



Clinton, DPKO Chief Visit Liberia

Peacekeepers Mentor AFL

Banking in the Soil



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

Liberia continues to play host to important personalities whose visits to the country underscore the importance the international community attaches to Liberia's sustained progress towards peace and development. Closely following the Security Council delegation's recent visit, Under-Secretary-General Alain Le Roy, who is in charge of all UN peacekeeping operations worldwide, visited Liberia in June to have first-hand knowledge of the progress we have made in consolidating the peace and the remaining challenges that require joint effort by UN, Government of Liberia and partners. He held talks with President Ellen

Johnson Sirleaf, the UN Country Team and a cross-section of Liberian stakeholders to assess Liberia's continued need for international support. He commended the outstanding progress UNMIL and the Government has made in ensuring peace and security in Liberia and stressed the country's need for continued support and assistance from the international community.

Another distinguished visitor to Liberia in June was the new United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator, Helen Clark. As an indication of the priority that UNDP attributes to Liberia's efforts towards recovery and development, Liberia was her first international trip since taking up her new assignment. In addition to meeting President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, she held discussions with senior government officials, UNMIL and the UN agencies, representatives of women's groups and donor institutions. She reiterated her agency's strong commitment to support technical and vocational capacity building to enable Liberia to achieve its development goals.

The US Secretary of State, Hillary Rodham Clinton, paid a visit to Liberia in August during which she met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and addressed a joint session of the legislature. She also visited the National Police Training Academy, which gave UNMIL the opportunity to highlight the progress that has been made in the

development of the LNP and the areas that require international community's support, including that of the United States, to ensure that the LNP is operationally independent.

Nearly six years after its launch, Liberia's Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (DDRR) programme was officially closed by President Johnson Sirleaf in July. The programme, spearheaded by the Liberian Government and UNMIL and supported by multilateral and bilateral partners, succeeded in disarming 103,019 former combatants. Of the disarmed and demobilized combatants, approximately 98,000 participated in vocational training and formal education schemes aimed at helping them earn a livelihood. The DDRR programme's success is testimony to the return of peace and stability in Liberia.

The peaceful celebration of the country's 162nd independence anniversary was a time of hope and encouragement for the people of Liberia. After many devastating years of civil war, Liberians now look forward to the prospect of a better future. The recently released report of the TRC presents both opportunities and challenges to the process of reconciliation based on peace and justice. As the Secretary-General stated, it is up to the Liberians to decide how to move the process of reconciliation forward. I therefore urge all Liberians to approach the issue with a sense of responsibility.

Ellen Margrethe Løj

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



Mathew Elavalthoduka/UNMIL

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During a whistle-stop visit to Liberia in August, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton offered unstinting support to Liberia's peace process calling the country an example of successful transition from lawlessness to democracy, and promised additional financial support for the training of the Liberia National Police.



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Visiting Liberia in June as part of a four-nation West African tour, DPKO head Alain Le Roy expressed satisfaction over the progress being made by UNMIL and the Liberian government in securing peace and security in the country.



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In a unique departure from traditional peacekeeping, UNMIL peacekeepers have been mentoring members of the restructured Armed Forces of Liberia with a view to enhancing their skills in rehabilitation and reconstruction work.

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Liberia a powerful exam

Despite pouring rain, hundreds of Liberians lined up along the main streets of Monrovia to welcome US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton who was on a whistle-stop visit to Liberia in the second week of August. And her key message of unstinting support for the country's efforts to consolidate peace and reconciliation was unequivocal and inspiring. "I am very supportive of actions that will lead to the peace, reconciliation and unity of Liberia," she said, and urged the people of Liberia to continue to speak out against corruption.

Emerging from 14 years of civil conflict, security issues are very close to the heart of Liberians. Speaking at the National Police Training Academy on the outskirts of Monrovia, where members of the new Liberia National Police (LNP) are

being trained with financial and technical support from the United States, the UN Police and other partners as part of the country's security sector reform, Clinton thanked Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj for "her outstanding work as head of the UN Mission in Liberia."

Since its deployment in 2003, the UN Mission has been assisting to restructure the Liberian police force. While acknowledging that training professional police officers was one of the hardest jobs to do in post-conflict situations, Clinton described maintaining law and order as "a critical element in sustaining peace and stability" and emphasized that Liberians, particularly the women and children, need the LNP not only to protect them but to heal the wounds left by years of conflict.

Clinton encouraged the recruits to rec-

ognize the investment that has been made in them but pointed out that there are greater challenges the LNP is facing as some elements of the Liberian police force had betrayed the public trust in the past. She quoted President Barack Obama's recent address in the Ghanaian capital Accra that urged Africans to take control of their destiny and strive for the peace and security necessary for progress. "For too long in Liberia, the police instilled fear. Today, you must fight fear. For too long, the police undermined the rule of law. Today, you must uphold it," she urged the LNP personnel. She lauded women who have joined the force, stressing that it has been found around the world that women police officers are essential, along with their male counterparts, to provide the stability of peace and security.

U.S. police officers and advisors have



Clinton with President Sirleaf and Løj at the Police Academy

the challenges facing the LNP, the UN envoy said: “Even the best trained police officer needs means of transportation; means of communication; a police station to work from; a place to live -- just to name a few of the logistical needs. Without that they will not be able to function. Without that they will not be able to respond to crime incidents and thus be able to gain the trust and confidence of the community they serve.”

Since the restructuring of LNP began in 2004, over 3,700 officers have been trained so far. Currently 14 per cent of all LNP officers are female. For the ERU, a fourth class of 80 recruits is currently undergoing training.

Prior to visiting the police academy, Clinton addressed the media following a meeting with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her cabinet, and later addressed a joint session of the Liberian National Legislature. “We think Liberia is on the right track, as difficult as that might be,” she told the media. She referred to Liberia as a model of a successful transition from lawlessness to democracy, and despair to hope. “Liberia has adopted sound fiscal

policies and is seeing strong economic growth. It’s impressive the way that Liberia has decreased its debt which had run up during years of conflict and has had a high rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the last few years,” she noted, praising Africa’s first elected female President for her accomplishments since coming to power in 2006. “I look at what President Sirleaf has done over the past three years and I see a very accomplished leader,” she said.

Alluding to the 2011 Presidential election, Clinton urged lawmakers that while hard fought elections are part of a democracy, opponents must close ranks when the election is over. She stressed that democracy depended on good governance, adherence to the rule of law, and sound economic policies, and announced that the US will be contributing US\$17.5 million for programmes to help Liberia ensure that the 2011 elections are free and fair. Earlier, welcoming Secretary Clinton to Liberia, President Johnson Sirleaf expressed gratitude for the partnership and friendship that Liberia enjoys with the US.

Liberia has very strong historical links with America. Clinton, who was visiting Liberia for the first time, left for Cape Verde the same day on the last leg of her seven-nation African tour. ♦

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ple, says Clinton

been collaborating closely with the LNP but much of the US Government’s focus has been on LNP’s Emergency Response Unit. “Our investment in the ERU, including the new headquarters that will be opening soon, is a down payment on Liberia’s future security. And I am pleased to announce today that in next year’s budget, the United States will increase its financial support for training the LNP,” she said to loud applause.

Special Representative Løj said the United States has been a “crucial partner” in the efforts to shape a national police force “that serves the people of Liberia with professionalism and dignity.” She noted that the United States has contributed over 100 UN police advisors including a Senior Advisory Team, which has brought expertise to the LNP’s development at the strategic level. Highlighting

Clinton addresses joint session of Legislature





Le Roy enjoys traditional welcome



DPKO Head Pleased With Progress in Liberia

Visiting Liberia in June for the first time, the head of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Alain Le Roy, expressed satisfaction for the outstanding progress being made by UNMIL and the Government in securing peace and security in this post-conflict West African nation.

“I must say I’m very impressed with what I’ve seen. I was very pleased that all

the interlocutors I met have been praising the work of UNMIL. I was pleased that the work of UNMIL to sustain the peace and security, to help with the rule of law, strengthen the judiciary and police, all that is very much appreciated,” Under-Secretary-General Le Roy said when he briefed journalists at the end of a three-day familiarization visit to Liberia, the first since he assumed office nearly a year ago.

The Under-Secretary-General however reiterated that despite the progress made

so far, there are still numerous challenges. He attributed the fragile security situation in the country to the limited capacity of the security and judicial institutions. He singled out the Liberia National Police (LNP), the Armed Forces of Liberia as well as judicial institutions which have still not developed the capability to function autonomously. He promised to continue to work with government to provide the necessary support to enhance capacity in the Security and Rule of Law pillars.



In a meeting with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Le Roy applauded the cooperation between UNMIL and the Government which has provided a smooth opportunity to align policies for maintaining peace and stability in the country. The President, in response, reiterated the vital role that the Mission has played in stabilizing the country. She expressed appreciation for the partnership, noting that the country would not have made progress without the support of the United Nations.

The Liberian leader repeated the need for more training of the police to enable it to provide security, particularly mentioning the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) which, she noted, is a critical component in Government's response to acts of lawlessness. Though President Johnson Sirleaf spoke of the many challenges facing the country, she assured the Under-Secretary-General that her Government is committed to reforms.

Le Roy, who heads 18 current UN peacekeeping missions around the world, said that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had presented to the Security Council recommendations and the report of the Technical Assessment Mission (TAM) that visited Liberia from 26 April to 6 May following the end of the second-phase of the UNMIL's drawdown process.

Amongst the several challenges still facing Liberia as stated in the TAM report is the fragile security situation, destabilizing factors like corruption, land disputes and high youth unemployment that are exacerbated by the global economic crisis.

The Technical Team also named the presence of a large number of ex-combatants who have retained their old command structures and are well organized; political tensions likely to increase as presidential and legislative elections in 2011 approach, divisions in the national reconciliation process and the work of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, and the situation in the sub-region, in particular the uncertain political situation in some neighboring countries.

Despite all these challenges, Le Roy noted that Secretary-General Ban has recommended to the UN Security Council a reduction in the mission's military strength by 2,029 troops but no change in the police component during the third drawdown phase, which would run from October 2009 to May 2010. This would bring UNMIL's total military strength down to 8,202 (including the 250 for the unit in charge of the Special Court for Sierra Leone) by May 2010 while the police component would remain at 1,375. A reduction in excess combat equipment is expected to result in substantial savings. The report foresees no further reductions before the 2011 presidential and legislative elections.

He noted that the military strength envisaged is capable of dealing with any security situation that may arise. "It's after the 2011 elections that we will assess the situation," the head of DPKO said, reassuring Liberians that though at some point UNMIL will have to leave, it will not be a hasty exit. A decision on the Secretary-General's recommendations will be taken when the extension of UNMIL's mandate comes before the Security Council in September.

During his visit, as part of his four-nation West African tour, besides meeting with President Johnson Sirleaf, the Under-Secretary-General held discussions with government officials including members of the Security Pillar, political party leaders and the International Contact Group on Liberia. He also met with the UN Country Team, the UNMIL's leadership and held a Town Hall meeting with UNMIL staff.

Out in the field, Le Roy visited Liberia's central city, Gbarnga, and met with Bong County Superintendent Ranney Jackson and the Joint County Security Team. He also visited the Circuit Court, interacted with the UN Formed Police Unit and was briefed on the security situation by the Sector Commander. Le Roy also visited the Monrovia Central Prison where he toured the facility. ♦

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UNMIL Mentors New AFL

The legacy of Liberia's 14-year civil war is still very much visible across the country. Roads in disrepair, collapsed bridges and broken infrastructure all offer a tell-tale story. Unexploded ordnances (UXOs) from the conflict are still being discovered, especially in the countryside.

As Liberia still lacks basic expertise and equipment to handle reconstruction tasks, UNMIL, through its military engineering contingents, continues to fill the void by rehabilitating roads, constructing bridges, rebuilding basic infrastructure and disposing of unexploded UXOs across the country.

Since October 2003, various rotations of the Bangladeshi, Chinese and Pakistani engineering contingents have been assisting the country in its much needed rehabilitation and reconstruction work. But as UNMIL continues its phased drawdown, the question is: Who will fill the gap when the peacekeepers are all gone?

The newly trained, over 2000-strong Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) looks set to pick up the pieces when the peacekeep-

ers leave, at least in a modest way.

The 1st Battalion of AFL's 23rd Infantry Brigade comprises of five companies, including an engineering unit, activated a little over a year ago but still being developed to a company-size. As the AFL is expected to be declared operational by December 2009, but with limited technical training, authorities of the Ministry of Defense and UNMIL decided to begin joint training exercises to take advantage of the peacekeepers' expertise.

With the unit of the AFL Engineering Company now stationed at Camp Tubman, near Gbarnga, Bong County, the Bangladeshi Engineering Contingent (BANENGR-12) is mentoring the newly trained young soldiers.

The rehabilitation of the 84-kilometer Gbarnga-Salala and the 31-kilometer Gbarnga-Belefani highways as well as the construction of the 800-meter People's Street, earlier a mere footpath, in preparation for Liberia's 162nd Independence anniversary was a perfect opportunity for the BANENGR-12 to begin tutoring their AFL counterparts in the skills necessary to enhance the country's reconstruction

efforts.

During the two weeks leading up to the 26th July Independence Day celebration, AFL counterparts were spread to these three different work locations along with their Bangladeshi colleagues. The tutoring was concentrated on road reconstruction,



laying culverts for building bridges, and training in operating heavy vehicles and earth moving equipment.

The BANENGR-12 Contingent Commander, Lt.-Col. Abdul Hamid Saddar, is elated at what he saw of the new AFL engineers. "I and my contingent take pride to familiarize and mentor a portion of the new Liberian army. This worthwhile endeavor should be encouraged throughout the AFL," he noted, adding that they are praiseworthy, committed, disciplined and up to the mark.



Members of AFL with UN peacekeepers

The 1st Engineering Company's Executive Officer, 2nd Lt. John T. Marshall, emphasized that this initial "hands on approach" is really an experience for them since their deployment in central Liberia. "This is a great opportunity for our soldiers to apply what they had learned during their basic training. If we can learn from UNMIL we will have additional hands on knowledge on exactly what is expected of us as an AFL Engineering Company," he said.

Not only were the AFL and their Bangladeshi counterparts happy about the new collaboration but Liberians resident in Gbarnga were also ecstatic. Beyan Johnson, a resident of reconstructed People's Street was extremely happy to see the new AFL engineers engaged in civil works. "This seems to be a new day for the AFL; how times have changed," he said with much optimism. "I didn't think that this would have happened during my life time."

Though this was an initial exercise involving the AFL and a component of the UNMIL military, a more sustained training and practical engineering exercises will commence shortly after the necessary modalities are concluded between relevant authorities of the Defense Ministry and UNMIL. Liberia's Assistant Minister of Defence for Public Affairs, Ambrose Nmah has disclosed that the formal com-

mencement of a full spectrum of the joint training between the AFL Engineering Unit and the BANENGR-12 has been approved and is expected to run till next year.

BANENGR-12 Commander Saddar hopes that when the training recommences, the over 100 AFL engineers will be placed into three groups – horizontal, vertical and sapper. The horizontal group will receive further training in road reconstruction and maintenance, building bridges using culverts, operating heavy vehicles and earth moving equipment. The vertical group will be taught various aspects of building construction, masonry and concrete works, carpentry, plumbing and electrical installation; while the sapper group will be trained to handle UXOs and other aspects of combat engineering.

UNMIL Force Commander, Lt.-Gen. Abu Tayeb Muhammed Zahirul Alam, on a routine visit to the Sector at the time, was pleased to see the collaboration between the two militaries. "They were very happy to have gotten this chance and they are learning on the job doing it," he observed noting that it was a good learning exercise. He added that UNMIL is ready to provide more support to the AFL military. "We are ready to give them the training support and scenario based exercises," he told UN FOCUS. ♦

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Getting Set for Life After UNMIL

It's evening rush hour in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Electrical Technician Joseph Forkpah, 42, has just ended his daily routine at the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) headquarters and is now at the Stella Maris Polytechnic for classes in electricity. Together with his colleagues, Forkpah, who has served in the mission for more than five years, actively participates in the lesson amid making sketches. "I am very happy for this course. I am feeling good," he says, adding with a smile, "The sketches here are circuit configuration--these are electrical jargons."

As the UN mission gradually draws down, the Integrated Mission Training Centre (IMTC) has instituted the National Staff Capacity Building Initiative in a bid to prepare Liberian staff for future career during the fast approaching post-mission scenario. Forkpah is among 75 UNMIL personnel benefiting from a 10-week evening course launched in June this year to upgrade the level of national technical staff working as electricians, masons, carpenters, plumbers and vehicle mechanics. Some of the trainees had only acquired long years of experience but no qualification, a deficiency that can limit the chances of job seekers. Some others, who had undertaken courses years ago, are not very familiar with modern implements of their trades. The last time Forkpah was in a classroom to learn about electricity was about 20 years ago.

"The main objective of this educational pilot programme is to upgrade the skills of UNMIL National Staff, using a recog-

nized technical educational institution. This will give them an opportunity to be better prepared when UNMIL leaves to continue the development of their own country," says IMTC Acting Chief Juliana Ribeiro, pointing out that depending on its success, the pilot phase will be expanded to other trade areas.

The technical courses include both theoretical and practical training. Electrical engineer Augustine Cooper, instructor of Basic Electricity, a professional hired for the training, says the skills of the personnel are being upgraded to level 2 and 3 depending on the participant's knowledge in the field. "This is our first collaboration with UNMIL. What the mission is doing is very good for Liberian nationals," comments the Dean of the Stella Maris Technical College, Julius Adighibe, adding that after the course the participants will have what the Liberians call "paper" to show for their trade.

"What we are learning is higher than what I was taught in vocational school," says Forkpah, a father of four, hopeful that the training will enhance his chances of securing a job in the future. After the training, Level 2 students should be able to assess damages, determine the size of a generator that is required for various types of buildings, and will be able to do costing and work with minimum supervision.

At the carpentry section of the training, Agnes Sieh, the only female in class was exuberant. "We have come here to improve our skills so when UNMIL leaves we would be better than before. I am glad to be learning new things," she says, dis-





UNMIL staff at a practical electrical training

playing her skills with some carpentry tools. "I am enjoying the carpentry course so much that I think we need more time," says Aaron C. Kangar. Carpentry instructor Frederick Joe observes that some of the trainees have the concept of the trade but lack the technical skills. "This training is very essential," he maintains.

"I love this course. It is a pleasure to be here because when UNMIL leaves I will be able to do something better for myself and my country," says masonry participant Jenkins K. Brown. "The trainees are very eager to learn so they make the work easier for us. For their practical, they are going to build a model house," says building construction engineer J. Kla Toomey.

Over the years dozens of national staff have left the country to render services in other peacekeeping missions but clearly a lot more will remain to serve in their country. As part of the capacity building efforts, some staff members have been proud recipients of certificates and diplomas under the IMTC National Staff Certification and Accreditation Project.

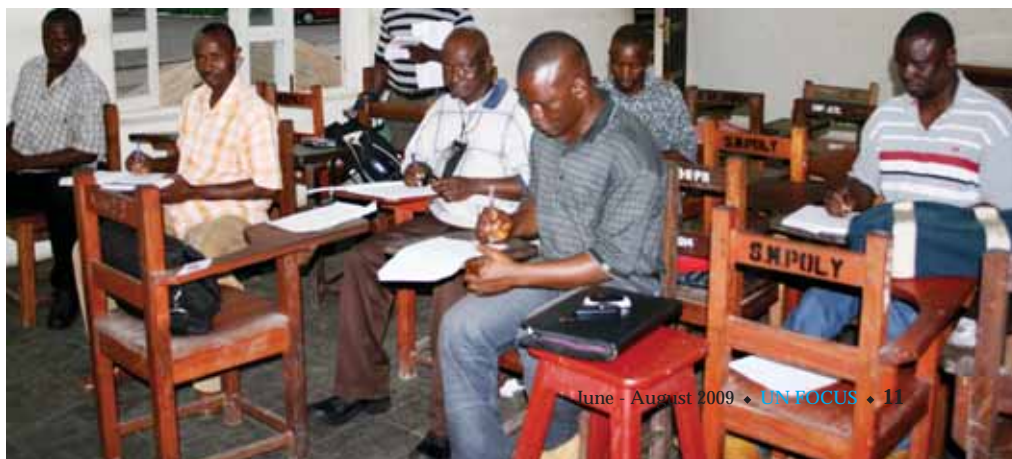
During the first phase of the project the process involved a pre-determined format and about 300 staff members in various sections were awarded certificates, says Anne Wangui Njoroge of IMTC.

Professional Administrators Diploma was launched in January 2008 and targets staff working in an office environment such as clerks, administrators, secretaries, personal assistants and customer service officers. To receive a diploma, a participant is required to successfully complete seven modules of relevant courses. It requires about 30 hours of face-to-face training and all participants go through an evaluation at the end of the course to ensure they are competent in each of the subjects.

Although the ongoing technical classes are conducted in the evenings after a hard day's work, the trainees are not complaining. "You will not be tired when you want to achieve something, you have to make the effort," says Forkpah. ♦

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UNMIL staff at the training



UNDP Administrator Satisfied with Liberia's Progress



Clark with President Sirleaf and Løj

Though it was only a 48-hour whirlwind visit to Liberia for Helen Clark, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator said she was satisfied with the progress being made in the country and was leaving with an impression that her agency is supporting the Liberian government and its people to make a difference.

Making her trip just two weeks after the visit of the 15-member UN Security Council delegation, Clark noted that although progress is slow because of where Liberia has been in its recent past, there is no comparison between where it has been and where it is now. She said Liberia has made tremendous progress at the national level, but it must now be transformed into concrete outcomes at the local and community levels.

The UNDP head, making her first visit outside headquarters nearly eight weeks since her new appointment, said she made Liberia her first stop because she wanted to see the country make progress in very important areas, especially the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which is a huge challenge for a country coming out of conflict and caught up in the global financial crisis.

"I go away highly motivated to continue to support our team here and to support Liberia make that difference and that transition. Though I've been here for a short time, I go away encouraged knowing that it's a long road and knowing that with the MDGs we are making some progress, but they are tough goals for Liberia," Clark said at a brief press stakeout following talks with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf at her Foreign Ministry office.

The UNDP Administrator reiterated her agency's continued commitment to more technical and vocational capacity building which will support Liberia to achieve its development goals. She noted that though Liberia, like other developing countries, has been severely affected by the global financial crisis, the UN will concentrate its support in assessing the human impact of the global recession in order to galvanize requisite resources.

She further noted that the UN will also advise on relevant policies that aim to spur the country's development agenda stressing as priority areas youth development, decentralization, improvements in maternal health and investment in agriculture which could serve as source of economic growth and development. A former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Clark pointed out that her country developed on the back



UNDP Administrator speaks during a town hall meeting in Kakata, Margibi County

of agriculture, primarily animal husbandry.

Clark named Liberia as one of the first ten countries that have developed detailed scenarios on scaling up Official Development Assistance which the Gleneagles G8 summit of 2005 advanced, expressing hope that the G8 would hold up to those commitments, especially for countries that have demonstrated ways in which they can improve their economies. “We will act as an advocate looking specifically around the plight of low income countries in the middle of the recession,” the UNDP Administrator reiterated.

President Johnson Sirleaf, speaking during the stakeout, emphasized capacity building and development as priority areas of her government, but stressed the need for the UNDP to do more in the area of vocational training so as to prepare the

youthful population with the skills needed to absorb them in gainful endeavors as the economy improves. “We are very pleased that they are working with our government to be able to develop a capacity development strategy that will help us determine what our capacity needs are and how we can develop them,” she said.

While in the country, besides meeting with the Liberian leader, Clark held discussions with the UNMIL leadership, senior government officials, the UN County Team, representatives of women groups and donor institutions.

Earlier on a field visit to Kakata, Margibi County, the UNDP Administrator participated in a well attended town hall meeting and later launched the Volunteers for Peace Programme (VPP). She urged the youth volunteers referred to as “Youth Peace Ambassadors” to stand up for peace and reconciliation. She described the pro-

gramme as a mechanism for grass-root support for the promotion of peace and reconciliation. She called for collective support for the national strategy, reiterating that the development of the country will have to involve the participation of all well meaning Liberians.

The VPP, implemented through the Ministry of Youth & Sports and funded by the UNDP and the Peace Building Fund, is aimed at providing opportunity to the youth through voluntary service, to contribute to peace building and social integration in the communities in all 15 counties.

Youth & Sports Minister Etmonia Tarpeh lauded the UNDP for its support in strengthening the educational sector and developing the skills of Liberian youth. She noted that government’s partnership with UNDP has led to the graduation of over 190 youth in rendering volunteer services to the country.

Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson earlier thanked the UNDP for its support to government so far, highlighting the key areas. “You have supported us in the implementation of our mandate that has the responsibility for the transformation of the rural communities - transformation in the context of providing services; ensuring good governance; providing some basic infrastructure such as services which serve the interest of the majority of our people,” he noted, adding, “You have collaborated with us in those areas that are close to the deliverables of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.” ♦

Government officials listen attentively



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Banking in the Soil

Liberians braved the cold weather with clouds threatening a heavy downpour and converged in the open air on Ashmun Street in downtown Monrovia in June for a 'Back to the Soil' campaign. Loud speakers blasted messages urging people to invest in the soil. The message was: The soil is a bank – invest in it.

Nearly one year ago, against the backdrop of global rise in food prices, thousands of Liberians converged at the Samuel Kanyan Doe Sports Complex in Monrovia for the launch of the 'Back to the Soil' campaign by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf with the theme "Eliminating hunger." So what is different this time? "What was launched last year was the concept but this is the awareness, sensitization and outreach component to reach out to the various communities," explains Julie Andee, Liberia's cultural

ambassador and one of the organizers of the campaign. "We want people to know that agriculture is a business and you can invest in the soil."

The three-month-long awareness campaign was launched simultaneously throughout the 15 counties of Liberia and included a parade with placards and banners reminding all to return to the soil. Distribution of posters, flyers, T-shirts, radio talk shows, door to door visit also form part of the activities.

Many Liberians rely on the country's staple food, rice. Such is the importance of rice that without a daily intake of it, many would easily deny having eaten for the day. However, with 'eliminating extreme poverty and hunger' one of the eight Millennium Development Goals, the Liberian President encourages the growing and eating of other food such as potatoes, plantain and vegetables.

There are genuine fears that the coun-

try will become heavily reliant on food importation if the younger generation is not encouraged to take up farming. Hence, schools are encouraged to practise agricul-





Liberians working with UN peacekeepers in Bong County

tural activities as was done in most institutions during the country's pre-war years. Idling young people are urged not to see agriculture as a punishment but a means of being independent. "Agriculture can put food on your table and money in your pockets," says Acting Agriculture Minister Borkai A.M Sirleaf.

Since deployment in 2003, UNMIL peacekeepers have been supporting communities in the production of food by sup-

plying them quality planting materials and providing technical assistance. In Ganta, Nimba County, Bangladeshi peacekeepers are currently assisting farmers to cultivate 15 acres of land while similar support is given in other parts of the country. Peacekeepers stress that food security enhances the sustenance of peace.

At the launch attended by government officials including ministers and legislators, UNMIL and UN agency officials, and representatives of various organizations, Andrea Tamagnini of UNMIL assured that the UN mission and UN agencies will continue to support the government's initiative. UNMIL, Chico, Crusaders for Peace, Cellcom, World Food Programme, and the Food and Agricultural Organization are supporting the campaign.

Last year, the Chairman of the Traditional Chief Council of Liberia, Zanzan Kawah, urged lawmakers and other government officials to take the lead in the 'Back to the Soil' campaign. He argued that since legislators go on agriculture break for six months, they should go to their constituencies and till the soil. This year, the chief told Liberians about his own response to the campaign. He has already cultivated some 50 acres of rice,

some of which he harvested and sold to the Ministry of Agriculture and used some of the proceeds to buy modern agricultural implements. "My people it is good to practise agriculture," said the chief but wondered why the cost of locally produced rice should be far lower than the imported. "We want the price of the locally produced rice to be at least equal to that of the imported one," he appealed.

Recently, Kelvin Sebwe, Liberian football international and the country's highest goal scoring midfielder retired from the game and returned home. As he received symbolic farming tools from Chief Kawah, the 37-year-old told his compatriots: "I am not leaving Liberia because I have retired from football. I am coming back to join the rest of you to return to the soil to develop and make this country a wonderful place." As if nature was fully supportive of the campaign, as the launch ended, the clouds opened and there was a heavy shower. In July, President Johnson Sirleaf toured two farms in rural Montserrado County as the campaign to encourage Liberians go back to the soil continues. ♦

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UN peacekeepers demonstrating agricultural practices



“Liberia deserves additional support and assistance...”

On a four-day assessment visit to Liberia in June, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Alain Le Roy, who is in charge of all UN peacekeeping operations worldwide, held consultations with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the UN Country Team, UNMIL leadership, peacekeepers and various stakeholders. In an exclusive interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka, he discusses the UN’s role in Liberia, the progress achieved by the country and the remaining challenges, and reiterates the war-ravaged nation’s continued need for support from the international community.

Would you briefly explain the purpose of your visit to Liberia at this time?

I started as Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations at the end of August last year. It’s important for me to visit our various missions. UNMIL is a very important and large mission. This is a familiarization visit to see the excellent work that has been achieved by UNMIL and the UN Country Team. I also wanted to better understand the tremendous challenges Liberia faces to be a stronger advocate for UNMIL and Liberia back in New York with the UN Security Council members and the UN General Assembly.

From what you have seen so far do you feel that Liberia is on the right track to achieving sustainable peace?

Liberia is definitely on the right track, but it still needs a lot of attention and assistance from the international community. Everyone knows how Liberia was shattered by 14 years of civil war. So many people were killed or displaced, and many were left traumatized by this terrible war. At the same time, clear progress is being made through the strong leadership and vision of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. I’ve seen many people both in the counties and in the ministries who are dedicated to making progress. And, of course, UNMIL is here to assist.

Currently there are several hotspots around the world which may need a lot of attention from the international community. Do you think Liberia stands to risk less attention from the international community because of other major pressing problems?

It is true that there are many hotspots such as Darfur in Sudan, DR Congo, Somalia, and Afghanistan that attract international attention. It is our task to

make sure that Liberia is not forgotten, and that’s why the UN is here in good numbers with a whole range of support activities for the Government and its people. The international community may have other hotspots to deal with, but Liberia will not be forgotten.

The next presidential election -- often referred to as the “second transition” -- is about two years from now. Do you think that the UN should have a strong



presence in Liberia until after the next presidential elections?

Yes. I visited parts of the country and many authorities told me that the situation, though improving, is still very fragile. So it's very important to have a strong UNMIL presence until after the 2011 elections. At the same time, since some progress has been achieved in the security sector, the Secretary-General is proposing to the Security Council a reduction of 2,029 troops by the end of May 2010 starting from this October. The Security Council will meet in September – when UNMIL's mandate is up for renewal -- to decide on the overall figure. If the proposal is accepted, it would bring the troop level to 7,952 while maintaining the current level of international police at 1,421 with the same level of logistical support.

We will also advise the Security Council not to drawdown any more troops until after the elections in 2011. Of course we must think of the exit strategy for post-2011 with Liberian ownership of most of the sectors we are involved in today.

So in your view, 7,952 soldiers and over 1,400 UN policemen will be sufficient to provide security until after the elections in Liberia?

That was the conclusion of the Technical Assessment Mission (TAM) which visited Liberia in late April and early May. The assessment mission held

extensive consultations with all stakeholders, including the Government, UN Country Team, and UNMIL leadership, among others. These experts reviewed UNMIL's current levels and deployments to propose a feasible reduction that would not affect UNMIL's capacities on the ground to fulfill its mandate.

A vast majority of the UN peacekeepers worldwide come from developing countries. There are very few peacekeepers on the ground from developed countries. Do you think that its time for developed countries, countries of the West, to contribute more of their soldiers to UN peacekeeping operations?

Yes, I do. However, I want to praise the work done by the troop contributing countries that we have in our African missions, especially here in Liberia. I visited some of these troops, who have come from elsewhere in Africa, South-East Asia and other countries. The troops here are very professional. I support more geographical balance of troops in peacekeeping. While developed countries are the main financial donors to peacekeeping, I agree that it's important for them to also deploy more peacekeepers on the ground. I'm exploring various ways in New York to realize this goal in the coming months and years.

DPKO has about 115,000 peacekeepers on the ground today. Do you feel that the UN has reached the limit of its capacity vis-à-vis peacekeeping operations?

We only had 20,000 peacekeepers eight years ago, and now we have 115,000 worldwide. Yes, we are close to to limit of what we can do. That's why we are now developing a new concept -- a "New Horizon" for peacekeeping. We want to discuss it with member-states to see how we can cope with this huge scope, global demands and increased complexity of operations, such as UNMIL's, which often have very broad and complex mandates. So, can we effectively manage 18 complex operations with 115,000 peacekeepers? Hopefully, we will not exceed our capacities.

Do you think that the ongoing global economic crisis will have some kind of

impact when it comes to contributions from member countries for peacekeeping operations? Is it going to impact peacekeeping as such?

Yes, financially. Reaching agreement on the budget of the worldwide peacekeeping operations is sometimes difficult, and the global financial crisis is a complicating factor today. This year the Fifth Committee asked for an extremely significant reduction of costs in all of our missions. That's one direct impact of the global financial crisis.

Another impact due to the financial crisis is that social and/or political unrest in some countries might escalate, increasing the demand for peacekeeping, while at the same time we might be faced with a similar reduction in our peacekeeping budget. Our task will be even tougher in the months and years ahead.

If you had a message for the people of Liberia, what would it be?

First, Liberia is on the right track and has made tremendous progress so far. Achieving peace has been a collective effort by many people in Liberia. I commend very much the great leadership of your President. She has a vision and is well respected worldwide. Liberians should continue their tremendous efforts towards progress in so many spheres. For example, a new army is being trained and equipped from scratch. Yet there is much more work still to be done with the police, judiciary, corrections, human rights, basic services and infrastructure. I'm very encouraged by the many people I've met during my brief visit who are fully dedicated to improving conditions and achieving progress throughout Liberia.

Returning to headquarters in NY, I will now be a better advocate for Liberia because the country and its people really deserve it. I've met so many committed people: from the President to government officials and others in the country. Liberia deserves the international community's additional support and assistance to sustain the real progress that has been made.

Thank you ♦



Planting for the Planet, and Liberia



Løj launches tree planting campaign

With Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj, gently lowering a tender tree seedling into the soil of the parcel of land at the annex of UNMIL headquarters premises in Monrovia, the UN Mission joined the Billion Tree Campaign by UN Environment Programme (UNEP). “We need more trees all over the globe including Liberia if we are going to fight climate change,” she said, launching the tree planting initiative.

Liberian landscape is awash with a wide variety of trees. However, with forest trees being increasingly cut down for charcoal, timber and other purposes without proper replacement, and as climate change becomes a global concern, Løj says the effect of climate change is already felt in Liberia, evident by changing weather patterns.

Planting trees helps to reduce the impact of climate change by offsetting carbon dioxide emissions. Planting trees also helps conserve soil and water and enhance water quality, wildlife habitat, ecosystems as well as scenic values.

Under the Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign, UNEP has set a new goal of planting seven billion trees by the end of 2009 equalling the world population which means every person should plant a tree. The campaign strongly encourages the planting of indigenous trees, and trees that are appropriate to the local environment.

UNMIL’s participation in tree planting exercise follows a call on all peacekeeping missions to support UNEP’s campaign. Reiterating that one of the main political priorities of the UN Secretary-General for

2009 is climate change, Special Representative Løj encouraged peacekeepers to voluntarily plant trees at their place of work, residence and in communities. Senior members of UNMIL management, including Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu took turns to plant more seedlings. UNMIL peacekeepers are busy planting trees throughout the country and already the mission's Environment Unit is overwhelmed. The Unit's chief, Charles Rwandekeye, says the mission's initial target to plant 1,500 trees has been raised to 5,500 which will be also exceeded as colleagues, including from UN agencies have enthusiastically embraced the campaign.

In pouring rain in Bomi County capital Tubmanburg, Nigerian peacekeepers and other UNMIL personnel were joined by local dignitaries, women and youth groups during which several dozens of trees were planted. "If Bomi County is to be protected from global climate change, every citizen of the county must plant a tree," said Commanding Officer Col. S. K. Abubakar. Lauding UN peacekeepers, Superintendent Mohammed Massaley said for the past 20 years the county had not planted trees to replace the damaged ones which had consequently caused violent

storms and disaster in communities. In Kakata, Margibi County capital, peacekeepers – military, civilian and police – in July planted more than 500 trees with the involvement of county authorities. In Lofa County, peacekeepers have requested 10,000 tree seedlings to plant. UN Volunteers serving in the mission are also actively involved in the initiative.

UNMIL Administration is supportive

By actively participating in the tree planting exercise, UNMIL goes beyond its core peacekeeping and peace-building activities and highlights the need to care for environmental issues.

of the campaign and has provided 500 tree seedlings to the effort. The mission's Environment Unit, however, says the demand for the seedlings is so high that the Forestry Development Authority (FDA), the Liberian government agency responsible for forestry, is being sought to raise seedlings in nurseries and to identify

areas to plant.

Ongoing tree planting awareness campaign encourages the planting of forest or hard wood trees. Environmental Affairs Officer James E. Coleman observes that there is serious devastation of Liberia's forests because most urban residents rely on charcoal for energy. "Planting trees will help restore the changing local weather," he says, adding that currently *Termenalia indica* and *Acacia mangium* are two trees being planted but the mission is working with the FDA to identify local tree species.

By actively participating in the tree planting exercise, UNMIL goes beyond its core peacekeeping and peace-building activities and highlights the need to care for environmental issues. But with hundreds of trees being planted, how will they be maintained? The mission's Environment chief admits it is one of their challenges but points out that they are involving the local communities since the UN mission will one day leave the country. Also, although the UNEP's campaign ends in December and the mission would have exceeded expectations, Rwandekeye says peacekeepers will continue planting trees for a long time to come. "The more trees we have, the better." ♦

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Mensa-Bonsu and other senior colleagues join





Unification Town Gets Magisterial Court

Over the last few years, the Roberts International Airport-Unification Town Magisterial Court has had a difficult time executing its core responsibility of trying cases. The court was often “on the move” - from one dilapidated building to another. First, the court worked in an old decrepit store until the proprietor needed his building for repairs. The next move was to the garage of another old house with a leaking roof in another inconspicuous area of Unification Town, which is popularly known as “Smell-no-Taste”.

“This was an open leaking place with no chambers and no privacy. This was no way for the judiciary to function,” the Court’s Stipendiary Magistrate, Francis

Sundemah, told UN FOCUS.

Recently the Magisterial Court became one of the beneficiaries of UNMIL’s Quick Impact Projects (QIP) that are assisting in the country’s reconstruction and rehabilitation process to strengthen peace. UNMIL continues to fund and hand over projects to communities across the country aimed at improving the lives of local residents in these areas. QIPs have shifted its humanitarian focus in line with its overall mission plan and broader strategies for community outreach.

Turning over the Magisterial Court, costing nearly US\$40,000, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for the Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, indicated that a strong justice system is an essential com-

ponent in the peace-building process, the establishment of the rule of law and the future for sound development of Liberia. She noted that progress is being made both within the Judiciary and at the Justice Ministry in addressing the weaknesses in the system. “This is why the UN remains committed to assisting the Government in the construction of magisterial courts and other rule of law infrastructure,” she said.

The Unification Town Magisterial Court, constructed with funds made available through QIPs and additional resources from UNDP, includes one courtroom, a judge’s chamber, two bathrooms and four offices. Another court expected to be dedicated soon is the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court in Sanniquellie, Nimba County.



Mensa-Bonsu inaugurates the court

Mensa-Bonsu stressed the importance of integrity among judicial personnel. “It is incumbent upon all of you – members of the judiciary, court officials, the police, the

she said, adding that the justice system will only be as good as the individuals who are part of it.

The deputy UN envoy urged the com-

From 2004 UNMIL has been carrying out QIPs across the country to help improve the lives of thousands of Liberians who were returning to their home areas where basic services had been either destroyed or non-existent. For the fiscal year 2008-2009, UNMIL allocated US\$ 1 million to its Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery (RRR) Programme where the major priority area is now the Rule of Law.

prosecution and defence lawyers – both public and private, to play your part by performing and upholding your responsibilities with transparency and integrity,”

munity to play its part in supporting the work and activities of the court, noting that the court should be seen as the embodiment of the rule of law in their communi-

ty and should be treated with dignity and respect. “The building and its equipment should never be attacked or destroyed as a protest against some perceived injustice or inefficiency in the delivery of justice; rather it should be protected from vandalism and other acts of wanton destruction, so that it may remain for a long time to serve the needs of the community,” she appealed.

The proxy for the Justice Minister, Margibi County Attorney Frank Oberly, thanked UNMIL for the building which promotes the Governance and Rule of Law pillar of the Government’s Poverty Reduction Strategy. “This is a clear manifestation of our international partners’ efforts to see that the Rule of Law prevails in Liberia that they have provided us such an edifice.” He urged those charged with dispensing justice to do so without fear or favour but within the confines of the law.

From 2004 UNMIL has been carrying out QIPs across the country to help improve the lives of thousands of Liberians who were returning to their home areas where basic services had been either destroyed or non-existent. For the fiscal year 2008-2009, UNMIL allocated US\$ 1 million to its Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery (RRR) Programme where the major priority area is now the Rule of Law.

Of the 40 approved projects at various stages of construction, 19 are Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization (BIN) county headquarters and border posts; 17 are police stations and depots; while two are prisons totaling 95.47 percent of the total funds allocated. The others are a fire station and the construction of a fence at the School for the Blind. As specialized UN agencies, other non-governmental agencies and government institutions are also undertaking various projects, QIPs are first approved by the local authorities to ensure that efforts are not duplicated by other institutions.

Are QIPs making an impact? Stipendiary Magistrate Francis Sundemah has no doubts about it. “Building up our infrastructure all across the country is an immense contribution to Liberia’s overall development. Yes, UNMIL QIPs are making an enormous impact.” ♦

JWW



A polio victim



Polio Resurfaces

The World Health Organisation (WHO) in October 2008 declared Liberia Polio-free after an outstanding success to eradicate the disease under the “Kick Polio out of Liberia” campaign. Less than a year later, however, that success seems to be at risk after some Liberian children were recently suspected of the disease which has alarmed health professionals.

Dr. Zakari Wambai of the WHO says Liberia has not reported any case of the Wild Polio Virus since 1999 until this year. Thomas Nagbe, the Director of the Expanded Programme on Immunization at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOH&SW), says eight cases of the Wild Polio virus have been confirmed recently in five out of the country’s 15 counties. Specimens from suspected polio cases were sent to Abidjan, Côte d’Ivoire, for laboratory investigations. “We have put a lot of effort into this process over the past years,” says Nagbe, calling on all

Liberians to join the fight and ensure that all children are fully immunized against the disease.

Polio is a highly infectious disease caused by a virus. It invades the nervous system and can cause total paralysis in a matter of hours and can be fatal. The crippling disease mainly affects children under five years of age and there is no cure. However, it can be prevented. Just four doses of the oral polio vaccine can protect a child for life. Some neglected victims of the disease could be seen crawling or in wheelchairs along roadsides in various parts of Liberia begging for a living.

Ravaged by civil strife until a few years ago, Liberia’s Polio Eradication Initiative activities started in 1999 but the campaign fell victim to the second wave of civil unrest in the country from 1999 to 2003. With the deployment of UN peacekeepers and the restoration of peace, rapid progress was achieved through routine and National Immunization Days (NIDS), many of which were synchronized with





Vaccination in progress

Deputy Minister for Administration - Ministry of Health Vivian Cherue addresses the media



other West African countries and in some cases the Central Africa sub-region. The last four rounds of polio vaccination were conducted in 2005.

As a result of the importation of the Wild Polio Virus in previously polio-free West African states since last year with confirmed cases close to Liberia's borders in Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, immunization campaigns were planned even before the suspected cases in Liberia were discovered. Intensification of surveillance, increased outreach immunization activities and a synchronized nationwide campaign in May and June focusing on preventing importation of the disease are some of the actions so far taken targeting 650,000 children while another campaign took place in August. "If your neighbour's house is on fire, don't say it will never get to me," says Nagbe, adding that the partners of the ministry have been very supportive including WHO, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and non-governmental organizations.

Most of the fund for operations is being provided through the WHO, which has mobilized additional technical support

in terms of personnel and funding for training, payment of vaccinators and logistics. Vaccines and other supplies are sourced through UNICEF. The Liberian government has a surveillance structure which look out for children presenting paralysis and other priority diseases. The WHO supports the structure with motor-bikes, fuel, spare parts and incentives.

Since the Wild Polio Virus 1 is the variety that is being transmitted in the affected neighbouring countries, the monovalent vaccine which produces a much stronger response is being used in the campaign than the trivalent used during routine immunization. The campaign involves the administration of the vaccine to all children zero to 59 months irrespective of previous immunization status; vitamin A supplements to all children six to 59 months; de-worming with mebendazole for all children 12 to 59 months and the distribution of mosquito nets in Grand Bassa, Nimba and Lofa counties which had earlier been planned as a stand-alone exercise. UNMIL has been supporting the campaign by airlifting and transporting vaccines and other logistics while enthusiastic health workers trek several miles in jungles and sometimes in heavy rain and contend with flooded rivers to reach the children.

As efforts continue to keep the polio virus at bay with Montserrado, Bomi and Grand Gedeh recording one confirmed case each, two cases in Maryland and three cases in River Gee county, medical professionals say laboratory investigations have proved that the cases were imported from Côte d'Ivoire as they have classical identity.

Heavy rains and lack of rain gears and inaccessibility of some areas are among the challenges health workers face as they contend with the re-emergence of polio. Health experts agree that no country can be truly polio-free until all countries are. Simple personal hygiene and proper disposal of human waste will drastically reduce the risk of acquiring polio and other diseases. For now though, Liberia's cases serve as a wake up call. "Polio is actually back in Liberia and we have to be more vigilant and reinforce surveillance," says Nagbe. ♦

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TB : Rising Resistance

Tuberculosis is one of the major public health problems in Liberia and the airborne infection is killing dozens of Liberians. In 2008, more than 5,000 new TB cases were detected compared to the previous year of more than 4,500 cases. But as the country battles with tuberculosis, drug resistance to the standard treatment of the disease has reared its ugly head.

“We have a lot of patients who have

Tuberculosis treatment requires a combination of drugs over a six to eight month period. Drug resistant TB develops due to a lapse or inadequate treatment. The cases in Liberia were discovered last November after sputum samples from four tuberculosis patients were sent to the Massachusetts State Laboratory in USA when they were not responding to treatment.

been diagnosed as having TB,” says the Programme Manager of the National Leprosy and TB Control Programme, Dr. Catherine Cooper, pointing out that they are in the process of doing a survey to determine the actual burden of the disease in the country.

Although many people are seeking free TB treatment as a result of the revitalization of the programme and improved services in all the country’s 15 counties with support from Global Fund to fight HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (GFATM) and the World Health



Organization, the programme manager reiterates that this could be the tip of the iceberg. “We have many TB cases in Bong County some of whom are co-infection with HIV/AIDS,” says Dr. Garfee Williams, medical director of the Phebe Hospital in Gbarnga.

Tuberculosis treatment requires a combination of drugs over a six to eight month period. Drug resistant TB develops due to a lapse or inadequate treatment. The cases in Liberia were discovered last November after sputum samples from four tuberculosis patients were sent to the Massachusetts State Laboratory in USA when they were

not responding to treatment. Out of the four samples, Dr. Cooper says two were confirmed to have developed drug resistance, one of whom soon succumbed to the disease. However, the remaining case - a male - in his twenties, and for whom the TB programme in collaboration with the WHO has made a request to the Green Light Committee for drugs, seems to be “one case too many” for medical personnel at the TB annex in Monrovia. People with drug resistant TB should wear nose masks and interaction with them should be strictly restricted. Also, medical personnel who deal with them should do so with

to Drugs



Marching against TB

great caution and should wear nose masks as well. For the remaining drug resistant case, though, he does not reportedly cooperate with the medical personnel and freely mingles with people. “Even though we have explained the implications to him, he is not cooperating. He has been a big challenge for the programme, but with him, we are learning,” says Dr. Cooper, admitting that there could be more drug resistant cases in the country. “How do we know this? We had people on the first line treatment and if at the end of the treatment they are still positive, we suspect that the patient may have drug resistant TB and we

will treat with another course and if the patient still remains positive we still suspect drug resistant TB until we can do the confirmation. There are cases all around that we suspect,” she says.

Dr. Peter Clement of the WHO says the emergence of drug-resistant TB is the likely result of the 14 years of civil unrest between 1989 and 2003 that devastated the country’s health system; and the gap in funding, management, and supplies between Rounds of GFATM in 2006 and 2007.

Generally, the treatment of TB is very tedious and drug resistant TB drugs are

highly restricted, expensive and toxic. In some countries, some patients have developed resistance to the TB resistant drugs making the disease extremely difficult to cure and an obstacle to effective global TB control efforts

Among other parameters, the TB programme is evaluated on the number of cases that are treated including whether the patients completed the treatment or not. The WHO requests TB programmes to attain treatment success of 80 per cent. Liberia’s programme treatment success is about 66 per cent. “We still have a lot of work to do but we are working towards that goal,” says Dr. Cooper.

The incidence of HIV is also posing a challenge to the war against TB as it is one

The incidence of HIV is also posing a challenge to the war against TB as it is one of the most common opportunistic infections. Over the past one year - from last June to June this year - nearly 1,000 TB patients were co-infected with HIV.

of the most common opportunistic infections. Over the past one year - from last June to June this year - nearly 1,000 TB patients were co-infected with HIV. The 2007 Demographic Health Survey estimates the HIV prevalence in Liberia at about 1.5 per cent.

It is anticipated that a TB culture and drug sensitivity testing laboratory will be functional in the country by the end of 2009. Health professionals stress that the disease has a cure, treatment is free and that communities should encourage TB patients to seek treatment. With Liberia now benefitting from the Global Fund and technically supported by the WHO, the TB programme is now available in all the 15 counties in about 251 health facilities. However, with fears of more TB drug resistant cases in the country, it is clear that the battle against the airborne disease still goes on. ♦

SM

Confronting Climate Change

To own a house that overlooks the ocean may be the dream of many but for thousands of Liberians living along the coastal lines it is more a nightmare these days as the Atlantic Ocean, which was once far away, now comes crashing near their houses.

In Buchanan, Liberia's second largest city, some coastal residents are spending sleepless nights terrified that the ocean might just swallow up their houses while asleep. "Years ago we used to play far over there," a resident points to a distance well into the ocean. "But today the ocean has taken all over that space, we don't know what is happening." Coastal residents of Monrovia, Robertsport and Cestos City also have similar tales to tell.

Although many people have heard of "climate change" only few know what its real impact could be on one's life and environment. Experts say the global consequences of climate change can be drastic: collapse of ecosystems, hunger, water shortages, mass migrations, floods, increase in sea levels, desertification, increase in tropical diseases and major economic losses.

"Liberia cannot escape the impact of climate change," says Ben Karmoh of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who is also the National Focal Point for Climate Change. Moses Massah, Environment expert at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Monrovia, says the effects of change in

climate is a reality in Liberia. "Farmers are actually confused because their traditional farming cycle has changed and it's affecting food security," he says, adding that they have received reports of uncultivated farms in some parts of the country because "the time farmers were expecting sunshine, it was raining and when they expected rains, they got days of sunshine."

In late June this year, climate change was the subject of discussion at a national Inter-Ministerial Dialogue held in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. The Dialogue was the initiative of the UNDP Bureau of Development Policy in New York. In December this year, Liberia will be participating in a global climate change conference in the Danish capital of Copenhagen.

The Dialogue in Monrovia was organized to prepare Liberian delegates to the conference where the Kyoto Protocol, which expires this coming December, will be discussed. Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement setting targets for industrialized countries to cut their greenhouse gas emissions. Liberia will need to present its case well at the conference to stand a chance of getting the needed resources to tackle climate change.

For three days, about 100 participants including ministers, legislators, superintendents, representatives from ministries, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and UN agencies focused their discussion on the impact of climate change on the key sector of agriculture, efficient energy use, and ways in which

forests can be used for reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming. The Dialogue was the first time policy makers in Liberia came together to discuss climate change and create awareness. Facilitators were from New York and UNDP offices in Africa. The UNDP Country Director in Liberia, Dominic Sam, reiterated that climate change is one of the major priorities of the UN today.

The participants agreed that agriculture, energy and forestry are key sectors being affected by climate change. There was consensus on the need to undertake an assessment of the magnitude of investments required to tackle climate change now and in the long-term.

Agriculture is a key sector for Liberia, estimated to employ over 70 per cent of the entire labour force and contribute around 20 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Timber exports also contribute around 20-22 per cent of GDP. Currently 95 per cent of Liberia's energy comes from biomass (firewood, charcoal, and palm oil). Alternative energy production will require significant investments. "All three sectors share linkages that need to be considered more holistically," stresses Massah.

As more preparatory meetings continue ahead of Copenhagen with the EPA working in close collaboration with UNDP and the United Nations Environment Programme, a climate change office is also being established in the President's office. For their part, UN peacekeepers in Liberia have been planting trees in response to climate change [see story on tree planting, page 18]. UNMIL has also been helping to create public awareness on climate change and environmental issues.

"If Liberia is to be resilient to climate change, it means we must equip our institutions and at the same time be able to develop the human resource capacity and create more awareness," says Karmoh. Climate change is not an environmental issue alone, he adds. "It is a developmental issue and a major threat to national development." ♦

Participants at the Dialogue



Dealing with Disaster

More than 500 people, many of them women and children, were trapped in their houses recently as the Goonie River and Zve in Grand Gedeh County burst their banks due to heavy downpour. Most of them were asleep at the time as the rains grew heavier past midnight. But the timely rescue intervention by Ethiopian and Chinese UN peacekeepers prevented a potential tragedy. The peacekeepers braved the rain and flood in the early hours of the morning, rescued the trapped residents and their belongings, and transported them to the Zwedru Youth Center, the county's capital where they also assisted them with food and water.

Over the years, Liberia has been experiencing one form of disaster or the other such as coastal erosion, flash floods and excessive storms. In July, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf visited flood affected areas in Virginia, on the outskirts of Monrovia, to assess the needs of the flood victims in the area. She toured the once booming CeCe Beach Amusement Center to get a first hand impression of the facility which was partly destroyed by flooding. She also visited flood victims on Bomi Highway in Brewerville. Last year, intense and heavy rainfall in Monrovia and its environs left several communities flooded and rescue workers had to use canoes to evacuate people as many roads were impassable.

Moses Massah, the Environment expert at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Monrovia, says in 2007 the country experienced a major flash flood that left many people homeless. At the time UNDP's Bureau of Crisis Prevention and Recovery (BCPR) provided some funds to deal with the emergency.

In late February this year, a four-storey building which houses several dozens of Liberians in the Maryland County capital town of Harper was engulfed in fire. But for the quick intervention of UN peacekeepers who battled to put out the inferno, the building would have been reduced to rubble and several lives lost.



Fleeing the flood

How can Liberia reduce the risk of disasters? This was the focus of a three-day workshop held in the Liberian capital Monrovia in late July. The workshop reviewed findings from a nationwide one-month-long capacity needs assessment for disaster risk reduction in Liberia. More than 100 participants including County Gender representatives, representatives from the Liberian National Red Cross Society, Ministry of Justice, members of the Liberian Senate, the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo Information Services, Environmental Protection Agency, and UN personnel including United Nations in Liberia peacekeepers participated in the workshop. UNDP is funding the disaster risk management and providing technical support through the BCPR, now headed by UNMIL's former Deputy Special Representative Jordan Ryan who is familiar with Liberia's disaster problems.

UNDP works closely with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Disaster Risk Commission comprising line ministries and agencies. UNDP Deputy Resident Representative for Programme, Maria-Threase Keating said UNDP's engagement with the Ministry of Internal Affairs is intended to build the necessary capacity at the national and local level to respond to disasters. She urged the government to accelerate the process of introducing the

necessary legislation as a demonstration of Liberia's adherence to international protocols. Senator Adolphus Dolo, who chairs the Senate Standing Committee on Internal Affairs, informed participants that work is in progress for the establishment of a National Disaster Relief Commission.

Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson frowned on people building structures in swamps in Monrovia and other parts of the country leading to the obstruction of water flow. He called on Liberians to adopt mitigating measures to minimize the economic impact of disaster. He noted that the involvement of local government officials in the workshop will help to bolster the decentralization process and get the message to Liberians in all parts of the country.

At the close of the three day deliberations, participants reviewed and accepted the draft National Action Plan for Capacity Development in Disaster Risk Management as the fundamental instrument to be used by the National Disaster Relief Commission (NDRC). They called on government to accelerate the passage of the bill seeking to establish the NDRC. Meanwhile, the UNDP will soon be organizing a workshop for the country's legislators who will be debating the National Disaster Risk Management policy for enactment into law. ♦

Nigerians: “The Face of UNMIL”



Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and an important regional player, has contributed significantly to securing and consolidating peace in Liberia.

Nigeria's efforts to restore peace to Liberia dates back to 1990 when it intervened in the country's conflict under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) cease-fire monitoring group (ECOMOG). Since then, Nigeria has committed substantial human and material resources over the years to secure peace in this war-ravaged nation.

In August 2003, to end the conflict that had reignited and engulfed the entire country, Nigeria again intervened leading a sub-regional vanguard force, the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL), that separated the warring factions and paved the way for the deployment of UN peacekeepers. Since being re-hatted on 1 October 2003, Nigerian peacekeepers have served UNMIL in significant numbers in the most strategic locations.

Initially and until 2007, Nigerian and Ghanaian troops were responsible for Margibi and Montserrado counties. In light of UNMIL's drawdown and the fact that the contingent had managed to conduct their activities without compromising the security of Liberia, the Nigerian con-

tingent assumed additional responsibility for both counties. Further drawdown added Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount counties to their area of responsibility.

With a total strength of 1,648 troops, the Nigerian contingent consists of two battalions manning the sector headquarters, protecting the President and other key officials, and guarding key installations such as the port, airport and parliament. The contingent has staff officers, military observers, and a signal company spread around the country. They also lend support to the Liberian National Police (LNP) and UN Police (UNPOL) in combating criminal activities and public disorder in Monrovia and its environs.

"Where Nigeria is deployed is where you have the seat of government, embassies, the headquarters of the UN, non-governmental organizations, a substantial percentage of the population and our contingent continues to do its best to maintain peace and security since its deployment here," said the outgoing Nigerian Contingent Commander, Brig.-Gen. Ezekiel Olu Olofin, in an interview with UN FOCUS.

At a recent medal parade ceremony for the departing Nigerian contingent, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj commended them for

a job well done, referring to them as "the face of UNMIL". She expressed her gratitude to the Nigerian Government for its commitment and contribution to peace in Liberia.

Nigerian troops have gone beyond their duty to contribute voluntarily to various communities by rehabilitating schools, clinics, police stations and public facilities around their area of operation. They have also imparted to Liberians vocational training, embarked on medical outreach to the remotest areas, and encouraged agricultural ventures, important for the nation's growth and development.

The new contingent commander, Brig.-Gen. Ebiobowe Bonna Awala, is determined to continue in the footsteps of his predecessors.

The history of Nigeria's participation in UN peacekeeping operations dates back to 1960 in the Congo -- just a few days after the country's independence and admittance to the UN as its 99th member. Nigeria not only contributed troops but also commanded the UNOC operation. Since then Nigeria has been involved in many UN peacekeeping operations.

Out of numerous UN peacekeeping operations to date, Nigeria has had over 150,000 troops participating in about 35 UN mission (former and current) in many parts of the world including Bosnia Herzegovina, Iraq, Kuwait, Western Sahara, Rwanda, Somalia, Mozambique, Cambodia, Angola, DR Congo, Sierra Leone, Lebanon, India and Pakistan, among others.

Today, considered the fourth largest troop contributing nation to UN peacekeeping missions, Nigeria's peacekeepers are currently serving in the UN Missions in Liberia, Sudan, Cote d'Ivoire, the Central African Republic and Chad, UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the African Union - UN Hybrid Operation in Darfur. Other missions are the UN Integrated Office in Burundi, UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti, and the UN Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste.

TRC Ends Mandate

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), created as recommended by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that brought an end to Liberia's civil war and created by the TRC Act of 2005, has completed its work and presented an "unedited" Final Report to the National Legislature. The report was presented on 30 June 2009 at the expiration of its mandate.

The CPA, signed by parties to the conflict including the international community as guarantors, mandated the TRC to promote truth, justice and reconciliation by identifying the root cause of the conflict, and determining those responsible for committing domestic and international crimes against the Liberian people from January 1979 to October 2003.

The TRC was charged to document and investigate the massive wave of human rights violations that occurred, identify victims and perpetrators of the conflict and establish a forum to facilitate constructive interchange between victims and perpetrators to recount their experiences in order to foster healing and reconciliation and address issues of impunity;

The Commission was further mandated to investigate economic crimes and other forms of human rights violations and determine whether these were part of a systematic pattern of violations or isolated events. It was also mandated to make recommendations to the Liberian Government for prosecution, reparation, amnesty, reconciliation and institutional reforms where appropriate to promote the rule of law and combat impunity as well as to compile a report and present it to the Government and the people of Liberia.

The nine-member Commission, inaugurated by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in February 2006 and officially launched on 22 June 2006, got off to a shaky start due to escalating administrative, operational, financial and human resource challenges which saw a lull in their work until July 2007 when the activities of the Commission resumed uninterrupted till its



termination.

The Commission engaged various segments of the Liberian society covering the entire country and the Diaspora and produced an over 350-page Volume II – Consolidated Final Report containing findings, determinations and recommendations. It summarizes over 22,000 written statements, several dozen personal interviews and over 500 live public testimonies with witnesses including actors, perpetrators, and direct victims. The Commission integrated desk research, media publications and human rights reports of very prominent international and local human rights institutions into its work.

The report contains major findings on the root causes of the conflict, the impact of the conflict on women, children and the Liberian society, responsibility for the massive commission of Gross Human Rights Violations, and violations of International Humanitarian Law as well as Egregious Domestic Law Violations.

It also determines and recommends reparation, amnesty, prosecution in a specialized Liberian criminal tribunal (The Extraordinary Criminal Court of Liberia), public sanctions and a "palava hut" peace building forum (National "Palava Hut" Commission) necessary to foster peace, justice, security, unity, genuine national

reconciliation and to address impunity.

The TRC recommends that Liberians adopt positive attitudes and change old mind sets to envision a new Liberia founded on equal rights and mutual respect for the cultural values and equal opportunities for all. To the Government, the TRC made a wide range of recommendations including institutional reforms, governance, issues of the Diaspora, national integrity and corruption, among others.

The TRC recommended that the international community continue and consider long term security engagement with Liberia and the sub-region until such time that Liberia's security infrastructure is reliable and stable. It recommends the creation of permanent conflict prevention and early warning mechanisms that will afford aggrieved citizens the opportunity to place their grievances before an international body when certain benchmarks for peace and democracy are not maintained by their governments. This, the report says, would be an alternative to violent actions and protest in pursuit of regime change.

Since the report was made public it has received mixed reactions, especially some aspects of its recommendations. The National Legislature is expected to deliberate on the report soon.

JWW

Liberians

What Is Your Take on

**Patrick Ketter
Petty Trader**

As for me, I prefer that the report be implemented to the letter because if we let them off the hook, it will show a sign of supporting impunity which we should guard against.



**Morris Jusu
Petty Trader**

I support the TRC report and recommendations advanced by them because we have to stop the culture of violence and impunity. People who pick up arms and destroy a nation and its society should be punished for the crimes they commit because the best way to change is through the ballot box and not the barrel of a gun.



**A. Diarus Dillon, Bong County Senior
Senator's Chief of Office Staff**

I'm of the opinion that while we welcome the TRC report, I think we should find some way to implement the recommendations taking into serious consideration the instability and insecurity that may result there from if we do not manage the implementation properly. I'm of the opinion that Liberia lacks the capacity and ability right now to prosecute people. I would prefer that the report forms part of our historical records and that we build on our ugly past and move our country forward.

I like the report, but the recommendations that came out of the report need to be revisited. The report exposed those who rained havoc on the Liberian people and I'm happy that they were exposed. This report will help us to rewrite our history but I think that we should move the country forward since those named in the report have been shamed. For me I think that if the report is implemented it could do more harm than good so we should move on from here.



**Fodey Kiawu
Petty Trader**

I want this report to be implemented to the letter. For me, I should be in school; but now I'm forced to street selling to survive because both my parents died as a result of the war. So I'm happy with the TRC report and the recommendations that have come out of it. It should be implemented to serve as a deterrent for those who might have intentions to do the same in the future.



**Gabriel I.H. Williams, Minister
Counselor for Public Affairs, Liberian
Embassy, USA**

I think Liberians should all work with the report to fashion the way forward for our country. While it's being reviewed, we have to be careful not to politicize it; we have to take the emotionalism and sentimentalism out of it to ensure that at the end of the day whatever decision is arrived at will be the way forward to reconciliation and national renewal for Liberia. We must allow for this report to serve as a unifying force, rejecting violence or anything that will take us back into a state of war and crisis.



Speak the TRC Final Report?

**Krubo M. Siryon, Student
University of Liberia**

For me, I would prefer that we have reconciliation because it's good that we avoid a recurrence of the past. I pray that the lawmakers would have consideration and as Liberians we should forgive. Though some of us are hurt because my father died in the process but I'll like to urge everybody to forgive one another including those that bear the greatest responsibility.



**Abigail Jallah, Student
University of Liberia**

Was the TRC process transparent? If it were so, why did the TRC only focus on the period from 1979 - 2003 and not from the beginning of the nation-state? I believe if we are talking about transparency we should have begun from the founding of Liberia to present. For me, those who are guilty for what they have done, if they can't repent, apologize to the Liberian people and if indeed we have declared this nation a Christian nation, we can forget about the past and move forward with reconciliation. If we continue to say that we want to implement the recommendations, the country might not move forward.

**John K. Donner, Jr.
Self-Employed**

Though I have not read the TRC report in its totality but from my own analysis I think that the report must be carefully scrutinized. We should also sensitize the Liberian people on the report and call a national conference and let them decide the way forward - a national referendum.



**Venus Linga, Student
University of Liberia**

For me, I would want all Liberians to forgive and forget and let's forge ahead with reconciliation to move this country forward. This is extremely important.

**Patrick Sumo-Jackson
Student, University of Liberia**

My take on the TRC report, I take the side of total reconciliation. I do believe that the intent of the TRC is for us Liberians to totally reconcile. So I'm of the strong view that since indeed it's about our own reasoning that we brought about the TRC then let us reconcile in that let by-gones be by-gones and let total peace prevail. What has happened has already happened; we can't reverse the situation. Let us forgive one another and try to forget the past so that we can live in peace once more.

**Joseph Momo
Un-Employed, High School
Graduate**

For me, the TRC report is good and has even helped the country by shaming those involved in the destabilization of the country. It will also try to persuade those who harbour the thought of wanting to destabilize the country to think twice because the same fate awaits them if they should proceed. As such, the recommendations should be implemented. That's my opinion.





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