

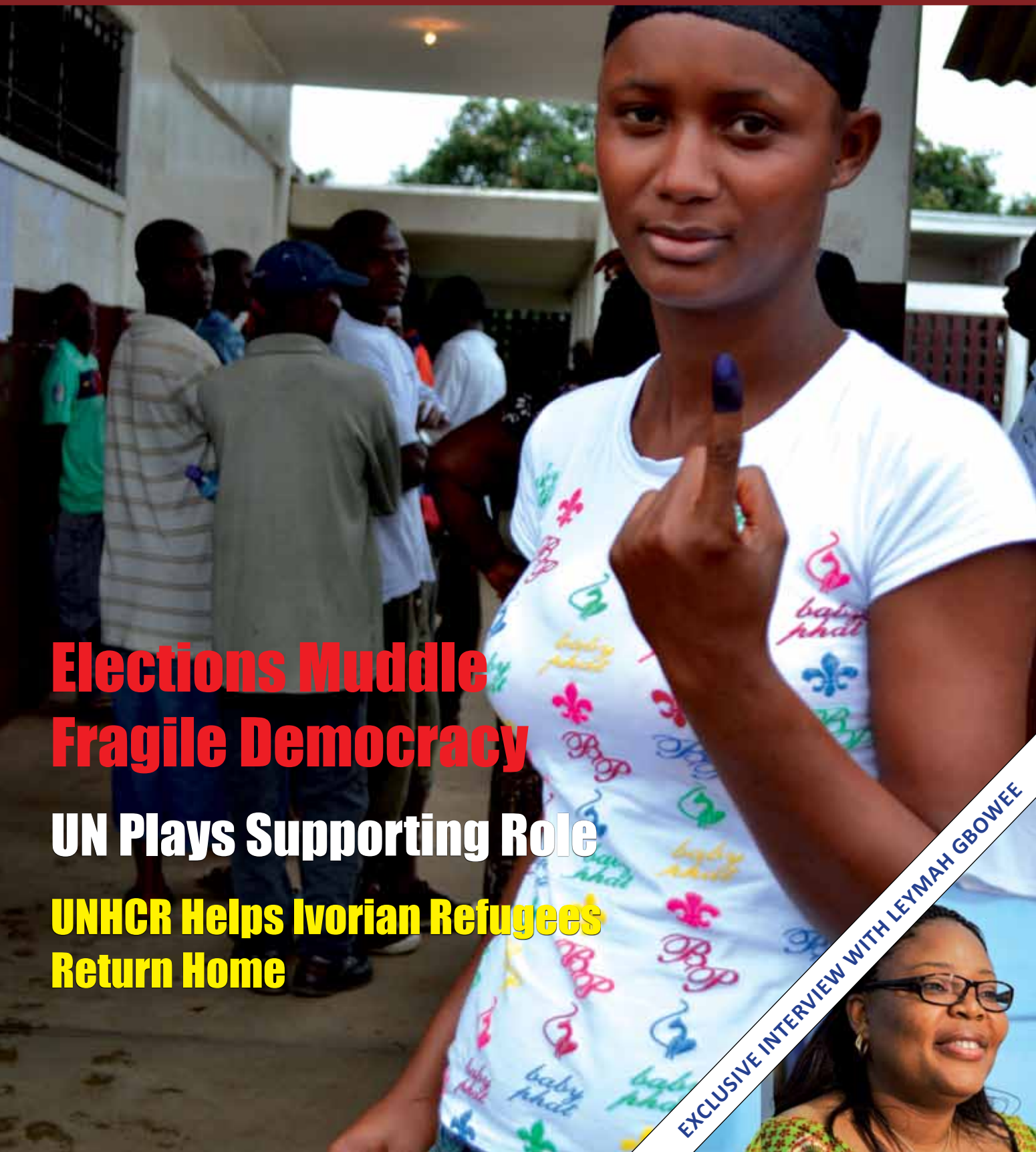


Elections Muddle Fragile Democracy

UN Plays Supporting Role

UNHCR Helps Ivorian Refugees Return Home

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH LEYMAH GBOWEE





Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

a boycott and violence on the eve of the run-off brought participation in the second round to almost half of the first, highlighting Liberia's need to address reconciliation, both at the level of political leaders as well as at the grassroots.

While congratulating the Liberian people for exercising their right to vote, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon commended national authorities for conducting free, fair and transparent elections. While deploring the violence that took place on the eve of the run-off and welcoming the creation of a Special Independent Commission to investigate the incident, he called on Liberians to accept the outcome of the elections and to work together to resolve any outstanding issues, while emphasizing the importance of a continued dialogue on national reconciliation.

The work of the Special Independent Commission of Inquiry will be critical to establishing what happened on that day, and vital for laying the groundwork towards successful reconciliation. Also, the appointment by President

Johnson Sirleaf of one of this year's co-winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, Leymah Gbowee, to head a national peace and reconciliation initiative is timely. Eight years of unbroken peace after the end of Liberia's conflict, Liberia must decidedly look forward to a future of peace, and away from the shadow of conflict.

Peace cannot be complete without reconciliation, and experience in much of the world has taught us that an incomplete peace is often a prelude to renewed conflict. Liberia faces immense challenges, but we must be mindful of the progress that has been made and the significant portion of the road to a lasting peace that has already been travelled. It is vital that in this process of introspection and reconciliation, Liberians continue to work towards other vital pieces of a lasting peace, through dialogue and inclusion. The United Nations family remains committed to working with national authorities to build on the foundations laid over the past eight years, and calls on Liberians to do their part to make reconciliation real, at all levels.

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

Liberia's presidential and legislative elections of 11 October, and the presidential run-off held on 8 November, were declared free, fair and transparent by both international and national observer groups. With over 71 percent of registered voters taking part in the first round, it was an emphatic statement by Liberians that they have chosen democracy. However,



4. Elections Muddle Fragile Democracy

Liberia's elections, marked by high voter turn-out during the first round and attested by both national and international observers as free, fair and transparent, turned sour with violence on the eve of the Presidential run-off that was boycotted by the Opposition



8. UN Plays Supporting Role

UNMIL supported the national elections by coordinating international assistance and providing logistical support in addition to assisting the Liberia National Police to maintain a peaceful atmosphere throughout the country during the polls



14. UNHCR Helps Ivorian Refugees Return Home

One year after some 200,000 refugees crossing into Liberia from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire following widespread post-election violence in that country, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees has begun assisting those who wish to return home while many refugees still remain in Liberia due to security concerns

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Chief of Public Information
Isabelle Abric

Editor and Head of Publications
Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Staff Writers
Ruby Ofori
Ataul Osmani
James S. King

Design and Graphics
Paddy Defoxy Ilos, II
Thomas S. Blidi

Photos
Staton Winter
Emmanuel Tobey

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Mission in Liberia

unfocus@unmil.org

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Elections Muddle Fragile

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Despite the heavy morning drizzle, Martha Sonpon, 35, waited patiently in the queue outside a polling station in the suburbs of Monrovia with her two-year old daughter strapped to her back. As soon as a polling officer spotted her, he ushered her to the head of the long line as pregnant women, mothers and the physically challenged were given priority to cast their ballots.

It was Liberia's second democratic elections since the end of the civil war but Sonpon was voting for the first time. Like hundreds of thousands

of Liberians who fled the country to escape the 14-year civil war, she spent more than a decade as a refugee in Ghana and returned home only three years ago.

"I am glad to have the opportunity to choose my government through elections, not by fighting," said Sonpon, recalling the days she was forced to hide in the bushes to escape the marauding bands of fighters.

The elections on 11 October saw Liberians opting decisively for the ballot to usher in a new government. As the young and old, men and women, queued outside polling stations from very early in the morning to cast their votes, their determination to embrace the ballot, and not bullets,

was very much in the air. With over 71 per cent of the 1.8 million registered voters casting their ballots, it was an emphatic statement from the people of Liberia – "We want peace and development, no more war."

The elections were the culmination of spirited, weeks-long campaign devoid of any major security incidents. This was also an election that was fully organized by Liberian national institutions headed by the National Elections Commission (NEC) unlike the first post-war elections of 2005 in which the United Nations was heavily involved.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the smooth holding of the elections and commended the



Enthusiastic voters turn out in high numbers during the first round of elections

le Democracy

people of Liberia for exercising their right to vote in a calm and peaceful manner. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) election observation mission, as well as the African Union and the Carter Centre observer missions also lauded Liberians for their peaceful and orderly conduct during the elections. Both the international and national observers declared the first round of elections free, fair and transparent.

By the time the results were announced, it became clear that no single presidential candidate had won an absolute majority, necessitating a run-off ballot between the two top vote-getters. The run-off was set for 8 November between incumbent

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Unity Party (UP) who won 43.9 per cent of the votes and Winston Tubman of the Congress for Democratic Party (CDC) who mustered 32.7 per cent.

However, with some opposition parties led by CDC alleging irregularities during the first round of elections and demanding the reorganization of the NEC, the prospects of a peaceful run-off election soon evaporated. The allegations were unsubstantiated and calls by ECOWAS, African Union and others to seek redress through legal channels went unheeded. The CDC announced a boycott of the run-off and an opposition gathering on the eve of the election turned deadly with

at least two people killed. Yet, since there is no legal provision in Liberia for withdrawing in between the first and second round of the election, the run-off went ahead as planned.

With fear and confusion gripping the electorate, the voter turn-out for the run-off reached only 37.4 per cent, and incumbent President Sirleaf emerged the winner with over 90 per cent of the votes cast. International and local observers billed the run-off vote as transparent, fair and credible with no major irregularities.

However, Liberia's second democratic elections since the civil war, widely touted as a litmus test for the country's nascent democracy, exposed deep divisions in the society and the lack of maturity among the political players. The President of the ECOWAS Commission, James Victor Gbeho, highlighted the need to raise the level of political education and advocacy in the region to ensure that political leaders recognized that "there is life after losing an election and that in every election there must be a winner and a loser."

Addressing the nation soon after the run-off vote, President Sirleaf announced her decision to set up a national peace and reconciliation initiative to be led by Leymah Gbowee, this year's co-winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace. "I invite everyone to be part of a national dialogue that would bring us together. I want to especially call on my fellow political leaders to join me in a conversation on the future of our country," she said.

Secretary-General Ban commended the national authorities for conducting free, fair and transparent elections and called upon the Liberian stakeholders to accept the outcome of the elections and to work together to resolve any outstanding issues. He emphasized the importance of a continued dialogue on national reconciliation.

Restoring a failed state and achieving reconciliation among a society that was torn apart are arduous tasks, and Liberia, placed among the lowest ten countries in this year's Human Development Report, faces daunting socio-economic challenges. ■



African Union observers announce their findings at a press conference

Observers Praise the P

By Ataul Osmani

Despite a boycott by the main opposition Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), the international election observers including the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), African Union (AU), Carter Centre, European Union and the Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa (EISA) have rated the 8 November Presidential run-off in Liberia free, fair and transparent.

They, however, said that CDC's boycott coupled with violence on the eve of the election contributed to the low voter turn-out.

ECOWAS

The ECOWAS observer mission

termed the November 8 election free, fair and transparent.

"The Mission wishes to state that it found no major irregularities in the voting process itself. It considers, on the whole, that the elections of November 8, 2011, met the acceptable conditions of being free, fair and transparent," ECOWAS President James Victor Gbeho told a press conference in Monrovia on 9 November.

The President also commended Liberians for their high sense of patriotism by exercising their constitutional right in the November 8 Presidential run-off elections.

"Despite these findings, voter turn-out remained a concern. While it increased during the course of voting, it seems relatively low compared to the first round," he said, adding, "It is obvious that people turned out to vote despite the disruption on the eve of the balloting. Obviously not as high

as in the first round of 11 October, but that was also partly because the first round had involved 16 presidential contenders and candidates for Senatorial and National House of Representatives seats."

The Mission deeply regretted the casualties caused by violence during the gathering organized by CDC on the eve of the election.

The Mission also expressed its appreciation to UNMIL for the key role it has played in supporting the electoral process and accompanying Liberia throughout the process.

African Union

The Observer Mission of the African Union (AU) said that the presidential run-off election was peaceful and held in accordance with electoral law of Liberia.

"The run-off was conducted in an



olls

atmosphere of peace and in accordance with the laws of the Republic of Liberia and in compliance with the AU Declaration on the Principles Governing Democratic Elections in Africa,” Head of the AU Observation Mission in Liberia, Speciosa Wandira Kazibwe, told a press conference in Monrovia on 10 November.

She, however, said that the call for boycott by the CDC, fear of violence and voter apathy appeared to have deterred a larger participation in the electoral process.

The Mission also found that polling materials were of good quality, delivered in good time and generally sufficient, including the indelible ink which was used in all polling centres. There were no evident acts of intimidation or coercion during the voting.

The Mission, however, urged all Liberian political actors to engage

in constructive dialogue as a way forward for ensuring peace, tolerance and inclusiveness in the best interest of the people of Liberia.

Carter Centre

Election observers from the US-based Carter Centre found the vote free and fair.

“Liberia’s November 8 presidential run-off election was conducted in general accordance with Liberia’s legal framework and its international obligations for democratic elections,” the Centre in its preliminary report said.

“Regrettably, however, the election was marred by an opposition boycott, violence on the eve of the elections, and low voter turnout,” the Centre added.

Speaking at a press conference on November 10 in Monrovia, the observer mission’s leader, former Nigerian head of state Yakubu Gowon said, “From a technical perspective, the election was well-administered and on the whole polling staff carried out their duties admirably at polling stations throughout the country. The process was conducted transparently, with domestic and international observers having access to all stages of the electoral process.”

Referring to the opposition boycott and election eve violence, Gowon said Liberia still faces challenges to consolidating democracy. “[T]he events of the past week show that important challenges to Liberia’s democratic consolidation remain. The main opposition’s decision to boycott the run-off was based on their assertion that the overall election process was significantly flawed. These claims remain unsubstantiated.”

“In addition, the Liberia National Police’s (LNP) use of deadly force in an action against the headquarters of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) on November 7, together with the closure of three media outlets, eroded confidence and contributed to an atmosphere of fear, particularly in Monrovia,” the former Nigerian

leader added.

Carter Centre was of the view that these events suggested a significant failure of the political process to resolve electoral disputes peacefully within the framework of the law. It also urged the Liberian political leaders to redouble their efforts for a genuine and inclusive political dialogue leading to national reconciliation and governance reform.

EISA

The Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa observed that the result of the presidential run-off election reflected the will of those Liberian citizens who went to the polls.

“The voting and counting process was conducted with integrity and professionalism in accordance with the laws of Liberia in most polling places observed by the Mission. A few isolated irregularities were noted, such as inconsistency in the inking of voters and the early beginning of the counting in some polling places in Monrovia,” the Mission said in its preliminary statement.

The Mission noted low turnout and regretted that the opportunity for thousands of Liberians to participate in the choice of their President in a free and informed manner was constrained by a number of factors; including CDC’s call for a boycott, the lack of a real choice between candidates as a result of this boycott, and the incidents of violence in Monrovia on the eve of the poll.

“The political dynamics of the 2011 electoral process highlighted the fact that Liberia still faces serious challenges to democracy building and national reconciliation,” the Mission said, making a call to the Liberian leadership and politicians and the Liberian people in general to take bold steps towards a genuine national dialogue about the country’s future and the construction of a united Liberian nation. ■



Election materials reach remote areas with UN support

UN Plays Supportin

By Ataul Osmani

The smooth and peaceful conduct of the 11 October national elections in Liberia – the second since the end of the civil war in 2003 – has earned the Liberian people good grades from local and international observers. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the smooth holding of the elections and commended the people of Liberia for exercising their right to vote in a calm and peaceful manner. “This election is an important milestone in the efforts to consolidate peace and democracy in the country,” he said.

Unlike the first post-war election

in 2005 in which the United Nations was heavily involved, this year’s was organized by Liberian authorities headed by the National Elections Commission (NEC).

The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) supported the elections by coordinating international assistance and providing logistical support in addition to assisting the Liberia National Police (LNP) to maintain a peaceful atmosphere throughout the country. Supported by UN peacekeepers, the LNP conducted mobile patrols and provided static security across the nation.

UN Development Programme (UNDP) handed over 42 double-cabin pick-ups worth about US\$ 1 million

to LNP to beef up security during the polls. UNMIL also deployed more ground troops and increased air patrols to improve security. The Mission also stepped up patrols along the border between Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire before the polls. To reinforce UNMIL forces, 150 troops and 100 Formed Police deployed in Liberia from the UN Mission in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire.

UNMIL supported the National Election Commission to transport election materials as well as 174 LNP officers by UN helicopters to remote areas of the country inaccessible by road. The Mission also deployed 40 ECOWAS and six African Union observers by air to the difficult to

access magisterial regions. The UN peacekeepers remained on standby to help local law enforcement agencies in maintaining security during the polls.

Several UNMIL staff were in place in all 15 counties of Liberia to monitor the polls. UNMIL had also assembled teams of advisors to assist with the elections. All NEC offices in the counties received support from 19 Magisterial Electoral Officers, all of them UN Volunteers.

UNDP, with a US\$ 27 million election basket fund, has been providing technical assistance to NEC while implementing a sustainable capacity-building programme for 2010-2012 Liberia Electoral Cycle. The project has helped build the operational and professional capacity of the NEC while offering support for voter registration, civic/voter education, domestic observation and women's participation. It is also supporting the NEC's relationship with political parties and the legislature, training for security, and legal counseling.

Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, Spain and Sweden contributed to the fund along with

and text messages to cell phone subscribers. The Mission leadership, headed by Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj and two Deputy Special Representatives, has had a series of meetings with political parties and civil society organizations ahead of the elections to foster a peaceful atmosphere during the campaign period and beyond.

Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj speaking to the press ahead of the elections highlighted that

the UN mission was in Liberia eight years ago, in 2003, when Liberians accepted peace and reiterated that UNMIL would be there on election day so Liberians can accept democracy in peace. "Tuesday, 11 October, is a very important day," she said, adding, "I encourage all Liberians who have registered to exercise their democratic right and go to vote peacefully. Liberia is all you have, help build it democratically do not destroy it violently." ■

A loud call for non-violence

g Role

other partners.

Some 1,780 polling precincts were set up nationwide under the project, which also helped bring electoral laws in line with international standards and enhanced awareness of gender equity and conflict prevention.

UNMIL also supported the NEC in carrying out civic education campaign using traditional communicators and by broadcasting live all NEC press conferences on UNMIL Radio. The Mission also provided NEC with a frequency and broadcast antenna.

UNMIL has also been running a nationwide non-violence campaign with radio and video Public Service Announcements, posters, theater groups and performers, songs,





UN Volunteers Rally

By Napoleon Viban

"I leave with a wealth of new experience, and the smile on the faces of the Liberian people is my pride," UN Volunteer Caroline Alice Onekalit, UNMIL's Magisterial Electoral Officer (MEO) for Bomi mused, as she wound up her tour of duty after the elections.

It is a sentiment shared by her counterpart at the National Elections Commission (NEC) office in Upper Bong County. "My experience curve has gone up," Anne-Marie Adihokubwayo affirmed at the end of a seven-month stint with the Commission. "I have learnt new things here."

Further inland in the southeastern County of Grand Gedeh, Aurelie Miclo, another UN Volunteer, said she was particularly struck by NEC's open communication lines, which enhanced

information flow among various partners.

Onekalit, Adihokubwayo and Miclo were among 20 volunteers deployed countrywide by the UN Mission in Liberia in May 2011 to reinforce the capacity of the NEC as Liberia braced for a referendum and subsequent national elections in October.

Seconded to NEC offices in the counties as MEOs, the volunteers were by and large the interface between the UN and the election body. Theophile Kanamugire, MEO for the NEC County Office in Maryland said they "updated leadership at the headquarters and field offices of the UN Mission on developments at NEC, especially areas needing urgent intervention and support."

But the brief of the MEOs stretched well beyond the confines of a liaison officer. Besides coordinating international assistance on the ground,

they also helped with the conception and rollout of civic education campaigns to raise public awareness on the Referendum and the general elections, as well as voting procedures.

"It was all about ensuring effective management of the electoral process, which involves implementation of legal frameworks, huge logistics, training of large numbers of human resource and being able to handle electoral complaints tactfully," Onekalit pointed out.

"Political parties were always represented in our meetings. So, whenever they had any queries, we would explain the technicalities of the process to them right there," said Miclo. She believes that this approach went a long way to keep the communication lines open and preempt any suspicions. "Even when you have your election plan perfectly laid out, the whole thing can still unravel if you do not have the tact



Mission accomplished - some MEOs pose for the camera

to Support Elections

and insight with which to manage sensitive issues as they arise.”

The MEOs all came on board the NEC with skills polished from elections conducted in other countries. But no two settings are the same and, for many of them, the elections in Liberia presented new challenges.

“Earlier, I worked in large teams with specialized members. We would have a logistics officer, a training officer, a civic/voter education officer, an operations officer and a complaints desk officer, all dealing with the different aspects of the electoral process,” Onekalit recalled. “This time, however, I alone wore all five hats!”

From the drawing board to the deployment of ballot materials and monitoring the polls on the ground, UNMIL’s MEOs worked with NEC teams on just every front of the electoral process.

“A number of polling places

were inaccessible because of broken bridges or because of rivers bursting their banks. Still we would manage to cross the rivers on foot or by canoe to reach a polling precinct,” Onekalit reminisced. “I drove on slippery roads and crossed dangerous wooden bridges. Some were so bad we would alight and cross by foot, then walk several kilometers to reach a polling centre.”

These hurdles notwithstanding, it was invariably with a deep sense of accomplishment that the MEOs recalled their experience with the electoral process in Liberia, as they prepared to leave the country.

“I discovered the soul-searching commitment of Liberian voters to make their voice heard, and I admire Liberia’s new democratic road,” said Adihokubwayo who helped the NEC in Upper Bong County train more than a thousand poll workers, and to deploy and retrieve polling materials

from 76 polling precincts that included some 200 polling places.

In Grand Gedeh, Miclo too spoke very highly of the NEC. “You can never be too sure how things will go with the conduct of elections, but I’d say that the Commission in Liberia has been very professional,” she declared. “In the last six months that I worked with them, I observed that they not only followed the steps, but also made sure that everyone with a stake in the process was aware of what’s going on.”

The compliments were returned in full measure by NEC officials. In Upper Bong County, Elections Magistrate Daniel Newland showered accolades on Adihokubwayo. “She was very resourceful, very creative, and very hard working. We owe our success to her planning and organizational abilities,” Newland averred. “We are proud of her.” ■



Porters: Cogs in the E

By Napoleon Viban

They were not in the spotlight, yet the behind-the-scenes role played by nearly 2,000 porters had a decisive impact on the successful conduct of Liberia's 2011 national elections. Thanks to their dedication and resilience, the National Election Commission (NEC) was able to scale one of its greatest hurdles in the hinterland: impassable roads.

In the counties, away from Monrovia's paved streets, bad or non-existent roads have been denying

Liberians access to hospitals and schools, and cutting off vital market outlets for local farmers. As the 2011 elections closed in, things looked pretty much like the rural electorate could also be denied their franchise.

"With the deteriorated state of roads in the rainy season, it was a daunting challenge reaching remote polling centres with voting material," Arthur Duogee, Senior Electoral Magistrate for the southeastern border county of Grand Gedeh conceded a day after the 11 October polls.

Over a third of Grand Gedeh's 64 polling centres had been unreachable

by car, and Duogee was visibly relieved that his team managed to beat the odds. But the county election chief owed much of that success to some 44 porters who helped transport election material to far-flung polling centres well beyond the reach of even all-terrain vehicles. Although most of the porters reached these inaccessible centres on motorbike, a sturdy few pulled the stunt on foot.

"It's a long, long walk," porter Saba Tizon, 19, quipped as he contemplated the trek from Senenwehn, a small town on the Zwedru-Monrovia main road, to the polling centres of Bodee



Twarbo and Gleh in Konobo – could also be reached only by foot. For a modest wage of US\$ 25 per head, the NEC County Office used ten porters to deploy and collect ballot boxes from all five centres.

But there was more to the motivation of these young men than the money. From Ziah, the porters transporting material to Nyongbah completed the journey by canoe after trekking up to Dugbeh River that straddles the counties of River Gee and Grand Gedeh.

“No one would do this for us, if we Liberians didn’t take up the challenge ourselves,” Election Supervisor Thompson Wonsiah pointed out, as he met Saba and his mates before their journey from Senenwehn to Jozon and Bodee. “If you saw what happened

The trip, though, would be real test of endurance as they pick their way through the thicket. But this was not uncharted territory. It was Thompson’s second expedition through the jungle. Six weeks earlier during the Referendum in August, he had accompanied the same porters to Bodee.

Foot traffic on the forest trails is occasional. As a result, the bushes quickly grow back, obliterating footpaths. In the rainy season, the density of the lush forest undergrowth is such that even the porters themselves have a tough time negotiating the very path they had followed only months earlier, but now overgrown.

“From Senenwehn up to Jozon, the track is difficult,” Thompson said of the first lap that would last seven hours.

For the first round of elections, the NEC, with support from the UN Development Programme, hired 1,944 porters, 298 pick-ups, 194 motorbikes and 132 canoes to ensure election materials reach every nook and corner of the country

Porters carry polling materials to remote voting centres

lection Wheel

and Jozon, deep in the jungles of Grand Gedeh.

Senenwehn is about 90 minutes’ drive from the NEC county office in Zwedru, and was as far as the Commission’s four-wheel drive pick-up could take its tightly secured election materials. Picking up where the pick-up left off, Saba and two fellow porters had the onerous task of transporting the two sealed ballot boxes and a third pack of polling materials by head load to the two centres in Ploe.

Three other centres in Grand Gedeh – Chayee in Ploe, Nyongbah in

just across the border in Ivory Coast after the elections there, then you can see why we must to do everything in our power to get our own election right.”

The porters were assigned two security escorts, including Police Constable Fedesco Gould and an officer from the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN). “Our role is to make sure that the election material arrives at the polling centres safe and secure, and that they remain under surveillance until we bring them back to the point from where we collected them,” Fedesco explained.

“But that’s nothing compared to what we endure as we continue to Bodee.” For five more hours, they will brush through dense growth, taking lashes from overhanging tree branches. “I still recall the pain when a twig cut into my right eye as we advanced in single file,” he reminisced of the previous trip. “It hurt so much that for a moment I thought I had lost an eye to the Referendum!”

Still, he and his men were in high spirits as they braced for the 12-hour jungle walk to Bodee on 10 October 2011. “We’ve done it before, we’ll do it again!” Thompson boasted as the porters picked up their back packs and lifted their head loads into place for the epic trek.

For the first round of elections, the NEC, with support from the UN Development Programme, hired 1,944 porters, 298 pick-ups, 194 motorbikes and 132 canoes to ensure election materials reach every nook and corner of the country. ■



President Johnson Sirleaf wins second term

By Ataul Osmani

Liberians re-elected incumbent president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for a second term through the two rounds of elections held in October and November.

According to the final run-off results, Johnson Sirleaf mustered 607,618 out of 669,825 valid votes cast. Despite boycotting the election, opposition CDC's Winston Tubman got 62,207 votes amounting to 9.3 per cent. The number of registered voters was 1.79 million.

"Based on the results of the November 8, 2011 Presidential Run-off election, I do hereby declare Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Ambassador Joseph Nyuma Boakai as President elect and Vice President elect respectively of the Republic of Liberia," acting chairman of the National Elections Commission (NEC) Elizabeth J. Nelson announced at a crowded press conference at the NEC office on 15 November.

In the run-off, which was marred by violence on the eve of the election and

a boycott by the opposition Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), the incumbent President Sirleaf of Unity Party won 90.7 per cent of the valid votes.

"On behalf of the Election Commission, I wish to congratulate the Unity Party on the occasion of its victory in the Presidential run-off election," Nelson told the press conference. She also appreciated all international partners including UNMIL, UNDP, EU, IFES, AU, and ECOWAS for their unflinching support to the 2011 electoral process.

The run-off election became necessary when none of the 16 presidential candidates that contested the October 11, 2011 elections received the required absolute majority to be declared winner in the first round. In Liberia, an absolute majority rule is applied for the Presidential election where a candidate needs "50 per cent plus one vote" to win the race. If none of the candidates secured an absolute majority in the first round, the two leading candidates contest the run-off election.

The opposition CDC's boycott

coupled with violence on the eve of the election were among the reasons attributed to the low voter turn-out for the 8 November run-off.

According to the NEC, only 694,412 registered voters, or 38.6 per cent of the 1.79 million electorate, turned up to cast their ballots in the run-off elections. Grand Kru and Nimba maintained high turnouts with 56.8 per cent and 52.4 per cent respectively. In Lofa, the turnout was 52 per cent. Montserrado recorded 34.1 per cent while Grand Bassa was the lowest with 24.4 per cent.

In contrast, the first round 11 October national elections for President, Senate and House of Representatives witnessed a high voter turn-out. About 1.28 million registered voters, or 71.6 per cent of the eligible electorate, turned up to cast their ballots in the national elections.

In the first round, incumbent Johnson Sirleaf obtained a total of 530,020 votes, representing 43.9 per cent while her contender Winston Tubman won 394,370 votes, representing 32.7 per cent. ■

Fewer Women in Legislature

By James S. King

The results of the 2005 national elections in Liberia, the first after the end of the civil war, electrified women in the country -- and Africa -- with the emergence of the continent's first ever elected female President. Liberian women also won 15 per cent of the seats in the national Legislature. The results were a boost to the self-esteem of the battered Liberian women, who had borne the brunt of the civil war, and signified their collective advancement.

However, the general elections of 11 October 2011 in Liberia recorded a decline in women's representation in the Legislature to about 10.6 per cent from 15 per cent in 2005 elections.

UNMIL Gender Advisor James Muriithi feels that this decline may have an impact on advocating women's rights issues. "Without affirmative action it might be difficult to achieve passage of the proposed Gender Equity Bill that seeks 30 per cent women's representation in the national Legislature," he said.

The Gender Equity Bill was submitted to the Legislature more than a year ago for passage into law. However, calls for amendments to the bill have caused delay in passing the bill. Proponents of the bill believe that when passed, it will help women legislators to promote laws that protect women's rights.

A total of 104 females including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf contested elective offices in the 2011 polls. Only eight of 90 females who contested seats in the House of Representatives were elected, and just one, from among a field of 11 female candidates, won a seat in the Senate.

"Our expectation was that women representation at the national Legislature would have increased but unfortunately it happened in the reverse manner," said Amelia

Ward, Second Vice President of the Mano River Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET). Liberia's women leaders consider this decline as "challenging." Ward said the decline in women's representation in the Legislature does not augur well for women who had played active roles in advocating for peace and women rights in Liberia.

During Liberia's protracted civil war, women battled for peace and called for greater regional and international involvement to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Leymah Gbowee, co-winner of the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize, was among Liberian women who were active crusaders for peace. According to Ward, Liberian women should take advantage of opportunities aimed at academic and skills improvement in order to meet challenges and political competitions that lie ahead of them.

Cecelia Danuweli, Special Assistant for Programmes and Special Projects at the Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET), said poor showing of women in the 11 October 2011 legislative elections was the result of "expensive electioneering activities" that most women legislative aspirants could not afford. She said another cause was high material and financial expectations on the parts of electorates in exchange for votes, a situation that "made it difficult for women aspirants to attract voters' support."

Amidst the various reasons attributed to the decline in women's representation in Liberia's new Legislature, one thing is certain: In the land of two female winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, and in a country that introduced women's suffrage way back in 1946, women still face an uphill task to secure their rightful voice in the political arena. ■

Liberian women demonstrate for peace during the election



“If we must reconcile, v

Along with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Yemen’s Tawakkul Karman, Liberian peace activist Leymah Gbowee was a co-winner of this year’s Nobel Prize for Peace. In an exclusive interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka, the Nobel laureate discusses Liberian women’s struggle to win peace, the need for genuine reconciliation in the country and her own political aspirations. Excerpts.

UN FOCUS: *First of all, congratulations on winning the Nobel Prize for Peace. What was your first reaction when you heard you won the Prize?*

Leymah Gbowee: Oh my God, I can’t believe it. Honestly I was shocked, I had no idea that a Nobel Peace Prize was coming my way. I have always done what I have done because I see a problem, there is a need for a change, I jump into it. My mother has a way of describing me. She says when people go to swim they test the water in the pool with their leg, but my daughter goes in heads first! So I was not thinking I was doing anything worthy of a Nobel Prize.

Two Liberian women, including President Johnson Sirleaf, winning the Nobel at the same time -- is it recognition for all Liberian women who battle for peace in the country?

The Nobel Prize for President Sirleaf at this point in time indicates to me that the world has first recognized the struggle of African women. In all of the struggles for independence on the continent of Africa, the back story is the story of African women who made those struggles possible. Women played vital roles. So I think this prize goes beyond Liberia and is an acknowledgement that women in Africa have done well, that they have the skills and capacities, and they could be engaged for a better and greater Africa.

The Nobel citation said you mobilized

and organized women across ethnic and religious dividing lines to bring an end to the long war in Liberia, and to ensure women’s participation in elections. How did you do that and what motivated you?

From 1989, when the war started, to 2003 -- that was the peak of my life. I was 17 when the war started in 2003 I was 31, that was a huge gap. Half of my childhood was stolen and I carry a lot of anger. Many Liberians, many individuals who lived in violent situations, would. Every time I saw a dead body I saw specifically a woman hurt, a child hungry, and that brought bitterness in my throat. I tell people that anger is fluid like water. I traveled that journey from 1989 to 2003 with a lot of anger in me, but every phase of that journey was encountering different ills that made me believe that if peace has to come in this country the women have to step up. In 2002 we started something called the Peace Outreach Project. A group of us women decided that from 1990 until up to 2002 all of the meetings for peace and stability were driven by men and an elite few Liberian women with the general population silent. The world of politics was the thing of the politicians and the warlords. When we started the messages to market places,

mosques and churches, the message was like -- Liberian women awake for peace. On the first Saturday we were group of 20 women and grew up to 75 women the second Saturdays. By nine months, we had to split into teams of women groups. We realized that to enjoy peace and to secure our children’s future, we must stand up for peace. We wanted to let the world know that the story of the wars in Liberia as shown on CNN, BBC, Aljazeera, etc. has a second part. The back story was the women with their babies on their backs, women trying



we must be genuine...”

to keep the community together, women, even after they have been raped and assaulted, continuing to do what they had to do to keep their society together. Let's take all the pains of rape, hunger, abuse, and display out there and let the world see and know what is happening in Liberia. First to shame the government of President Taylor and to also shame the international community for neglecting to really engage and to involve this [women] population of Liberia. Our protest act of sitting at the Airfield in the rains and under the sun was also to shame and draw the attention of those who had neglected the children and women of Liberia.

The trouble that surrounded Liberia's recent elections led President Sirleaf to ask you to head a national peace and reconciliation initiative. What is your plan of action and what do you expect to achieve?

After the President asked me to lead this national peace initiative, I have been consulting left, right forward and centre. I recognized that without consultations in Liberia, whatever we intend to set up would be a failure. Every Liberian is important to this process. After winning the Nobel Prize I said to my colleagues that I am going to use this Prize as a symbol of reconciliation. So we have begun planning a nationwide tour to every county to show to Liberians what we have won and, can we use this international recognition to reconcile ourselves? Reconciliation must

be a nationwide approach and not a Monrovia based process. It is a process that will require jeans and sneakers, going from one community to the other and talking. People need to talk and vent their anger, because from 1989

to 2011 some people have not found a space to tell their story. You have thousands of Liberians who had never had the space to tell their stories about what they did to others or what others did to them. If we must reconcile, we can't move forward without going backward. Liberia faces a barricade. And that barricade is simply saying that in order for us to move forward, you have to reverse to address the issues of the war, issues of injustices, issues of past oppressions.

I was at UNDP in New York the other day and said to them -- you did security sector reform, you did the police, look at the police you reformed. Those are the issues that everyone who loves Liberia including our international partners will have to reverse now to look at what we have done well and what we have not to move forward for reconciliation. I am aware it is a herculean task and by God's grace I am up to the task.

In other words, you are saying that even after eight years of unbroken peace the scars of the civil war are still raw in Liberia?

Eight years of silence of the guns. Peace is a process not an event. Eight years of no shooting, no missile attacks. Eight years of people silently sitting down and saying maybe, maybe my issues will be addressed tomorrow. I would say peace is when people can afford their daily meals, peace is when a group of marginalized people believe that they are being heard, peace is when you have medicare, peace is when people take their pay home. Peace is a process of many things. Have we met those conditions? We are on a journey to meeting those conditions. We have not met those conditions yet. So I won't say eight years of peace, I would say eight years of silence of the guns.

How hard is it to bring genuine reconciliation amongst Liberians?

I don't think it's hard. I think the question is how genuine will the parties be to address the issues of reconciliation? Liberians, depending on what side of the spectrum they are, they do not want to hear about their wrongs. One of the questions I have been asked repeatedly as a Nobel laureate is on the incident of November 7. My opinion is Congress for Democratic Change erred. Justice Ministry says don't protest, this is a country of laws. The police erred. There is nowhere under international protocol where you quell a protest and use live bullets. Sugar coating all those issues is what has brought us where we are. In order for any wounds to heal we must tell the painful truth. The wounds must be cleaned and then medicated. If we must reconcile we must be genuine. If you are corrupt you need to step aside. We need to be genuine about some of these issues.

Do you envisage continued presence of UN peace keepers in Liberia for some time to come?

Every country emerging out of conflict has to wean off international aid. It is time for us to start training the Liberia National Police, the Army, Immigration, gradually. Between now and the end of the term [of the coming administration], like Sierra Leone has done, we must see a draw down.

You have not crossed 40 and yet you are now a Nobel laureate. Do you envisage a political role in Liberia in the coming years?

If you read my memoir "Mighty Be Our Powers" you would know that some people who are 50 and 55 have not been through what I have been through in my life. I have always considered myself a politician. I am not ruling out any possibilities of political office be it the presidency or a seat in the House.

Thank you and wish you all the best.

Bolstering Security in



By Ataul Osmani

Efforts to enhance the security sector reform in Liberia were bolstered by a recent donation of 42 double-cabin pick-ups, 122 motorbikes, uniforms, communication equipment and solar panels to the Liberia National Police (LNP) and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalisation (BIN).

The UN Development Programme (UNDP), under its Justice and Security Trust Fund (JSTF), with the support of donor countries like Sweden, Norway, Australia and Japan, made the donation in September and October with a view to enhancing the capacity of the security agencies.

“Rebuilding Liberia’s security is fundamental to the recovery process of the country and this donation will definitely boost the process,” said

Dominic Sam, UNDP Liberia Country Director at the handing over of 42 vehicles to LNP on 28 September in Monrovia.

The vehicles handed over to LNP include 39 Telcoline 4x4 pickups, two (32 seater) buses and one ambulance. One Motorola UHF repeater and 18 solar lamps were also handed over. The donations are valued at over one million US dollars.

Terming the gesture a “historic

Liberia



Rose Stryker rides one of the donated motorbikes

moment” for Liberia as the country is moving towards second democratic elections, Sam said, “I am confident that the people of Liberia can now feel secure more. It’s a turning point that will help navigate security in the country.” The donation was to strengthen the operational capacity of police and immigration officers during the electoral process as well as to holistically enhance security and justice in Liberia.

“The donation of the vehicles will enhance the movement of the police to enable them work more effectively in discharging their duties, because, at the end of the day, it is about the people of Liberia who will be feeling safe, secure as well as to have access to justice,” Sam said.

Justice Minister Christiana Tah lauded UNDP and donor countries for making the contributions and said, “The creation of Justice and Security Trust Fund has created an avenue for donors’ funds to enhance justice and security in Liberia. These vehicles represent greater peace and security for the Liberian people.” She also urged the LNP and BIN officials to effectively and professionally handle the items handed over to them.

Swedish Embassy Charge d’ Affairs Klas Gierow said that election security was a priority and the Government of Sweden was committed to helping rebuild Liberia’s security. “It is with great satisfaction that we today see that our contributions for the purposes intended are bearing fruits.”

Speaking at a separate handing over ceremony of 122 motorbikes on 18 October, Deputy Inspector-General of Police, Rose Stryker, said the donation came at the most appropriate time. She also expressed her appreciation to UNDP and its partners, especially Sweden, for the donations, and said,

“This will help police combat crimes in the country.”

The main objective of the JSTF is to support the strategic reconstruction and development of Liberia’s justice and security institutions within the framework of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. It includes support to the Ministry of Justice, Judiciary, Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (BCR), LNP, BIN, the Solicitor-General and public defenders. Since the establishment of the trust fund in 2009, donor funding to justice and security agencies have been geared towards harmonizing all efforts to enhance the Security Sector Reform (SSR) process.

For Liberia, emerging from a protracted conflict, ensuring stability, reducing poverty and promoting sustainable development are crucial for progress. “Ineffective and poorly governed security sectors can become decisive obstacles to stability, poverty reduction, sustainable development and peacebuilding,” said Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Hervé Ladsous while addressing the UN Security Council in October.

The Security Council attaches utmost importance to security sector reforms in countries emerging from conflict to build effective, accountable and affordable security structures within the broad framework of the rule of law. ■





The journey back home begins



UNHCR Helps Ivorian R

By Sulaiman Momodu

It's an unusual morning in Bahn Refugee Camp on Thursday, 3 November, as dozens of Ivorian refugees prepare for the journey back home after fleeing to Liberia several months ago. On this thanksgiving holiday, the camp is busy with humanitarian workers assisting refugees getting ready for departure.

Following days of preparation including medical screening, packing of their belongings such as mattresses, mats, blankets and even chickens, the day has finally arrived for the refugees to leave the camp and return to their homes in Côte d'Ivoire. In preparation for their long journey, they have been provided with high energy protein biscuits, bread, sardines and water.

As the visibly elated refugees converge at the assembly point in the camp, staff of the United Nations High

Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in collaboration with the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and partners, call out their names and assist them to board the vehicles. Soon, everybody is onboard. The convoy, including a Liberian police escort, ambulances, passenger and luggage trucks as well as light vehicles, slowly starts driving out of the camp. The refugees heartily wave goodbye to their friends and to the sprawling camp as they begin their two-day journey.

November 2011 marks one year since thousands of Ivorians fled into Liberia's Nimba County following disputed presidential run-off elections. The Bahn Refugee Camp in Nimba County is the first of six new camps established this year in Liberia between February and September to accommodate these new refugees. The other five camps are Ziah, Solo, Dougee and PTP camp (former Prime

Timber Production compound) in Grand Gedeh County and Little Wlebo in Maryland County.

The refugees are first transported to the Toe Town Transit Centre where they stay overnight. Next morning they continue their journey through dense vegetation to Liberia's B'hai border crossing point onward to the Toulepleu Transit Centre in Côte d'Ivoire.

Up to 96,000 refugees are estimated to have returned to western Côte d'Ivoire on their own since April. "This is a welcome development which is as a result of the improvement in safety and security in Côte d'Ivoire. We hope conditions will continue to improve so we can accelerate returns," says UNHCR Representative Cosmas Chanda, adding that the return is in line with the implementation of the Tripartite Agreement signed in August by the governments of Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and UNHCR. Representative



Happy to go home



It's a long trek

Refugees Return Home

Chanda and the LRRRC Executive Director Cllr. Wheatonia Y. Dixons Barnes recently briefed President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on the repatriation, a development welcomed by the Liberian leader.

Although security has improved in

doors, windows and everything we had in it had been looted," notes Daple, 33, a father of two. "I am returning to clean up my cocoa plantation to get income and take care of my family. In the camp, I have no source of money," says Kouala, 45, a father of six. Education and

Grand Gedeh County on 21 October. Less than two weeks later, the second and third convoys left from the Bahn camp. The refugees are received by the Government of Côte d' Ivoire, UNHCR and partners on arrival at the Toulepleu Transit Centre, from where they are assisted to reach their final destinations.

"I am happy to be back in Côte d' Ivoire, but I will need some assistance to continue the petty business I was doing before we ran away. I was running a shop but everything was looted when fighting broke out," laments 36-year-old Kpan Beatrice as she alights from the truck. UNHCR and partners in Côte d' Ivoire help the former refugees to reintegrate in their homeland after a difficult year.

"UNHCR is responding to the request of refugees to be assisted to return to their country; the momentum is on and we are going to organise regular convoys at this facilitation stage," remarks UNHCR Head of Sub Office, Andrew Mbogori. ■

As of early November, the UN refugee agency and partners had facilitated the return of 421 refugees. The first UNHCR facilitated convoy of 114 refugees left Solo Refugee Camp in Grand Gedeh County on 21 October. Less than two weeks later, the second and third convoys left from the Bahn camp.

Côte d' Ivoire, some returning refugees face serious challenges. Some of their houses had been either destroyed during the post-electoral violence or vandalized in their absence.

"I went to look at my house before deciding to return. I found the roof,

employment opportunities are among other reasons for return.

As of early November, the UN refugee agency and partners had facilitated the return of 421 refugees. The first UNHCR facilitated convoy of 114 refugees left Solo Refugee Camp in



Innocence uprooted



We Are Not Returning

By Sulaiman Momodu

As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and partners have begun facilitating voluntary return of Ivorian refugees from Liberia, thousands of others are relocating from host communities to refugee camps as they are not yet ready to return home.

"I have decided to relocate to a refugee camp with my family because we can get better services as well as privacy," said Pierre, 45. "We will stay in Liberia until we feel peace and stability have been consolidated in Côte d'Ivoire before deciding to return," he maintained, a view shared by many other refugees.

In the first week of November,

nearly 700 Ivorian refugees relocated to the recently opened PTP camp located on a piece of land formerly owned by the Prime Timber Production (PTP) company in Grand Gedeh County. The relocation brings to 3,911 the number of refugees relocated to the camp in a few weeks despite logistical challenges posed by deplorable road conditions. The UN refugee agency opened PTP as the sixth camp to accommodate the refugees who have been living with host communities in eastern Liberia since fleeing their homeland. The camp has a capacity for up to 27,000 persons.

These refugees had until then been living in host communities near the border; by moving to the PTP camp further inland, the refugees enjoy better services such as monthly food supply, medical care, education, water

and sanitation. The camp, the largest of the six in Liberia, also offers family shelters. Refugees are also being relocated to the other five camps as expansion work goes on. The UNHCR Representative in Liberia, Cosmas Chanda, has expressed profound gratitude to the Government and people of Liberia for hosting the refugees "We welcome the relocation both for economic and security reasons as it will enable the LRRRC (Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission), UNHCR and NGO partners to provide assistance to refugees in camps better than when they are scattered in more than 200 villages which is a huge logistical challenge," he said.

More than 138,000 Ivorians are currently estimated to be in Liberia including over 43,000 who live in



Communities have welcomed refugees into their midst

Home Yet...

camps and relocation villages. This population is fluid, with significant numbers repatriating to Côte d'Ivoire and figures are verified on a regular basis and revised as needed. "We are

welcoming the relocating refugees to PTP. On top of the ongoing relocation of refugees in UNHCR trucks, dozens of refugees have been directly moving from communities into camps by

Government of Liberia through the LRRRC as areas where refugees can live. This move is in an effort to ensure that refugees who fled into Nimba County at the beginning of the influx are not scattered in inaccessible areas where the delivery of humanitarian services has been very difficult. UNHCR has provided shelter assistance for these refugees and is supporting livelihood programmes in addition to protection.

In the relocation villages in Nimba, refugees and local residents are living together in harmony and both speak the local dialect Gio. "We are very peaceful with our brothers and sisters from Côte d'Ivoire. The refugees are farmers and we are also farmers, so we are assisting them with land to engage in farming activities," said Flomo, a resident of Gblah.

The UN refugee agency is funding livelihood programmes for both refugees and their hosts in these villages through its partner, the International Emergency and Development Agency (IEDA). "Today is the closing of a three-day small business training workshop here at Wea-Beadatuo. We have 66 participants," said Hestor A. Thomas, the IEDA training officer. Before the training, an assessment was done to determine the type of business individual refugees and local residents wanted to undertake. Skills training being provided also include carpentry, tailoring and farming, among others. At the end of the training, UNHCR provides the trainees with start-up materials. "Our motto is helping communities to help themselves and that is exactly what we are doing in partnership with the UNHCR," stressed the IEDA training officer.

As relocation to camps and the 16 villages continues, many refugees say they will only return to Côte d'Ivoire when the UNHCR tells them that it is time to go back home. Meanwhile, UNHCR provides information for those who wish to return about their area of intended return in Côte d'Ivoire and provides transportation, while closely monitoring developments on the other side of the border through UNHCR in Côte d'Ivoire. ■

More than 138,000 Ivorians are currently estimated to be in Liberia including over 43,000 who live in camps and relocation villages. This population is fluid, with significant numbers repatriating to Côte d'Ivoire and figures are verified on a regular basis and revised as needed.

delighted that we are responding to the expressed desire of the refugees themselves to relocate," said Andrew Mbogori, head of the UNHCR sub-office in the town of Saclepea,

themselves.

Some 6,000 refugees are living in host communities in 16 villages spread across Nimba County. The relocation villages had been identified by the



Ruby Ofori/UNMIL

A fistula operation in progress

Ivorian Refugees Receive Free Fistula Repair Treatment

By Calixte S. Hessou

Therese, an Ivorian refugee in Grand Gedeh County, has been living with fistula for about 35 years. “I was 17 years when I went to give birth in 1977. Due to the distance one had to travel from my village to the nearest town with health facility, the baby died in me as I was unable to deliver by myself. The dead baby was pulled at the hospital after three days,” she said.

“For almost the whole of the 35 years I have been having this problem, I lived in fear and isolation. My husband was forced by the situation to abandon me.”

Therese can now look forward to a much better life thanks to a two-week fistula operations campaign conducted in October by the Liberia Fistula Project at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare with funding from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). She was among 91 women, 25 per cent of them Ivorian refugees, who received free treatment for fistula. According to UNFPA, teenage pregnancy is one of the major contributing factors to obstetric fistula in many countries.

Ange is another Ivorian refugee who became pregnant at the tender age of 13. She developed complications when it was time to give birth. “In

September 2006 I went into labor in my village. Because I was unable to deliver the baby, I was first taken to the hospital in Touloupleu where my situation could not be handled. From Touloupleu, I was transferred to Guiglo and to Daloa. I spent three days making these journeys and as the result the baby died in me. And finally when the dead baby was pulled out, I

she bewailed.

Among the Liberians who received the treatment is Edwina, 17. She came down with fistula in June after a prolonged period in labor. According to her, she is blessed to still have her boyfriend at her side helping her through. “My boyfriend is there for me, something which is not common for us fistula victims.”

Obstetric fistula is a hole in the birth canal caused by prolonged labor without prompt medical intervention. The victim is left with chronic incontinence and, in most cases, a stillborn baby. The smell of leaking urine or faeces, or both, is constant and humiliating, often driving loved ones away. Left untreated, fistula can lead to chronic medical problems, including ulcerations, kidney disease, and nerve damage in the legs.

Surgery can normally repair the injury. The average cost of fistula treatment and post-operative care is US \$300. Sadly, most women with the condition do not know that treatment is available, or they cannot afford it.

In 2003, UNFPA and its partners

Obstetric fistula is a hole in the birth canal caused by prolonged labor without prompt medical intervention. The victim is left with chronic incontinence and, in most cases, a stillborn baby. The smell of leaking urine or faeces, or both, is constant and humiliating, often driving loved ones away. Left untreated, fistula can lead to chronic medical problems, including ulcerations, kidney disease, and nerve damage in the legs.

came down with the continual leakage of urine,” she recounted her ordeal.

At least Ange has the opportunity to smile once again. According to her, she wants to attend the skill training and rehabilitation programme afforded all fistula survivors desirous of an income generating means. “From here I want to learn something so that I can take care of myself because I don’t want to rely on any man to help me. This is what put me into where I am today”,

launched the global Campaign to End Fistula, a collaborative initiative to prevent fistula and restore the health and dignity of those living with its consequences.

The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare in collaboration with UNFPA, launched the programme in Liberia in 2007. More than 870 women and girls have so far received free treatment. ■

[The names of fistula victims in this story have been changed to protect their identity – Editor]



Fundira with Baby Bernice

Liberia's Symbolic 7 Billionth Baby

By Calixte S. Hessou

Baby Bernice is Liberia's own symbolic 7 billionth baby. Born just after midnight on Wednesday, 31 October, baby Bernice was named after the Chief Medical Officer of Liberia, Dr. Bernice Dahn, who represented the Government of Liberia during the identification ceremony at the Redemption Hospital in New Kru Town by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

"As you know, the world has reached 7 billion today, and in Liberia, we are very proud to present to you the journalists the seven billionth baby born in Redemption Hospital in Liberia," UNFPA Resident Representative Esperance Fundira said.

Fundira indicated that UNFPA would continue to direct its support towards the improvement of maternal health and family planning services as well as the reduction of maternal mortality in Liberia.

Across the world, the United Nations marked the population milestone by urging world leaders to work harder to meet the challenges of a fast rising global population, and to ensure the provision of basic needs for all such as adequate food, clean water and equal access to security and justice.

The observance of the global population milestone followed the launch on 26 October of the State of World Population report 2011. "With planning and the right investments in people now -- to empower them to make choices that are not only good for themselves, but also for our global commons -- our world of 7 billion can have thriving sustainable cities, productive labour forces that fuel economies, and youth populations that contribute to the well-being of their societies," says UNFPA Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehin in the foreword of the report, entitled *People and Possibilities in a World of 7 Billion*.

Our record population size can

be viewed in many ways as a success for humanity because it means that people are living longer and more of our children are surviving worldwide, the report says. But great disparities exist among and within countries. Disparities in rights and opportunities also exist between men and women, girls and boys. Charting a path now to development that promotes equality rather than exacerbates or reinforces inequalities, is more important than ever.

The State of World Population 2011 is mainly a report from the field, where demographers, policymakers, governments, civil society and individuals are grappling with population trends ranging from ageing to rapidly rising numbers of young people, from high population growth rates to shrinking populations, and from high rates of urbanization to rising international migration. The countries featured in this report are China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, India, Mexico, Mozambique, Nigeria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. ■

National Seed Policy for



By Ataul Osmani

A comprehensive National Seed Policy will soon help streamline Liberia's seed sector and provide directives for a value chain function that encompasses production, quality control, distribution, trade, exchange and use of quality seeds.

The main objective of the policy is to enable increased seed systems development that will support crop production and thereby ensure food security and poverty reduction. The government of Liberia, with technical assistance from UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), is formulating the policy, funded by a European Union (EU) project.

"Seed security is a prerequisite for achieving food security. A coherent seed policy provides farmers a roadmap to access better seeds and

suitable varieties, thus ensuring food security," says Robert Chakanda, FAO Seed Scientist at the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI).

"The policy development and implementation is entirely government's responsibility. We, from the FAO, are providing the government with all necessary

in formulating the policy.

Jointly organized by FAO and the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the first national workshop on Seed Policy was held in early October. Representatives from MoA, University of Liberia and Cuttington University, NGOs, farmer seed producers, seed out growers and CARI scientific staff participated in the

Years of civil war, mismanagement and neglect had damaged Liberia's agriculture sector. Productivity plummeted, especially as people fled their homes, and agricultural value chains were left under-developed. The production of rice – the most important staple – fell by 76 per cent between 1987 and 2005.

technical assistance to formulate a formidable policy match with country context," adds Chakanda, who is closely working with the government

workshop. A specialized Seed Policy Specialist from FAO headquarters in Rome guided the consultations with key stakeholders from the country's

Or Food Security



agriculture sector.

Explaining the different aspects of the seed policy, Chakanda said, "This policy is going to be the most formidable framework to guide decision, all activities related to seeds, trade, quality control, analytical aspects, scientific research, and exchange across the border. It will play an instrumental role in stimulating investment in seed industry, and building a multi-facet chain of seed multiplication and marketing, and the necessary inputs and capital flows."

Existing policies in the West African region are being examined for coherence and to encourage cross border trade and exchange of this very important agriculture commodity. The first draft of the policy is expected to be finalized by December for review by the government.

Lauding the FAO initiative in formulating the policy, Deputy Agriculture Minister for Planning

FAO Trains Prison Inmates in Vegetable Production

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), in collaboration with the Ministries of Agriculture (MoA) and Justice (MoJ), is training 100 prison inmates in Bong, Grand Gedeh, Margibi, Lofa and Montserrado Counties in vegetable production.

Twenty inmates will receive four days intensive training in each county.

The exercise, which began at the Monrovia Central Prison in late October, is a rehabilitation programme aimed at helping prisoners to acquire vegetable gardening techniques.

The Ministry of Justice has an agricultural programme for inmates of various prisons around the country. To support this programme, the Ministry in early 2011 requested the FAO to provide vegetable seeds, tools and fertilizers to the Monrovia Central Prison. The training comprises indoor tutorial and field practice sessions within the prison grounds.

and Development James Logan said, "This is really a step forward for Liberia's seed sector. We hope that this policy will help us in improving our seed industry to make the country a food-sufficient one. The Government is committed to streamline the country's agriculture sector and this initiative is a step forward in fulfilling the target."

Years of civil war, mismanagement and neglect had damaged Liberia's agriculture sector. Productivity plummeted, especially as people fled

Speaking to inmates at the Monrovia Central Prison just before the start of training, John Jaygbe, St Paul Left Side Bank (Montserrado County) District Agriculture Officer said: "This training in agriculture is something that you will apply in your lives when you leave prison. You will learn how to plant your own vegetables and support yourself and your family because agriculture is also a business."

FAO Training Coordinator J. Kanie Merfee told inmates that FAO and the government "believe that the right to adequate food and health is a human right for all" regardless of whether one is in jail or not. He encouraged them to take full advantage of the exercise as a way of acquiring useful and marketable skills that can be put to good use upon their release.

FAO has been partnering with the MoJ and MoA in prison outreach since 2008 through the provision of seeds, tools, fertilizers, training and technical support.

their homes, and agricultural value chains were left under-developed. The production of rice – the most important staple – fell by 76 per cent between 1987 and 2005.

Agricultural production has increased in recent years as the sector slowly recovers, but yields are still well below the regional average and food insecurity is high. Liberia only produces about 40 per cent of the rice it needs to feed its population, relying on expensive imports to cover the rest. ■

The Sea Swallows Buchanan



By Daniel Mensah Brande and Moses Zangar

Home to the headquarters of several big international companies including the global steel giant AcellorMittal, the port city of Buchanan is fast emerging as the industrial hub of Liberia. However, the Grand Bassa County political capital, which is also the second largest city of Liberia, is gradually being obliterated by the marauding waves of the Atlantic Ocean.

There are no official figures on the exact rate at which the sea is eroding the city -- as most records were destroyed during Liberia's 14-year civil war -- but conservative estimates

show that the sea has, in the last 40 years, moved some 250 metres into the city. Balehwreh Town, one of the most affected communities, is said to be ceding about 6.6 metres of land to the sea every year.

Grand Bassa County Superintendent Julian Duncan Cassell describes the situation as "worrisome," warning that if nothing is done immediately, the entire city could be wiped away.

"Sea erosion is something we are battling with, and is getting worse with each passing day," she says, pointing out that "since 2006, the sea has been regularly encroaching on the city, leaving more than one hundred homes destroyed, and displacing hundreds of people."

Communities along Buchanan's

Atlantic Street bear the scars of the invasion by the ocean. Residents here say they no longer consider themselves as living by the sea, but rather living in the sea.

"Buchanan is on the verge of falling into the sea; we are all afraid," says octogenarian Joseph Sekum, a former County Attorney and one-time Member of the House of Representative, who laments that in 2010, he lost a two-storey modern house built at the cost of US\$400,000 dollars to the sea.

Fifty-six-year old John Aggrey, who was born at one of the Atlantic Street communities, says he remembers that "the sea was about one nautical mile away from the Atlantic Street, but now it is just a stone throw from the street, and threatens the very existence of



Imperilled by the invading sea

fishing communities."

Looking disturbed, a 42 year old Ghanaian resident of one of the fishing communities points to a distance in the sea, saying "I had a video club and a filling station there. They all fell victim to the encroaching sea. If nothing is done, we will continue to lose our properties and our traditional heritage; this will ultimately lead to the death of the community."

"The sea has washed away the sand dune on the beach," cries fisherman John Mensah. "We barely have space to park our canoes," he complains. He fears their greatest asset, the beach, is being stolen away by the sea.

For 80-year old retired chief fisherman Kwaku Mensah of Bardehwleh Town, whose makeshift house is on the verge of being

swallowed up by the sea, the fishing business is fast collapsing. "We are not killing fishes like before; I am thinking where we will go next if the sea swallows the remaining land on which we live."

But Buchanan is not alone in this phenomenon of coastal erosion, also known as coastline retreat. Nine of the country's 15 counties along Liberia's 560-kilometre long coastline are all potential victims. Sea erosion is reported to be claiming lands in Monrovia's coastal suburbs of Congo Town, New Kru Town, West Point and Virginia, with New Kru Town said to be losing at least five metres of land to the sea every year.

The enraged sea has also not spared the Grand Cape Mount County administrative headquarters of Robertsport, devouring human habitats and socio-economic infrastructure. The city's airfield and a police depot have been swallowed up by the sea.

Climate change, culminating in rising sea level, is known to be responsible for the increasing coastline retreats throughout the world. However, the situation in Buchanan and the rest of Liberia seems to be accentuated by human activities.

Liberia's then Minister of Lands Mines and Energy, Eugene Shannon, told journalists in Buchanan that

the pillaging of the metals and rocks erected to act as a barrier to ward off the advancing sea in Buchanan was one of the major causes for the increasing sea erosion.

"As a result of this," he explained, "the corridors where those metals and rocks were placed are now allowing the sea to hit the coastlines, devastating homes."

Sand mining along the beaches is yet another factor. This has become a major business, feeding the booming postwar construction industry in the country. The creation of unplanned human settlements along the coast adds to the woes.

To fix the problem, Buchanan, alongside with Liberia's foremost city, Monrovia and Robertsport, is to benefit from US\$3.3 million provided by the Climate Change Adaptation for Least Developed Countries' Fund through the UNDP, for the erection of sea defence walls.

Feasibility studies for the Buchanan project have already been carried out, and according to Grand Bassa Land Commissioner James Harris, the government has allocated a 20-acre land for the resettlement of more than 570 coastal community households, most of whom are Ghanaians. But until Buchanan gets the sea defence walls, the Atlantic Ocean will continue to eat up the city, known locally as Gbezhohn. ■





Liberian

With the elections over, how can

Cynthia S. Gilman: resident of SKD Boulevard, Paynesville: As for me I feel that Liberians should accept and put the past behind and push forward. For those who felt they were hurt during the elections we are appealing to them to forget it whether they tell them sorry or not. Let them forget it and move ahead. Let those who had hurt others in our society sit with those they hurt to find common grounds to live in peace.



Johnetta C. Thompson: University of Liberia student: I strongly believe that Liberians should put away violence because that is what I have noticed. Having dialogue is one best way for reconciliation. To reconcile this country we should be able to respect each other's views. Listen to what I say and I listen to what you say, by that we can be able to reconcile our differences. I also think that law makers should play roles in the reconciliation process. I think we can have reconciliation when provisions mentioned in the TRC are implemented.



Amy M. Johnson: Old Road resident: I will say thank you very much for that question because I have been anxious to give my views about this reconciliation process. First I would like to say reconciliation should start from our various communities down to churches, mosques and organizations. It is us the same people that live in the communities and attending the various churches and mosques. If we don't reconcile ourselves in the various communities, I don't think we could be able to do that in organizations or even in churches. I would like to recommend to government to constitute committees to go out into the communities because it is where the very people who attend the churches and mosques live. The community people are part of political parties. If you are reconciling with someone, be able to tell them the truth about what you did to them rather than just mere statement of sorry. You sorry for what? Oh my dear, I am sorry for what I did to you at this time or that. Then the offended would take off time to reflect and possibly forgive you. But if you don't do that it would be very hard for such person to forgive you. And finally we have to establish the root cause of this violence and work towards it.



Teddy Thompson Gbowee, New Matadi resident: Reconciliation is inward. Reconciliation in Liberia is overdue after 14 years of war. The first thing to do is to recognize where we faulted before we can embark on reconciliation process. We expected reconciliation after 2005 elections, but instead we began to downsize people from their jobs, put people out of jobs. While we were in that state we created another hurdle by the way the elections were conducted. Liberians are unique people. But in our uniqueness we are far from realizing reconciliation. We have created mental wounds. Reconciliation should not be fragile but practical. We must do it with sincerity. By appointing Leymah Gbowee alone cannot reconcile us. Include people from various parties, peace and human rights advocates as well.



Chris Wolo, Monrovia resident: Liberians should reconcile with each other. Reconciliation must be internal, practical in the palaver hut discussion. Reconciliation can be achieved without TRC. TRC is just the ceremony aspect.

ns Speak

Liberians achieve reconciliation?



Gwendolyn S. Paul, resident of Chocolate City, Gardnersville: Let us come together as one and reconcile our differences. The president should play a major role by setting up the committee on reconciliation. I don't have much to say about TRC. To err is human and to forgive is divine. We cannot have reconciliation in absence of justice.



Edwin B. Zoludua, Jr., Member, Mano River Union Children's Parliament: I think reconciliation in Liberia now is something very major. I think that should be the first agenda for President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as she has already begun doing this. In the face of all these political disarrangement as I would put it, it is now time that all Liberians understand that politics is behind us. Liberia is our common patrimony and we must now come together as one people. Reconciling Liberians does not necessarily mean implementation of TRC recommendations. The TRC in itself is a fine report, but there are some components that may not be fine for reconciliation in Liberia. The issue of the TRC is necessary but what should now be done is to holistically initiate a national reconciliation conference. Implementing the TRC is ok but there are some components that are not very healthy for our reconciliation process. There are ways in reconciling our people like the South Africa module. I think if we follow the South African style of reconciliation we could achieve reconciliation.



Mabamah S. Siryon, New Georgia Estate resident: What we can do is to get to those who were hurt and confess the wrongs done to them and begin to ask them for forgiveness. They should go over to them in the name of unity and reconciliation and let the victims be willing to forgive those who hurt them. But without TRC implementation there can be no reconciliation. Justice and reconciliation should go together.



Moses Flomo Tunnie, employee, Harbel, Firestone: My view here is the President should have the ability to bring together members of the opposition to a round table despite what is happening. In order to reconcile we must be able to bring people together to be able to trash our differences. If we try to mix TRC report with what is happening right now it will not be good thing to do. When we shall have come to stabilization maybe we can consider TRC report in future. The incumbent should take the lead to invite opposition and aggrieved parties before people from the foreign parts can come in. But we should be able to start the process of reconciliation. Provision of jobs for me is not only solution to reconciliation. But I think we must first reconcile and when we work and receive funds then we can all live happily to develop our country.



Monica P. Bantoe, Resident of Berdnerville: I want every Liberian to reconcile with each other to move our country forward. Without genuine reconciliation it would be difficult to achieve peace and development. Let those who did wrong to others come forth and say we are sorry for what we did. And those who feel hurt should be willing to forgive those who hurt them. Liberia is a small country of one family. If we live with hatred it won't do us any good.

