

UN FOCUS



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Soldiers Learn Engineering Skills from Peacekeepers

Liberia Activates Coast Guard Unit

All Eyes on the Borders

MESSAGE FROM THE SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL



First of all, I would like to pay homage to all the victims of the devastating earthquake in Haiti in January. Many UN colleagues were among the victims. Among them were four former UNMIL employees, namely former Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Luis Carlos da Costa, as well as Jerome Yap, Fred Wooldridge and Josseline Nguekeu, who died in the tragedy. Their invaluable contribution to the Liberian peace process will not be forgotten. We can pay no better tribute to their memories than by renewing our own commitment to realizing their goal of consolidating the peace in Liberia.

Six years after the deployment of UNMIL with 15,000 troops, the Mission's military troop strength will be reduced by May 2010 to just below 8,000 personnel in line with the phased drawdown, while the police strength will remain at 1,200. Although the future troop level is subject to Security Council decision, the maintenance of peace and stability in Liberia remains a high priority for UNMIL, and the Secretary-General has recommended in his 19th Progress Report that there be no further troop reduction until after the 2011 general elections.



There has been continuous progress in the reform of the security sector. The restructured Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) is making progress in enhancing operational capacities as well as in training. The two battalions of AFL completed the United States Army Training and Evaluation Programme in September and December 2009. A landmark was reached in January with the Government of Liberia officially assuming responsibilities for the development of its new army. Liberia also activated a 40-member Coast Guard Unit in January. UNMIL has initiated joint training with specialized units of AFL, such as engineering, military police, signal and headquarters staff.

The Liberian National Police (LNP) also continues to take steps towards operational independence, but still faces serious challenges. Its Emergency Response Unit (ERU) continues to improve in performance and professionalism. The ERU has deployed outside Monrovia to respond to unrest on a number of occasions, serving as a deterrent and adding a tactical element to the local LNP presence. The LNP has also prioritized the expansion of the Police Support Unit to offer flexible armed support to normal police operations. However, achievement of an operationally effective PSU at the recommended strength of 600 officers will require substantial additional donor support for training, equipment and infrastructure. It remains critically important that both the army and the law enforcement agencies are capable of defending the country and maintaining internal security by the time UNMIL fully draws down, and the support of donors for improvements in the security sector remains critical.

With the transfer of Sinoe Rubber Plantation to a Chinese company under interim arrangements with the

Government of Liberia, all rubber plantations are now under the Government's control, a major milestone. However, unemployment and underemployment, especially of youth, remains a concern as disaffected youth are considered a threat to internal stability and regional security. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in conjunction with the Government, is also preparing to launch a job-creation programme for youth in two counties. This will engage 1,500 youth in agriculture and related activities and will complement the Liberian Government's own dry season initiative to create 8,000 jobs. Employment opportunities for youth are of vital importance for the consolidation of peace and longer term development in Liberia.

The 20th Progress Report of the Secretary-General on UNMIL has just been released, in which the Secretary-General acknowledges the progress made in Liberia towards consolidating peace and stability, but noted that significant challenges remain in the development of the Country's security and rule of law institutions. The Secretary-General also underlined that with the release of the final edited version of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) report, time has come for Liberia to define its road towards reconciliation. He therefore urged for continued constructive dialogue within the Liberian society on the road ahead regarding the TRC recommendations. The Secretary-General also underlined the importance of addressing national electoral legislation in this Legislative term in order to facilitate the holding of credible democratic elections. The United Nations will continue to utilize its good offices, as required, to facilitate dialogue among political actors in the coming months on the outstanding political and legislative agenda.

Ellen Margrethe Løj

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ellen Margrethe Løj". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned over the printed name and title.



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As the new Armed Forces of Liberia still faces major operational and professional challenges, UNMIL and the Government of Liberia have built a strategic partnership through which UN peacekeepers deployed in the country are partnering with the members of the army to enhance their capacities through training. Scores of AFL soldiers have benefitted from the first training in engineering.



Against the background of Liberia's vast maritime resources along its coastline being pillaged daily, the country has recently activated a Coast Guard Unit, which is currently benefiting from training as well as funding support from the United States government.



With mounting political tensions in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, an inter-agency contingency plan has been developed to preserve Liberia's peace and security and to counter any spill-over effects should there be any population influx from neighbouring countries.



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Bangladeshi peacekeepers impart engineering skills to their AFL counterparts

BANENGR-12/UNMIL

Soldiers Learn Engine Skills from Peacekeeper

First Lieutenant Daniel Holman, Jr., a member of the 1st Engineering Company of the Armed Forces of Liberia's 23rd Infantry Brigade, is elated at the training he has received from the UN Mission's Bangladeshi Engineering Contingent (BANENGR-12). "The training was rewarding because it developed our capacity and skills in a number of critical areas of our discipline which will become essential to the reconstruction and

development of our dear country when the United Nations peacekeepers depart," he told UN FOCUS.

Holman, Jr., was part of the 60-member AFL engineering company that successfully completed a 12-week training with the BANENGR-12 contingent. They completed eight weeks of training in combat engineering and another four weeks of specialized training.

The specialized training involved soldiers being trained in three specific engi-

neering areas – horizontal, vertical and sapper. The horizontal group received training in road reconstruction and maintenance, building bridges using culverts, operating heavy vehicles and earth moving equipment. The vertical group was taught various aspects of building construction, masonry and concrete works, carpentry, plumbing and electrical installation; while the sapper group was trained to handle UXOs and other aspects of combat engineering.



BANENGR-12/UNMIL



BANENGR-12/UNMIL

Engineering Officers

Besides, the AFL engineering company officers' corps was taught engineering tactics, intelligence and support planning.

Staff Sergeant Keita Musa, Jr., one of the graduates, praised the BANENGR-12 for going the extra mile in imparting the knowledge to them sometimes through practical demonstrations due to the language barrier. "I really want to clap for the Bangladeshis due to this major challenge. They did all they could to share their experiences and knowledge with us which is

good for our training as a new engineering company," the youthful soldier said.

As the newly trained, over 2,000-strong AFL is expected to shoulder full responsibility for the security of Liberia when the peacekeepers eventually leave, it was a strategic decision to institute joint training exercises between the peacekeepers and the AFL soldiers to take advantage of the skills of the peacekeepers while they are still in Liberia. And the training began with the engineering company stationed at Camp Tubman near Gbarnga, Bong County.

During two weeks leading up to Liberia's 26 July Independence Day celebrations in Gbarnga, Bong County, in 2009, the BANENGR-12 began mentoring the newly trained young soldiers. They were spread to three different work locations along with their Bangladeshi counterparts whose tutoring was centered on road reconstruction, laying culverts for building bridges, and training in operating heavy vehicles and earth moving equipment.

They worked along with the BANENGR-12 in constructing the Bailey bridge that was dedicated at Nyanforleh River, in Salala District. More recently, they worked with a contingent of Pakistani engineers during the construction of another Bailey bridge near Sinji, in Grand Cape Mount County.

At the launch of the Sinji Bridge recently, Deputy Public Works Minister for Technical Services Jenkins Mends-Cole praised the AFL engineers. "I'm touched and overwhelmed by your smart approach in responding to training acquired from UNMIL in the launching of this Bailey bridge. I'm proud of your determination to learn at such a high speed," he said.

The BANENGR-12 Contingent Commander, Lt.-Col. Abdul Hamid Saddar was delighted with what he saw of the new AFL engineers. "The standard of the Company was excellent. They took their lessons – both in the classroom and practical – seriously," he told UN FOCUS.

At their graduation ceremony, the AFL engineering graduates demonstrated their newly acquired military engineering techniques and tactics by displaying their ability to use hand power tools while remain-

ing calm under stress. They also conducted assault river crossing and obstacle breaking operations, mine laying and clearing operations, as well as executing target demolition.

UNMIL Sector B Commander Brig.-Gen. Rahman Muhammad Majibur, reiterated UNMIL's increased desire to see Liberians take care of the country's security. "We would like to see the AFL and other security agencies take full charge of the country's security and other law and order situations," he said. Brig.-Gen. Majibur, also the Bangladeshi Contingent Commander, reminded the newly trained engineers that their profession is full of challenges which can only be overcome by professional efficiency, sheer hard work, and dedication.

Liberia's Deputy Defense Minister for Operations, Dionysius Sebwe, expressed the Liberian Government's gratefulness to the UN Mission, especially the peacekeepers of BANENGR-12, for the training. "We are grateful for the mentorship and training opportunities we continue to receive from our international partners," he said, assuring Liberians that in addition to its core mission, the new AFL will play a major role in the country's reconstruction and development.

The AFL Command Officer-in-Charge Maj.-Gen. S.A. Abdurrahman described the new AFL engineering unit as a "path finder that will lead the way for Liberia's recovery and reconstruction." He told them that, military engineers are an important component of every army in the world. "They are the first to go the battlefield, and the last to leave," reminding them that as the pioneer engineers of the new AFL, they have a huge responsibility to go to every nook and corner of Liberia to open up the country for development.

Recently, at the 53rd anniversary of Armed Forces Day, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf praised the efforts of the AFL Engineering Battalion, and hoped to see more collaboration with other partners. "We want to see the AFL Engineering Battalion working alongside the Ministry of Public Works in opening up the hinterland through the construction of bridges and culverts and in logistics support where necessary," she said.

J.W.W



Liberia Coast Guard Unit Commander receives "Guide-on" from AFL Command Officer-in-Charge, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Alao Abdurrahman

Liberia Activates Coast Guard

Amidst the spectacle and pageantry that characterized the celebration of the Armed Forces Day in February, Liberia also marked another key milestone in its ongoing security sector reform with the activation of the Coast Guard Unit.

Neatly dressed in their white uniforms and caps, 40 newly trained soldiers of the reorganized Liberia Coast Guard Unit stood "at ease" on the green turf of the Barclay Training Center (BTC), attentively watching the formalities of the "Guide-on" being presented to the unit's Commander by the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) Command Officer-in-Charge, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Alao Abdurrahman.

The activation with the initial 40 offi-

cers chosen from within the ranks of the AFL and trained in the United States fulfills in part the 2008 National Defense Act which obliged the Liberian Government to develop and re-establish its capacity to man its territorial waters.

Liberia's vast maritime resources along its 300-mile coastline are being pilaged daily due to the country's inability to oversee its waters. The country loses over US\$12 million annually due to illegal fishing. Maritime control is a continuing challenge in the sub-region with drug smugglers using West Africa as a trans-shipment point for illegal narcotics and counterfeit drugs worth a staggering US\$1.8 billion.

Addressing the occasion, United States Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said her government is proud to assist

Liberia in the activation of its Coast Guard and to counter the maritime threats. The US government has agreed to provide over US\$5 million worth of training, equipment, and infrastructure to the nascent Coast Guard.

"When the Coast Guard moves to their base on Bushrod Island, the US Seabees will welcome them home by beginning three major infrastructure construction projects at the base – a pier, a boat ramp and perimeter wall that will be valued at US\$1.3 million," the US envoy said. Besides, the US Government has provided the embryonic Coast Guard with eight zodiac boats and outboard motors to ensure that they get off to a successful start.

Already, a US Coast Guard mobile training team has begun a series of training



Public Affairs/Ministry of Defense

ard Unit

courses to help build the Coast Guard's technical capacity. Additional training courses in areas including boat maintenance, small boat operation, and maritime law enforcement are scheduled for later this year.

The US Government also provides the Unit with scholarships and opportunities to study abroad. Four of its personnel are currently studying in the United States. Two are in Coast Guard Machinery-Technician School while the others are in the Officers' Indoctrination School at the US Coast Guard Academy. Three others returned recently - one from the US Army Engineering Basic Officers' Leadership Course and two from the US Coast Guard Boatswain Mate School.

Commander Jennifer Keteum has been appointed as maritime advisor in the

Office of Security Cooperation within the US Embassy here. She's also coordinating activities of the newly restructured Unit.

Speaking at the activation, Defense Minister Brownie J. Samukai, Jr. assured the AFL Commander-in-Chief, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, that the re-activated Coast Guard Unit would work with the line ministries and agencies of government through the inter-ministerial committee to coordinate and collaborate in protecting Liberia's maritime shores. Samukai



sounded a strong warning to intruders violating Liberia's territorial waters. "All of those illegal fishermen and others engaged in illegal activities out there, we want you to be on notice that the Coast Guard is up and ready for the task and will chase you out of our waters."

In her remarks, President Johnson Sirleaf congratulated the Coast Guard for its activation while reminding them of the daunting task ahead which is to improve the security of the country's coastline, and control smuggling and illegal fishing. Commenting on the Armed Forces Day 2010 theme, "Building a Force for Good," the Liberian leader noted that this year's theme was most appropriate, given the achievements of the armed forces so far.

"We are acutely aware of our Government's responsibility to sustain a professional armed forces, including Coast Guard personnel. We commit to the continuous development of the AFL to a professional standard through training and other capacity-building programmes both at home and abroad," President Sirleaf stressed. The Liberian Government assumed full responsibility for the growth, maintenance and sustenance of AFL on 1 January when the contractual arrangement with the US Government contractors expired on 31 December 2009.

President Sirleaf challenged AFL personnel to continue to live up to the motto of the institution, "Dare to Protect and Defend," and to go forward and be a force for the good of the nation.

At the Armed Forces Day programme, the ministers of defense of Liberia and Sierra Leone signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate in different spheres of responsibilities to improve and expand military and security relations among the two Mano River Union Basin states.

JWW



Justice Minister Cllr. Christiana Tah addresses the graduation program



Immigration Officials Undergo Training

Officer Abigail Wisseh, who joined Liberia's Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization (BIN) in 2007, has since been working without any formal training. But late last year she got selected for a four-month intensive training at the Ghana Immigration Training School in Assin Foso, Ghana, along with 49 other immigration officials personnel.

"The training was very interesting and rewarding. I sincerely want all my colleagues to undertake such training because it teaches you how to exhibit discipline, respect superior officers, be time conscious, and most importantly immigration and border management. Every BIN officer needs to learn these," says Wisseh.

Most of the nearly 2,000 BIN personnel have either not been trained at all or had obtained training before 1989 and

therefore have limited capacity to administer the Aliens and Nationality Laws. To compound matters, these laws themselves are obsolete and need overhaul to reflect present day realities.

As the Liberian Government currently lacks the capacity to address the challenges facing the BIN, a tripartite project through the Netherlands Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), the Netherlands Government Immigration Repatriation and Departure Service (R&DS) and the Ghana Immigration Service (GIS) in collaboration with the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is supporting the training of 150 BIN officers to strengthen the Bureau's institutional capacity. Out of the 150, a chosen group of 20 would undergo a 'training of trainers' course. These trainers would then form the core of the training unit of the BIN in the near future. The training commenced in

September 2009 and runs for 24 months.

The first group of trainee officers, including 10 females, successfully completed four-months of professional training last December and were graduated in January 2010. The second group of 50 BIN officers is expected to leave Liberia in late March.

Besides physical fitness and drill training, the training offers lectures in various courses including Immigration Law/Disciplinary Orders, Fraud Document Detection, Sea Port/Land Border Duties, ECOWAS/International Relations, Basic Intelligence Training, Human Trafficking, as well as Border Security Management.

During the graduation programme, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for the Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu reaffirmed UNMIL's commitment to support the BIN



Bill Smith/BIN

come into contact, ensure impartiality and confidentiality in the discharge of your duties and eschew corruption,” Ms Mensa-Bonsu advised.

She thanked the Government of Ghana for its continued support for the recovery process in Liberia and the Ghana Immigration Service for the training as well as the Netherlands INS and the Netherlands R&DS for their dedication to the cause, their commitment to the realization of the project, and for the funding support.

immigration services.

Already, a deployment schedule has been developed for the recently returned graduates. “Those to be deployed to the border areas will have to be provided the necessary support which is still lacking,” Commissioner Massaquoi told UN FOCUS, adding that those to be deployed need accommodation, uniform, equipment and other logistics to enhance their work. “Most projects undertaken in the name of the BIN are currently being done by donors,” Massaquoi said, adding that

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to develop and implement its strategic plans. UNMIL is mandated to establish functioning administrative structures in immigration and border management at the national and local level. “We have supported the BIN in a variety of ways, including training of officers; monitoring and on-the-job mentoring of BIN officers; improving the infrastructure of the BIN by building Border Posts under the Quick Impact Projects; and providing technical support to BIN personnel in preparing proposals to seek funding to improve their operational capacity.” Mensa-Bonsu noted. UNMIL will also support the establishment of a training institute for the BIN, she said.

The DSRSG reminded the newly trained BIN officers of the challenges they will encounter in the discharge of their duties, especially for a country with porous borders. “The West African sub-region has been identified as an attractive route for the illicit international trade in narcotics, in addition to its existing problems of human and child trafficking and illegal cross-border movement of ex-combatants,” she said, reminding them of the need to win the trust and confidence of the public so they will be willing to share with them information on undesirable aliens or aliens engaged in prohibited activities. “This can only be achieved if you respect the human rights of those with whom you

The BIN Commissioner, Clarence Massaquoi, urged the newly trained officers to remain vigilant, and be focused on issues of national security. “In order for us to have an effective border management programme, our emphasis will be on training,” Massaquoi disclosed, adding that the newly trained officers on their return would be deployed at the major border points in order to provide professional

financial support from the government is far below requirement.

Currently Liberia has 36 official entry points alongside 137 illegal ones, many of them created during the war years which explains the porous nature of the borders and the myriad challenges facing the country’s immigration authorities.

JWW



Bill Smith/BIN

All Eyes on the Borders



The mounting political tensions in neighbouring Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire cast a shadow over Liberia's hard-earned peace, overseen by thousands of UN peacekeepers for over six years now. Going by the history of the West African sub-region, troubles in one country tend to easily spill over to its neighbours and beyond.

Since the death of Guinea's President Lansana Conté and the subsequent military takeover, the political situation in that country remains extremely fragile with

should there be any population influx from neighbouring countries. The Plan is also geared towards rendering humanitarian assistance to the needy.

The Inter-agency Contingency Plan, involving the Liberian government, UNMIL, UN agencies and other partners, is primarily meant to ensure that roles and responsibilities are known to all stakeholders and early response mechanisms are in place in case of a refugee influx. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj and Deputy Special Representative Mustapha

Special Representative Løj has stressed the importance of peace and security to development, and has assured Liberians that UNMIL was closely watching the situation in Guinea and had intensified border patrols. During a recent visit to the border, she urged Liberians to alert national security agencies and UNMIL of any unusual movements along the border.

dozens of protesting civilians massacred. As for Côte d'Ivoire, in February, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon voiced concern about events following the suspension of voter registration ahead of this year's presidential election because of rising tensions. Originally intended to be held in 2005, the polls have been repeatedly postponed. The UN peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire is currently engaging the major political parties to resume the Ivorian political process.

It is against this backdrop that an Inter-agency Contingency Plan has been developed to preserve Liberia's peace and security and to counter any spill-over effects

Soumaré were actively involved in putting in place the task force led by the UNHCR to update the contingency plan both at country and county levels. In line with its international obligations, the Government of Liberia will assume overall responsibility for coordination of emergency response operations through the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Liberia Refugee, Repatriation and Resettlement Commission.

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sified border patrols. During a recent visit to the border, she urged Liberians to alert national security agencies and UNMIL of any unusual movements along the border.

"There is no report of influx yet, but we have identified potential primary and secondary crossing points, transit points, way stations, and camps. We have also built up a network of information sharing. We don't want people, including women and children, to cross over the border and there is nobody to help should there be any influx," says Ibrahima Coly, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees



Border patrol in progress



(UNHCR) representative in Liberia. Coly, who routinely visits the border counties and interacts with key actors, says given Liberia's post-conflict transition status, it is crucial that any eventual emergency response is balanced with the needs of maintaining stability in the country and supporting the people to continue rebuilding their lives.

Reiterating that border monitoring is part of his agency's routine activities, UNHCR's Senior Protection Officer Mamadou Balde says the Contingency Plan targets refugees who may opt to

remain in border areas among communities with whom they have ethnic affiliations. Local communities have already been informed. "However, others may opt to move to areas in the interior where they can receive protection and assistance. We are here to support the Government," says Balde. Currently, there are nearly 13,000 registered Liberian refugees residing in Guinea.

The likelihood that a mass influx would create the opportunity for armed elements to infiltrate border counties cre-

Programme will be responsible for food while UNICEF is the lead agency for WATSAN, nutrition and education, and will support UNHCR and World Health Organization (WHO) in protection and health. The WHO is the coordinating agency for the health and nutrition sector. There are many other actors with defined roles.

At a recent press briefing in Monrovia, UNMIL Force Commander, Lt.-Gen. Sikander Afzal, reassured Liberians that there are no external threats to the country.

The likelihood that a mass influx would create the opportunity for armed elements to infiltrate border counties creates an imperative to secure these areas both for the benefit of civilians and humanitarian workers. Armed elements of any nationality will be separated and dealt with according to the Contingency Plan.

ates an imperative to secure these areas both for the benefit of civilians and humanitarian workers. Armed elements of any nationality will be separated and dealt with according to the Contingency Plan.

Various organizations have already been identified for support in vital sectors such as shelter, food, and water and sanitation (WATSAN). "Relief items, including food and non food items have also been prepositioned in the border areas," says Representative Coly. World Food

"We have a comprehensive mechanism in which we regularly have meetings with the security agencies of Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire," he pointed out. As the political situation in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire continues to remain uncertain, humanitarian and security actors say the best scenario is that there are no disruptions leading to population influxes into Liberia.

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Correcting Corrections

Inside the high walls at the Monrovia Central Prison (MCP), inmates make distress calls to almost everybody who enters the premises. “Papay, I want talk to you,” requests one young man behind bars. “Boss man, please give me something,” begs another on top of his voice from one of the prison blocks.

Among the detainees, 16-year-old John (not his real name) has been in detention for more than five months without trial. “They brought me here because one boy lied that I bought an item from him that he had stolen,” he explains. Only many months after his detention did a prison supervisor discover that the juvenile has been living among adult detainees instead of a new block with a wing specifically for juveniles. “I am really suffering. They only give us small gari in the morning and small rice in the evening. I am sick. I am in prison for nothing,” John laments.

Human rights activists say dozens of Liberians are languishing behind bars for

very flimsy reasons. At the Monrovia prison, a magisterial fast track court has been established to expedite cases of prolonged pre-trial detention. When UN FOCUS visited the prison, the court was in session and some prisoners had just been freed. The court sessions have so far reviewed more than 2,300 cases and released more than 800 detainees charged for minor offences since its inception a year ago. On 22 February, MCP had 714 pre-trial detainees in custody including 670 adult males and 29 juvenile males, and 14 adult females and one juvenile female.

Many observers say MCP, which was completely destroyed during Liberia’s civil war, has greatly improved since 2005 with the support of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). However, although much has been done, mammoth challenges remain in Liberia’s prisons. Augustine Toe, the Executive Director of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, describes the situation in the country’s prisons as “horrible”, and indi-

cates that calling them Correction facilities is a misnomer. “There is nothing called “corrections” happening here. What we have are mere detention centres. What are they correcting?” Toe argues that the essence of sending people to prison is to rehabilitate and make them better persons. “But people are sent to prison; they spend months and years, come out commit crime and are sent to prison again. The whole thing we have is a vicious circle.”

Correctional service is an integral part of the criminal justice system. It has a key role in the protection of society through the provision of safe, secure and humane control of prisoners. Marjo Callaghan, the head of UNMIL’s Corrections Advisory Unit, says: “Look at the priorities of the Government. Everything needs everything. Where do you put your money? Where do you put your attention?”

Currently there are 11 prison facilities in Liberia. “When we arrived here there were only the Kakata and Harbel prisons. We reopened all the other facilities in collaboration with our partners and made them a bit habitable,” says Callaghan, adding that UNMIL has continued to assist Liberia’s Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation to refurbish and build corrections facilities across the country through funds from UNMIL’s Quick Impact Projects, UNHCR, and governments like the USA, Canada and Norway. UNDP, ICRC, WFP, and Prison Fellowship, among others, have also provided assistance.

Due to the weaknesses in the criminal justice system, the majority of prisoners are in pre-trial detention. “Eighty five per cent of the prisoner population is in pre-trial detention,” says Callaghan. With overcrowded facilities, prison breaks are not uncommon. “From January to June 2009, nine prison breaks occurred in Liberia, some of which were violent and resulted in the mass escape of inmates,” states a recently released Report on the Human Rights Situation in Liberia. In May 2009, 32 prisoners escaped from MCP; three officers allegedly conspired to facilitate the escape. In Maryland County, 34 out of 36 inmates were set free by a mob who forced their way into Harper Central Prison in June 2009 to attack a man suspected of killing a 27-year-old

man. The prison was seriously damaged during the attacks leaving it not secure enough to hold detainees. "Prison escapes prevent justice from being delivered. Victims are also at risk of intimidation by suspects who have escaped," states the human rights report. At MCP, security seems to have relatively improved. "There has been no security incidents since we deployed here six months ago," says Lt. Ibraheem Al-khaled, commander of UNMIL's Jordanian platoon guarding the prison.

Prison reform, prison monitoring, and training and development of personnel are the principal areas of UNMIL's assistance. In collaboration with national and international stakeholders, UNMIL's Corrections Advisory Unit has also helped design a Penal Reform Development Plan that will guide the medium and long-term development of the Liberian Corrections system. As a way of correcting Corrections, Counsellor Toe suggests that the Ministry of Justice should design a well coordinated programme which should include rehabilitation.

Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (BCR) authorities say rehabilitation programs are now being implemented in corrections facilities. UNMIL's Corrections Advisor Suraj Olarinde says the UN Mission supported the BCR in developing a three-year strategic plan for prisoners' rehabilitation activities. In Zwedru, two UNMIL Corrections Advisers with expertise in agriculture are deployed to provide technical support to the Corrections' agriculture pilot project on a 10-acre land inside the premises.

Also, a consultant has been assigned to BCR by the Ministry of Justice with primary focus on assisting with the development and implementation of rehabilitation programs for inmates. At its strategic planning retreat in January 2009, the Ministry of Justice identified Corrections as one of the five areas for immediate and sustained attention.

Callaghan says UNMIL's presence has raised the profile of Corrections but notes that there are huge capacity and security issues to be addressed. "There is still a lot of work to do."

SM



Sanniquellie Gets New Prison

A clearing on a hillock overlooking picturesque jungle in northeastern Liberia is a hive of activity, as dozens of workers with hammers and nails, buckets of cement and cement blocks set about constructing the first purpose-built prison in Sanniquellie, the capital of Nimba County.

Not far away, amidst stacks of cement blocks, high-tension steel rods and other construction material, two men are busy tending pots simmering with the mid-day meal for the workers. A hoarding with details of the project and implementing partners, towers over the men. The prison complex is being constructed by the United Nations in Liberia to support Liberia's Ministry of Justice. The project is a result of a joint initiative by the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Ministry of Justice and is being constructed under a contract by the United Nations Office of Project Services with an almost US\$ 1 million grant provided by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (UN PBF). The project also includes the recruitment and training of 50 Corrections Officers (20 for Sanniquellie, 30 for Monrovia Central Prison), and the provision of security equipment and other logistics support.

The new prison will replace an ageing and cramped warehouse-turned-prison facility that has for years served as the only holding facility for prisoners in the city. It stands in the middle of an enclosure protected by barbed-wire and has a small area for recreation facilities. Prison breaks occurred often, as prisoners were able to easily cut through the barbed wire encircling the compound.

Not built to be used as a prison, the

complex also lacked basic facilities. Over 100 prisoners, including seven women and five juveniles, are currently cramped into the warehouse that is divided into holding cells meant to house 25. Until recently, the premises had no running water, functioning sanitation facilities or kitchen. Only two of the six toilets are functioning. To alleviate the water problem, a hand pump has been sunk within the facility through a joint initiative of the Danish Red Cross, the Nimba chapter of the Red Cross and the Prison.

The new prison is set in a twelve-and-a-half acre plot of land not too far from the city centre. It will be more secure, and have a series of airy and spacious cells that are designed to comfortably hold 72 prisoners. There will be running water and several toilets for use by inmates and prison officials. It will also have a separate building that will serve as a kitchen.

The UN is also training 20 new corrections officers to strengthen the nine-man staff at the facility. The new officers have commenced a six-month training programme, which includes a month of on-the-job training in Sanniquellie.

The prison complex and training for prison officers is part of a wider effort by the UN in Liberia to support the Government of Liberia develop its corrections and judicial facilities. The UN is constructing buildings to house courts, providing equipment and vehicles, and offering training as part of its support to Liberia's judiciary.

By Rukshan Ratnam and
Magdalene Matthews



Grand Kru County Junior Senator Blamo Nelson make remarks at the opening of the Legislative Drafting Course

Building Skills of Leg

Lack of clear and explicit laws that translate policy into a legislative framework has dogged governance in Liberia for a long time. Developing and enacting a revised legal framework that addresses the weaknesses of past governance is very much the need of the hour.

At the onset of Liberia's first post-conflict government in January 2006, most elected members of the 52nd National Legislature, including their staff, were quite new to that august body. Besides, the Legislature lacks the requisite legislative support bureaus to adequately facilitate their work, including an archives section, a library, a research bureau, and a drafting section.

To address these deficiencies and to strengthen the lawmaking capacity of the National Legislature based on its strategic

plan, the UN Mission in Liberia's (UNMIL) Legal & Judicial Systems Support Division (LJSSD) and the Joint Legislative Modernization Committee identified several priorities for the body.

To strengthen the lawmaking pillar, one of five pillars of the Legislature's strategic plan, the Government of Liberia, the UN and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (UK-DFID) jointly supported a 10-day intensive Legislative Drafting Course from 1-10 December 2009 facilitated by the United Kingdom-Royal Institute of Public Administration (UK-RIPA) in collaboration with the Liberia Institute of Public Administration (LIPA). Twenty-one persons from the Legislative and Executive branches of government as well as UNMIL, UNDP, and UNICEF participated in the workshop with the overall

objective to enact better laws.

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, reminded participants that as Liberia is still recovering from its conflict, there is a need to ensure that laws that are enacted by the National Legislature play a significant role in promoting peace and reconciliation as well as in attracting the necessary investment for the country's economic growth.

"The Legislature has a crucial role to play in the promotion of good governance and the rule of law in any democracy. It has in its hand the power to either advance or impede the interests of the people," she pointed out, adding that it is because of this that the UN in Liberia is supporting, and will continue to support, the Liberian Government, including the National Legislature with initiatives to build institu-



Legislature, highlighted the herculean challenge at the National Legislature of the need to amend or repeal many old laws while at the same time write new laws using 21st century diction. He hoped that as time goes by, courses could be introduced at various universities on legislative drafting so that students in law, government and even lawmakers could benefit.

Chief facilitator Roger Rose, an English barrister with nearly 40 years experience in legislative drafting, reminded the participants that to be a full effective drafter one has to spend eight to ten years full time practicing the skill. "Not too much must be expected of the group of 21 persons who have spent just two weeks looking at some of fundamentals of it," he cautioned. During the 10-day training, participants reviewed the basic fundamentals of drafting legislations focusing on the essentials which are needed to construct clear, concise and unambiguous legislative sentences.

The Deputy Director of the Legislative Drafting Section, Ophelia Browne, expressed the participants' gratitude for

the knowledge acquired. She conceded, "We must be blunt here that this is something that we didn't know. We sometimes thought what we did was the right thing; but now we've gotten to know where to put our "must", "or", "and", or "may." We needed this." Nine legislative staffers participated in the training.

Besides this training, two Legislative staff recently returned from the United Kingdom where they underwent a seven-week training course in Legislative Drafting at the UK-RIPA. Shortly, two other legislative staff members are expected to undergo a two-month training course in Parliamentary Procedure and Research at the House of Commons in the United Kingdom.

Already, UNMIL's LJSSD and Quick Impact Project have begun working towards refurbishing and equipping a new Legislative Drafting Office at the Capitol Building to host the newly trained legislative staff.

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Legislative Staffers

British Government Representative Gillian Dare presents certificate to a participant

tional and operational capacity.

The British Government Representative, Gillian Dare, whose government sponsored the training through the UK-DFID, expressed her satisfaction that the participants in the course represented a cross section of two branches of government who are responsible in some way for ensuring that Liberia passes laws which will provide the framework for a fair and just society based on equality before the law, the protection of rights and spelling out of responsibilities. She reminded the participants of the phenomenal task before them – identifying conflicting legislation, proposing repeal of outdated laws and initiating amendments to others to bring Liberia's laws up to international standards.

Grand Kru County Senator Blamo Nelson, representing the National



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

“Democracy is taking root in Liberia...”

Six months after joining UNMIL as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance, Moustapha Soumaré, who is also the UNDP Resident Coordinator, sits down with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka to discuss the progress and challenges facing Liberia. Excerpts from the interview:

It has been some six months since you joined UNMIL as Deputy SRSG with principal focus on recovery and governance. How far has Liberia come in recovering from the devastation caused by the civil war?

I have travelled extensively in Liberia's counties since I arrived to get a good sense of what is going on. Even after six months, it would be presumptuous to say that I know everything. But from what I have seen so far, Liberia is recovering very well and the country has made very significant progress towards recovery and development.

First of all, security has vastly improved. Today, we have an Armed Forces of Liberia, with approximately 2,200 personnel, and the Liberia National Police, which is about 3,800 in strength. Prisons and Corrections Centers have been built, and more are being built, to strengthen the Justice system.

There is also economic growth. Liberia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from 2.4 per cent per annum to 7.1 per cent between 2004 and 2008, from about US\$575 million to US\$746 million today. The real GDP per capita has increased from US\$225 to US\$390.

The World Bank Doing Business 2010 Report named Liberia as the second-fastest reforming economy in the region. Looking at the infrastructure, such as roads and bridges being built, there is an impressive turn-around for Liberia moving from emergency to recovery and

development. Of course, UNMIL and the UN system have played an important role in that.

Poor governance in the past is considered one of the major reasons behind Liberia's civil crisis. How do you see governance in Liberia turning away from the past?

Good governance is a long term process. Corruption has been identified by the President as a significant impediment to development. Government officials and ministers have been suspended on allegations of corruption to enable investigations to take place. Institutions are being built to support the drive against corruption. The Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission has been established and is operational. Regular auditing is in place for all the major ministries and government entities and the General Auditing Commission is also operational and independent from Government.

Of course there are challenges. Investigations into corruption allegations can take time, and that is an issue of capacity. Many of Liberia's institutions are not yet fully operational because they still lack capacity. UNMIL and the other UN agencies, funds and programmes are focused on developing capacity across the Government, but there is a considerable way to go.

Transforming from many years of violence and lawlessness and dictatorship



into a democracy can be a very slow and difficult process. How is Liberia faring? Is democracy taking root?

Democracy is certainly taking root in Liberia. Like good governance, democracy is also a long-term process. It also implies patience and a change of mindset. I can see that accountability is being established strongly in the country. There is a high degree of freedom of expression, evidenced by the number of newspapers and their content. People can literally write anything in the newspapers - which I think shouldn't be always the case. The media has a social responsibility not to exploit freedom of expression, particularly when the consequences could have serious secu-



urity implications, as is the case in Liberia.

Our work with the Legislature and other branches of the Government continues to focus on the consolidation of democracy and to build the capacity of these institutions in laying solid foundations for sustainable democracy.

Of course, there are some challenges. One of the big challenges for strengthening democracy is the weak capacity of institutions. That's why we in the UN system are supporting the government's efforts in capacity building. We are also trying to bring together a coalition of donors to support long-term capacity building.

Although the economy is improving, it has yet to create enough jobs. Unemployment is far too high and this could threaten the democratic process. That is why one of the UN's joint programmes is aimed at tackling youth unemployment.

Many observers feel that the coming elections in 2011 will be critical in determining the future of Liberia's democracy. What is the United Nations doing to ensure that the next elections are fair, transparent and peaceful?

Security Council Resolution 1885 mandates UNMIL to support the electoral process and coordinate international electoral assistance while creating an environment that enables free, fair, transparent and peaceful elections. The international community sees the coming elections as an important milestone for the whole democratic process and peace consolidation in the country.

The elections will be run by the National Elections Commission (NEC) of Liberia itself. Our role is to strengthen the capacities of the NEC to manage and conduct the elections and to provide necessary logistical support. Since elections are costly and the government has budgetary difficulties, the international community is also helping the government to mobilize resources. Already a donor group has been convened, with close collaboration with NEC, and a framework will be in place for donors to contribute. As per the Security Council mandate, UNMIL and the UN System are working with the Government and NEC to mobilize over US\$ 38 million

which is required for the electoral cycle.

As the UN Mission eventually closes down, UN agencies, such as UNDP, of which you are the Coordinator in Liberia, will need to take on additional responsibilities. How do you envisage UNDP's role in Liberia once the Mission draws down?

UNMIL is a good example of an integrated mission, with peacekeeping, recovery and development components all interwoven. Here we have an Integrated Strategic Framework, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF). Security, rule of law and development are all important elements of this framework, as are the benchmarks for drawdown of the mission.

We are already preparing ourselves for the transition. A big chunk of UNMIL's mandate will be transferred to the government. The remaining parts will transfer to UN agencies, programmes and funds, rest of the UN System and civil society. The government is taking the lead in the transition and is establishing a task force for the purpose.

The UN family in Liberia has already adopted the "One UN" concept. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is keen to see Liberia as a self-starter "One UN" country. This is very encouraging and shows strong leadership and ownership from the government.

The transition will be managed so that people will see UNMIL leave but not afraid because they know that systems are in place to meet the challenges ahead. But most importantly, the government will take the ownership of things on the ground.

But everything hinges on how the 2011 elections go? If something goes wrong then we're back to square one?

We are all very optimistic. From what we see there's nothing to tell us that something will go wrong. We are hopeful that 2011 is going to consolidate peace and democracy in the country.

Thank you.



Mensa-Bonsu addresses the media at the launch of the report

Human Rights in Liberia

Although much has been achieved, there are still significant gaps in human rights protection in Liberia, according to a recent Report on the Human Rights Situation in Liberia issued by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

The report, produced by the Mission's Human Rights and Protection Section

Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu launched the report at UNMIL headquarters in Monrovia. The report draws from monitoring conducted by Human Rights Officers deployed in each of Liberia's 15 counties.

Cases of rape and other sexual crimes, especially against the girl child, are still common. Between 1 January and 8 June

local NGO, helped to get the victim, who was in a critical condition, to a health facility. The LNP did not investigate the case fully, nor was the suspect arrested. Other allegations of rape involving personalities of high standing that were not pursued were reported in Gbarpolu County, where the alleged perpetrator was a school principal, and in Sinoe County where the alleged perpetrator was an immigration officer."

The report says the situation of children in many orphanages is still dire. In 18 orphanages visited in Grand Bassa, Bomi, Montserrado, Nimba and Lofa Counties, it was observed that living conditions and the quality of care and protection provided were generally poor. Parents reportedly surrendered their children to live in orphanages encouraged by false promises of education and better living conditions.

Allegations of misconduct within the Liberian National Police (LNP) are also among the human rights abuses described in the report, covering January to June 2009. Twenty allegations of serious police misconduct were reported to HRPS, of

Cases of rape and other sexual crimes, especially against the girl child, are still common. Between 1 January and 8 June 2009, UN Police recorded 267 reports of rape. However, many cases are believed to go unreported.

(HRPS), draws attention to human rights violations and abuses based on systematic verification and documentation, and highlights efforts and progress made by the Liberian government to address challenges. It also outlines activities UNMIL has undertaken in support of the Government's efforts to promote and protect human rights. Deputy Special

2009, UN Police recorded 267 reports of rape. However, many cases are believed to go unreported. "In January, a high profile politician was accused of raping a 17-year-old girl who he employed as a housemaid. The incident was reported to the Brewerville LNP station in Montserrado County. HRPS and UNMIL's Office of the Gender Adviser, in collaboration with a



which 13 cases were of police brutality, theft or extortion. In March 2009 about 30 youths representing various youth groups and members of the community held a peaceful protest against police brutality and arbitrary detention in Tubmanburg and called for the removal of the LNP County Commander, states the report.

The enactment of the amendments to the Act establishing the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) is considered as a major development in the reporting period. The INCHR is crucial to establishing accessible long-term human rights presence in Liberia, and is mandated to follow up on implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's recommendations.

The number of police officers with forensic training was augmented with the training of 17 LNP officers including two females. The report further states that the number of police officers deployed outside Monrovia increased and several police stations were rehabilitated. A Sexual and Gender Based Violent Crimes Unit was established within the Ministry of Justice to monitor SGBV investigations and to prosecute criminal cases arising from incidents, as well as to provide support to victims.

A major challenge facing the justice

system in Liberia is the large number of detainees held in pre-trial detention for prolonged periods in violation of human rights standards. The holding cells are often overcrowded rendering them deplorable and unhygienic. "At the Monrovia Central Prison (MCP) in Montserrado County, a rotational Magisterial Court was established at the premises to address cases of prolonged pre-trial detention. Since commencing work in February 2009, the Court has

human rights. It also recommends that orphanages be made to conform to the Minimum Standards for Operating Child Welfare Institutions and those that do not should be closed. "Children with a living parent or parents or relatives should be reunified with them and those without should be placed with approved orphanages."

UNMIL continues to support Government's efforts to promote and protect human rights through its activities

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reviewed 1,470 cases and released 472 detainees. With the establishment of the rotational Court, the prison population at MCP which averaged about 900 inmates dropped to an average of about 680 inmates," states the report.

Among other things, the report recommends that the Government of Liberia should continue to work towards the full implementation of the recommendations contained in UNMIL's previous reports on

including, monitoring and reporting on human rights concerns, human rights training at various government institutions, and awareness activities in communities and schools through established Human Rights Clubs. It also provides technical support to Ministries of Justice, Education, Labour and Health and Social Welfare as well as the Legislature and collaborates with civil society organisations on various human rights projects.

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President of JASAGBV, Lawrence Fahnbulleh greets DSRSG Mensa-Bonsu

children in homes, families and in communities. The terrible effects do not affect the victims alone, but often an entire family, and create fear and insecurity in the community. Under the theme “Together We Will Report”, the journalists marked the anniversary with weeklong activities such as discussions on radio, television, visits to high schools and sporting events.

“The fact that you are all here after a year of sustained reporting on this issue tells me that you are ready and willing to continue on this complex journey of fighting SGBV,” Mensa-Bonsu said at the anniversary celebration. She noted that the first year of the life of any association is often the most delicate for its survival and congratulated the media practitioners for making it to the first milestone.

In the Report on Rape sponsored by the UN Response to Rape Group that was released last December, respondents from Sinoe and Grand Gedeh reported the highest number of known rape incidents. “Yet, only 12.5% of the known cases were ever reported to the police. You thus have a major role to play in creating public

Journalists Unite Against

At a press briefing in June 2008, Liberia’s media practitioners asked Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu about what the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was doing to stop the scourge of rape in the country. Elaborating on UNMIL’s efforts in support of the Government, the deputy UN envoy then turned the question around: “What are you doing? What have you done with the instruments at your disposal?”

In January and February alone of 2008, out of nearly 200 rape cases, 17 involved infants of five years and below. A special plea was made to journalists to be partners in efforts to prevent or stop the menace. Nearly two years after, Journalists Against Sexual and Gender-

based Violence (JASAGBV) came together in February this year, to mark the first anniversary of their association formed not only to fight rape but also other forms of Sexual and Gender-based Violence (SGBV).

awareness of the need to report such cases to the police and to discourage private settlements which only end up promoting re-offending,” Mensa-Bonsu stressed. In supporting the journalists, the Ministry of Gender and Development collaborated

Rape and other forms of SGBV are still the most frequently committed serious crimes in Liberia, according to official statistics. SGBV dehumanizes women and children in homes, families and in communities. The terrible effects do not affect the victims alone, but often an entire family, and create fear and insecurity in the community.

Rape and other forms of SGBV are still the most frequently committed serious crimes in Liberia, according to official statistics. SGBV dehumanizes women and

with UNMIL’s Public Information and organized two media workshops in Monrovia and Ganta in February 2009.

The president of JASAGBV, Lawrence

M. Fahnbulleh, said they came together to stand against rape but expanded their scope to include all forms of SGBV. The independent association is however contending with many challenges. “This

the counties.

As the media practitioners plan to extend the sensitization exercise nationwide, the Executive Director of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission,

Last year, a Sexual and Gender Based Violent Crimes Unit was established within the Ministry of Justice to monitor SGBV investigations, prosecute criminal cases arising from incidents of SGBV, and to provide support to victims. A dedicated court was also inaugurated in Monrovia to deal with SGBV crimes.

organization does not have an office space but squatting at the press union office,” said Fahnbulleh, appealing to the UN, NGOs, and others for assistance. Sam Zota, JASAGBV vice president, says funding to undertake activities is mainly through personal contributions of the association’s members. Pointing out that members rely on public transport, Zota said one of their urgent needs is transportation to reach out to communities in Monrovia and

Cllr. Augustine Toe, has urged the journalists not to focus their advocacy only on reporting but should go beyond to educate the public. The civil society activist says there are 90 persons detained at the Monrovia Central Prison over rape allegations but cases cannot proceed to court because of lack of evidence. “The prosecutor cannot do magic. The prosecutor can only do a successful job if the evidence is properly collected, preserved and presented in court,” says Toe.

Various speakers including Liberia’s Press Union president Peter Quaqua lauded the journalists for their efforts. “Some

of us grew up in an environment where we saw women and girls being abused. When you see these things on a daily basis, you tend to think it is ok. This is unacceptable,” said T. Nelson Williams, II founder and president of the Servants of All Prayer Assembly, who is also the Managing Director of the Liberia Petroleum Refinery Company.

Last year, a Sexual and Gender Based Violent Crimes Unit was established within the Ministry of Justice to monitor SGBV investigations, prosecute criminal cases arising from incidents of SGBV, and to provide support to victims. A dedicated court was also inaugurated in Monrovia to deal with SGBV crimes. With the support of UN Police, the Liberian National Police is also working at improving its investigative skills and evidence-gathering techniques.

Assuring JASAGBV members that the UN family remains fully committed to supporting their association, Mensa-Bonsu expressed optimism about the battle against SGBV. “It is my fervent conviction that our combined efforts in this cause will yield dividends. I look forward to the day when we can all gather to celebrate the complete eradication of this menace from our midst.”

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SGBV

Platform guests including the DSRSG Mensa-Bonsu at the programme



Learning along borders



Come next academic year, Liberian children living along the border with Guinea who have never had the opportunity to sit in a classroom will be finding their way to a high quality school free of charge.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is supporting the Ministry of Education (MOE) to construct the facility in Ganta, Nimba County, on the border with Guinea. The school, which will cater to primary and junior secondary students, will consist of a playground, a laboratory, water and sanitation facilities, solar power and computers with internet access as well

as community radio and a school-based mobile clinic. It will also have a citizen hall where local residents can conduct meetings and events. "There is only one public school in Ganta. The others are either private, mission or concession," says John Sumo of UNICEF, pointing out that there are still many Liberian children out of school.

The Learning Along Borders for Living Across Boundaries (LAB-LAB) initiative focuses on high quality school construction as one of the components of child-friendly approach to schooling. Since the civil war ended, education experts say there are children living across

Liberia's borders who are yet to return home because of the lack of educational facility in their areas. The aim of the LAB-LAB initiative is to provide quality education that is community oriented and child friendly; cement the peace that is prevailing in Liberia and her neighbours; and prevent border communities from being manipulated into conflict and to share development.

During Liberia's civil crisis, education was severely affected. Many children who should have been busy with pens and pencils instead carried Kalashnikovs. With the restoration of peace, getting children back in school has been a daunting task. Added

rders...



School under construction in Ganta

J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

to Ganta, six more border schools will be built in Harper, Maryland; Zwedru in Grand Gedeh; Garmu in Bong; and Zorzor, Voinjama and Foya in Lofa County.

In her January 2010 annual message to the Fifth Session of the 52nd National Legislature, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said the revival of the education system is reflected in increasing national enrollment, which now stands at 1.4 million, representing an 11 per cent increase over the previous year at 1.3 million. Pre-primary enrollment is estimated at 550,000. Primary enrollment is estimated at 605,000 and secondary enrollment at 182,874. The Liberian leader said the first of “The Learning Along Border Schools”, is intended to enhance peace and security at border crossing points with Sierra Leone, Côte d’Ivoire and Guinea.

“We are very much happy about this school. We want to capture all children who are not in school,” says Hester Williams Catakaw, Deputy Minister for Instructions, pointing out that it is in the interest of not only the children of Nimba County but for children of sister countries living along border areas.

At the construction site, technicians are busy at work with sounds of machines all around. Four big classroom structures and other buildings using hydroform brick-making machines now stand on the piece of land which previously was all bush. Sam V. Menwoe, the local technical supervisor, says the project construction

started in June 2009 but will be ready in early 2010. Limited competency among local contractors remains one of the challenges of building construction in post-war Liberia.

Once completed, UNICEF will furnish the structures before handing over to the MOE to run. Deputy Minister Catakaw says the ministry has already identified a principal and teachers for the school. The teachers are undergoing special Child Friendly School training with Peace Education as part of the curriculum. UNICEF says the first phase of the project will be from primary level and as the children graduate, they will be the first to enter the secondary school.

Further to the LAB-LAB project, UNICEF is currently supporting the Liberian government with renovation of five schools in Gbarpolu, Lofa and Nimba counties. Sumo says UNICEF will be doing more construction in the coming years. “Between now and 2012, we expect to construct about 100 schools and rehabilitate more than 100 others,” he says. Before the end of every year, UNICEF and MOE officials draw up a work plan. UNICEF, which also provides “book bags” with stationeries to all first graders entering public schools, provides funding and technical assistance.

Added to UNICEF and other partners, the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has also been providing support to Liberia’s education sector through the construction and rehabilitation of schools. Some peacekeepers are actively volunteering to teach in some schools, especially science subjects that lack competent teachers. UNMIL peacekeeping engineers have also helped to clear and level school construction sites.

“It was in this county that the civil war started in 1989, so we are very much happy about this border school. If our children are educated, nobody will give them arms to kill their own people,” says a visibly delighted resident of Nimba. Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire are also beneficiaries of the LAB-LAB project.

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J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL



“Pen-Pen Riders” Be

Motorcycles, or “pen-pen” as they are popularly known in Liberia, are ubiquitous across the country. Although slightly more expensive than a taxi ride, “pen-pen” a popular choice for commuters because, unlike taxis, they drop you at your door step or wherever you want to beyond the normal taxi routes. However, majority of the riders of these often rickety contraptions are young, most of them either ex-combatants or affected by the civil war in other ways. Compounding this informal taxi industry is that most drivers do not have any formal training in driving and lack familiarity with traffic rules.

Commercial motorcyclists now constitute a hefty fraction of public transportation in Liberia. They are seen all over the country transporting commuters to various destinations - work, school, market, and even making risky journeys to rural areas where most roads are virtually impassable

to vehicular traffic.

In an effort to improve the informal motorcycle transport sector in the country, and at the same time support the socio-economic reintegration of hundreds of high-risks youth, about 1,500 commercial motorcyclists nationwide are benefitting from training in road traffic regulations, conflict resolution and psycho-social counseling.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) are partnering with the Liberian Government, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) and the National Motorcycle Union (NMU) to implement the pilot project. The UNDP has made available US\$250,000 through the “Peace Building Fund”, while YMCA-Liberia, responsible for the overall implementation of the project, is contributing US\$150,000.

The trainings in Tubmanburg and Gbarnga concluded by the end of 2009,

but continue in 2010 in Kakata, Zwedru, Greenville and Monrovia. The exercise, targeting this fast growing informal transport sector, now a major avenue for youth employment, is also addressing risky situations that often lead to public disorder in some of these communities.

In most parts of Liberia commuters believe travelling by “pen-pen” is the fastest mode of transportation. Even in the capital city, Monrovia, “pen-pens” snake their way through the traffic most times violating traffic rules and using unauthorized routes to get to their destinations. Not surprisingly, they constitute one of the major causes of road accidents in the country. The UNDP/YMCA-Liberia Peace Building Fund Project Manager, T. Martin Allen, says statistics from the John F. Kennedy Hospital and other referral hospitals across the country show that 65 per cent of all accident cases are those caused by motorcycles.

The trainings are intended to change



"Pen-pen" is a popular mode of transport



Benefit From Training

all of these. The selected commercial motorcyclists are being given classroom and practical lessons in traffic regulations and road safety measures by authorities of the Liberia National Police (LNP) supported by the UN Police (UNPOL).

At the end of the training, a test is conducted and successful candidates are given two helmets, a pair of gloves, and a reflective safety jacket by the facilitators. They are given a driver's license by the Ministry of Transport to operate as a certified motorcycle taxi driver. They are however requested to register their motorbikes with the transport ministry and given a license plate.

In Bong County's capital, Gbarnga, Mark Kangoma, now a sixth grade student at a local school who rides his "pen-pen" after classes, is thrilled with what he had learned over the one week exercise. "Before now, I had no idea of traffic rules and regulations that I needed to abide by when riding my motorcycle. Now I know,

I'll learn to abide by them to ensure my safety and that of my passengers," Kangoma, one of 445 commercial motorcyclists who took part in the training, said.

Implementing the 18-month project, YMCA-Liberia is also using the opportunity to train the targeted group in conflict resolution to enable them develop mechanisms for resolving conflicts among themselves, between them and law enforcement agencies and the larger community. YMCA-Liberia also provides the participants with education on HIV/Aids.

"We encourage commercial motorcyclists to ensure that they and their passengers wear their safety helmets when they're on the bikes and adhere to the traffic rules" says Allen. "They need to ensure safety first and not money. Making money and not ensuring safety, making money and not having peace will not carry us anywhere."

At the Tubmanburg and Gbarnga training sessions only six female motorcyclists

participated. It is hoped that more women "pen-pen drivers" would take advantage of this training opportunity.

The motorcyclists, now constituted into a national association, with various branches around the country, are overwhelmed by the training opportunity. The president of the over 4,000-member Bong County Motorcycle Association is thrilled with the training his members got as a result of the pilot project. Sam Elliot said he is extremely grateful to all the partners for such an enlightening programme which he considers went "very successfully". "It has enlightened us on the issues of peace, reconciliation and the rule of law. It has built our capacity and has established a cordial relationship between us and law enforcement officers," he said.

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J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

An old lady sits by her pot near a fire hearth in Weleta, Kokoya District



Millennium Village on

Liberia's first Millennium Villages Project (MVP), in Kokoyah District, is gradually taking shape. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in partnership with the Government of Liberia, the regional Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Center in Mali, and the Government of Norway, which is offering US\$5.4 million in funding, has begun scaling up activities aimed at achieving the MDGs at the district level within a five-year timeframe which ends in September 2013.

Kokoyah District, in south-eastern Bong County, borders Grand Bassa and Nimba counties. It covers 930 square kilometers with a population of nearly 24,000 but lacks the basic services necessary to sustain economic growth. In consultation with the Liberian Government, the UNDP-Liberia chose this district for the first of two MVPs. Activities are to be spread out in 40 of the 167 villages and towns in Kokoya District. Sabo District, River Gee County, in south-eastern Liberia, is the

proposed site for the second village project.

The MVP in Liberia was formally launched in September 2008 but actual implementation only got underway in January 2009, commencing with series of community entry-point activities including community consultation, sensitization, town hall meetings and training workshops.

The late start, according to the Project's Manager Stephen Kolee, was due to securing a field office, getting the relevant staff and the needed logistics to work with. "We've got the staff, computers, internet connectivity, vehicles, and motor-bikes. Now that we have all of this in place this year, we will move with much greater intensity," he said.

Highlighting the agricultural sector, Kolee noted that the target was to boost food security by increasing the production of Liberia's staple food crop, rice, through the distribution of potentially high-yielding, short cycle rice varieties called New Rice for Africa (NERICA), and fertilizers

to smallholder farmers across the district.

The project first tested NERICA varieties since it's relatively new to Liberia's agro-ecological zone, trained extension workers and farmers for their production before it begins distributing certified NERICA seeds to farmers for production purposes this year. "During 2009, 20 national agriculture technicians (including Kokoyah MVP agriculture team members) and 109 farmers selected from across the district were trained on NERICA production," Kolee said.

"The project established 18 demonstration sites (using both lowland and upland ecologies) across the district with 39 NERICA rice varieties tested. Six of the 18 demonstration sites were planted in April and harvested early August. The other 12 sites were set up in September and were recently harvested," the project's Agriculture Coordinator, Alex Mulbah told UN FOCUS. Already, a warehouse is nearing completion to store rice seeds and fertilizers for distribution to smallholder and group farmers as soon as the farming



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

Rice demonstration farm in Mbalorpkalor, Kokoya District

n Track

season begins.

“I’m so happy with the demonstration harvest. Imagine me harvesting three times in a year; this could make me self-sufficient in a few years,” says an elated farmer, Ben Yanyan, who is benefitting from the project.

Activities planned for 2010 include the distribution of 65 metric tons of NERICA and other improved rice varieties along with fertilizers to smallholder and group farmers who will develop at least 20 hectares of lowland for the cultivation of rice and other food crops. Diversification of food crop production is also planned.

The project continues to work in partnership with the Health Ministry to improve healthcare delivery. In 2009 during periods of immunization campaigns, the project provided technical and logistical support to the Health Ministry to carry out vaccination campaign across the district. Staff of the three existing primary health clinics underwent training in health management information system. Construction has begun on two new pri-

mary health clinics in Rock Crusher and Yolo Town. The facilities are expected to be completed by the end of March 2010.

An ambulance will be bought this year to provide emergency support to all health facilities across the district. There will also be training of clinical staff and community health volunteers in malaria control, and the promotion of hygiene and community health education. In the education sector, two primary schools will be built and there will be capacity building programmes for teachers and school administration.

In the water and sanitation (WATSAN)

towns/villages in the district which helped to restore safe water supply to over 7,000 community residents. The team also introduced a ‘cash box’ system (a bank account) to which community members will make cash donations at regular intervals for the maintenance and sustainability of WATSAN facilities.

To enhance the rule of law, a police station is expected to be constructed during the first half of this year. A community radio station is also expected to be established. Kokoyah is to shortly benefit from mobile phone connectivity after seven

Activities planned for 2010 include the distribution of 65 metric tons of NERICA and other improved rice varieties along with fertilizers to smallholder and group farmers who will develop at least 20 hectares of lowland each for the cultivation of rice and other food crops. Diversification of food crop production is also planned.

sector, last year the project conducted training workshops for 25 hand pump mechanics and 25 sanitation promoters selected from communities across Kokoyah, sensitized communities on efficient utilization and management of water resources, reactivated community-based WATSAN management committees in 12 towns and villages, and rehabilitated facilities.

Using the services of 15 of the 25 trained hand pump mechanics, the WATSAN team repaired 31 damaged community and institutional hand pumps in 18

sites were identified with three being prioritized for the immediate erection of cell towers. This will enable clinic staff in Kokoyah to communicate with referral health centers and hospitals.

The Millennium Villages project so far has reached nearly 400,000 people in 79 villages across 10 other African countries. Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Malawi have one village each while Mali, Nigeria, Kenya and Liberia will have two villages each.

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A primary health clinic under construction in Rock Crusher, Kokoya District



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL



Nigerian Foreign Minister Chief Ojo Madueke greets peacekeepers

Minister meets Nigerian Peacekeepers

Neatly dressed peacekeepers proudly wearing the blue berets stand at attention in the Liberian capital Monrovia as the Foreign Minister of Africa's most populous country Nigeria, Chief Ojo Maduekwe, inspects the guard of honour. The soldiers are part of the Nigerian contingent serving with the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

"Words are not sufficient to state the debt the entire nation owes to our armed forces in peacekeeping operations all over the world," says the Nigerian Minister, addressing the peacekeepers at their Camp Abuja base during a two-day official visit to Liberia in January.

Minister Maduekwe hails the soldiers as being "worthy ambassadors" of Nigeria. "The world acknowledges you, the world appreciates you and you have

made your country absolutely proud." He follows the address with the handover of a consignment of food as gift to the peacekeepers from the Nigerian government.

"I am here to appreciate our troops for the good work they are doing and to encourage them to continue with the work of contributing to make the world a better and safer place," Minister Maduekwe tells UN FOCUS, adding that his visit is also to strengthen the bilateral relations between Liberia and Nigeria.

Added to their core mandate of providing security in strategic locations, successive Nigerian contingents have been assisting the local population with the construction or rehabilitation of schools, offering free medical services, engaging locals in agricultural activities, and more. The current contingent's commander, Brig.-Gen. Ebiobowe Bonna Awala, briefed the ministerial delegation on the

peacekeeping and peacebuilding activities of the Nigerian peacekeepers whose current strength is more than 1,600 troops and officers.

Since 1990, the oil-rich nation has been instrumental in contributing to Liberia's peace and stability under the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ceasefire monitoring group, ECOMOG, and now with the UN mission. During his visit, the Foreign Minister paid a courtesy call on the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ellen Margrethe Løj, and also met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. In his discussion with the Liberian leader, the Minister observed that when the rule of law and good governance are undermined, other countries must act. "Whatever touches Nigeria touches Liberia," he said. Renewing Nigeria's commitment to the reconstruction, peace and stability of Liberia, he said, "Your success story is Nigeria's success story."

President Johnson Sirleaf lauded Nigeria's crucial role in Liberia's reconstruction, citing that Nigeria has provided training opportunities for Liberian military personnel and has also provided logistical support for the Liberia National Police. The Liberian leader extended best wishes to the Government and people of Nigeria as President Umaru Yar'Adua recuperates.

The Nigerian ambassador to Liberia, Ebenezer Adigun, says his country is providing technical manpower to Liberia at Nigeria's expense. As part of this two-year assistance, 18 medical doctors will be provided to the health sector. Most of the doctors will be sent to rural areas which have the most critical and greatest needs. In the educational sector, 96 teachers including more than 50 science teachers for secondary school and university lecturers have already begun arriving in the country.

The Foreign Minister's delegation included two members of Nigeria's National Assembly and the House of Representatives. The delegation also visited Benin, Ghana, The Gambia and Togo. The last time a Nigerian Foreign Minister visited Liberia was in 1997. In October 2009, the Nigerian First Lady, Mrs. Hajiya Turai Umaru Yar'Adua, also visited the peacekeepers.

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Supporting Law Reform

The Legal and Judicial System Support Division (LJSSD) of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has handed over a large consignment of office supplies such as computers, printers, photo copiers, tables, chairs and stationeries to Liberia's Law Reform Commission.

The donation in early January was a big boost for the newly established Commission, which was created in 2009 when President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf issued an Executive Order. "We hope this will go a long way in assisting the commission perform its statutory functions," said Judicial Affairs Officer Ganiat Mustapha as she handed over the items at the Commission's office in the Liberian capital, Monrovia.

"We are very much grateful for this donation which comes at a time when the Government is facing financial constraints. We are happy that we have a partner in UNMIL and other partners who have made contributions so we can move as fast as we intend to move. These are things that the commission need for its operations," said former Justice Minister Phillip Banks, Chairman of the Commission. The items were sourced by UNMIL with the support of the United States Institute for Peace and the University of Northern Ireland.

The Liberian leader has often cited rule of law as one of the critical challenges confronting Liberia. The reasons are obvious. During Liberia's protracted civil war, rule of law was the first casualty, and the country's meagre facilities such as courts, prisons and police stations were either destroyed or comprehensively looted and vandalized. But that is not all. Legal experts say some Liberian laws are extremely obsolete and include Hinterland regulations and statutes which are inconsistent with the country's Constitution.

Stressing that rule of law is at the very heart of every country's sovereignty, Deputy Special Representative for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu says law reform is one of the many things UNMIL has been working on. "As social change



Judicial Affairs Officer Ganiat Mustapha hands over items to Chairman Phillip Banks

occurs, you need new laws. But if you do not have any institution to study the trend or do research, then sometimes you are overtaken by events. Some laws have to change to adapt to new realities; you have to move with the times," says the Ghanaian former professor of law.

The creation of the Law Reform Commission is the brainchild of the Mission. Kamudoni Nyasulu, the director of LJSSD, which has 37 international and national lawyers with diverse expertise, says UNMIL developed the concept paper on law reforms. The idea was subsequently shared with the Government, UNDP and the Department for International Development (DFID).

"We helped the Government set up a Task Force to make consultations and propose draft legislations that will create a Law Reform Commission," says Nyasulu, pointing out, however, that reforms must reflect the culture of the people, and that

complex issues such as marriage, divorce and inheritance require consultations. The functions of the Commission have been clearly delineated from that of the Ministry of Justice. The other three commissioners are yet to be appointed.

"Everybody needs to understand that rule of law, unlike infrastructure, takes a long, long time to build," says Nyasulu, who is a former Law Reform Commissioner. For her part, Deputy Representative Mensa-Bonsu says UNMIL is compiling all the recommendations over the years as related to law reform which will be handed over to the commission. "For every new institution, it takes a bit of time to set up, to train, to adapt to procedures, obtain equipment, set up a good library," she says, assuring that UNMIL will continue to support the commission to function effectively.

SM

Liberians

How Can Liberia Achieve Food Security?

Mrs. Suzana G. Vaye
Commissioner, Land Commission

“One way that we can achieve food security is to empower our people. If you want them to be part and parcel of this food security, you must empower them – give them the land, the tools and the security so that when they produce they will benefit as well. So I think that the most effective way to attain food security is to empower our people.”



Kemah Carter
Executive Secretary

“I think Liberia can achieve food security by prioritizing agriculture; I’m referring to both mechanized and subsistence farming. If all Liberians get engaged in farming, it will help to produce more food instead of relying on outside assistance.”



Peter Quaqua
President, Press Union of Liberia

“I would like to encourage the government to provide subsidy for local farmers. Government also needs to begin to make the agriculture sector an employment place where we put farmers on salary. We should also be looking at mechanized farming. People who are making farms on their own, government probably needs to begin to recruit them and give them subsidy, try to strengthen them and I’m sure by that we will improve on our food security in the country.”

Philip Sandi – Secretary-General,
Press Union of Liberia

“Liberia can achieve food security if government can identify those farmers that are engaged in massive food production and provide them subsidy to improve their agricultural venture be it animal husbandry, dairy farming or growing crops including rice. Void of politics, government should establish an autonomous Commission - Food Sustainability Commission - that would ensure increased and sustainable food production. Lastly, institute policies which will create the environment to boost farmers’ local production like adding tariffs on imported dairy and other products.”



Kuluboh Jensen – Programme
Manager, Land Commission

“To achieve food security, I see three critical things. First, farmers must get some support; secondly, food production must be diversified; I would say not only rice; and thirdly government should provide a transport network that when farmers produce their food they would be able to get it to the market especially urban markets. I think a fourth one would be to give better incentive to farmers for whatever they would produce. This would sway more people into agriculture. Otherwise it will be difficult when we have this trend of rural –urban migration - everybody moving to the cities and nobody being left in the villages and communities to produce the food.”



J. Mayles T. Suku
Student

“The Liberian Government needs to empower local farmers; subsidize them and give them the things that they need to grow more food. This is very important because if that is done then Liberia will be able to move to another level.”



Speak Achieve Food Security?

Winston Momboe
Businessman/Journalist

“We have to put in place necessary mechanisms to achieve food security. One of them in my mind is investing in the agriculture sector. Institute measures that redefine our approach to farming. I would support mechanized farming and also redevelop the Agriculture Cooperative Development Bank to be able to support farmers to have food security in the country.”



Arthur Tucker
Information and Communication
Officer, Land Commission

“Food security first and foremost is national security because without food people will be hungry and then they are angered. If Liberia is to achieve food security they need to infuse the necessary funding into the sector. Farmers have to be supported with quality seeds, farming equipment and the necessary training to produce. Farmers have to be able to take their produce from the farm to the market. Another issue that comes to mind is the issue of roads. Government will have to build farm-to-market roads so that farmers can bring their produce to market. Another issue is utilization. How can we utilize the food that we produce – that is processing and packaging; the entire value chain looks at production, processing, marketing and storage. If all of these are attained then, Liberia is very close to food security.”

Lawrence Randall
Journalist

“Food security is a serious post-war challenge for Liberia. If we improve farm-to-market roads as well as provide some leverage for domestic farmers to have their produce mechanized, that would help. But again, looking at the whole policy construct, the Ministry of Agriculture will need to divert most of its current responsibility mainly towards monitoring and formulation of policies than towards actual implementation. We think the private sector through cooperatives can also help in that direction.”



Ruth Engman
Student, University of Liberia

“I think Liberia can achieve food security if the Liberian Government helps to build the farmers’ capacity. I mean if they help to provide the farmers with seeds, tools and all the things necessary for a farmer to produce more. It’s also important to build these farm-to-market roads to enable farmers bring their produce from the farms to the market before the produce spoils. These are just two of the issues that readily comes to mind on how I think Liberians can attain food security.”

“We should empower our local farmers by giving them the necessary seeds and farming implements that they need to grow food since we have such fertile soil to grow food in abundance. Government must improve the farm-to-market roads to be able to have these farmers take their produce from the farm to the market. We have abundance of land that communities can use to grow some cash crops. Government can empower communities to cultivate the land and whatever is gotten from the yield can be sold within these communities through a revolving fund.”



Melissa Annan
Journalist



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