly contributed to the erosion of cultural values and institutions that once fostered inter-ethnic co-existence. With West Africa now enjoying relative peace, artists determined to revive the region's cultural values thrilled their audience at their Monrovia meet with their music, dramas, storytelling and acrobatics.

Over the years, the neighbouring nations had experienced devastating conflicts which left thousands of people killed or maimed, destroyed infrastructure and forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes and countries. The journey from war to peace has been long and painstaking. The sister countries are now recovering with the assistance of current United Nations peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire while the UN mission in Sierra Leone ended in 2006 following a successful peacekeeping operation. Although Guinea also experienced an armed insurrection, it was quickly crushed but some regard the country as a potential hotspot.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who witnessed the closing ceremony, noted that the aim of the event was to bring together

not only cultural groups from the 15 counties of Liberia but also countries of the Mano River Union which have cultural similarities with Liberia to ensure that peace is sustained in the sub-region. The Peace and Cultural Festival was jointly organized by the Government of Liberia in collaboration with International Alert and partners, including the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR), Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and Comium-Liberia, among others.

"We cannot underestimate the relevance a system of this nature brings to our peace building and our conflict resolution and our peace maintenance," said Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson, recalling Liberia's journey away from the 14-year civil war.

Essentially, the festival was a celebration of peace after war and an invitation for reconciliation in the wider sub-region. It also offered a space to explore constructive means of reconciliation. The Monrovia event followed three colourful festivals in Grand Kru, Bong and Nimba counties, during which it came out clearly that building a strong and lasting peace in Liberia will mean celebrating and using the country's cultural diversity to develop a strong spirit of oneness. The festivals also led to consensus on the need to recognize and remove barriers that have prevented Liberians from celebrating cultural diversity and national unity in the past. Although Liberia's cultural heritage is quite diverse, Liberians agree that there are commonalities across ethnic communities that offer opportunities for the promotion of peace and unity.

At the close of the three-day event, participants agreed that land ownership,







customary and statutory laws, disrespect for elders by youths, the lack of women's participation in traditional councils, marginalization of people from the leeward counties, corruption, tribalism and weak justice system are the major challenges to peace.

Programme Director of International Alert Phil Vernon expressed confidence that the meeting would discover traditional norms and values and how they could be connected to already identifiable structures at the local level. "Our objective is to make sure that peace and democracy that were broken down due to war are restored," he said.

Earlier, cultural artists from Liberia's 15 counties paraded through the principal streets of Monrovia before proceeding to the festival venue. The Justice and Peace Commission, Press Union of Liberia, Center for Justice and Peace Studies and Flomo Theatre were involved with the festival.

Reminding the gathering that peace could only be possible when every Liberian, Sierra Leonean, Ivorian and Guinean decides to be peaceful, Information, Culture and Tourism Minister Laurence Bropleh, said: "We believe that in order for Liberia to be peaceful, Sierra Leone must be peaceful. In order for Guinea to have peace, Ivorians must have peace...we are tied together in the garment of mutuality in West Africa. Today, we stand to say that we welcome peace not just for Liberia, but for all of West Africa." ♦

Artists perform at the festival



# Liberian President Receives FAO's Highest Award

By Sulaiman Momodu

Once considered the breadbasket of Liberia, Voinjama, the capital of Lofa County, was in a festive mood in December as President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf arrived at the National Agricultural Fair accompanied by the Food and Agriculture Organization Director General, Jacques Diouf, senior Liberian government officials, ministers and delegations from neighbouring countries. Banners from various counties and organizations depicted messages highlighting the importance of agriculture.

Liberians who excel in various agricultural categories are publicly recognized and given awards during the annual fair as part of the efforts by the government to encourage farmers to return to the soil and boost agricultural production. This time it was not just the farmers who were being recognized but the Liberian President as well. FAO Director General conferred President Sirleaf the Ceres Award, an honour recognizing women who have made an outstanding contribution to food security and agricultural development. The award is named after the Roman goddess of agriculture. Former winners of the Ceres Award include the late Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Mother Teresa and the former President of Iceland, Vigdis Finnbogadóttir.

"The award is in recognition of the tireless efforts President Sirleaf has made in building peace and economic development of a country torn by a long and sad period of civil conflicts," said Diouf. He said the Liberian President has been instrumental in highlighting the role of the agriculture sector as a prerequisite for national development.

Receiving the Award, President Sirleaf

described the FAO honour as an achievement of all Liberian farmers, particularly women who continue to work all year round to produce food to feed their families and the nation. The Liberian leader encouraged all to go back to the soil and stressed the importance of agriculture to nation building.

UN Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj congratulated President Sirleaf for FAO's recognition for her leadership in moving the post-war nation forward in the direction of sustainable peace, security and economic growth. "Peace can only be sustained if the population is fed and enjoys a certain quality of life," said Løj, pointing out that global increase in the prices of cereals, particularly rice, can



President Sirleaf receives the award from Jacques Diouf

potentially undermine, if not reverse, the progress that has been made in restoring peace and setting Liberia on the road to economic growth.

"This is the third year in a row in this administration that we have celebrated the contribution of our farmers," Minister of Agriculture Dr. Christopher Toe, said, noting that the event was organized 2006 in Ganta and 2007 in Tubmanburg.

Harvested crops including rice, tubers, fruits, and animals including cows, chicken, goats and sheep as well as some agricultural machines were among the exhibits on display at the fair. Also present at the fair were the National AIDS Control Programme team which sensitized the gathering on HIV/AIDS, and personnel from the National Malaria Control Programme who screened farmers for malaria parasites and administered free

drugs. Several Liberian farmers received their prizes in various categories from President Sirleaf. The 2009 National Agriculture Fair is planned to take place in River Gee County.

During his two-day visit to Liberia, the FAO Director General toured projects aimed at improving agriculture and visited an FAO-donated veterinary laboratory in Fendell, near capital Monrovia. He also met with representatives of other UN agencies and with agriculture ministers from Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. ♦

## Rice, More Rice?

Dear Editor,

In the article "Rice, More Rice?" (UNMIL FOCUS, September-November 2008), you stated that the Government of William Richard Tolbert back in late '70s "applied huge import tariffs, effectively doubling the price of imported rice".

This is factually inaccurate.

In 1978/79 Minister of Agriculture Florence Chenoweth in line with President Tolbert's philosophy that Liberians who were then importing about 50 to 60 per cent of their rice needs should become self sufficient in rice growing proposed that the Government increase the price of imported rice by around 10 per cent from the subsidized price of around \$24 to \$26.

This was what triggered the rice-riots of 14 April, 1979 which some say was the proximate cause of the coup of 12 April, 1980 and the subsequent collapse of our society, the deaths of hundreds of thousands and the presence of over 10,000 UN peacekeeping troops at a cost to the international community of over \$700 million a year.

And today we are back to talking about getting to self-sufficiency in rice production again.

**Dr. Richard V. Tolbert**

Chairman

National Investment Commission (NIC)  
Monrovia, Liberia



# Nepal Contributes to Peace in Liberia

By J. Wesley Washington

**T**he landlocked Kingdom of Nepal, over 10,000 kilometres away from Liberia, was one of the first countries to provide peacekeepers to the United Nations' effort at ensuring peace in this war-ravaged West African nation. In late November 2003, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) received the advanced team of the first Nepalese Military Police Unit, which later consolidated into its full strength by 30 December 2003.

Five years on, the Nepalese has its tenth contingent in UNMIL constituting two Formed Police Units (FPUs) -- (Nepal-1 based at the Freeport of Monrovia and Nepal-2 based in Buchanan, Grand Bassa County) -- and a Military Police Unit in Monrovia. Since their deployment, the "robust" Nepalese military police and FPUs have helped maintain peace and security, especially at flashpoints in Monrovia and other parts of the country. Currently, there are two Nepalese FPUs totalling 240 officers and 15 military police officers in Liberia. In addition to these, Nepal has contributed two military observers, four staff officers and 40 soldiers to UNMIL.

As its specific mandate, the Nepalese military and FPUs provide support to the Liberian National Police (LNP) in managing public disorder, serve as back-up during joint UN Police and LNP patrol, including anti-robbery patrols, but more importantly, provide maximum security for the Monrovia Central Prison. Nepalese peacekeepers also provide security for the Zwedru Corrections Palace in Grand Gedeh County where a number of hardened criminals have been relocated since it opened a short while ago. In collaboration

with the LNP, the Nepalese military and FPUs also embark on a number of special operations including raids and cordon and search, and provide protection for Very Important Persons (VIPs) as well as undertake other operations that may be required.

The Commander of Nepal FPU-1, Superintendent Suraj Kumar Shrestha, observed that the security situation in Liberia is gradually improving as compared to when he first arrived in the country. "This is the 10th contingent of the Nepalese military police and FPUs. We arrived here on 10 August 2008. Since that time, I find that the security situation in

honesty and distinction, as well as upholding the core values of the UN Police and military," she told them.

Despite their demanding and hectic schedule, the contingents even became humanitarian workers -- conducting medical outreach programmes and building bridges and roads -- to assist the Liberian people reclaim their lives.

At the Monrovia Central Prison, the Nepalese FPU found time to share their agricultural skills with inmates aimed at making them become productive citizens when their prison terms are over. Coordinating with Correction Officers at

the compound, the Nepal-1 FPU began a skills training project in vegetable farming with the inmates, imparting agricultural skills to make them productive citizens to avoid reverting to old habits that will see them back in prison.

Since becoming a member of the UN on 14 December 1955, Nepal has committed herself to the principles and purposes enshrined in the UN Charter. The Asian nation attaches great importance to the centrality of the UN in the maintenance of

international peace and security and in promoting international cooperation for economic and social development.

Since 1958, Nepal has continuously participated in UN peacekeeping operations. Its first was the deployment of five military observers in Lebanon (UNOGIL/UN Observer Group in Lebanon). Over the last five decades, Nepal has contributed 60,000 peacekeepers in some 40 peacekeeping missions, ranking among the top five troop contributing nations. Today Nepalese peacekeepers are deployed in a number of UN Missions including Congo, Burundi, Haiti, and Sudan. ♦

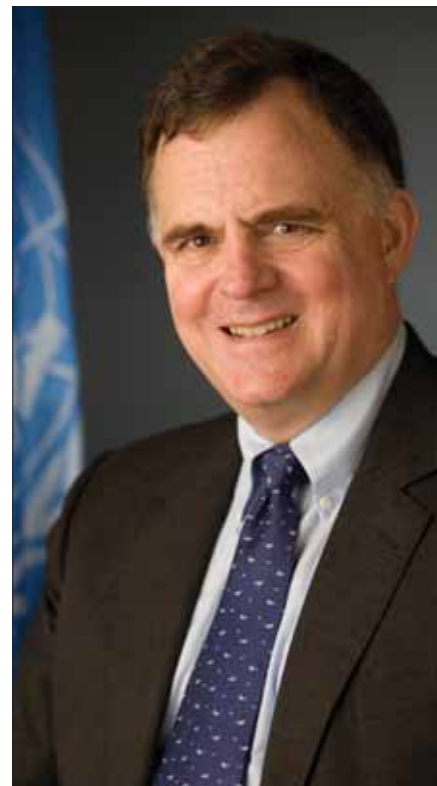


Liberia is improving greatly," he noted.

The Nepalese Units have been quite vigilant in executing their tasks during their tour of duty in UNMIL that the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj, at a medal ceremony last December, praised the peacekeepers for representing their country well. "I am very happy to be with you here today as we acknowledge the contribution of the Nepalese Contingent to the consolidation of peace in Liberia. Nepal has a long history of assisting UN peacekeeping operations. You have represented your country well by serving with courage and respect,

# “Liberia is ahead but needs more support...”

Arriving in Liberia just before the inauguration of the Government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in January 2006, the UN Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Governance who is also the Humanitarian Coordinator and the UN Resident Coordinator, **Jordan Ryan**, is leaving Liberia to take up a new appointment in New York as the Assistant Administrator of UNDP and the head of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR). In this interview with Staff Writer **Sulaiman Momodu**, he reflects on his more than three years in the post-war nation and stresses that Liberia still needs support while urging Liberians to sustain the country's peace and work towards prosperity.



**You have been in Liberia as the UN Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Governance, Humanitarian Coordinator, as well as UN Resident Coordinator for three years now. What would you say are some of the major achievements by the United Nations since the time of your arrival?**

Looking back, I think the United Nations here has made a number of key contributions. It all starts with peace. Every day, around Liberia, UNMIL peacekeepers are hard at work providing a “security” blanket. You might say the UN is providing the government the “time and space” to get the nation back on track.

The UN family has also helped ease the humanitarian emergency. Liberia has been a pilot country in the humanitarian reform efforts, and our partnership with the government, donors and NGOs, has made a difference. We helped return over 122,000 refugees and approximately 350,000 internally displaced persons and refugees home. The UN has helped with school feeding and nation-wide efforts to eradicate disease. We raised some \$10 mil-

lion in special emergency funding for quick responses.

We also have considerable achievements in our efforts to support national development goals. We have succeeded in establishing greater coherence in the UN support to the government's effort to formulate the development agenda. From the 150 day plan, to the iPRS, to the PRS (Poverty Reduction Strategy), the UN has provided considerable support to the national-led efforts. We applaud the innovative consultative processes, and we are glad to have been able to help ministers and other government officials to travel to the countryside - into villages, districts and counties - to listen to the Liberian people speak of their aspirations and their priorities.

A hallmark of the last three years is to try to do development differently. We are supporting efforts in each of the 15 counties with real work on the ground - where real change happens. This includes the partnership with the World Bank that funded the innovative road works that made use of UNMIL Force engineering capacity. It created work for hundreds of Liberians.

The UN also helped to advance the Senior Executive Service, a needed adjunct to build national capacity. Our innovative County Support Teams worked with county superintendents and local officials. The result is a better equipped local authority that can engage with the local population in advancing country development agendas. We have supported national efforts to promote equality, stop rape and gender-based violence, empower youth, and address food security and nutrition. The list goes on...

**You have been a driving force behind the ‘One UN’ or ‘At Work Together’ concept. Could you elaborate on what it means, and why it is important that we shift our focus to reflect this change?**

We are concerned not with activities but action, birds flying, not wings flapping. The entire UN family, consisting of



UNMIL as well as the UN Country Team and its 16 agencies and the World Bank, is committed to advance the twin goals of coherence and effectiveness. We believe that that we can do much more if we, the entire UN family, analyze problems together, come up with practical responses, and roll up our sleeves and get to work, drawing on our respective strengths. We like to call it a UN that is “At Work Together”. What we have done is to put national priorities as the starting point – food security, gender equality or sexual and gender based violence, justice, rule of law. Our team approach has been singled out as a “best practice”. We are proud that the UN Mission and the UN Country Team see the importance of working together to help the people of Liberia realize their dreams.

**What priority areas do you see as being important for Liberia to focus on during the next three years?**

Liberia has come a long way over the last three years. But it is very important to continue the emphasis on security and the rule of law. The security forces require equipping and training, the security forces have to work and to work well. As the government recognizes, much more needs to be done to improve infrastructure. The nation needs more electricity, adequate water and sanitation, and, of course, more roads.

But the nation also needs over the next three years to address governance challenges. Corruption needs to be rooted out. Accountability for public action needs to be championed. Also we in the UN hope that efforts at peacebuilding will become central to the nation’s transformation. Essential in moving forward is a national effort to make sure that factors that caused the conflict are addressed “root and branch”.

Underscoring all the priorities is the fact that Liberia’s development requires competent management and administration. Resources are scarce and efficiency is at a premium. If asked what the nation’s priorities are, many would respond “everything is a priority”. Perhaps what is needed is indeed more focus on management, administration and the efficient use of Liberia’s scarce resources. The manage-

ment gap was evident right from the start and this government and Liberia as a whole is playing catch up. That is one reason why the 10-year national Capacity Building Strategic Plan is being developed to build capacity of ministries and agencies.

**What are the UN and other actors currently doing to assist the Liberian Government in the area of good governance so that peace and stability in Liberia can be sustained long after the UN mission phases out?**

The UN has been a strong supporter of the original effort of good governance that came out of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP). GEMAP focused on Liberia’s financial and revenue generating institutions. In my view it has played a constructive role to put the issue of financial probity and fiscal responsibility front and center.

Corruption is another governance issue that needs attention. The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, established in September 2008, is being supported by the UN to become operational. Some argue that corruption is endemic and must be tolerated. Unless addressed, corruption will destroy the prospects of a fair, equitable society. And there are many other issues on the governance agenda: land reform, reconciliation, decentralization linked with constitutional reform. Certainly the United Nations will be involved in these as we see governance as central to ensuring that every Liberian has a stake in the nation’s future. A 10-year national Capacity Building Strategic Plan is being developed to build capacity of ministries and agencies.

**You take over at the helm of UNDP’s Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) in New York. Could you elaborate a bit about your new assignment?**

BCPR works around the world through some 100 country offices to restore the quality of life for men, women and children who have been devastated by natural disaster or violent conflict. The Bureau provides a bridge between the humanitarian agencies that handle immediate needs

and the long-term development phase following recovery. So I will be faced with questions about how to get a country back on its feet, moving forward in a way that creates jobs, builds stability and gives people hope for the future.

**Does this make your future work relevant to Liberia?**

Very much so. I had the chance to speak with the President who knows the work of BCPR. She urged me to be sure that BCPR continues to support the work of UNDP in Liberia. Of course I look forward to returning to Liberia and see first hand further progress in the effort to reconstruct Liberia. I want to see a Liberia that is at peace and a future where the children of Liberia will never experience the scourge of war which their parents had endured.

**Now that you are leaving Liberia, what message do you have for the people of Liberia?**

The peace of the last five years has provided a unique opportunity for all Liberians. My message is that now is the time for each Liberian to seize this chance – to seize this chance for peace, this chance for national development. Your land is uniquely rich. But its promise will only be realized through hard work, self-reliance and the rejection of violence. Now is the time to embrace unity of purpose and engage to make this nation what it truly can be.

**Any message for the UN colleagues you are leaving behind?**

Well, I know that some around the world like to disparage the work of the UN. I only wish those who do could come to visit Liberia. They would witness some of the most dedicated, hardworking individuals. Many have left families behind to work here often in some very remote areas of Liberia. So to my colleagues in the UN, whether military, police or civilian, I leave with a sense of gratitude. I salute your hard work and devotion to duty. It has been a true pleasure to work with each one of you. I leave with great pride to have been a member of the UN Liberia team.

**Thank you.**

# Liberians

## How long would you like UN pe

**Togar S. Galyboe**  
Paramount Chief, Kokoya, Bong County

I'm overjoyed that the UN is in Liberia. We are pleased with their performance. However, we would like to appeal to the UN authorities to allow the UN peacekeepers to remain here for the next four years, especially until after the next presidential and legislative elections scheduled for 2011.



**Rev. Robert G. Mesleh**  
Pastor, Liberia Assemblies of God Church, Ganta, Nimba County

I would appeal that the UN peacekeepers remain for the next ten years. My reason is that our neighbors, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, peace is still fragile. Anything that ruptures in any of the two countries will definitely spill over to us. Remember, once there's no peace in Guinea, it means no peace in Liberia; likewise Cote d'Ivoire. So until there is regional peace and the problem our neighbors are facing is solved, I would prefer that the peacekeepers remain to ensure our peace and stability.



**Mark D. Dowee**  
Chairman – Youth for Development, Bong County

I would say this is not the time for our UN peacekeepers to leave. I would prefer that they remain in Liberia for up to ten years because the security sector is still undergoing reform. Currently, our security personnel are not armed to combat the high wave of crimes around the country. In the interim, the UN peacekeepers are providing that for us. So until the army and other security apparatus is properly restructured and fully competent to take up the mantle, I would prefer that the peacekeepers remain to fill that void.



**Madame Nohn Tensonnon**  
Mayor, Ganta City, Nimba County

For us who have been through this war and have seen the transformation of this country since the UN peacekeepers came, it's important that they remain to consolidate the peace though we know that they should not be here indefinitely. Peace for now is still fragile. I would appreciate if they remain until we are sure that peace is lasting and irreversible.



**Madame Emma Yei Konneh**  
Commissioner, Bain-garr District, Nimba County

Well, if I should be asked how long I would want the UN peacekeepers to stay in Liberia, I would say I would want them to stay until the peace we are yearning for is gotten in its totality. I would want them to remain for at least two more years because by then we would have consolidated peace; if not by 100 percent, it would be by 90 percent.



**Emmett D. Harmon**  
Student, UL – Resident in Kakata, Margibi County

For me, I would prefer the UN peacekeepers to remain here for the rest of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's tenure. Currently, the situation in the country is still fragile. There is a proliferation of armed robbery and other crimes. So if UNMIL were to leave here today, some of us would not be please to do the kind of business we're now doing. Our lives would be at risk. Some of our friends are not willing to contribute to the reconstruction of Liberia. As such, I'm appealing to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to please extend UNMIL's mandate here.



# Speak

## Peacekeepers to stay in Liberia?



**Elvis T. Dweh, Sr.**  
Businessman, Margibi County

I would want the UN peacekeepers to remain in Liberia until the next elections considering that most former combatants are not 100 percent demobilized. They still have the concept of war. So we would appreciate if the UN could remain here until the next elections where people will have to understand the significance of life.

By significance of life, I mean some Liberians have decided to engage in the negatives – hijacking, armed robbery, and other negative things. So that's why I would prefer that UN peacekeepers remain until we can try to remodel their minds to positive undertakings.



**Joseph Timmue**  
UNMIL Security

Though that decision would be taken by the UN Security Council, personally, I would prefer that they remain here for five years to consolidate the peace process not only for Liberians but the entire sub-region. Their being here that long will also help Liberians improve their skills in their various fields of expertise and make them marketable as well as improve the living standard of Liberians.



**Ranney B. Jackson**  
Superintendent, Bong County

It is about time that Liberians become serious and responsible and start doing those things that we can do for ourselves. The peacekeepers came at a crucial time, performed very well and continue to perform very well; but, I would want them to remain another five years, so as to consolidate the peace. By that time Liberians would have realized that this peace is perpetual because there are those who are waiting for the President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to complete her term to foment trouble. However, for those who would want to rupture the peace in our society, they must now join us to make Liberia a better place for all of us.



**Mrs. Monah W. Young**  
Human Resources Manager, Ministry of Health & Social Welfare, Kakata

I would want them to stay for another five years while our security sector is being restructured. If they prematurely depart, I'm of the opinion that detractors to our peace process would want to destabilize the country. So they should remain until our army and security sector are restructured and are performing to the optimum, they should remain.



**Cece Togbah**  
Money Exchanger, Margibi County

I would prefer that the UN peacekeepers remain as long as they see fit taking into consideration our security sector reform is still in its infancy and the Armed Forces of Liberia is still undergoing restructuring and training. Liberia still has people with a hidden agenda so they would have to be careful how they disengage from Liberia.



**Rev. Alexander Freeman**  
Principal, Harriet E. Parkingson Memorial Academy, Ganta City

From my observation, I feel that peacekeepers should remain until rumours of war and threat of insecurity are all done away with. Right now the peace seems to still be fragile where there are still differences and disputes in various areas of the country. I feel that as long as these disputes are still around, there will not be peace until they are settled. So the peace only seems to be around only because the UN peacekeepers are around, but with the absence of UNMIL, there are those that are brave enough to take up arms because of these disputes and tribal differences. As such, I feel that the peacekeepers should be around for about 10 years.



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