

UN FOCUS



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ERU Passes Halfway Mark
Yet Another Milestone
Village Enterprise



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

In September, the Security Council extended the mandate of the UN Mission in Liberia for another year and endorsed Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's proposals for a continued and phased troop reduction in view of the progress in consolidating peace in the country. The Security Council also agreed to maintain UNMIL's current police levels. The extension gives us one more year to work hard and make further progress in the implementation of our mandate in support of Liberia's recovery.

A continued priority area for the Government of Liberia and UNMIL in terms of durable security and stability in the country is the development of national security and rule of law institutions that are fully and independently operational. The law enforcement and judicial agencies must evolve to be robust and professional enough to deal promptly with law and order challenges and widespread impunity. Rule of law agencies must also work to regain the confidence of the Liberian society. To highlight these critical challenges and funding gaps that must be addressed in the rule of law sector, the UN assisted the Government of Liberia to present security and justice sector strategic plans to international partners at the UN Headquarters in September.

While renewing UNMIL's mandate, the Security Council has also requested

UNMIL to provide support to Liberian institutions for the conduct of 2011 national elections. The Security Council stressed that the responsibility for the preparation and conduct of elections rests with the Liberian authorities, while the UN will assist with coordination of international electoral assistance and facilitate the creation of a conducive and positive atmosphere for peaceful elections. The recent Montserrado by-election has revealed the challenges that lay ahead of us in ensuring a smooth and credible polls; and it also enabled us to appreciate that preparations need to commence without further delay. I therefore call for speedy conclusion of action on critical legislation that is needed to keep the electoral timetable on schedule for 2011.

The success of Liberia's peace process will depend on a combination of efforts that address security, economic and social development, and respect for human rights. Ultimately the touchstone for Liberia's long-term stability will be the capacity of its own institutions to operate in a democratic, responsible and efficient manner.

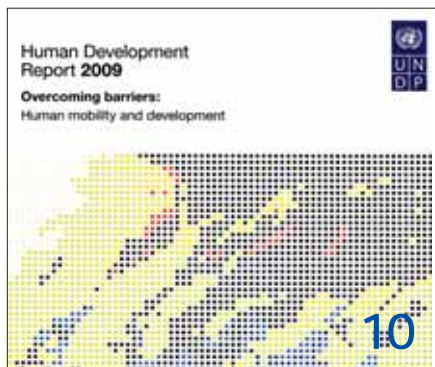
As Liberia continues to move further away from its legacy of civil war, the international community should remain committed to offer its support for this fledgling nation to realize durable peace, stability and prosperity.

Ellen Margrethe Løj

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



The Emergency Response Unit, the elite component of the Liberia National Police, passes half-way mark of its expected strength with 80 more officers completing the special training recently. The elite unit is being trained to deal with armed criminals, hostage situations, terrorist activities, riot control and to engage in anti-crime patrols.



For the first time in 15 years, Liberia this year features in the global Human Development Index listing. Barely six years after the civil war ended, Liberia now ranks above several West African countries previously ranked higher, including Guinea, Burkina Faso, Mali and Guinea Bissau.



Where banks or financial institutions do not exist, dozens of enterprising Liberian women have got together to start a unique venture they call Volunteers Savings and Lending Associations giving them access to credit to start small businesses. Members say their venture has strengthened social cohesion in their villages thus enhancing peace-building.

- 4 ERU Passes the Halfway Mark
- 6 UNHCR Supports Rule of Law
- 8 Partners' Forum
- 10 Yet Another Milestone
- 12 Engaging Youth Volunteers
- 14 Battle against Yellow fever
- 16 Interview: Lt.-Gen. Abu Tayeb
Muhammad Zahirul Alam
- 18 From Refugee to ECOWAS Citizen
- 20 Village Enterprise
- 22 Rubber Plantations Reclaimed But...
- 24 State of the World Population 2009
- 26 Children's Festival
- 27 India Extends Hand of Friendship
- 28 Ethiopians Bid Farewell
- 30 Liberians Speak



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ERU Passes the Halfway

The elite component of the Liberia National Police (LNP), the Emergency Response Unit (ERU), has now passed the halfway mark with 80 LNP officers from Class Four recently completing the special training and thus bringing the total strength to 287 ERU officers since training of this selected unit began in mid-2008. The ERU now also benefits from an exclusive Command Center.

The ERU is being trained to deal with crimes which may require the use of firearms. Members are trained to deal with armed criminals, violent crimes in progress, hostage situations and armed terrorists activities. They also deal with riot

control, engage in anti-crime patrol in crime prone areas and provide assistance in major disaster situations.

Addressing the graduates on completion of the three-month intensive training at the LNP Training Academy, Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu reminded the graduates that it was now time for them to transform their abilities into practical service to their community. The ERU officers have inherited the hopes and dreams of all Liberians who seek to live in a safe and secure environment, she said, and cautioned them against the abuse of their strength and power which could bring shame and dishonour to the unit.

While assuring the Liberian Government of UNMIL's continued assistance in training, reforming and restructuring the LNP, the UN Deputy Envoy noted the immense contribution and continued commitment of bilateral partners to the development of the ERU, most especially the Governments of the United States and Ireland.

Making remarks at his first ERU graduation ceremony since becoming the LNP Inspector-General, Marc Amblard reminded the newly trained ERU officers that the tasks, expectations and sacrifices ahead of them were huge but urged them to serve Liberia with diligence, respect, dignity, discipline and honour.



ERU graduates demonstrate their skills

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The Political and Economic Counsellor at the US Embassy, Steven Koutsis, who represented his Government at the ceremony, reminded the audience of the recent visit there of the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton who promised additional US financial support for training the LNP in next year's budget, including additional support to the ERU. "You are about to embark on a mission to protect your country and its citizens against dangers that only you are trained and equipped to face; you are right to hold your heads high, but not with arrogance," the US diplomat said.

Project Manager Damon Brown confirmed that an additional 107 applicants



President Sirleaf with senior UN officials at the graduation

have been recruited for enrollment in Class Five, expected to commence training shortly. He noted that there has been difficulty in recruiting more women. To date, there are only three women in the ERU. "We have had women recruitment drives and information seminars so women can understand that not only will they be involved in directed patrols and the like, but there are different operations like logistical support, communication and different things we would like to have the women here for," he said.

Meanwhile, a new LNP-ERU Command Centre has been dedicated and turned over to the Liberian Government. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said the dedication of the Center is an attempt to move one step further in Government's efforts to enhance human security. "By these facilities, our ERU who have been professionally trained and are in the process of being properly equipped will be able to meet those unexpected and unwanted circumstances in which they have to deal with the infringement of rights, disturbances of the public peace – lawlessness," she said.

President Sirleaf praised the UN and the US Government for being major partners in the process of strengthening the ERU. She stressed that the ERU remains a unit of the LNP, which must gain the confidence of the public by working with them and partnering with communities to

enable citizens obey the law, respect their dignity and help them become law abiding citizens.

At the dedicatory ceremony, US Ambassador to Liberia Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the nearly US\$1 million Centre will serve not only as a place for the ERU to operate from but also a testament to the ongoing partnership between the US and Liberian Governments, and the UN in the development of the LNP and its ERU. The 12-office Centre, its communications set-up and the upcoming training of the fifth class will mark the completion of the initial US commitment in 2007 to develop the skilled unit through a US\$5 million authorization. Since then, the US Government has committed US\$2 million more to advance the development of the ERU and by extension the LNP. The US commitment to the development of LNP is expected to increase in the coming months.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ellen Margrethe Løj, noted that the opening of the Command Center will serve as a significant enabler for the ERU to improve upon and sustain its capabilities to deliver timely and effective police response to critical incidents and serious crimes. She noted that over the period the ERU has acquired professional policing skills that go beyond the fundamentals of operational policing. ♦



UNHCR Supports Rule of Law

On a sun-drenched day in Sinoe County, Joe walks many kilometres on a dusty stretch of road to reach a makeshift magistrate court. He has been doing this in search of justice over a piece of land. But Joe is not alone. Almost every week, many Liberians defy searing sun or pouring rain to hear court proceedings of their cases which sometimes drag on for years.

Now, however, residents of Margibi, Grand Gedeh and Sinoe counties are

delighted that new structures and facilities have been built for cases to be expedited, thanks to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). “Before UNHCR’s intervention, we had no magistrate court,” says Grand Gedeh County Attorney Adolphus Karnuah.

Ibrahima Coly, the UNHCR Representative in Liberia, says the UN refugee agency has built three magisterial courts in the three counties as well as provided furniture and a package of stationer-

ies to the administration. The courts, located outside the county capitals, were constructed in line with standard practice. The magistrate court in Sinoe is the last of 13 construction or rehabilitation support projects UNHCR embarked on since 2007.

“Rule of law is protection and protection is UNHCR’s core mandate,” says Coly, stressing: “Whether you win a court case or not, the fact remains that people have a place to go to lodge a complaint and to be listened to than to resort to vio-



UNHCR - Liberia

CR Representative Ibrahima Coly hands over generators

lence. Everyone is equal before the law and this is very important for peacebuilding.”

During Liberia’s civil war, most people fled their homes and lived either as internally displaced persons or refugees. But back in their home areas as returnees, issues that require the intervention of the law are sometimes not far away. The Deputy Executive Director of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), Saah Nyumah, says UNHCR’s support to rule of law is as a result of gaps identified in return areas during refugee monitoring. “One crosscutting issue in all the counties was rule of law; either there were no courts and police stations or such facilities were broken down,” says Nyumah. Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has often named rule of law as one of the major challenges facing Liberia.

The UNHCR has also constructed facilities including four police stations and

barracks in Lofa, Maryland, Grand Gedeh and Grand Bassa; it has also constructed four Correction facilities in Sinoe, Bong, Bomi and Margibi in addition to constructing Immigration offices in Grand Cape Mount and Maryland. All facilities are furnished. The UN agency is also part of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework that is funding the construction of the 1st judicial Circuit Court in Voinjama, Lofa County.

UNHCR, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice, has assisted to train county attorney clerks to work with the attorneys. “Among other responsibilities, we help the court attorney arrange documents for court proceedings,” says A. Mayango Joyfe, a clerk in Bomi County. County Attorney Karnuah describes the clerks as “very useful.” The UN agency has also assisted the county attorneys with laptop computers and generators to enable them compile reports.

UNHCR collaborates with the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) as its major implementing partner, UN agencies and with the United Nations Mission in Liberia, which has supporting rule of law activities through its Quick Impact Projects (QIPs).

In October, more than 50 judicial and law enforcement officials were provided basic skills and techniques in Harper, Maryland County, aimed at strengthening relations among key players in the justice system. Under the sponsorship of the

UNHCR, the two-day capacity-building exercise was in collaboration with UNMIL Legal and Judicial Systems Support, Human Rights and Protection Section, Correction Advisory Unit, the Carter Centre, and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission. “This is part of our ongoing capacity building process which takes place in other areas as well,” says Mohamed Tejan-Cole, UNHCR’s Protection Monitoring Coordinator.

To assist returning refugees and internally displaced persons, the agency is also engaged in reconciliation programmes, income generation activities and community empowerment projects including building schools, water and sanitation, construction of health centres and other basic services through implementing partners. Coly says so far the UN agency has funded more than 530 projects in agriculture, capacity building, education, health, income generation, infrastructure, rule of law, shelter, and water and sanitation.

As the UN agency scales down its operations in the country, Coly assures that UNHCR will continue to support peacebuilding and capacity building efforts. “Rule of law is very vital for the consolidation of peace,” he maintains. Many Liberians could not agree more. “If we have justice, we will have lasting peace,” says Joe. ♦

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The 1st Judicial Circuit Court in Voinjama under construction



UNHCR - Liberia

Partners' Forum



Ellen Margrethe Løj with Liberia's Justice Minister Christiana Tah at the Forum

In an attempt to raise awareness among Liberia's development partners on progress achieved so far, including the challenges to inter-agency coordination and cooperation, the Ministry of Justice and its parastatals, the Liberia National Police (LNP), Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) and the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (BCR) held a Partners' Forum at the United Nations Headquarters in New York recently.

The Forum, attended by 46 countries, was introduced by the head of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Under Secretary-General Alain Le Roy, and chaired by the Secretary-General's Special Representative, Ellen Margrethe Løj.

In her introductory remarks, Løj noted

that though substantial progress has been attained in the justice and security sectors, resources remain an enormous challenge despite increases in Liberia's meagre budgetary allocations to the rule of law sector. "To address their respective challenges, the LNP, BIN and BCR have each developed Strategic Plans consistent with Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), the National Security Strategy for Liberia (NSSRL) and the overarching Ministry of Justice Strategic Plan towards their becoming independently operational ahead of Liberia's 2011 elections and UNMIL's eventual withdrawal," Løj said.

In the NSSRL, which covers a three-year period (2009-2011), the Liberian Government has identified the gaps in the security sector and the resources needed to address them, and projected a Government

contribution over three years of US\$22 million for LNP (out of a projected need of US\$92 million), US\$8 million for BIN (out of a projected need of US\$27 million) and US\$3 million for BCR (out of a projected need of US\$21 million).

The strategic plans of the three security agencies focus on strengthening their institutions and capacities. These are further broken down into five thematic areas - Strategic Development, Training, Operational Support, Logistics, and Infrastructure. The agencies have mapped the way forward to ensure an effective transition, articulating their respective visions and priorities. The three parastatals are seeking funding gaps of a total of nearly US\$60 million - LNP, US\$30 million; BIN, US\$9 million and BCR, US\$12 million. They have also identified critical

capacity gaps, including legislative reform, increasing administrative capacity, better protection for women, children and vulnerable people, as well as gender mainstreaming.

All three agencies need basic and advanced skills training, especially for

(PSU) is currently unable to provide basic armed support to patrolling officers or to respond to incidents of public disorder, a major gap given the foreseen vital election security role. This unit also lacks sufficient capacity to ensure security at corrections facilities, usually calling on UNMIL

The LNP still needs to construct or renovate numerous police stations in rural areas, and with over 30 separate incidents of escape from correctional facilities last year, the need for new correctional facilities is critical. In addition, the major border crossings to/from Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Guinea are controlled by BIN officers who have little or no means of communication.

new officers, who have rudimentary education and basic skills, and lack the capability to address specialized contexts within the new profession, including providing election security, and enforcing drugs and human trafficking laws. They noted specific need for effective management and leadership training for senior officers.

LNP noted that its Police Support Unit

Formed Police Units to fill this gap. Lack of capacity in forensics and pathology often leads to charges against suspects being dismissed or not being brought at all. For the BCR, the lack of rehabilitation and counseling services at their facilities mean that when convictions are won, prisoners serve time with no preparation for release into the community, greatly

enhancing the risk of their reoffending. The anticipated deportation of 2,000 Liberians from the US, including those convicted of serious crimes, will put severe additional strain on all three of the agencies.

All three agencies note that despite receiving donor support, a majority of LNP, BIN and BCR officers, especially those deployed in rural areas, remain without basic transportation, communications or equipment to carry out even their most basic duties. Citing examples, they note that at the county level, LNP officers are almost entirely dependent upon UN Police (UNPOL) for mobility and communication. The BIN faces similar constraints, relying on UNMIL to patrol the borders. For command and control, all agencies almost entirely depend on mobile phones, and are ill prepared in the event of a disaster or threat to national security.

The LNP still needs to construct or renovate numerous police stations in rural areas, and with over 30 separate incidents of escape from correctional facilities last year, the need for new correctional facilities is critical. In addition, the major border crossings to/from Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, and Guinea are controlled by BIN officers who have little or no means of communication. They are also unable to conduct effective border patrols. At best, they hold ropes across the road, and at the 140 unofficial border crossings, BIN is ill prepared to address illegal immigration, trafficking, and trade.

Justice Minister Christiana Tah, who headed the Liberian delegation, is optimistic that there will be favorable responses from partners. To support inter-agency coordination, cooperation and cohesiveness, the UN Development Programme has opened a Justice and Security Trust Fund (JSTF) for the three parastatals. Partners can channel funds to these security institutions in general or to individual projects. For those partners who have institutional constraints regarding contributions to a trust fund, they may contribute to these institutions through third party cost sharing agreements with UNDP.

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Moustapha Soumaré at the launch of the report

Yet Another Milestone

For a country once branded as a failed state, Liberia's slow but steady progress towards normalcy cannot boast of giant strides but only small steps. For the first time in more than 15 years, Liberia this year features in the global Human Development Index (HDI) listing. Due to the intermittent civil war, the country has been for a long time beyond the pale of

any assessment on the progress of human development measured by life expectancy at birth, per capita income, and adult literacy and enrollment ratio in education, the benchmarks for the listing.

According to the 2009 global Human Development Report (HDR) launched in Liberia recently by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in collaboration with the Government of

Liberia, the country ranks 169 out of 182 countries. The progress reflects a per capita income of US\$362, adult literacy rate of 55.5 per cent and a life expectancy of 57.9 years.

Liberia's ranking has improved from 176 in 2007/2008 to 169 in 2009. The HDI has also increased from 0.364 to 0.442 during the same period. These achievements reflect improvement in the well-being of the population. They are results of increases in the GDP per capita (which has increased from US\$335 to US\$362), adult literacy rate (from 54.4 percent to 55.5 percent) and life expectancy (from 45.1 years to 57.9 years).

Liberia now ranks above several West African countries previously ranked higher in the 2008 HDR. Guinea, which previously ranked 167, is now 170; Guinea Bissau is down to 173 from 171; Burkina Faso, which ranked 173, now ranks 177; and Mali has plummeted from 168 to 178.

Speaking at the launch of the Human Development Report in Monrovia, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance who is also UN Resident Coordinator as well as UNDP Resident Representative in Liberia Moustapha Soumaré said the inclusion of Liberia in this year's HDI clearly signifies the progress that the country is making in rebuilding its data systems, their growing credibility and the overall recovery and reconstruction.

Touching on this year's HDR theme: "Overcoming Barriers – Human Mobility and Human Development," Soumaré underscored the critical role that national and local policies play in enabling better human development outcomes both for those who choose to migrate in order to improve their circumstances and those forced to relocate due to conflict, environmental degradation or other reasons.

Officially launching the Report on behalf of the Government of Liberia, Acting Planning and Economic Affairs Minister Sebastian Muah hailed Liberia's inclusion in the report for the first time in 15 years. He, however, noted that at 169 out of 182 countries, Liberia is among countries with low human development and instead of getting disillusioned by this, the Government will, instead seek to tack-



Minister Sebastian Muah at the launch

Liberia now ranks above several West African countries previously ranked higher in the 2008 HDR. Guinea, which previously ranked 167, is now 170; Guinea Bissau is down to 173 from 171; Burkina Faso, which ranked 173, now ranks 177; and Mali has plummeted from 168 to 178.

le the challenges and the hurdles, and stay focused on making further progress in building and strengthening national systems while ensuring that the national strategy for the development of statistics is fully implemented as the foundation for evidence based public policy.

“Our past experiences in Liberia provide extremes and our present realities provide hope. The impact of the conflict will never be forgotten economically and

historically. However, we must always take stock to set the baselines for the measurement of progress,” Muah said.

Since 1990, annual Human Development Reports published by the UNDP have examined challenges that face humanity including poverty, gender, democracy, human rights, cultural liberty, globalization, water scarcity and climate change. This year’s report focuses on migration in the context of demographic

changes and trends in both growth and inequality. Migration, both within and beyond borders, has become an increasingly prominent theme in domestic and international debates.

In his statement during the launch, Soumaré made reference to Liberia’s own national Human Development Report published in 2006 under the theme: “Mobilizing Capacity for Reconstruction and Development”. He noted that this report, the first to be published in the post-war era and the second ever for Liberia, not only won a global award for excellence in analysis in a post-conflict context, but has also laid the foundation for advancing the national capacity development dialogue which has resulted in the formulation of a 10-year national capacity development strategy now in its advanced stage spearheaded by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs.

He noted that the third National Human Development Report under the theme: “Promoting Human Development through Shared Growth: A Focus on Agriculture and Infrastructure” is being prepared and is expected to be launched in early 2010. “We believe these reports, both national and global, serve to enrich the analytical wealth and policy dialogue on critical issues that affect the country as it makes progress in its recovery and reconstruction efforts,” Soumaré noted, adding that the UN family is committed to supporting this dialogue in the interest of advancing human development in Liberia in partnership with the government and the people of Liberia.

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Comparative Review: Liberia HDI ranking from 176 in 2008 to 169 in 2009

	LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH (YEAR)	ADULT LITERACY RATE (% AGE 15 AND ABOVE)	COMBINED PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND TERTIARY GROSS ENROLLMENT RATIO IN EDUCATION	GDP/CAPITA (PPP US\$)	RANKED
2008*	45.1		54.4	335	176 OF 179 COUNTRIES
2009**	57.9		55.5	362	169 OF 182 COUNTRIES

*2008 calculations based on 2006 data

**2009 calculations based on 2007 data



Engaging Youth Volun

Following the restoration of peace in 2003, thousands of young Liberians have graduated from the University of Liberia and other tertiary institutions. However, with few opportunities for gainful employment, these graduates face an uncertain future.

Youth between the ages of 15 – 35 constitutes 55 per cent of Liberia's population, says Minister of Youth and Sports Etmonia Tarpeh. Young Liberians emerging from institutions of learning largely remain unemployed because many of them lack experience. Added to university graduates, there are thousands of youngsters with no skills roaming the streets.

To address the youth unemployment problem, the UN/Government of Liberia Joint Programme on Youth Empowerment and Employment promotes the employability of young women and men as a

means of promoting economic growth and sustaining peace and security in Liberia. Sam E. Hare Jr., Liberia's Deputy Minister for Youth Development at the Ministry of Youth and Sports, admits that his Ministry confronts myriad youth issues. "We see the major challenge for youth development as youth employment or the youth unemployment crisis which entails anything that would keep a young person out of job, disenfranchised and disempowered," he says and commends the United Nations for supporting youth activities in the country. "We have been working very strongly with the United Nations agencies in developing and promoting youth empowerment and employment."

On her first official visit to Liberia in July, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Administrator Helen Clark joined Liberian government minis-

ters and community leaders to launch a youth volunteer initiative, "Volunteers for Peace". Clark described the programme funded by the UN Peacebuilding fund as a mechanism for promoting peace and reconciliation at the grassroots level. At the launch in Kakata, Margibi County, she noted that the development of Liberia should involve the participation of all Liberians, particularly the youth.

About three months after the launch, in October, the first group of 30 volunteers, half of them female, was deployed in the country's 15 counties. The programme seeks to establish a cadre of trained volunteers also known as 'Youth Peace Ambassadors' to identify and diffuse potential violent conflicts throughout Liberia. By organizing workshops, they are expected to create a group of young people in the communities who will share



President Sirleaf addresses conference on volunteerism

teers

messages of peace with their peers and other community members.

Deputy Minister Hare says the “Volunteers for Peace” programme stems from the success of the National Youth Volunteer Service (NYVS) which was launched two years ago. The NYVS is spearheaded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and funded by UNDP and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) - Bonn, as a pilot project of what is to become a permanent structure.

The NYVS volunteers have been deployed throughout the country’s 15 counties but predominantly in six counties – Maryland, Grand Geddeh, Bong, Lofa, Grand Bassa and Sinoe. They work with communities on development issues, including education, agriculture, gender equity, health and sanitation, and community development. The programme creates

linkages between the various cultures of Liberia as the volunteers are deployed outside their home counties.

The first set of 67 volunteers deployed for a period of six months in 2007 received a monthly living allowance of US\$100 to cover food, transport and accommodation in the various communities. The amount has now been reviewed and increased to US\$150 for the current second group of 122 volunteers whose length of service has also been increased to one year. The recruitment for the third group of 150 volunteers is in progress. The ‘Volunteers for Peace’ also receive the same allowance.

Before deployment, the volunteers undergo a one-month induction training which entails orientation on the National Youth Policy, leadership and peacebuilding. They are offered core courses in Agriculture and teaching techniques, among others. Most of the volunteers have amazing stories of their experiences and have expressed gratitude for the opportunity to serve. “Young people should create the spirit of volunteerism as a means of contributing to the development of Liberia,” says Caroline Yei Nyanama, a nursing graduate who was assigned to the Martha Tubman Memorial Hospital in Zwedru.

Since its establishment in 2003, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has been backing various youth initiatives of the Government and civil society, including skills training and sup-

porting youth projects throughout the country. “Dealing with youth is a national security issue so UNMIL is naturally interested,” says the Chief of Civil Affairs, Francis Kai-Kai, whose section has personnel working in ministries dealing with youth issues and promoting youth development at county level.

During a regional conference on volunteerism held in Monrovia in late May, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf pledged her government’s unflinching support to youth volunteer services across the sub-region and encouraged the youth to prepare for future leadership. Pointing out that volunteerism is something which has been lost over the years, the Liberian leader urged the youth to engage in activities not just for personal financial gains but also to render service to one’s country which enhances the character of a person and gives satisfaction that money cannot buy.

“Government cannot create jobs for everybody, so engaging young people in volunteer service is good for peace and for professional development,” says the Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, Amara Konneh. Government officials say 37 per cent of the first batch of volunteers is now gainfully employed by the Government, NGOs and the United Nations. ♦

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Battle against Yellow fever

Clutching her two-year-old daughter Martha in her arms, Mafanta, 23, stands in a queue in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. She is pregnant. The toddler takes a look at the needle approaching her right shoulder and lets out a cry as she recoils. The resistance does not last long and soon, the proceedings are all over. For the next 10 years and more, Martha is safe from the mosquito-borne viral disease, Yellow fever.

For medical reasons, Mafanta's pregnancy does not permit her to take the vaccination as the nationwide immunization campaign gets underway. "The medical people say I should not take the vaccine now but I am happy that Martha and the other children I brought have all taken it," she says, smiling. Children under nine months are also excluded. "People went to our school today and I took it. It was not very painful," says elated seven-year-old Baindu, apparently pleased with her achievement.

Yellow fever is an acute viral haemorrhagic disease transmitted by infected mosquitoes. The "yellow" in the name refers to the jaundice that affects some patients. The disease has no cure and treatment is symptomatic, aimed at reducing the symptoms for the comfort of the patient. Single-dose vaccination is the single most important preventive measure against the disease which can be deadly serious and lethal with a patient bleeding from the nose, mouth and ears. The vaccine, created in 1937, is safe and becomes effective within one week after administration.

Throughout Liberia, more than 2,200 health teams of more than 8,000 health workers mobilized in hospitals, community centres, clinics, schools, market places

and even under trees as crowds gathered to take the jab. "It is free and if taking it will protect us against Yellow fever, then it is good," says 45-year-old John, rolling up his sleeve to take the jab.

The week-long Integrated Yellow fever campaign, targeting over 3 million out of the country's 3.4 million population, was launched by Liberia's Vice President Joseph N. Boakai in November in Monrovia at an event witnessed by Ministry of Health officials and partners including the Minister of Health, Dr. Walter Gwenigale. Added to Yellow fever vaccination, children between 12 months and five years of age were given de-worming tablet (Mabendazole) during the campaign. The Vice President noted that the Liberian government considers a healthy citizenry as a central element in the implementation of the country's Poverty

Reduction Strategy.

"One single confirmed case of Yellow fever is considered by WHO an outbreak

Health worker



UNICEF Liberia/2009/Glema Gordon



J Washington/UNMIL



A young girl receives the vaccine

which requires immediate response. That is why WHO recommends international travelers to get vaccination against Yellow

vaccinates a resident in Zai Town, Grand Gedeh County



fever," says World Health Organization Representative in Liberia, Dr. Nestor Nyayimirije.

Risk assessments were undertaken in Liberia this year during which it was found that eight out of the country's 15 counties were at highest risk while seven were medium. "Liberia is an endemic country for Yellow fever. We have had so many outbreaks," says Thomas Nagbe, the Director of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) at the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MOH&SW). He says the most recent outbreak was recorded in May this year in Zorzor, Lofa County. "So far we have recorded about 19 deaths from 1995 to now," says the director, pointing out that though the Ministry has a good surveillance system in place, many more deaths may have gone unreported in the country, which has a lot of forests providing the ideal habitat for the disease-causing mosquito. The one case discovered this year was a logger.

Prior to the campaign, the Health Ministry in collaboration with WHO and

partners conducted a two-day training workshop in Monrovia for national officers who were to be deployed in the counties to provide technical support to the county health teams. "What I have seen on the ground is that there has been absolute political commitment which is very impressive. I see a lot of collaboration from partners – UNICEF, WHO, Red Cross and others all being part of the working group. I have seen the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) supporting very strongly by airlifting materials to hard-to-reach areas," observes Stanley Biamemu, Technical Officer at the WHO office in Ghana, who was in Liberia mainly to support the campaign. "UNMIL has done tremendously well. With many roads in the country deplorable especially during the rains, the UN mission has airlifted vaccine materials to most counties," lauds Nagbe, adding: "This is the biggest ever immunization campaign in Liberia. We have had campaigns before such as for Polio and Measles targeting specific populations but this one is targeting more than 90 per cent of the entire population."

WHO, UNICEF, and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Red Cross and other partners supported the Liberian government to plan, implement and monitor the campaign, which was also simultaneously undertaken in Sierra Leone and Benin, and targeted some 12 million people in the three vulnerable West African countries. Since 2007, a total of 29 million people have been protected through mass vaccinations conducted in Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Mali, Senegal and Togo, as well as a first phase completed in Sierra Leone, according to WHO.

"We are very happy with the huge turnout at immunization centres in Monrovia and other parts of the country," says Dr. Zakari Wambai of the WHO in Liberia, adding that the Yellow fever campaign is targeting 12 countries in Africa, including Nigeria, in an effort to control the disease from becoming a public health problem. The campaign against Yellow fever will continue in Liberia through routine immunization schedules. ♦

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"I see a bright future for Li

After serving for a year with the UN Mission in Liberia as its fourth Force Commander, Lt.-Gen. Abu Tayeb Muhammad Zahirul Alam said farewell to the country in October 2009 and returned to his home country, Bangladesh. In an interview with Staff Writers J. Wesley Washington and Sulaiman Momodu before his departure, the Force Commander talked about his one-year tenure and what Liberians need to do to consolidate the "fragile" peace.

What are your thoughts about the security situation in the country at present?

The security situation in Liberia has improved greatly from what I saw when I arrived. The stability has improved and peace has been made sustainable. In spite of lots of apprehensions about the draw-down, the reduction of troops and relocation, and also rumours that some ex-combatants were trying to destabilize from Côte d'Ivoire, tension relating to developments in Guinea, also the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report, I think peace has endured.

What were the major challenges you faced during your time here with the Mission?

The only challenge I encountered was doing more with less because with every Security Council Resolution we had additional tasks while we were reducing our troops. For example training the Armed Forces of Liberia, and now we have the mandate to assist in the preparation for the elections in 2011. Besides added tasks, we still have to execute our mandate. But we have lived up to the challenge.

My forces have even increased the tempo in many respects – in the number of military operations and the frequency in our border cooperation meetings and joint patrolling. We have re-enforced inter-mission cooperation. We have also improved and expanded on our outreach and CIMIC programmes. So even with less, although we are constrained, we delivered more than our required tasks.

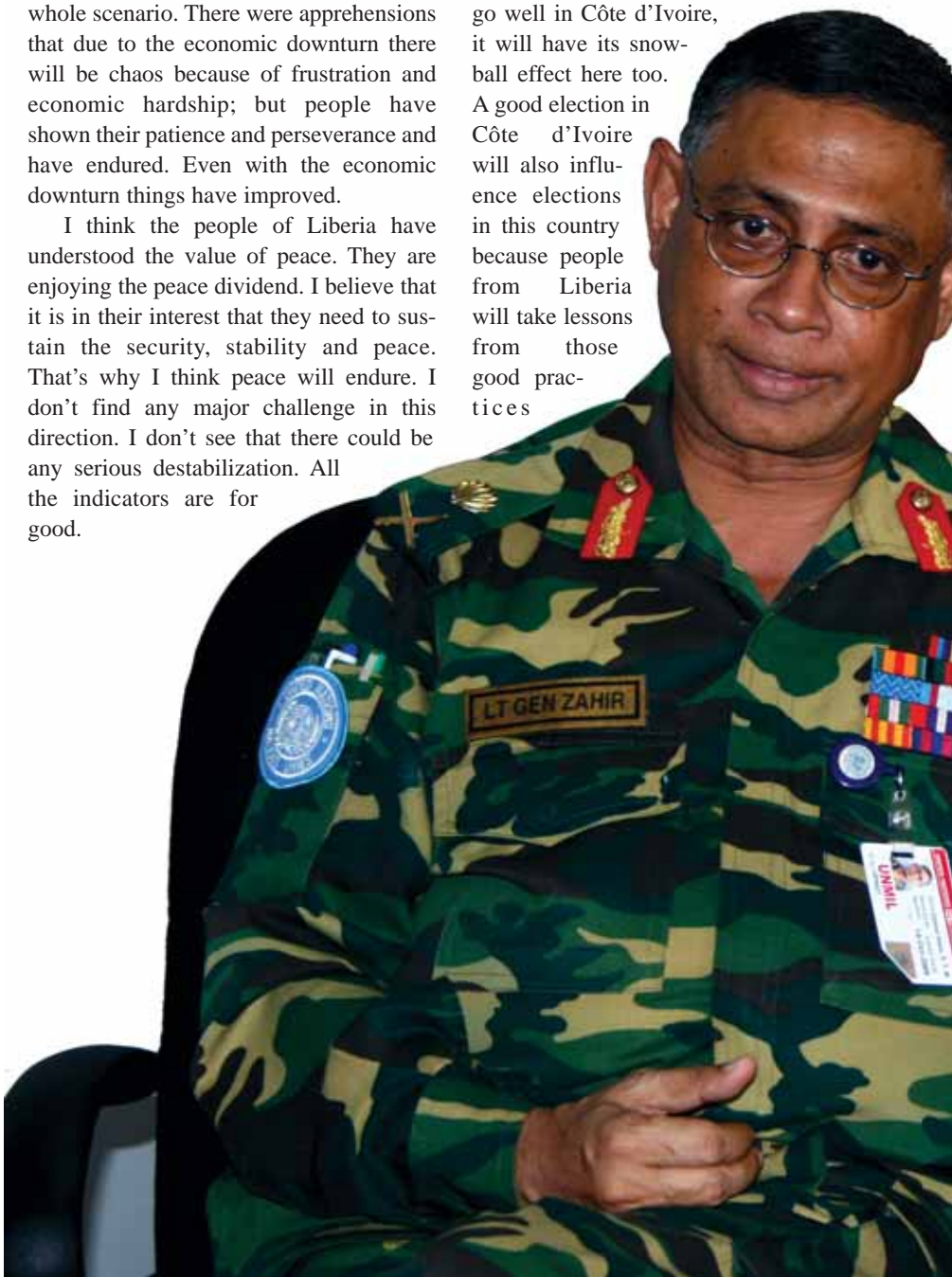
The peace in Liberia is often described and considered "fragile". How can we

make it more enduring?

It is fragile because any incident that happens like in Guinea could change the whole scenario. There were apprehensions that due to the economic downturn there will be chaos because of frustration and economic hardship; but people have shown their patience and perseverance and have endured. Even with the economic downturn things have improved.

I think the people of Liberia have understood the value of peace. They are enjoying the peace dividend. I believe that it is in their interest that they need to sustain the security, stability and peace. That's why I think peace will endure. I don't find any major challenge in this direction. I don't see that there could be any serious destabilization. All the indicators are for good.

If things go wrong in Guinea, there could be a fallout effect. If the DDRR process and the election do not go well in Côte d'Ivoire, it will have its snow-ball effect here too. A good election in Côte d'Ivoire will also influence elections in this country because people from Liberia will take lessons from those good practices



iberia..."

that have happened there and will definitely try to improve upon that. Although peace is fragile, I don't think we will face a crisis situation but will continue to improve.

You have completed a year here as UNMIL's Force Commander. What are your major achievements during your tenure?

When I took over we were in stage two of the drawdown process. Troops were leaving the Mission; units were relocating from one area to the other, and at the same time normal rotations were taking place. In spite of the weather, poor road conditions, with the concerted efforts of the UNMIL Forces and UNMIL Integrated Logistics and other components and with the assistance of our core security partner UNPOL and others, we were able to complete the stage two of the drawdown process in time.

We moved from four sectors initially to three, now finally to two – Sector Alpha and Sector Bravo. Sector Alpha is the coastal sector and Sector Bravo is more the bordering sector. I think all of these have gone well. In addition, we have also revised and updated many of our Standard Operating Procedures. We have updated all our rein-

forcement plans in relation to support for both the Special Court in Freetown, Sierra Leone, and also for the UN Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI).

There is an arrangement that the UN Mission is to mentor the restructured Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) after their training with the United States contracted team. Where is UNMIL on this and when do we expect the restructured AFL to be fully operational and functioning?

We have identified several areas which can be supported. AFL's officers and staff officers are being trained in our Force and Sector Headquarters. There are engineers located in Gbarnga, Bong County, who are being trained by our engineers there on basic field and combat engineering. Another group of engineers will be trained on bridges at various road rehabilitation work sites. We are already in the final stages of formulating a plan jointly with the AFL and the Ministry of Defense.

What would be your advice to your successor?

I have prepared a full brief for my successor. It is very exhaustive and covers everything.

The major challenge for my successor will be the implementation of stage three of the drawdown process. Another task will be the implementation of the reinforcement plan for UNOCI in support of the forthcoming elections.

During stage three of the drawdown plan two battalions will go and these locations have to be filled by others who are here. The remaining forces will be readjusted, sector boundaries will have to be readjusted and there will be some important relocation. I think these are the major tasks.

Are there any special memories that you take back as you leave Liberia?

Before coming to West Africa, I did not have much practical knowledge about Africa. The nearest to Africa that I came was Egypt. Of course I studied a lot about Africa. I was Commandant of the National Defence College before coming

here. I had African students from Nigeria, Sudan, Egypt and other places.

But after coming here I've learned that there is tremendous potential in West Africa. We didn't know really that there are so many resources here. We have seen and heard about conflict and poverty in Africa. Now, my eyes have opened; I see the sub-region as such an endowed region. I've seen that Liberia is such an endowed country and with a little organization, commitment and support from all of us, this country will prosper, this region will prosper. I'm taking this memory back home.

I contributed to the peace, security and development of this country for one year. I firmly believe that the Liberian story will be a success story of the United Nations. As it is, we see that Sierra Leone is also a success story and it's moving and progressing. Now it has a political mission. Maybe some day, Liberia will transit to a political mission or something else. I want to be a part of this success story. My heart will always be here. I will follow-up on everything that is happening in Liberia.

What would your parting words to Liberia be?

My parting words to Liberians is that peace is the way forward, and security, the precondition for development. Of course, security today is a very broad concept and it incorporates everything – military, internal, human security and everything.

I believe that now we have a very conducive external security situation. I have not seen in my one year here any attempt to destabilize Liberia from outside. So there's not much threat from outside. Liberia now has to consolidate internal security. With good elections in 2011, I think the country would make a good move to the next level of development.

My appeal to Liberians is to have patience and commitment and give peace a chance. There will be moments of stagnation and difficulties but with concerted efforts to overcome them, they can move forward. I see a bright future for Liberia.

Thank you.

From Refugee to ECOWAS Citizen

After 15 years as a refugee, Rose S. Rogers says Liberia is now her home. “I am alright here,” says the 45-year-old Sierra Leonean in eloquent Liberian English. Rogers, now married to a Liberian, is among hundreds of Sierra Leonean refugees who have opted for local integration as their refugee status ended last year.

As Liberia and Sierra Leone enjoy relative peace and stability after years of civil war, refugees from the sister countries are integrating locally. In the process, they transform from refugees to citizens of the

the Cessation Clause, which applies when circumstances which made people to flee their country cease to exist.

“We have many Sierra Leoneans who have applied to naturalize and are going through the process. What we are doing is the legal framework as the refugees have stayed here for many years,” says the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission Deputy Executive Director, Saah Nyumah. The Liberian laws state that for someone to naturalize, he or she should have stayed for about five years in Liberia. The

UNHCR assists the refugees with houses but 20 per cent goes to the host community. The facilities in the community are also strengthened and both refugees and their hosts are provided with income generation and livelihood activities.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative in Liberia, Ibrahima Coly, says that there are three durable solutions for the refugee problem -- voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. In June 2008, the agency announced 31 December 2008 as the effective date for cessation of refugee status for Sierra Leonean refugees all over the world under

Liberian constitution does not accept dual nationality.

At a symbolic handing over ceremony of 105 passports to Sierra Leonean refugees in April, Liberia’s Vice President Joseph N. Boakai observed that Liberia and Sierra Leone have a lot in common with similar ethnic groups, landscape and traditions. He reminded the Sierra Leoneans that “rights come with responsibilities” and encouraged them to live within the confines of the laws. He expressed



J. Washington/UNHCR



Some Ivorian refugees in Liberia

the hope that West Africa would one day be like the European Union, where citizens of member countries are free to travel anywhere in Europe.

The Sierra Leonean Ambassador to Liberia, Rev. Marie Jilo Barnett, described the ceremony as a milestone in the history of the reintegration programme and noted that it was a sub-regional approach to finding a lasting solution to the refugee problem.

UNHCR assists the refugees with houses but 20 per cent goes to the host community. The facilities in the community are also strengthened and both refugees and their hosts are provided with income generation and livelihood activities. "We have completed two sites. In Bensonville we have 35 families and in Memeh Town we have moved in 45 families. We now have a new local integration project going on 50 acres of land in Sinje where 140

way for Liberian refugees in Nigeria where there are over 7,200 refugees, including 5,619 Liberians and 1,673 Sierra Leoneans, many of whom have opted against returning home. In Ghana, the process is yet to begin because the Ghanaian authorities say the remaining caseload of about 20,000 registered Liberian refugees is too large and there are also about 16,000 illegal Liberian immigrants in the country.

More than 60,000 registered Liberian refugees currently remain in the West Africa sub region, including Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Gambia after the assisted voluntary repatriation officially ended in June 2007 during which more than 111,400 refugees returned to Liberia.

ECOWAS recently signed an agreement with Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone and the UNHCR to allow the refugees to

More than 60,000 registered Liberian refugees currently remain in the West Africa sub region, including Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria and Gambia after the assisted voluntary repatriation officially ended in June 2007 during which more than 111,400 refugees returned to Liberia.

houses are under construction," says Nyumah.

Although many refugees are enthusiastic about local integration, not all of them opt for it. Out of more than 2,500 Sierra Leonean refugees, about 500 have indicated to remain refugees. "The refugees have the right to appeal that they are not going back home and will not locally integrate and want to instead remain as refugees. In this regard, there is the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) committee chaired by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and includes Ministry of Justice, UNHCR and LRRRC that will hear from refugees on an individual basis. The Committee will either accept or reject the appeal," explains Representative Coly.

Like the Sierra Leoneans in Liberia, some of the about 9,000 remaining Liberian refugees in Sierra Leone are also going through the local integration process. Local integration is also under-

settle in Nigeria. The deal requires Liberia and Sierra Leone to provide passports to their nationals, who will lose their refugee status and become entitled to a series of rights guaranteed by agreements among ECOWAS member states.

"The host government will ensure they enjoy the entitlements of ECOWAS citizenship, including the right to work, access to education and health on the same terms as Nigerians," says the regional bloc. "We are drawing attention of the country where they are staying to the fact that they are an ECOWAS community citizen," said ECOWAS Commission President Mohammed Ibn Chambas.

Although mass repatriation of refugees has ended, the UN refugee agency continues to facilitate return in the region. Currently, Liberia hosts about 6,000 Ivorian refugees many of whom look forward to returning home. ♦



Village Enterprise

Dozens of Liberian women in Bong County, where banks or financial institutions do not exist, now have access to credit and are shareholders of a growing enterprise in their area known as the Volunteers Savings and Lending Associations (VSLA).

So far there are four VSLA in the county in Moipata, Baysah Farm, Totota and Maimu communities. Each VSLA, comprising of about 30 members including a chairlady, financial secretary and treasurer, also has its own constitution and holds regular meetings. “We do not have a bank here but we have organized ourselves and support each other with our own money,” says Fatu Kpakla, the proud chairlady of the association in Totota.

Informal banking schemes are not new

in Liberia. In both rural and urban communities, including offices, Liberians usually form “susu” clubs wherein an agreed amount is collected from members and given to one person during an agreed period and it rotates until every member receives a bulk sum. The VSLA is however different. Members of the association who are mainly women pool financial resources together through voluntary purchase of shares from which loans are taken by individuals and repaid with interest. At the end of the year, members share the profits and begin another cycle.

The aim of the pilot project is to promote the economic empowerment of women and is supported by the United Nations Volunteer programme and a local non-governmental organization, Liberia Initiatives for Development Services

(LIDS). “The association is mainly for rural women who do not have access to financial institutions or do not have the requirements for bank loans,” says Nee-Isaac Duanah, Director of LIDS. All 120 members have benefitted from a month-long training in microenterprise development, club management and operations. Members say the association has strengthened social cohesion in their communities as some members who never interacted with one another or had petty grudges have reconciled and now work together. The women have a committee in the association that settles any disputes that may arise among members thus enhancing peacebuilding.

The United Nations Volunteer (UNV) Programme Officer at the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in

Liberia, Rukaya Mohammed, commends the women for their enthusiasm. Most of them are returnees and single mothers. The UNV programme has distributed stationeries, cash boxes, stamp pads, pass books, calculators, among others to the four associations. The programme has also assigned a national volunteer to the VSLAs to assist the women organize meetings and records. "Because the money belongs to the women there has not been any incident of

difficult to pay their fees but this year I have paid their fees through the credit I took and the small business I am doing by belonging to the association," she says. Many women say they were motivated to belong to the club because of the transparent manner in which the finances are handled. "Although I am the treasurer I do not handle money, I just keep the records. There is someone who keeps the metal cash box which has two big padlocks

others offer support through the association's social fund. Members of the associations also undertake group work from time to time and income generated from such activities are saved.

"Initially most of the women thought we were going to give them money to start the business but we said "no", they should contribute themselves. They did not believe they will do it but today they are very happy and are moving forward," says Programme Manager Mohamed, adding that VSLAs have inculcated the habit of savings among the rural women. "Our next plan is to include adult literacy as most of the women are illiterate," she says.

Up to late October, the associations had a total sum of more than 300,000 Liberian Dollar (about US\$5,000). The women say their wish is to expand the programme to other communities as more women are interested in joining the VSLAs. "We are very grateful for this programme. Now we have the experience to take care of our own finances but we need more support from the United Nations and non-governmental organizations in order to be very strong and independent," appeals the Totota chairlady. ♦

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theft or non-payment of loan," says Mohammed. The UNV programme has also organized awareness raising for the women on HIV/AIDS and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, among others.

Esther G. Kollie, treasurer of the Baysah Farm, notes that the association has been very helpful to rural women. "I have children in school. Before it was very

while the keys are kept by two different individuals," explains Kollie.

Sarah Toukao, a teacher at the Baysah Farm elementary, is also a member of the VSLA. "I joined the association because the members are determined to be united and love one another which are needed for peaceful coexistence." In addition to credit facilities, when one member is sick the

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UNDP/UNV - Liberia



Rubber Plantation

In August this year, Liberian government officials including ministers together with senior United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) personnel were received with jubilation by members of the local community at the Sinoe Rubber Plantation. The excitement of the local residents was understandable. For a community that lacked basic social facilities, on that day, two UNMIL Quick Impact Projects -- a police station and a health centre -- were being inaugurated.

Amidst the celebrations, Minister of Internal Affairs Ambulai Johnson formally announced that the Government had taken over the plantation and that an interim management team was being set up to replace the plantation's illegal management and to improve the living conditions of the local population.

The rubber industry is the largest industry in Liberia, representing more than 95 per cent of the country's exports in 2006, according to Liberia's Central Bank and Ministry of Commerce and Industry sources. That year, the country earned

US\$172.3 million from rubber exports, out of an overall export volume of US\$180.8 million. However, Liberia's most important economic resource is also an industry mired in controversy.

During Liberia's ghastly civil war, some of the country's rubber plantations were abandoned and subsequently taken over by illegal occupants or combatants who exploited the natural resources for their own gains.

To ensure that the country's resources are used for the good of all, in February 2006, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Liberia established the Rubber Plantation Task Force (RPTF) to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the country's major rubber plantations. The Taskforce was composed of the Government of Liberia, the private sector and the United Nations. It was chaired by the Minister of Agriculture and co-chaired by UNMIL's Director of Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery Section. The decision to set up the Taskforce was partly

triggered by UNMIL's Human Rights Section report which exposed serious human rights violations in rubber plantations.

In its pre-processed state, rubber comes in the form of latex, a milky emulsion that seeps out of the tree after it has been cut. Every day, rubber plantation workers carefully place a thin spiral cut in the rubber trees. Over the next few hours, liquid latex seeps out of the cut and flows into a cup. Most of the country's latex is eventually processed and the concentrated latex is exported.

To reclaim the plantations, all seven major plantations - Cavalla, Guthrie, Cocopa, Sinoe, Liberian Agricultural Company (LAC), Firestone and Salala - were visited. The Taskforce found out that Firestone, Salala and LAC were owned by companies and had management systems in place. However, for the other four, the companies with concessions had fled during the conflict.

In its report to the Liberian President, the Taskforce revealed that ownership and



Plants Reclaimed But...

management rights of several plantations were unclear. Existing agreements were old and not in line with Liberian labour laws and working conditions were deplorable. Payment of salaries and other benefits were often delayed by several months and basic standards for environmental protection and occupational health and security were not followed. Internal security in plantations was very poor and "Plantation Protection Departments - PPD" were accused of serious violations. The Taskforce also found out that tensions existed between administrations of rubber plantations and local communities. Liberian National Police (LNP) and the justice system had limited access to plantation areas while social services such as schools and health clinics were either in deplorable condition or non-existent. Two plantations were found to be occupied and exploited by former fighters. The report further stated that as a result of the combination of factors, state authority in and around several plantations was limited with consequent instability in many areas.

The first plantation to be retaken was Cavalla followed by Guthrie and Cocopa. Sinoe was the last. In Guthrie, for instance, where ex-combatants had rioted and set structures on fire, the Taskforce negotiated with ex-combatants to leave while a national police station and UNMIL peacekeepers established camps to ensure security. "It was very difficult for the ex-combatants to let go the plantations but we explained to them that they can't hold on forever," said Andrea Tamagnini, who was co-chair of the Taskforce. During the global financial crisis when prices of rubber plummeted, many ex-combatants who were reluctant to leave finally decided to let go and were provided some assistance by the Taskforce and skills training by the non-governmental organization Land Mine Action. Also, in Guthrie, UNMIL constructed 11 water wells, one police station, and repaired one school under its Quick Impact Projects. At the same time, UN agencies and NGOs were encouraged to extend their programmes to the plantation, which was now accessible.

While ex-combatants have been reintegrated and now compete with their compatriots for limited job opportunities in community-based projects undertaken by the UN mission and partners, fundamental challenges remain. Up to late October, the interim management team was yet to be set up at the Sinoe Rubber Plantation while there were pending issues of severance payment at Guthrie.

UNMIL Chief of Civil Affairs Francis Kai-Kai points out that proper management of rubber plantations is crucial to Liberia's economic revitalization and job creation for unemployed youths. "UNMIL will continue to work with the Government to ensure that the plantations become a source of revenue and employment. Proper management in rubber plantations will ensure that Liberians benefit from their resources in peace," he said. ♦

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State of the World

Population 2009

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning & Economic Affairs has launched the State of World Population 2009 with the warning that climate change remains a key issue facing humanity. Climate change not only endangers lives and undermines livelihoods, but it also threatens to exacerbate the gaps between rich and poor and amplify the inequities between women and men, says the report themed “Facing a changing world: women, population and climate.”

In a statement delivered on behalf of the UNFPA Representative Esperance Fundira at the launch, World Health Organization (WHO) Representative to Liberia Dr. Nestor Ndayimirije noted that this year’s report demonstrates that climate change remains a key issue of population dynamics, poverty and gender equality. He said approximately 600,000 deaths occurred worldwide as a result of weather related disasters in the 1990s, with some 95 percent of these in poor countries. If these trends continue unabated, many climate scientists are predicting further catastrophic effects on the environment, habitats, economies and people.

“Climate change has the potential to reverse the hard-earned development gains of the past decade and the progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals,” the WHO Representative cautioned, adding that climate change threatens to exacerbate poverty and burden marginalized and vulnerable groups with additional hardships. “Poor households are especially vulnerable to climate change because their marginal income provides little or no access to health services or other safety nets to protect themselves against the threats from changing conditions,” he said.

Launching the report on behalf of the Liberian Government at the University of Liberia, Vice President Joseph Boakai said climate change poses a serious threat to the way of life in Liberia as in the rest of the world. “The consequences of climate change are inevitable, and they impact the world’s population significantly,” he said.

The Vice President noted that while

Liberia has not contributed in any significant way to global warming, the country is, nevertheless, a victim of climate change. “We are among disaster prone nations and gradually being affected by climate change, and experiencing unprecedented levels of floods and sea erosion,” he said, noting that Liberia supports the stance of African leaders who have met

Selected Indicators LIBERIA

MORTALITY		
INFANT MORTALITY TOTAL PER 1,000 LIVE BIRTHS		93
LIFE EXPECTANCY M/F		57.3 / 60.1
MATERNAL MORTALITY RATIO		1/200
EDUCATION		
PRIMARY ENROLMENT (GROSS) M/F		96 / 87
PROPORTION REACHING GRADE 5 M/F		-
SECONDARY ENROLMENT (GROSS) M/F		37 / 27
PERCENTAGE /ILLITERATE (>15 YEARS) M/F		39.8 / 49.1
REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH		
BIRTHS PER 1,000 WOMEN (AGES 15-19)		40
CONTRACEPTIVE PREVALENCE	ANY METHOD	11
	MODERN METHOD	10
HIV PREVALENCE RATE (%) AGES 14 - 49		1.7

and agreed to demand compensation from leading industrialized countries who are heavy polluters.

He noted that the issues of women and climate change, two issues of focus in this year's theme, are thematic issues that the Liberian government has already declared priority areas central to the country's national development agenda. He noted that as climate change is partly the result of an approach to development and economic growth that has proven to be unsustainable, halting climate change requires a fresh, more equitable and sustainable approach to the way we live, produce and consume. Given women's significant engagement in food production, gender blind policies may exacerbate the problems associated with climate change by widening inequalities between the sexes, the Vice President said, cautioning that



policies that aim to address climate change will be less effective if they fail to take into account the gender aspects.

A youth debate followed the official launch which stressed the need for today's young people to be at the frontline of climate change. Young people between 10 and 24 years constitute over 1.5 billion

people in the world, of which 70 per cent live in developing countries. Thus, young people, especially young women, are particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate change. The report contains a youth supplement titled: "At the Frontier: Young People and Climate Change."

The report, aimed at highlighting the gap between the rich and the poor and the inequities between women and men, highlights the relationship of population dynamics, reproductive health, and climate change in the face of unpredictable weather events. It describes what can be done to slow down -- and possibly roll back -- climate change and what must be done to help the poor adapt to the climate change that is already under way.

Women, particularly those in poor countries, are affected differently than men. Women are among the most vulnerable to climate change, partly because in many countries they make up the larger share of the agricultural work force and partly because they tend not to have access to as many income-earning opportunities as men.

The report was released as a lead-up to the 15th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, where delegates from around the world are expected to endorse a new treaty to limit the warming of the earth's atmosphere.

The report also aims to remind the international community that climate change is more than an issue of energy efficiency or industrial carbon emissions - it is also about people and where and how they live, what they consume and the rights and opportunities available to them.

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DEMOGRAPHIC, SOCIAL & ECONOMIC INDICATORS

TOTAL POPULATION (MILLIONS) 2009	4.0
PROJECTED POPULATION (MILLIONS) 2050	8.8
AVERAGE POPULATION GROWTH RATE (%) 2005-2010	4.1
% URBAN (2009)	61
URBAN GROWTH RATE (2005-2010)	5.4
POPULATION/HA ARABLE & -PERMANENT CROP LAND	3.8
TOTAL FERTILITY RATE (2009)	5.01
% BIRTHS WITH SKILLED ATTENDANTS	46
GNI PER CAPITA PPP \$ (2007)	280
EXPENDITURES/PRIMARY STUDENT (% OF GDP PER CAPITA)	6.0
HEALTH EXPENDITURES, PUBLIC (% OF GDP)	1.2
EXTERNAL POPULATION ASSISTANCE (US\$.000)	10,544
UNDER-5 MORTALITY M/F ESTIMATES (2005-2010)	144/136
PER CAPITA ENERGY CONSUMPTION	-
ACCESS TO IMPROVED DRINKING WATER SOURCES	64

Children's Festival



UNICEF - Liberia

dren were victims of their country's civil war during which many of them were killed, forced to become child soldiers, or had their education derailed.

While the event was taking place at the stadium in Paynesville, activities were also taking place in the counties. "Today is a day for children to witness what adults have committed to them 20 years ago," said Isabel Crowley, UNICEF Representative in Liberia. She expressed the hope that the children's festival will become landmark towards making Liberia a beautiful, peaceful and prosperous country for generations to come.

Liberia ratified the CRC in 1989. "Many people are not aware of what is contained in the Convention, so we were on the UN Mission's radio to sensitize the public on the rights of the child," said UN police advisor, Doreen Malambo. The UN Children's Fund marked the global event by launching its special edition of the flagship publication, State of the World's Children.

During the festival, the Liberian children had messages on posters and T-shirts for the attention of adults and policy makers. Some read: "It's our right to have free healthcare"; "I have a right to go to school"; "Don't just sit there, do something to help children survival." UNICEF says it is working with partners to ensure the full realization of children's rights in post-war Liberia. ♦

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"Today is your day; I want to see you smile," said Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, her voice amplified by the loudspeakers. As she took a few dance steps cheerfully waving at high-spirited Liberian children who had converged at the Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex outside the Liberian capital, Monrovia, on 21 November, the Liberian leader continued: "Are you happy?" The children beamed in unison, "Yeah!"

Called "oldma" by the kids and many Liberians, President Sirleaf, who turned 71 on 29 October, was the chief guest at Liberia's first children's festival commemorating the 20th anniversary of the Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) organized by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Ministry of Gender and Development and partners. "A children's festival is a way to look forward and an opportunity for children to take on leadership and make their country friendly for them to grow up. Let's make Liberia a country where children can play again," said the President who took a walk around the stadium where the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) had

erected stalls for use by various organizations. Accompanied by the UN Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, and Government officials, the Liberian leader interacted with the children and the nearly 300 volunteers donning special T-shirts who made the event possible.

The festival included a mix of 'learn and fun' such as music, dance, literary and sports competitions, workshops and special events on art, photography, careers, life skills, radio, music and cultural concerts. The hundreds of children at the Stadium were full of life, and understandably so. Until six years ago, Liberian chil-

President Sirleaf at the festival



UNICEF - Liberia



Minister Tharoor with Indian peacekeepers

India Extends Hand of Friendship

India is known in Liberia for sending the United Nations' first female police contingent to support and mentor the Liberia National Police. Now, the world's most populous democracy has pledged more support to the country during a recent visit to Liberia by Shashi Tharoor, India's Minister of State for External Affairs.

Tharoor, a former UN Under-Secretary-General, is the first Indian minister to visit Liberia in 38 years. During his visit, he met with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, cabinet ministers and other Government authorities as well as senior UN officials, including the UN Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj in the Liberian capital, Monrovia.

The Indian Minister, who was accompanied by a business delegation, told **UN Focus** that India did not come with an agenda to Liberia but instead asked Liberians how India could help them. India has offered help to Liberia in capacity building, training, trade, investment and Information Technology. It has also offered assistance in the forms of lines of credit on concessional terms, as well as a

grant-in-aid for education and health projects worth US\$ 2 million. Tharoor also announced the donation of 25 buses to the Monrovia Transport Authority. In addition, India has offered two 'hole-in-the-wall' computer education centres which is a special educational project where children

"Let me thank you as a former UN man for honouring the blue beret by wearing it so proudly. Let me thank you for being here and doing what you are doing."

who don't have access to technology are able to learn how to use computers. "Africa is a real priority for us and presence is the best way to prove it," said the Minister.

While visiting the Indian peacekeepers at their headquarters in Monrovia, Tharoor noted that the Indian women have set an astonishing landmark in the history of UN peacekeeping by becoming the first all Female Formed Police Unit. "What you

are doing will be remembered and applauded by many generations to come," he told the troops, adding that the presence of the Indian peacekeepers is a demonstration that women are not just victims of conflict but can be a source of strength and can provide security. "Let me thank you as a former UN man for honouring the blue beret by wearing it so proudly. Let me thank you for being here and doing what you are doing."

As part of the UN Mission in Liberia, the first batch of the Indian FFPU arrived in Liberia in 2007 amid global media coverage. The role of the peacekeepers includes maintaining law and order in and outside the capital, and providing security to the President. The presence of the FFPU has also motivated Liberian women to apply to join the law enforcement agencies in the country.

Tharoor, who was on a six-day visit to Liberia and Ghana, said his impressions were that prospects for Liberia are bright but he urged Liberians "to rebuild today for a good tomorrow." ♦

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Ethiopia

Residents of southeastern Liberia, especially the city of Zwedru, capital of Grand Gedeh County, are emotional, like when friends depart, as the Ethiopian contingent finally says goodbye to the UN Mission in Liberia.

“The Ethiopian contingent has done tremendously well. Their overall contribution to the peace process in Liberia has been significant,” said Alfred Junye, the regional coordinator of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) based in Zwedru. He recalled the flood disaster in the provincial city last June when the Ethiopians, risking their lives, rescued several women, children and the elderly trapped in their homes as the water levels rose to unprecedented heights. The peacekeepers later also provided humanitarian assistance to the displaced victims.

Otis Jolo, a resident of Zwedru, noted the outstanding collaboration between the Ethiopians, the citizenry and local authorities. He found them to be hospitable, cooperative and highly security minded. “Their leaving is bringing mixed feelings to most residents in the southeast including me,” Jolo said adding, “Beyond their mandate, they initiated capacity-building activities and provided other kinds of assistance to the locals that I consider remarkable.”

In early 2004, the first Ethiopian contingent was deployed in Zwedru, and gradually fanned out to the southeastern counties of Sinoe, River Gee, Grand Kru, Maryland, Rivercess and lower Nimba. Southeastern Liberia then was sparsely populated with most Liberians still in refugee camps in the sub-region. Security was non-existent and infrastructure, broken down. Gradually, with the Ethiopians providing umbrella security, the situation began to change and get better. Today, Zwedru, like most other cities around the country, has become a bustling economic hub in the southeast.



ns Bid Farewell

With approximately 17,500 troops having rotated in the Mission since arriving here in late December 2003, the ETHBATT-20 Commander, Lt.-Col. Weldesilasse Kiros hopes that his country's efforts to restore peace and security in south-eastern Liberia will be consolidated by all Liberians. "I feel happy returning home after completing a successful mission," he said.

Commenting on their accomplishments as well as civilian/military coordination (CIMIC) activities during their tour of duty, Lt.-Col. Kiros recalled that his contingent distinguished themselves beyond their normal duties to provide skills-training in auto mechanics, electricity, plumbing, and health and agricultural education to unemployed youth in the county. They also quelled four incidents of civil unrest in their areas of responsibility without any serious injuries to the demonstrators.

He highlighted the role played by the contingent's 67 female soldiers in collaborating with the Zwedru Women's Association in cultural activities aimed at the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse. During the UN medal award ceremony in Zwedru early October, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ellen Margrethe Løj, acknowledged this unique contribution. "Thank you for being the touch-bearers of this noble cause and for helping us all address an issue that you know I consider paramount in our day-to-day interactions with those around us," she said, highlighting the importance of combating sexual exploitation and abuse.

The contingent commander recalled the humanitarian assistance his officers provided to the victims of last June's floods in Zwedru. "These activities have created good relations with the people of Grand Gedeh and River Gee counties," he noted. In a written citation on 13 July, the local county officials thanked the Ethiopian peacekeepers for the bravery

exhibited in the face of danger and saluted them for saving the lives of fellow citizens.

As the final batch of ETHBATT-20 is expected to depart shortly, the contingent commander intends to donate their balance medical supplies to the Martha Tubman Memorial Hospital intended for the local population's use. Those who benefited from their agricultural training will be provided with agricultural tools and other materials to enhance their capacity to produce more food. A number of local schools will receive some benches and chairs.

"We are doing all this as a show of gratitude to our Liberian brothers and sisters," Kiros said adding, "Liberians accepted us, not as foreigners, but as brothers and sisters. Since they have made our mission a successful one, our various donations is only to show our affection and gratitude to them as we leave." He wished that had they stayed much longer, they would have engaged themselves in more capacity-building initiatives and contributed to building the country's economy.

The departure of the Ethiopian contingent is in line with the UNMIL drawdown process. The third phase runs from

October 2009 to May 2010. Based on a report by a Technical Assessment Mission that visited Liberia from 26 April to 6 May, the Secretary-General recommended to the Security Council a reduction in the mission's military strength by 2,029 troops but no change in the police component. Special Representative Løj has assured Liberians that the drawdown of UN forces in the country would be "carried out in a gradual manner so as not to jeopardize the gains we have made thus far, as well as to allow Liberian security institutions to be up and running."

Ethiopia, one of the original signatories of the United Nations Charter, has played a significant role in promoting world peace and security. As early as the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, Ethiopia raised a volunteer battalion (Kagnew battalion) and authorized its deployment with the UN forces. Before the 1953 ceasefire, three Ethiopian battalions, totaling 5,000 men, had rotated and served with distinction.

From 1960 to 1964, the Ethiopians again served with the UN peacekeeping force in Zaire (present-day Congo) and Rwanda following the genocide in 1993. It also successfully completed its peacekeeping mission in Burundi. Currently, Ethiopian soldiers are playing a significant role in the United Nations-African Union hybrid peacekeeping operation in Darfur, Sudan. ♦

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Ethiopian peacekeepers at a medal parade



Liberians

Six years after war, is demo

Edwina Gbeanquoi
Cosmetology Student, Salvation Army
Vocational Training Programme

"Yes, democracy is taking root. I say so because the recent Montserrado County senatorial by-election was free, fair and transparent. Before, elections were held but they were not transparent. Now, elections are being conducted and they are being held, so far, in a transparent manner. I'm so proud of that."



Geraldine Doe-Sheriff
Junior Senator, Montserrado County

"It's gradually picking up. Though it started before now, but the word democracy isn't only by saying it, but also by one's actions. Liberia is gradually moving towards it. Though it's a tedious task, but we're getting there."



Amos Ticker
Political Advisor, Unity Party

"You can see the difference between this government and previous ones. Since we took over. We are executing our platform promises; and one of those promises is to uphold democracy in this country. For instance the recent Montserrado County senatorial by-election went on smoothly. Though we lost, we have accepted the results indicating that we are a mature political party and will do everything to ensure and uphold democracy. There is freedom of speech, press, and movement. All these are tenets that ensure democracy. You can see for yourself. Before now, these things could not happen."



Otis Jolo
Regional Coordinator, Liberia
Democratic Institute based in
Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County

"Basically, it's difficult to say whether democracy is taking root in Liberia because the processes that should ensure that democracy is taking root in our society are yet to clearly be seen. With the presence of UNMIL here in the country, it's difficult to measure whether democracy is making progress because other things that are happening in the south-east have the propensity to carry us back to where we're coming from. So, it's only when UNMIL leaves that we can measure the progress of democracy in our society. We can safely say that it is progressing, but I think it is because of the presence of UNMIL."

Augustine Nugba
Programme Coordinator, CARITAS –
Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County

"I think democracy is taking root. In fact a long time we have been practicing democracy and when we look around us, some of the signs of good democracy are unfolding. For example, the various counties and communities are able to elect representatives and councilmen of their choice. There is freedom of speech in the country, people worship freely, we don't have religious rivalry, and we have freedom of the press. All these are signs of democracy in our country."



Florence Teah
Student, Nursing School –
Gardnersville

"I think democracy is taking root. The recent senatorial by-election is a case in point. People were able to exercise their rights freely and without intimidation. When the run-off was held recently and the opposition won, the ruling party accepted the people's verdict. This was a clear sign that Liberians are coming of age."



Speak cracy taking root in Liberia?

Samukai Vamuyan Dukuly
Television Journalist, Power TV

"We are moving there gradually. In recent times, we have had a series of by-elections in which both the ruling and opposition political parties have been declared winners. There haven't been any confrontation or court actions and everyone has accepted the results as such, so we are getting there gradually. I think the process is on."



Alfred N.T. Junye
Regional Coordinator, LRRRC –
Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County

"Yes, democracy is taking root in Liberia because from looking at where we've come, today people have got the opportunity to say what they want to say without fear of arrest and incarceration. Before central government would sit in Monrovia and design policies for the counties; today, when we look at the formulation and implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) and the County Development Agenda (CDA), this government believes that the people must participate in the process at all levels. Where people's participation in the process of governance is being highlighted, this is a sure sign that democracy is taking root in the country."



P. Kerdial Johnson
O-I-C MOVCON, Greenville,
Sinoe County

"I would say yes because now we experience significant levels of freedom of expression and freedom of the press. gradually, we are moving towards total democracy, though it will take time considering coming out of nearly 15-year civil war."



Alex Kawah
Student, University of Liberia

"Of course, as far as I'm concerned, after the October 2005 elections, we've seen many changes that have never happened before in Liberia. For instance, the ruling party has included opposition parties in government. Also, there had not been much freedom of speech or movement as its being practiced today. These are all clear signs that democracy is taking root in Liberia."

"That's a very tough one. But looking at the trend of events, people can now decide who they want. People can now have a say in what they want. So we can safely say that democracy is somehow taking place; I wouldn't say it is taking root. For me I would see democracy taking roots if people can make informed decisions. Though there are some, but for me people are not making an informed decision and because of people not making informed decisions, I say democracy hasn't taken roots yet. We are thriving, the process is still in its infant stage. Whether it's going to take root, that's the big question."



Bendu Nimley
Journalist



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