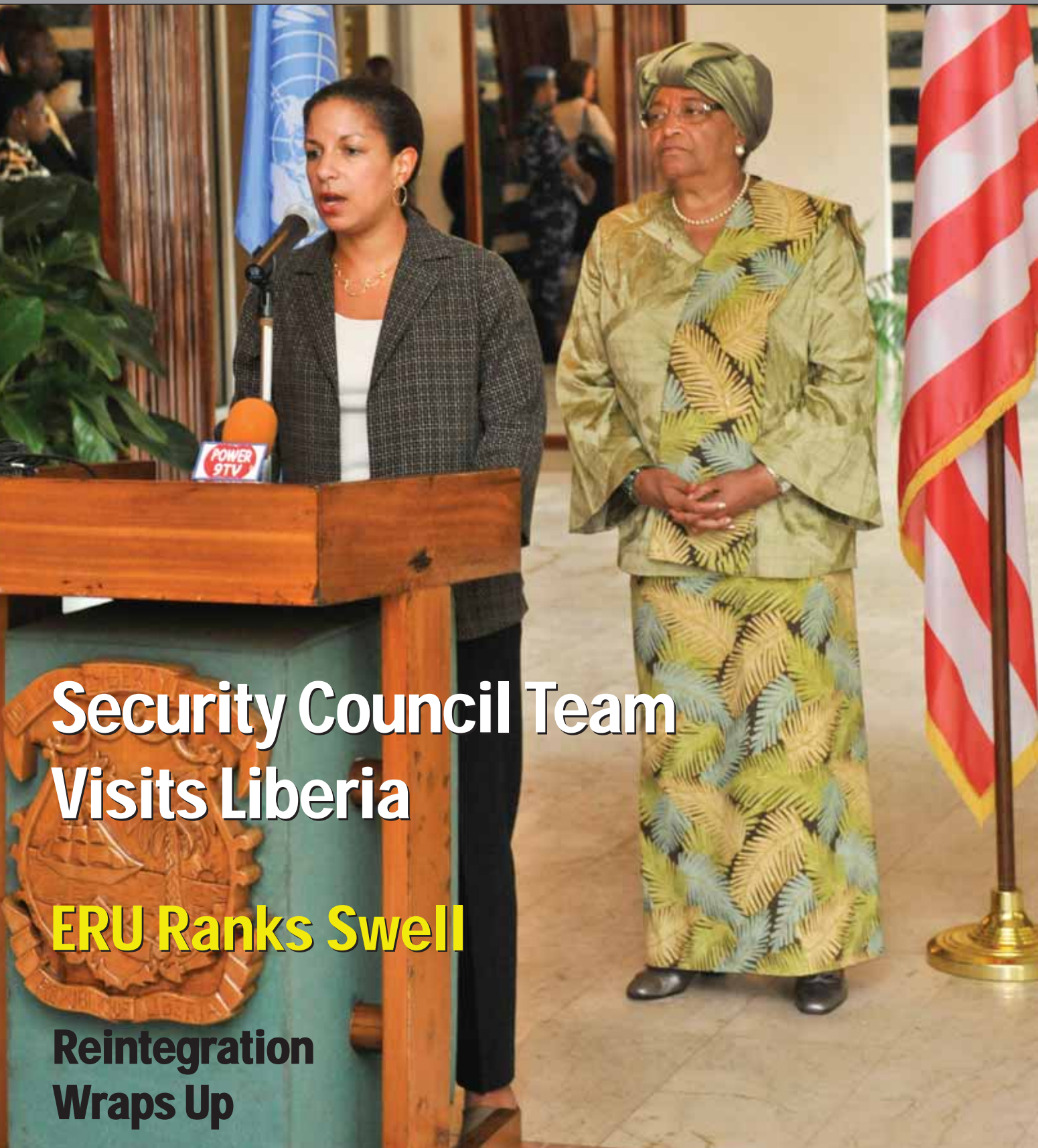


UN FOCUS



Vol. 5, No. 03

March - May 2009



Security Council Team Visits Liberia

ERU Ranks Swell

Reintegration Wraps Up



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

The last three months have provided a number of opportunities to give key external partners an impression of the progress made since the civil war, and the remaining challenges to peace and security in Liberia.

For the first time since 2004, the UN Security Council visited the country. The delegation, led by Dr. Susan Rice, US Ambassador to the United Nations, visited from 19-20 May, thereby demonstrating once again the importance the international community attaches to Liberia's progress towards sustainable peace. The delegation, which comprised representatives of all 15 members of the Council, met with a wide spectrum of actors to assess the progress achieved since the end of the conflict and the challenges that remain. In addition to meeting with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Cabinet Ministers, the delegation held discussions with UNMIL leadership, representatives from the UN Country Team, commissioners of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as a representative selection of civil society organizations. The delegation also held talks with major international investors, visited the Monrovia Central Prison and the National Police Academy and witnessed ex-combatants graduating from a skills training programme.

In late April, a Technical Assessment Mission (TAM), consisting

of senior officials and experts from UN Headquarters in New York, visited Liberia to take stock of UN operations and to assess the country's continuing need for international support. During their week-long visit, members of the team held consultations with President Johnson Sirleaf, senior government officials, the UN Country Team and a number of other key partners. The team will soon submit its findings to the Security Council and highlight the mission's assessment of the situation in Liberia, and its recommendations for the short to mid-term future of UNMIL.

Earlier in March, I presented the Secretary-General's report on Liberia to the Security Council. This was an opportunity to highlight the progress the country has made and the major challenges that Liberia still faces in the process of peace consolidation. My presentation also laid the groundwork for the TAM and Security Council assessment missions that followed in April and May.

As Liberia moves towards the 2011 Presidential elections, which will be a crucial test of the country's peace consolidation so far, it is vital that the international community continues to support the Government in its efforts to enhance security and economic development. UNMIL will continue to support Liberia to realize critical milestones and cement the hard-won peace across the nation.

Ellen Margrethe Løj

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



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

A Security Council delegation led by US Ambassador to the UN Dr. Susan Rice visited Liberia in May to assess Liberia's progress towards peace and development and the performance of the UN Mission in Liberia with a view to determining the need for continued involvement of the international community to sustain peace and development in the country.



An additional batch of 74 Emergency Response Unit of the Liberia National Police officers graduate from the National Police Academy, taking the number of the elite police unit to nearly half of its targeted strength of 500. The elite unit is being trained especially to deal with armed criminals, violent crimes in progress, hostage situations and terrorist activities.



Almost six years after its launch, Liberia's Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration programme aimed at absorbing into mainstream society the country's ex-combatants involved in the civil war comes to a formal end. During the programme, over 100,000 former fighters, including 11,000 children, were disarmed and assisted.

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Ermanuel Tobey/UNMIL

President Sirleaf and Dr. Rice address the media



Security Council Team Assesses Lib

At the end of a visit to Liberia to assess the country's progress towards peace and development and the performance of the UN peacekeeping force deployed since 2003, a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) delegation led by the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Dr. Susan Rice, said Liberia's national security remained fragile.

From what the delegation had heard and seen, there was a relative degree of calm in Liberia despite frequent incidents of violent crime, Rice said during the one-day visit in May as part of a week-long trip to the continent. "Yet, the message we have received is that this current calm is highly fragile and could be disrupted at any point with little warning. Our conclusion is that this is a security environment that needs close attention and care."

While jointly addressing the media

with Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Rice said it is critically important that the security forces and the police evolved into a fully effective, responsible, trained and equipped body that can provide effective protection for the people and their property.

On the issue of the travel ban imposed by the Council on some Liberians, the US Ambassador said: "The UN Security Council has to maintain sanctions on certain individuals who the Council continues to believe pose a risk to Liberia and to regional peace and security through their actions. The Security Council imposed the sanctions and has not to date taken a decision to change them."

During the whistle-stop visit, the delegation met with a wide spectrum of people, reviewed the progress Liberia has achieved and the challenges that remain. "The Security Council has been struck by the tremendous progress the UN Mission

in Liberia (UNMIL) is making. It is undoubtedly a UN success story," Rice remarked.

In addition to meeting with President Johnson Sirleaf and Cabinet Ministers, the UNSC team held discussions with the leadership of UNMIL, the UN Country Team, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as well as civil society organizations. The delegation also met with officials of Buchanan Renewals and Mittal Steel companies and UN peacekeepers, among others. The delegation visited the National Police Academy and the Monrovia Central Prison where there have been two jail breaks in recent times. On the outskirts of the capital, the delegation witnessed the graduation of ex-combatants from a reintegration programme. Rice distributed certificates to the ex-combatants much to their delight as they return to their communities with skills to earn a livelihood and contribute to national recon-



Meeting with the Cabinet

Liberia's Peace

struction.

President Johnson Sirleaf lauded the role of UN peacekeepers in ensuring security which she noted had enabled Liberia to embark on the security sector reform and to forge the country's development agenda. She, however, stressed the need for continued and enhanced support to the security sector and justice and the rule of law, a view shared by the Council members.

While it was the first visit by Rice to Liberia, it was the second by the Security Council since the deployment of UNMIL as part of the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which brought the country's 14-year civil war to an end. Prior to visiting Liberia, the delegation comprising representatives of all the 15 countries currently on the Council, visited Ethiopia, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. ♦

SM



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

Delegation visits Monrovia Prison



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

At the Police Training Academy (top); briefing by Indian FPU (below)





and development efforts.

The first Joint “One UN” Office in Voinjama brings together seven UN agencies – Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the UN Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), World Food Programme (WFP), and World Health Organization (WHO) – together with UNMIL. While the Voinjama office opened last year, the one in Zwedru opened in March this year.

Shortly before his departure from Liberia, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Jordan Ryan inaugurated the three-storey building office in Zwedru. “Our goal is to support the Government and the people of Liberia, our activities need to be aligned with national priorities, county priorities, and

At Work Together

Aimed at enhancing the synergy among the various UN agencies present in Liberia, two Joint “One UN” offices have opened in the country. The launching of the offices in Voinjama, Lofa County, and in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh, now enables UN personnel to share facilities and expertise, undertake joint assessments and collaborate in planning, programming, implementing and monitoring projects to enhance effectiveness and maximize output.

The principle of “At Work Together” under the “One UN” concept helps members of the UN family to draw on the

knowledge, best practices and comparative advantages of one another and external partners in search of collaborative solutions, rather than performing individually, as has often been the tendency in the past.

Since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in August 2003, the security situation has been steadily improving in post-war Liberia, with a high degree of collaboration amongst all actors. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) have been actively supporting the Liberian government in its reconciliation, recovery



priorities of the people, which are set out in the County Development Agendas,” he said at the opening ceremony that was attended by UN agency representatives, UNMIL personnel, Liberian government officials and other development partners. “We have done a lot of planning and lot of work together. It is time for us to change from ‘plenty talk’ to ‘plenty work now’,” he added and called on the “one-UN family” to keep in mind that all UN workers are the same guests in Liberia with the same purpose to work harder and effectively together. “The one-UN staff should as much as possible project that image of the United Nations that collaborates together even though we have different agencies and mandates,” he pointed out.

Liberia’s Planning and Economic Affairs Minister Amara N. Konneh said Liberians need to emulate the fine example set by the UN in cutting down on cost

and making full use of limited resources, especially during the current period of economic downturn. He urged Liberians working within the joint UN office to learn from the wealth of experience of the international staff for a better tomorrow.

Grand Gedeh Superintendent Christopher Beh Bailey said the joint office will make it easier for meetings with the agencies and for better working relations. The “One UN” building in Zwedru, named Tubman Palace in honour of Liberia’s 18th President, William V.S. Tubman, was comprehensively looted during Liberia’s civil war but was rehabilitated by UNMIL. In Voinjama, the office was largely built by the UN peacekeeping mission.

Field Support Team Coordinator Catarina Fabiansson says the establishment of the offices has indeed assisted in improving the coordination of activities

and consolidation of reporting in the field. Added to the launching of the joint offices, the new field structure with Head of Field Offices in each of the fifteen counties aims to enhance the effectiveness of UN’s field presence as a whole. The Heads of Field Offices were appointed last December by the UN Special Representative to facilitate the work of the UN at the county level and ensure that all UN staff act as one County Support Team.

“The Heads of the Field Office have delegated responsibility by the UN Special Representative to facilitate the work of the United Nations at the county level, and in that capacity serve as focal points for liaison with Government authorities, representatives of civil society and other relevant partners at the county and district levels,” says Fabiansson. ♦

UN staff in Voinjama with senior officials at the launch of the new office





Vice President Joseph Boakai inspects a guard of honour



ERU Ranks Swell

Michael Kojo, a resident of the Monrovia suburb of Barnersville wouldn't wish for another Christmas morning like the one he had last year. As he was waking up with plans for a good Christmas day, a gang of thieves carrying guns and other deadly weapons was trying to break the doors of his house to forcibly enter. However, thanks to the agility, speed, and professionalism of the new elite police unit, the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) of the Liberian National Police (LNP), Kojo's life and possessions were saved.

"The ERU officers saved my life," said Kojo, explaining his ordeal. "Had it not been for the swift response of the ERU, I might not have been alive today as the robbers were determined to break down my doors to get to me. When I contacted the ERU, in a very short time they came to my rescue. The ordeal did not end without exchanges of gunfire before the robbers fled the scene," he said. Despite

the end of the 14-year civil conflict, residents of Liberia's capital Monrovia and its suburbs have become vulnerable to an upsurge in criminal activities, notably armed robbery.

Though not yet up to its targeted strength, the elite police unit is trained to deal with crimes which may require the use of firearms -- specifically in the arrest of armed criminals, violent crimes in progress, hostage situations and armed terrorist activities. It also deals with riot control, anti-crime patrol in crime prone areas and is expected to provide assistance in major disaster situations.

Late last year, the first group of 139 officers of the ERU graduated from the National Police Training Academy. Recently, an additional batch of 74 officers (73 male and one female) of Class III graduated after completing intensive classroom and physical training. This new batch of graduates brings the total number of trained ERU officers to 210, including only two females. The ERU Programme

Manager Damon Brown hopes to have the targeted 500-strong ERU ready before the end of the year.

Liberia's Vice President, Dr. Joseph N.





Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu at the graduation

Boakai, speaking at the graduation of the new batch, stressed the importance of respecting the dignity of all persons while at the same time challenging the new graduates not to disappoint their compatriots. “You represent hope. Fine feathers make fine birds; we will seek support to prepare you for the challenges ahead,” he said. He reiterated the government’s support to make them comfortable while performing

New graduates demonstrate their skills



their duties. The Vice President praised the United States Government and other international partners for being supportive of the country’s security sector reform.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, advised the ERU graduates to display sound judgment, discipline, restraint, responsible behaviour and unquestionable integrity, hallmarks of every law enforcement officer of repute. She reminded the new graduates that as members of an elite corps of LNP officers, they were assuming the onerous yet honourable responsibility of protecting their communities against untoward criminal activity and helping to make Liberia a more secure society. “Such security will not be achieved or sustained unless your actions are tempered with responsibility and accountability,” Mensa-Bonsu cautioned.

Over the period, the new graduates will be assessed by their advisors and the training team. They will also be evaluated to see if they need specific training or whether they will continue with in-service training that is held three times a week. “Graduates will continue training while we continue to assess their performance to determine the need of each officer,” Brown noted.

The ERU Programme Manager said though there have been recruitment drives aimed at attracting more women into the Unit, the response has been lukewarm mainly because of the perception relating to what the ERU does. Brown said beyond patrols, tackling armed robbers and hostage operations, there are other areas within the ERU that female officers could function efficiently, including operations, medical, communications, and transportation.

Some 82 officers constituting Class-4 commenced training in the second week of May and their graduation is expected to take place in early August. At full strength, the ERU is to have its resources and capabilities available throughout Liberia by dividing the unit into three tactical operations groups – one in Monrovia and two strategically located in the leeward counties. The exact location and timing of deployment are yet to be decided by the Liberian Government.

Training of ERU personnel began on 2 January 2008. Those selected are active LNP officers. Each candidate undergoes a vetting process that includes a background investigation by the UNPOL staff, medical and psychological screening, physical agility test and an interview. ♦

JW



Monrovia Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre and Headquarters

Boosting Maritime Safety

The Kenya Airways flight that crashed a few miles into the Atlantic Ocean minutes after taking off from Abidjan's Felix Houphouet-Boigny Airport on 30 January 2000 was carrying 169 passengers and 10 crew members. Only 10 survived and seven of them were not located for at least three hours after the accident took place a little after 9 p.m. local time. Many lives were lost because of the lack of adequate search and rescue facilities in place.

More recently, just off the coast of Liberia's Grand Bassa County, the captain of the distressed MV Jeffery travelling from Monrovia to Maryland County sent out an SOS message after the vessel

encountered problems. Again, due to the lack of adequate search and rescue facilities, a 15-year old girl drowned after most of the 19 people onboard decided to swim ashore.

These incidents highlight the need to enhance the capacity for maritime search and rescue as well as effective responses to maritime security threats around Africa, especially now with the increasing incidents of piracy.

A regional approach for search and rescue services in western, southern and eastern Africa was launched in October 2000. The concept, first proposed at the International Maritime Organization (IMO) Conference on Search and Rescue (SAR) and the Global Maritime Distress

and Safety System (GMDSS) in Florence, Italy, was subsequently endorsed by IMO. The Florence conference proposed the establishment of five regional Maritime Rescue Coordination Centres (MRCCs), which, in conjunction with 26 sub-centres, would work cooperatively to provide search and rescue coverage in areas identified as lacking efficient SAR and GMDSS infrastructure.

Already, four of the five regional African MRCCs have been inaugurated, including the most recent one in the Liberian capital Monrovia. Others are in Mombasa, Kenya, Cape Town, South Africa, and Lagos, Nigeria. The fifth, situated in Rabat, Morocco is nearing completion.



Inaugurating the MRCC in Monrovia recently, the Secretary-General of IMO, the UN agency responsible for the safety of life at sea, termed the feat as not only a vital link in the global search and rescue chain but also a major step forward for Liberia, the maritime and shipping world and the international community of seafarers. Efthimios Mitropoulos said the Centre fills a sizeable gap in the effective coverage of a vast area of the eastern part of the middle Atlantic Ocean which many ships ply.

“I have no doubt that this network of regional MRCCs and their associated sub-centres will vastly improve the capability of the region to effectively coordinate operations for the search and rescue of people in distress at sea, ensure effective responses to threats of maritime security, including those from criminal elements such as pirates and armed robbers,” the IMO chief noted.

Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana have a multilateral agreement on the coordination of maritime search and rescue services in place. The agreement, signed in November 2007, mandates these countries to establish sub-regional facilities in their respective coun-

tries that will operate in concert with the MRCC. At the inauguration in Monrovia, representatives of the four neighboring countries pledged to ensure that their part of the pact is fully implemented. The United Nations Development Programme defrayed the cost for their participation in the event.

Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson, on behalf of the Liberian Government, said the establishment of a regional office is a splendid example of what the government intends to accomplish putting into context the overall development scheme through the “Lift Liberia” strategy. “Liberians and West Africans will be proud of this initiative which provides not only the security for sea-faring but also an environment in which our neighboring states can also benefit,” said Johnson.

Earlier, Bureau of Maritime Affairs Commissioner Binyah Kesselly pledged Liberia’s readiness to rise up to the challenges posed by the growing maritime trade in sub-regional waters, protecting the marine environment and ensuring the safety and security of all those using their respective coastal waters. “We hereby renew, confirm and affirm our commitment to effectively, efficiently and professionally operate the Monrovia MRCC,” he pledged.

As the Liberia Coast Guard begins initial entry training in line with the restructuring process in order to safeguard more than 300 miles of Liberia’s coastline, Defence Minister Brownie Samukai reiterated that this core group of officers will not only be involved in the task of search and rescue but also to ensure national security. He said the government is planning to procure four vessels to support search and rescue efforts along Liberia’s coastline. The country has already purchased 18 zodiac rafts that will be used for additional training of the officers.

The Monrovia Centre, which also serves as the headquarters of the Liberian Coast Guard, has at its facilities a helicopter landing pad and a marine safety equipment store, which will make available various marine-related items for sale. ♦

JW

IMO’s Mitropoulos and Minister Johnson inaugurate the Rescue Centre





Gillian Dare, UK gov't representative, DSRSB Mensa-Bonsu and BIN Commissioner Chris Massaquoi

J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

BIN Adopts Strategies for

Though border security and management constitute an integral part of the country's peace-building process, Liberia's Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization (BIN) in charge of these tasks has been struggling due to the lack of training, logistics, infrastructure and other necessities to carry out its work. However, recent efforts to enhance the effectiveness of BIN seem promising. Efforts are already underway to develop a National Immigration Policy, Standard Operating Procedures, recruitment and organizational policies as well as funding proposals for the parastatal.

At a recent five-day workshop held in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County, key decision makers at the BIN, the Ministry of Justice and other major stakeholders formulated a framework for a Strategic Development Plan for the BIN. The workshop, which brought together

over 20 BIN officers from various sections and detachments, also provided an opportunity to deliberate on the enormous challenges involved in reforming the immigration agency.

The workshop, supported by the United Nations Development Programme and the UN Mission in Liberia through the UN Police with funding from the United Kingdom Government Security Sector Reform (SSR) Trust Fund, was aimed at supporting systematic restructuring and reform of the BIN to ensure its sustained level of operational capacity throughout Liberia. It was facilitated by Senior Consultant Karin Delin, also owner and Managing Director of Devenio AB in Sweden.

Since the end of Liberia's civil war, the Government has embarked on the multifaceted process of post-war reconstruction and peace-building. One of the essential components, as stipulated in the

Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2003, is reforming the country's security sector with the aim of making it more professional, transparent and accountable.

The 14-year war witnessed the security sector become factionalized, dysfunctional, and highly bloated both in size and the resources it consumed. These conditions encouraged cronyism, ethnicity and undue political interference that replaced merit, acceptable standards and professionalism. The CPA stipulated that the restructured security forces shall adopt a professional orientation that emphasizes democratic values and respect for human rights, a non-partisan approach to duty and the avoidance of corrupt practices.

Much progress has been made since the security sector reform process began in 2004 with major focus on the Liberia National Police (LNP), the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) and the presidential security guard, the Special Security Service

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP PORT CITY, CAPE MOUNT COUNTY 14-18 April 2009



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

Participants at the workshop



Lecture session at the workshop

Reform

(SSS).

Although the BIN, another security institution named for the restructuring exercise, has profited from a number of in-service training and a vetting process, it has not received the attention it requires to effectively perform its duties. BIN Commissioner Chris Massaquoi noted that meager support to his institution has come from the National Budget and on a piecemeal basis from donors.

“The security sector reform can only be complete if all the critical security agencies are restructured including the BIN,” said Massaquoi, citing the necessity to make BIN capable and efficient in managing Liberia’s borders, especially against the backdrop of global terrorism and illegal immigration. Currently Liberia has 36 official entry points alongside 137 unofficial ones, which explains the porous nature of the borders and why it is extremely difficult for BIN to deal with

the increasing challenges of illegal immigration.

Speaking at the close of the workshop, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for the Rule of Law reassured the Liberia Government that UNMIL, the UN family and other partners stand ready to work in partnership to assist the BIN achieve its strategic objectives. Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu reiterated that the danger of conflict and civil war being rekindled and refueled by elements from across the borders will remain as long as Liberia’s borders are not well protected, adequately regulated and properly monitored. This means that the Bureau’s responsibilities have a cardinal and direct bearing on the maintenance of peace and security in the country, she noted.

Mensa-Bonsu urged participants to strongly fight the temptation of going back to the old ways of doing things. “Whether it is internal resistance from people who do not want to change, a lack of resources to fund the needed equipment, or even absence of political support to carry required reforms through, the effect will be the same – a test of whether you believe

in the reform you have proposed here as the way forward for your institution. Stay the course and fulfill the pledges you have made to yourselves and to one another at this workshop,” she advised.

The DSRSG hoped that the participants would take the next steps with the same unflagging zeal since the forum had given them the chance to step back and see where they’d slipped and identify what to do in order not to fall again. “I hope you have done some honest self-assessment here, and have identified what you each have to do to make BIN an organization which you are proud to be associated with,” she said, cautioning against corruption and inefficiency.

The UK Government Representative, Gillian Dare, said her government was pleased to provide the financial support for the workshop and hoped that what will be realized out of this will not only be a strategic plan, but also a detailed implementation plan. She emphasized that strategic planning is essential to make the most cost effective use of resources in order to protect the stability of the country. ♦

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Vice President Boakai at the launch of the report

to achieve the MDGs. "Without the participation of all levels of society in these national efforts and the translation of these efforts to the local level, we would not be able to achieve the MDGs," he said, expressing the hope that Liberians will get actively involved in the campaign.

The report reveals that the country's systems for data collection and analysis remained weak, an aspect that severely undermines the use of statistics in policy analysis and the allied monitoring and evaluation frameworks. It also notes that after 14 years of intermittent unrest the country has entered a period of increased stability, largely sustained by the UN peacekeeping force.

The Liberian government's main vehicle for achieving the MDGs is the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which was launched last year and outlines Liberia's plans for national development in four key areas including: consolidating peace and security; revitalizing the economy; strengthening governance and the rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services. The national MDGs Steering Committee that is responsible for

Going for Goals

The final results of Liberia's 2008 census released in April this year recorded that 68 per cent of the country's population was living below the poverty line of one US dollar a day. However, according to the recently launched report on "Liberia's Progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 2008," poverty perception in Liberia has dropped from 76 per cent in 2004 to about 63 per cent today. The prevalence rate of underweight children is also down to 18.8 per cent from 26.4 per cent the same year according to the MDGs report.

Liberia has a sense of urgency to achieve the MDGs by 2015 but huge challenges remain. The report states that the

lingering effects of the prolonged civil war have diminished the hopes for positive outcomes by 2015. However, all is not lost. "With strong political leadership and commitment, scaled-up support and investments in capacity building, resource mobilization, and focus on 'quick wins' at the community level, Liberia can make good progress towards achieving the MDGs even if it does not achieve all the goals," the report notes.

Pointing out that this year's statistics represent significant improvement, Liberia's Vice President Joseph Boakai said the government remains committed to making progress working in close collaboration with the international community to meet the 2015 target. He emphasized the critical role of each person in participating



the overall MDGs agenda commenced its work in 2008, says the report, which adds that the UN system, the World Bank, IMF, USAID, EU and bilateral partners have all indicated their unwavering commitment to assisting the Government of Liberia in its efforts to achieve sustainable peace, maintain good governance, the rule of law, inclusion, socio-economic recovery and reconstruction of the country.

UNDP Country Director Dominic Sam says the report will continue to be used as a tool for policy dialogue and advocacy at all levels of government and civil society. The advocacy campaign will influence national decision-making on socio-economic investment, public resource allocation and management at all levels of Liberian society, from the three branches of government - Legislature, Executive and the Judiciary - to the counties, districts, towns and communities. The key focus of this campaign will be the implementation of the 2008 PRS, community-based recovery, and gender empowerment.

The report says low agricultural productivity, limited employment opportunities and limited access to health care are

some of the factors responsible for the high poverty level in the country and rec-

The Liberian government's main vehicle for achieving the MDGs is the Poverty Reduction Strategy, which was launched last year and outlines Liberia's plans for national development in four key areas including: consolidating peace and security; revitalizing the economy; strengthening governance and the rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services.

ommends an increase in agricultural productivity through improved access to

inputs, irrigation, storage and extension services including improvement in the road infrastructure to facilitate the marketing and distribution of agricultural products.

The global financial crisis is a major challenge confronting most countries to meet the eight MDGs, which include eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensuring environmental sustainability; and developing a global partnership for development.

The Millennium Declaration by world leaders in September 2000 identified the MDGs and their achievement as key to the formulation of a trajectory for developing countries' development and global partnerships. This edition of the MDG report was initiated by the Liberian government through the Ministry of Planning and Economics Affairs. ♦

SM





Agriculture Minister Dr. Chris Toe makes remarks during the launch of P4P project

Purchase for Progress

Most of Liberia's farmers resort to subsistence farming due to the many hurdles facing large scale farming. Poor roads, insignificant private sector investments in agriculture and limited market access are some of the factors that discourage the farmers to venture beyond subsistence. The high level of losses before and after the harvests, inadequate storage facilities and the insignificant involvement of farmers in the value chain, further compound the situation.

However, better days are in the offing for Liberian farmers thanks to a new initiative. The World Food Programme (WFP),

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Ministry of Agriculture recently signed a Framework Agreement that will lead to WFP purchasing more than US\$1 million worth of locally produced rice over the next two years, thus giving smallholder farmers in rural Liberia a big boost in income. The rice will be procured through the Purchase for Progress (P4P) project, a global initiative recently launched by the Liberian Government and the United Nations in Liberia.

The P4P is a groundbreaking initiative to transform the way the WFP purchases food in developing countries, giving small-scale farmers access to reliable markets and the opportunity to sell their sur-

plus at competitive prices. In Liberia, WFP will purchase locally produced rice from smallholder farmers through a combination of direct and forward contracting with farmers' cooperatives. The promotion of the agriculture sector, the source of livelihood of about 70 per cent of the population, is central to the Government's overall strategy for poverty reduction, and it assumes urgency in view of the global rise in food prices.

The P4P is being implemented within the broader framework of the Government and the UN Joint Programme on Food Security and Nutrition which has FAO, UNDP, UNICEF, UNMIL, WFP and World Bank as key participating agencies



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

produce more food and to increase their income is critical to addressing hunger and poverty at all levels.

“Weak access to markets has historically denied these poor rural farmers opportunities to sell their surplus crops at fair price thus reducing and undermining the incentive for them to produce more,” Toe noted. He expressed confidence that the P4P initiative will create an environment that will remove some of the barriers to market access and increase the incentives for farmers to produce surplus food for sale.

The P4P will be piloted over a two-year period ending December 2010, with the possibility of a three-year extension. During the implementation period, the UN will spend more than US\$1 million to buy at least 1,400 metric tons of processed “country” rice from at least 5,600 local smallholder farmers through their cooperatives. The rice purchased will be used for school feeding programmes.

Initial implementation will involve smallholder farmer cooperatives in Lofa, Nimba and Bong counties. Some of the funds to purchase the rice have already been provided by the governments of Germany, Japan and Switzerland to cover about 600 metric tons of milled parboil

in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Gender & Development, and Planning & Economic Affairs.

The FAO Senior Emergency Coordinator, speaking during the signing ceremony, noted the progress the agricultural sector has made in recent years, especially the increase in rice production from 85,000 metric tons in 2005 to 144,000 metric tons in 2006-2007. The post-harvest evaluation indicated a similar trend in 2008. Tim Vaessen noted that despite these achievements, Liberia is still a food-deficient country where the local production of rice meets only around 40 per cent of its national requirements. Liberia depends on imported rice, often at high costs, for the rest of its needs.

Describing the P4P programme as a milestone, Agriculture Minister, Dr. J. Chris Toe, said since the majority of rural Liberians relies on agriculture not only for food but also for income, it is clear that supporting the ability of small farmers to

The P4P is a groundbreaking initiative to transform the way the WFP purchases food in developing countries, giving small-scale farmers access to reliable markets and the opportunity to sell their surplus at competitive prices. In Liberia, WFP will purchase locally produced rice from smallholder farmers through a combination of direct and forward contracting with farmers’ cooperatives.

rice during the first procurement season.

A price of US\$0.34 per kilogramme

has been set for paddy (un-milled) at the farm-gate. Based on this paddy price and other associated costs including trans-

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Another US\$1.5 million, provided by the Howard G. Buffet Foundation, will be used to improve the capacity of farmer cooperatives in agro-processing and marketing, and in the development of procurement processes.

The P4P is a win-win opportunity that allows the UN to help those who have little or no food, while supporting local farmers who have little or no access to markets to sell their crops. The programme is a global partnership with WFP, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Howard G. Buffet Foundation. In Liberia, it is a partnership of the Liberian Government and the UN system. ♦

JW

Final Census Results Out



Courtesy of LISGIS

Minister Konneh releases the census results

Nearly a year after the provisional results of Liberia's 2008 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) was announced, the Government has officially released the final results putting the country's total population at 3,476,608 as of the night of March 20/21, 2008.

At a news conference in May, the Chairman of the Census Commission, Amara Konneh, who is also the Planning & Economic Affairs Minister, disclosed that the final result is 12,464 persons or 0.4 percent less than the provisional figures released in June 2008. The decrease, he noted, is within acceptable statistical limits by international standards. The provisional results put Liberia's population at 3,489,072 at the time.

Minister Konneh said this recent figure fell between the official population projection estimate of 3,238,000 and the population estimate of 3,511,618 which were calculated by multiplying the number of households generated from the 2008 census geographic mapping exercise and the average household size obtained by the pilot census.

The final results put the country's annual population growth rate at 2.1 per cent, on par with other sub-regional countries such as Ghana at 2.1 per cent, Guinea and Nigeria at 2.2 per cent, Sierra Leone at 1.8 per cent and Côte d'Ivoire with 1.6 per cent. If the trend of the 2.1 per cent annual growth rate continues, the country's total population would double in 34 years.

The country's first census, conducted in 1962, was followed by another in 1974. Liberia should have had two more censuses, in 1994 and 2004, but the civil war made such an exercise impossible to conduct. As a result of this lapse, the country lacked timely and accurate data for socio-economic, political and physical development planning.

A gloomy image of poverty emerges from the census -- 68 per cent of the country's 3.4 million live below the poverty line, earning less than US\$1-a-day, especially those in western and south-eastern Liberia. "It's serious, very serious that 68 per cent of the 3.4 million that we have just announced cannot afford one dollar a day. When you go to western and south-eastern Liberia -- Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu, Bomi, Sinoe, River Cess and

Grand Gedeh -- people there cannot afford US\$1-a-day. That's a very harsh condition that we must all work to tackle," Minister Konneh stressed.

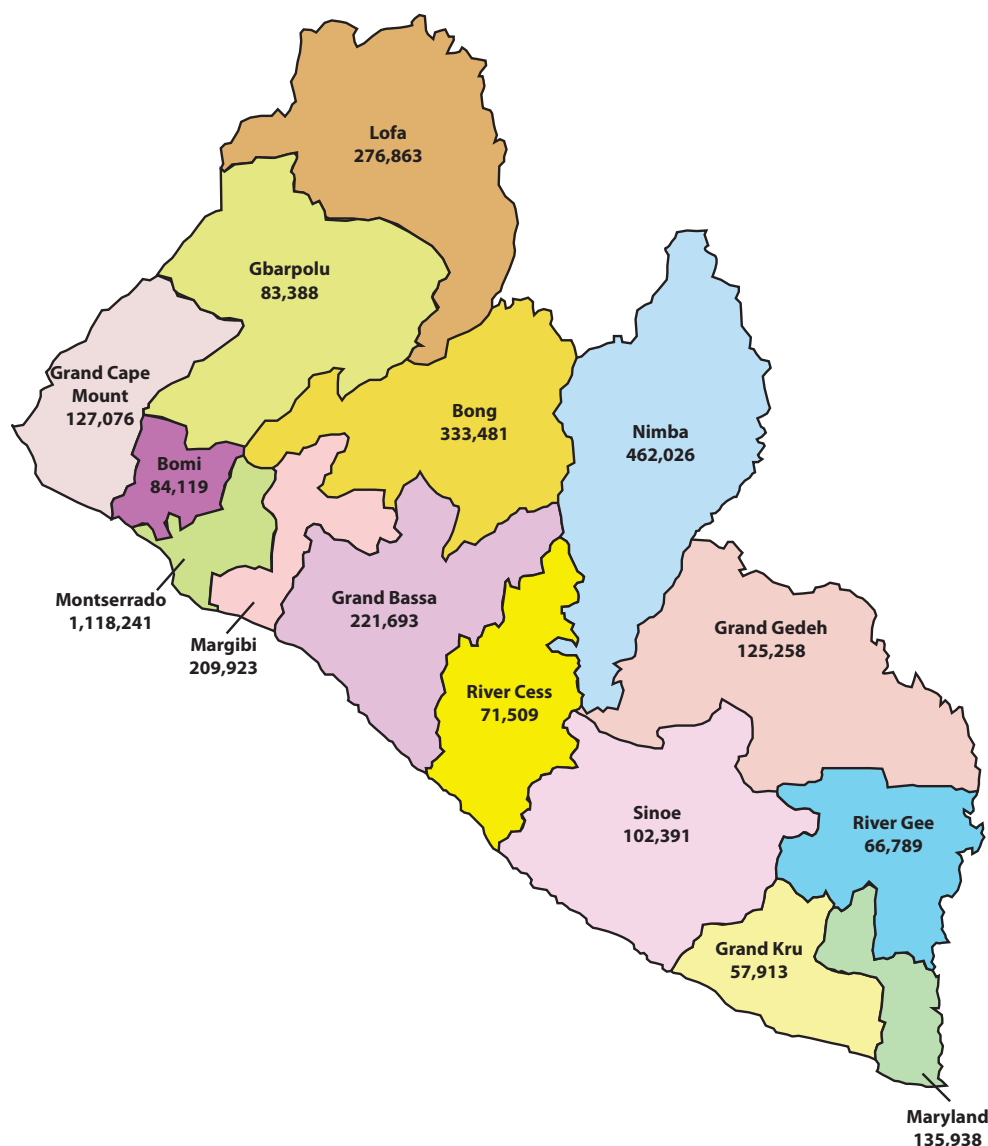
The final results, broken down by county, district, urban, rural, age and sex, show the national population unevenly distributed among the counties, with more men than women in the country. Population distribution favours the "big six" counties which include Montserrado with the highest population of 1,118,241, followed by Nimba with 462,062, Bong, 333,481, Lofa, 276,863, Grand Bassa, 221,693, and Margibi, 209,923.

Other counties are Maryland, 135,938, Grand Cape Mount, 127,076, Grand Gedeh, 125,258, and Sinoe, 102,391. The lower end of the scale shows the "small five" counties as Bomi with a population of 84,119, Gbarpolu, 83,388, River Cess, 71,509, River Gee, 66,789. Grand Kru County has the least population of 57,913.

With the final results announced, the census exercise now enters the next phase. Specialists in Liberia and abroad including demographers, statisticians, mathematicians, economists and other professionals will analyze the data to identify indicators

2008 POPULATION AND HOUSING CENSUS

Distribution of population by County, Liberia 2008



Courtesy of LISGIS

of infant and maternal mortality, fertility, migration, disability, ethnicity, housing, and overall determination of the poverty level of Liberians. This stage of the exercise runs until December 2009, and after its completion, the Liberia Institute of Statistics & Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) will disseminate the results throughout the country.

The census process began with the conduct of a geographic planning exercise leading to the demarcation of enumeration areas that formed the national sampling frame. This was followed by the field enu-

meration exercise which took place from 21st to 31st March 2008. Three months later, on 20 June 2008, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf announced the provisional results of the census.

Soon after the announcement of the provisional results, LISGIS began the challenging and arduous task that included the coding and entering data collected from the field, the electronic editing and the designing of the data, as well as reviewing and production of the census table.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia

(UNMIL), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United States Aid for International Development (USAID), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the African Development Bank (ADB)/PARIS 21 contributed significantly to the success of the 2008 NPHC exercise.

The 2008 NPHC is the first post-war census and also the first one to be conducted in Liberia in 24 years. The next population census will be conducted in 2018. ♦

JW

Malaria is Everybody's Business



Malaria patients at the Jallah Lone Medical Center in Bopolu City, Gbarpolu County

Agnes Mulbah, 21, sits by her two-year-old son at the Jallah Lone Medical Centre in the Gbarpolu County capital Bopolu. “Last evening I came from school and found out that the temperature of my son was very high. This morning he was shivering and suddenly became unconscious so I rushed with him here to the hospital,” says the eleventh grade student and single mother. “This is not the first time my son has gone down with malaria. This is the third and each time he becomes unconscious.”

Mulbah’s son is among dozens of Liberian children who visit hospitals or clinics every day for malaria. Many others, especially those in inaccessible parts of the country with no health facility, usually succumb to the disease.

Malaria infects more than 500 million people annually and kills more than 1 million, according to the World Health Organization. Although the disease afflicts Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and even parts of Europe, the burden is heaviest in sub-Saharan Africa, including Liberia. The 2005 Liberia Malaria



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL



Indicator Survey indicates that the disease accounts for over 38 per cent of outpatient attendance, 42.3 per cent of inpatient deaths and 46.4 per cent of under-five deaths. The results of a more recent survey are currently being analyzed to determine the current prevalence of the disease, knowledge, attitude and practice, among others.

As a result of Liberia's 14-year civil war which ended about six years ago, the country's health services were severely disrupted. Although Liberia is getting back on its feet with the deployment of UN peacekeepers and the restoration of peace, its health facilities are still in doldrums. To alleviate the situation, UN peacekeepers have been conducting medical outreach programmes during which Liberians are treated free of cost for conditions like malaria in addition to similar treatment at UN clinics throughout the country. But even as they try to offer medical help to Liberians, some UN peacekeepers themselves have fallen victim to malaria and lost their lives.

"Malaria is spreading at an alarming proportion since the beginning of this year," notes Joseph Dwana, the Gbarpolu County Health Officer. The medical officer says pregnant women are given antenatal preventive treatment, which reduces mother to baby transmission. The disease accounts for about 75 per cent of admitted patients at the Jallah Lone Medical Centre, most of them children. Mosquito bed nets and anti-malaria drugs are given by donors through the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MHSW). "The drugs are free of charge and we treat free of charge, nobody pays one cent here," says Dwana. This may not, however, be the case in some other hospitals. During the World Malaria Day celebration in April this year with the theme "Counting Malaria Out", Liberia's Health Minister Dr. Walter Gwenigale warned health personnel to desist from selling donated drugs entrusted to their care to run the various health and medical centres across the country.

Since 2005, Liberia has been stepping up malaria prevention and control activities. This is as a result of the introduction of a policy and strategic plan for malaria control and prevention by the MHSW in 2004 and subsequent funding of part of the

plan by the Global Fund and other key partners like UNICEF, WHO and USAID. The current National Malaria Strategic Plan (2009 – 2013) envisages fulfilling the WHO Roll Back Malaria objective of reducing malaria morbidity and mortality by 50 per cent by the year 2010 -- a target for all African countries but a huge challenge for Liberia.

Amidst the numerous challenges facing the post-war nation's health sector, officials of the National Malaria Control Programme (NMCP), an arm of the MHSW responsible for malaria control activities throughout the country, are hopeful that the disease can be put under control. "We have very strong partnership with UNICEF, UNDP and WHO provides us with the technical support," says Programme Manager Dr. Joel Jaryenneh Jones.

Recently, nearly 400,000 bed nets provided by UNICEF and Global Fund were distributed. "Liberia has some of the worst roads in the world and some of the hard to reach areas but we are now developing a community based approach to reach those areas using community health workers. We have drugs in some of the remotest areas in the country," says Jones, pointing out that areas that become inaccessible during seasonal rains are supplied with more drugs to cover the rainy season.

As the fight against malaria continues, behavioural change is also crucial as some patients do not complete their treatment while others do not appropriately use the bed nets. At the same time, some medical personnel have been accused of malpractices. The medical director at a rural hospital has been reportedly hauled to court for allegedly selling mosquito bed nets meant for free distribution. Also, many medical staff are dissatisfied with their working conditions.

Medical specialists stress that improved environmental sanitation is the *sine qua non* for reducing the spread of malaria. The NMCP programme manager says they have now embarked on a door to door campaign to raise awareness. "Malaria is everybody's business. Everybody should learn about malaria and how to prevent it," says Jones. ♦

SM

Reintegration Wraps Up

Almost six years after the peace agreement, the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme in Liberia has finally come to an end. The programme, which began in 2004 and which provided assistance to some 100,000 ex-combatants, ended in April. Henceforth, there will be no more targeted assistance and no more special status for ex-combatants in Liberia. Instead, assistance will focus on all needy community members which can include ex-combatants. "Every member of the community should have equal access to opportunities. Liberia has changed. Time has changed. The war is over, everybody should now take their lives into their hands to rebuild Liberia," says the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) DDRR Technical Coordinator, Aderemi Aibinu.

Until recently, the battlefields of the West African sub-region were the breeding grounds for fighters who crossed over bor-

ders to fight in neighbouring countries. With rape and sexual violence used as major weapons of war, Liberia's civil war was notorious for heinous crimes. In light of these atrocities, some people feel that this type of programme compensates ex-combatants. However, cash hand-outs and training assistance are not rewards but a contribution to help ex-combatants get out of a vicious cycle of violence and hopelessness to give them the necessary skills to reintegrate into civilian society, says UNMIL's Civil Affairs chief Francis Kai-Kai, who was head of the DDRR programme in war-ravaged Sierra Leone.

The DDRR programme has been jointly implemented by the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR), UNDP and UNMIL. UNDP has been managing the Multidonor Trust Fund, as well as the project for the final phase of the DDRR process funded by the Norwegian Government. UNMIL Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery Section

(RRR) provided technical assistance as well as logistical and monitoring support. The NCDDRR was the lead national institution; its mandate ended in April 2009;

During the DD process, over 101,000 former fighters were disarmed, demobilized and eligible for reintegration support, including 22,000 women and 11,000 children. Of those demobilized, some 97,000 have benefited from initial reintegration assistance in form of formal education, vocational training, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, psychosocial counselling and some financial support. More than 30 per cent of those who benefited from reintegration assistance are in the agricultural sector. An unprecedented number of women were demobilized and benefited from this reintegration assistance. The programme also catered to those with special needs such as the blind.

The final phase of the reintegration programme targeted a final caseload of 9,000 ex-combatants who had not yet received reintegration assistance. Before the commencement of the final phase, an intensive media campaign was undertaken during which ex-combatants were informed about the training assistance. Almost 4,000 came forward to participate in the final round of reintegration activities.

"I was with LURD forces [Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, one of the warring parties]. Today, I am happy to have acquired skills in tailoring because I want to do something better for my country and my family," says 27-year-old former fighter Kamara whose dream is to establish his own tailoring shop.

The trainings, with the involvement of government ministries such as the Ministry of Labour, the private sector and UN agencies, were conducted in the various communities based on job and trade opportunities available. The beneficiaries were also counselled on their chosen career vis à vis their capability and marketability, and were given a monthly

Skills training as part of the reintegration programme





stipend of 30 USD to assist them with transportation fare.

“It has been an important effort, a significant financial contribution and a considerable logistical exercise to try and reach every ex-combatant in every corner of the country. It has been a huge undertaking considering the number of ex-combatants who went through the training. Overall, I think we are pleased with the result,” says Doris Kleffner, UNMIL Senior Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Reintegration Officer. “It is time to move on.”

Sallimatu Kamara of Women’s Aid Incorporated, a local non governmental organization involved in reintegration activities, and other authorities say that ex-combatants get into trouble because, in spite of the training they received, they are confronted with poverty and unemployment.

As Liberia struggles with the global economic crisis, unemployment is a major challenge for many Liberians – also for ex-combatants. In an effort to address this challenge, UNMIL joined forces with the World Bank, UNDP, WFP and ILO to create “emergency employment”. Most of these short- and medium-term jobs were created by using labor-intensive methods for necessary road repairs and other infrastructure rehabilitation. The communities along the roads get to participate in the selection of beneficiaries for these programmes, with the condition to include a minimum percentage of ex-combatants, refugee and IDP returnees, as well as women. Since the beginning of the UNMIL employment creation efforts in 2006, over 68,000 jobs have been created, equalling over 2.1 million work days. Over 20% of beneficiaries were women, and ex-combatants and returnees were included in the work force.

As Liberia comes out of the conflict, UNMIL RRR Director Andrea Tamagnini emphasizes that reintegration is a long-term objective and unemployment remains a major challenge. “UNMIL is working together with other UN agencies and various national partners to ensure that reintegration efforts continue within Liberian communities.” ♦

SM

IVORIAN REFUGEES

Longing for Home



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

Some of them want to go home

For thousands of Ivorian refugees living in Liberia, the prospect of returning home to rebuild their shattered lives is anchored on hope. Hope that their country's presidential and parliamentary elections, postponed several times since 2005, will materialize this year and will be peacefully conducted.

Fleeing from a once peaceful and prosperous Côte d'Ivoire at the height of the conflict in 2002, thousands of Ivorians crossed over to seek refuge in Liberia, a country which was also experiencing conflict at the time. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are about 6,000 Ivorian refugees,

95% of whom live in 109 border communities in Nimba and Grand Gedeh counties. Approximately 20 per cent of them live in Saclepea Refugee Camp in Nimba County, while the remaining 8 per cent are spread across host communities. There are a small number of Ivorian refugees in Maryland and Monrovia as well.

Segui Boya Jerome fled from Côte d'Ivoire in late 2002 when fighting broke out in Danane, a town about 15 miles from the Liberian border. Arriving at Karnplay at the Liberian border, Jerome was subsequently transported to Saclepea in Nimba County together with other refugees. "We have been living in this camp since January 2003," says the head of a family

of seven. "Life in the camp is very hard. Those who know Côte d'Ivoire will agree with me that it is one of the countries in the sub-region that had a better life, but to come to Liberia as a refugee, a country torn apart by war, it is very difficult for us."

The camp-based refugees are catered to by the UNHCR, World Food Programme, the Liberian Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and other partners. Assistance to the residents include shelter materials, soap and women's sanitary materials, kitchen sets, income generating packages, and agriculture seeds and tools. The UN refugee agency has also built a

school in the camp for first to sixth graders. Secondary school pupils attend school in Saclepea and UNHCR pays their fees. Refugees living in communities attend Liberia's Government schools. The Saclepea Comprehensive Health Center, handed over to the Nimba County Health Team by MSF-Swiss on 1 May, provides free medical care to the refugees and their host community.

WFP supplies monthly food ration, but most refugees say it is insufficient. "Big man like me I receive 12kg of bulgur wheat - how can I eat 12 kg of bulgur for one month?" questioned heavily-built Boubakar Kroma, who arrived in the camp in 2007. Kromah says he was living in Monrovia, but noted that in line with the Liberian government policy, food is not supplied to refugees living out of the camp. Subsequently, more than 300 of them who were living in Monrovia moved to the camp and built their own shelter using local materials and shelter kits provided by UNHCR.

While most refugees complain that their monthly food ration is insufficient, come July, WFP will discontinue the ration. LRRRC officials say they are engaging local leaders to provide land where refugees can cultivate. Fortunately, the Government of Liberia allows refugees to engage in skilled and unskilled work freely. Those who seek work permits can receive them from the authorities.

The Deputy Executive Director of LRRRC, John Saah Nyumah, says Ivorian refugees are very enterprising and that some of them are already engaged in agricultural activities. Humanitarian workers argue that after years in refuge, many refugees may tend to develop a dependency on aid, but if they grow their own food or engage in income generating activities, they become self-reliant and get a feeling of dignity than relying on hand-outs.

Jason Hepps, Head of UNHCR office in Saclepea, says self-reliance, livelihoods, and protection monitoring are the issues the organization is focusing on. Since last year, UNHCR has been working on converting the camp to a community, and to remove dependency by giving the refugees income generating packages varying from US\$ 250 to 400 per family depending on their family size. The pack-

age is given to the refugees based on their needs and they are provided training in their areas of interest. To ensure that the money is actually used for the intended purpose, assistance is also given to refugees to purchase their needed items and to transport them free of charge. All refugee families will receive their packages before the food ration is discontinued.

Verification exercises are done from time to time to ascertain the number of refugees remaining in the country as some have returned following the deployment of UN peacekeepers under the aegis of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI). UNHCR officials say conditions in Côte d'Ivoire are not yet conducive to promote voluntary repatriation but note that they keep on assessing the situation.

Although the refugees living in communities have easy access to plentiful land from the Liberian hosts, for the refugees in the Saclepea Camp it is not as easy. As the

refugees prepare to produce what they eat, UNHCR and LRRRC have negotiated with nearby communities which have generously offered farmland for Ivorian refugee neighbours. Another challenge that the French-speaking refugees cite is language as one of their major challenges to freely interact with their host population. However, most refugees share ethnic ties with the host communities and speak local languages such as Krahn, Yakouba, and Mandingo.

Some refugees are already making Liberia their new home by getting married to Liberian men and women. Generally though, most refugees are keeping hope alive that one day they will return home with their children, some of whom were born in Liberia which is all they know as home. "I want to go home even today but my hope is that the elections will be peaceful and everybody will live as one in Côte d'Ivoire," says 40-year-old Kroma. ♦

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J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

UNFPA Boosts Fistula Project



Courtesy of UNFPA

UNFPA's Simonen with Minister Gwenigale during the handover of bikes, vehicles and an assortment of medical equipment and supplies

As they strive to return the dignity of fistula patients by rectifying their condition, the medical personnel of Liberia's Obstetric Fistula Project face major challenges.

During the formal opening and the first graduation exercise of the Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center in Jacob Town, in the Monrovia suburb of Paynesville, Programme Manager Dr. John K. Mulbah listed the increasing demand of fistula services nationwide, poor socio-economic status of patients and accessibility to six rural areas (transportation and road conditions) as major challenges.

Fortunately, the cry did not fall on deaf ears. Recently, in a show of support to vulnerable women and girls and aimed at improving maternal health in Liberia, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Deputy Executive Director and Assistant Secretary-General Mari Simonen presented 14 motorbikes, four vehicles and an assortment of medical equipment and drugs to the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare valued at over US\$800,000.

"Liberia has one of the highest rates of

maternal mortality which is unacceptable," the UNFPA Deputy Executive Director said as she handed the consignment of assorted items to Liberia's Health & Social Welfare Minister, Dr. Walter Gwenigale. She applauded the commitment of the Health Ministry and partners for the efforts they're making to improve women's health. Simonen made the donation during her visit to Liberia in early March to attend the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security.

Receiving the items, Health Minister Gwenigale praised the UNFPA as an excellent partner and lauded the agency for supporting the country's health care delivery system. He placed special emphasis on the UNFPA's role in establishing the Obstetric Fistula Project in Liberia that is greatly contributing to the training of nurses, midwives and doctors in managing common obstetric emergencies including caesarian section and fistula.

Three of the vehicles and the 14 motorcycles are to be used for the Obstetric Fistula Project, while the other vehicle was turned over to the University of Liberia's A.M. Dogliotti College of

Medicine. Minister Gwenigale believes the vehicle would minimize constraints faced by the medical college especially student doctors being trained in all aspects of health.

During a visit to the Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Center Simonen urged fistula survivors to be ambassadors for those yet to muster courage to seek help. "I'm happy to see the joy and smiles on your faces after years of trauma," she said, adding, "Now you must go back to your communities as wonderful advocates in the prevention of fistula in Liberia." Fistula is preventable and treatable and for those suffering from fistula it would be wise to come out of hiding and get help, she added, reaffirming UNFPA's commitment to work with the Government and the people of Liberia to end fistula in the country.

The Liberia Fistula Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program is financed by UNFPA and implemented by Liberia Prevention of Maternal Mortality (LPMM) in collaboration with the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare. Since the launch of the project in April 2007, 332 patients with various types and degrees of fistula have been successfully treated and have since reintegrated into their communities after completing a process of rehabilitation and skills training.

To ensure that fistula is preventable, UNFPA is continuously building the capacity of healthcare workers and facilities. Over 200 nurses and midwives have received training in the provision of quality emergency obstetric care services while 20 doctors have been trained in the management of common obstetric emergency including caesarian-section that could prevent fistula.

UNFPA is also helping the John F. Kennedy Medical Center, Liberia's largest referral hospital, to carry out foreign training to some of its surgical staff and nurses in fistula case management. ♦

Preserving Biodiversity



Liberia is rich in biodiversity

Liberia's abundant natural resources must invariably hold the key to the country's economic development. But like other countries with similar riches – DR Congo, Zambia, Sudan – the gifts of nature can also be a curse. Natural resources were used to fund war in Liberia and Sierra Leone as is the case with several other wars across Africa. That is a past Liberia is striving to put behind. Now the Government of Liberia is taking control of the country's natural resources to improve the lives of its citizens.

Exploitation of natural resources, however, could also engender potential damaging effects such as environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity, and it is important not to overlook them. Liberia is believed to be once covered entirely by

rainforest. However, after years of population growth and commercial logging, more than 50 per cent of Liberia's forests have disappeared with almost a quarter -- an area of around 900,000 hectares -- lost during the years of 1990 to 2005. The destruction of the forests also means potential loss of one of the most unique ecosystems in the world and what could one day bring tourists to the country. With pressure being put on natural resources from an expanding population, and particularly with more and more people moving to Monrovia and other towns, this becomes a complex issue. Coastal erosion is also having an impact, as well as poaching and hunting. Many people living in remote parts of Liberia depend on bushmeat for survival – but some of the animals they are hunting may be threatened

species.

More than 13 per cent of the country is covered in water, and within the rivers and lakes live five of the seven species of marine turtles that exist on earth. Liberia has 881 known species of amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles, of which at least seven are unique to the country. Close to 40 species are officially considered threatened. Liberia has at least 2,200 species of plants, of which more than 90 are only found here.

In light of the unique ecosystem that Liberia is blessed with, and the worldwide focus on preserving the natural environment, Liberia signed up to the Convention on Biological Diversity – a commitment by 150 nations at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Further to this the parties agreed in 2002 to a target – to achieve, by 2010, a significant reduction in the current rate of biodiversity loss at the global, regional and national level as a contribution to poverty alleviation and to the benefit of life on earth. Now the Government of Liberia, with the assistance of the UN, is starting work on programmes to make sure Liberia fulfils its commitment.

Liberia already has a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, developed in 2004. However, in a post-conflict environment, the challenge is in its implementation. That is why the Government of Liberia and UNDP have recently signed an agreement to take the first steps needed to implement the strategy. This agreement includes funding to conduct an assessment of Liberia's capacity to implement its strategy, as well as to focus on making information about biodiversity more readily available. The project will also include finding ways to monitor Liberia's progress in reaching the target.

It is the first step in a plan which will ensure Liberia can develop its productive industries, and make the most of the natural resources it has, but can still protect some of the most rare and unique flora and fauna in the world. ♦

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Ghana Contributes to Peace in Liberia

Barely three years after achieving independence in 1957, Ghana sent its first peacekeepers to the former Congo Leopoldville, now Democratic Republic of Congo, thus becoming one of the first African countries contributing to UN's peacekeeping initiatives. Today, the West African nation is the sixth largest among the troop contributing countries.

During the past half century, more than

80,000 Ghanaian soldiers, policemen and women have played their part in major conflict zones in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. They have taken up their positions along fragile lines between war and peace, amidst genocide and civil wars, and have proven themselves with exceptional professionalism, gallantry, and human compassion.

In the West African sub-region, Ghana has been in the vanguard ensuring that peace returns to trouble spots, especially

to war-ravaged Liberia, beginning with their membership in the West African grouping, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990. When fighting flared up in Liberia in 2003, Ghana's capital Accra served as the venue for the belligerent parties to carve out the Comprehensive Peace Agreement that paved the way for peace in the country through the establishment of a multinational peacekeeping mission known later as the UN Mission in

Ghanaian peacekeepers are popular among the local residents



Liberia (UNMIL).

Ghana earlier served as a member of the 3,500 West African vanguard stabilization force, ECOMIL. Its members were provisionally re-hatted as UN peacekeepers on 1 October 2003. Of all the member countries that contributed to the initial sub-regional vanguard force, only Ghana and Nigeria still have contingents within UNMIL with the former augmenting its strength from a company-sized contingent to a battalion to support the Liberian peace process.

Ghana now has its 10th contingent (GhanBatt-10) serving in UNMIL, the latest being deployed in March 2009. With its headquarters at the Arcelor Mittal Compound in the port city of Buchanan, Grand Bassa County, the battalion has a company each deployed in the port city and at the Liberia Agriculture Company (LAC), some 40 km outside Buchanan; two platoons in Cestos City, River Cess



County, 120 km from Buchanan; and another platoon in Yappa's Town, along the Buchanan-River Cess Highway.

Besides implementing the Mission's mandate, Ghanaian peacekeepers have provided a human touch in the midst of misery and depravity. In Liberia, GhanBatt-10 is involved in imparting skills training to the locals with a view to preparing them to take over the rebuilding of the country. Since their arrival here, in collaboration with the local authorities, they have organized courses in a number of skills training activities including computer training, generator maintenance and agriculture.

Due to the critical scarcity of trained teachers in the rural areas, especially those of the sciences, at the Ellen Johnson Sirleaf High School near LAC, four peacekeepers are currently volunteering their services teaching biology, physics, mathematics and geography to the senior high students. "There are plans to extend this gesture to another school in Buchanan, where we will provide teachers for the sciences, to prepare students for the West African Exams," says Maj. Errington Commey, Deputy Commanding Officer.

Besides imparting knowledge to Liberians, GhanBatt-10 has also adopted an orphanage in Buchanan, God's Heritage Orphanage, which is hosting 44 orphaned children. Already, they are assisting in the construction of a dormito-

ry for the children. GhanBatt-10 is providing materials and expertise, while the orphanage is providing the labour. In the interaction, the Ghanaians are teaching the labourers skills in masonry and carpentry which will contribute positively to society. GhanBatt-10 has also begun acquiring school uniforms for the kids at the orphanage ahead of the academic year expected to begin in September.

Continuing to make its mark in UN peacekeeping operations, Ghana currently has 3,267 of its citizens deployed in missions, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the Darfur region of Sudan, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire, with smaller contingents deployed in Chad, Western Sahara, Kosovo, Southern Sudan and Georgia. Ghana also contributes nearly 900 military and police personnel to UN Interim Force in Lebanon.

Beyond peacekeeping, Ghana enjoys a special place in UN's history with one of its citizens, Dr. Kofi Annan, serving as the organization's seventh secretary-general, and the first to emerge from the ranks of United Nations staff. The organization's immediate past Secretary-General, Annan brought to his position a wealth of experience in peacekeeping.

JW



Liberians

What should Liberians

**Esther James – Administrative Assistant,
Medical Section, UNMIL**

Liberians, first of all, don't love one another. So as a first step to sustain peace, we should love one another. Secondly, Liberians should stop envying one another especially when one is not qualified for a particular job that someone else occupies.



**Roseline Nyankoon
Inter-Con Security**

To sustain the peace that the country currently enjoys, Liberians need to work together, be transparent in all their undertakings. Corruption is becoming the order of the day. This must stop. Liberians, especially public servants, must be honest and serve the people's interest.



**David Koon
Central Matadi, Sinkor**

Liberians, whether in the public or private sector, should be honest and transparent in all their undertakings with the foremost interest in seeking the welfare of the people they cater to. Corruption, especially in government, is having dire consequences in our society that Liberians are becoming frustrated. As such, those caught in acts of impropriety should be prosecuted for dishonesty. This will be one way that we can sustain the peace.



**Patrick Dampson
9th Street, Sinkor**

As Liberians, it behooves us to first change our minds and attitudes because after 14-years of war, if we forgive one another for whatever they did or did not do and recreate that friendship with each other this is one way we would ensure sustainable peace in Liberia. Secondly, we should ensure that the rule of law take root in this country instead of resorting to mob violence or other extra-judicial action. Whenever we have a problem, we should revert to the judiciary for redress.



**Saylee Johnson
Thinker's Village, Paynesville**

To ensure that peace is sustained, government and our international partners should ensure the completion of the ongoing security sector reform, especially training more para-military officers and the police. Liberians also have a role to play by ensuring the safety of their various communities. It also means that within our various communities, where there are strange movements or incidents that they are not satisfied with, they should report it to the security forces who will further investigate; all this to keep our communities peaceful and safe.



**Martina Nagbe
Inter-Con Security**

Over the last 14-years of war, Liberians have been a divided people. It is now time, with the assistance provided by the international community that Liberians should join together and be united; as united we stand and divided we fall. Liberians should dialogue with each other rather than fight.

Speak do to sustain peace?

Victoria Izebehai
Inter-Con Security

To sustain peace in Liberia all tribes must understand that we are all one. No Liberian is better than the other. We are all one and united we stand and divided we fight. Also, to sustain the peace, the UN Mission in Liberia should remain for another five years and continue to consolidate the peace; besides, Liberians should in turn practice those things that have brought us peace.



Rose Blamo
Inter-Con Security

In order to sustain the peace, government and its citizens should unite because only by working together can Liberians sustain the peace. We should remind our compatriots that anything negative for this country would not help us rather it will hinder our fragile peace. We should hold together as one big family, united for the benefit of the country.



George Richards
Private Security Guard

For Liberians to sustain the peace we must strengthen the justice system in the country. Besides, and more importantly so, I would suggest that a war crimes court is established in this country to try all those who bear the greatest responsibility for the atrocities committed in this country. We cannot allow impunity to set in because this could motivate others to take the same path to power and wealth. We have to set examples to deter others from treading the same path that brought death and destruction to our nation.



John Konneh
Resident of Airfield Short-Cut

In order to sustain the fragile peace that we now enjoy, Government should do more in its fight against corruption because this is having a serious effect on the country's development and progress. Secondly, Government should speed up with its security sector reform. Training the army and security apparatuses is an important component that will ensure peace in the country. Thirdly, Government should create job opportunities for the unemployed, especially the youth. There is a saying that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. As such it's important that the focus is on creating job opportunities for its citizens. If these things are pursued, in my view, we can sustain the peace in Liberia.

T-Wah Woart – Driver (International Center for Transitional Justice)

As a result of our 14-year upheaval, Liberians need to work together to sustain the peace. Instead of working collectively, a lot of Liberians are engaged in corrupt acts only for personal gains. But again, as a way of sustaining the peace, we need to reinstate all our security and army personnel that were retired or downsized. These trained security personnel, who are now idle, could pose a threat to the security of this country if they are not engaged. I would urge government to reconsider its decision and engage these ex-officers in ventures that would keep them busy positively.



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