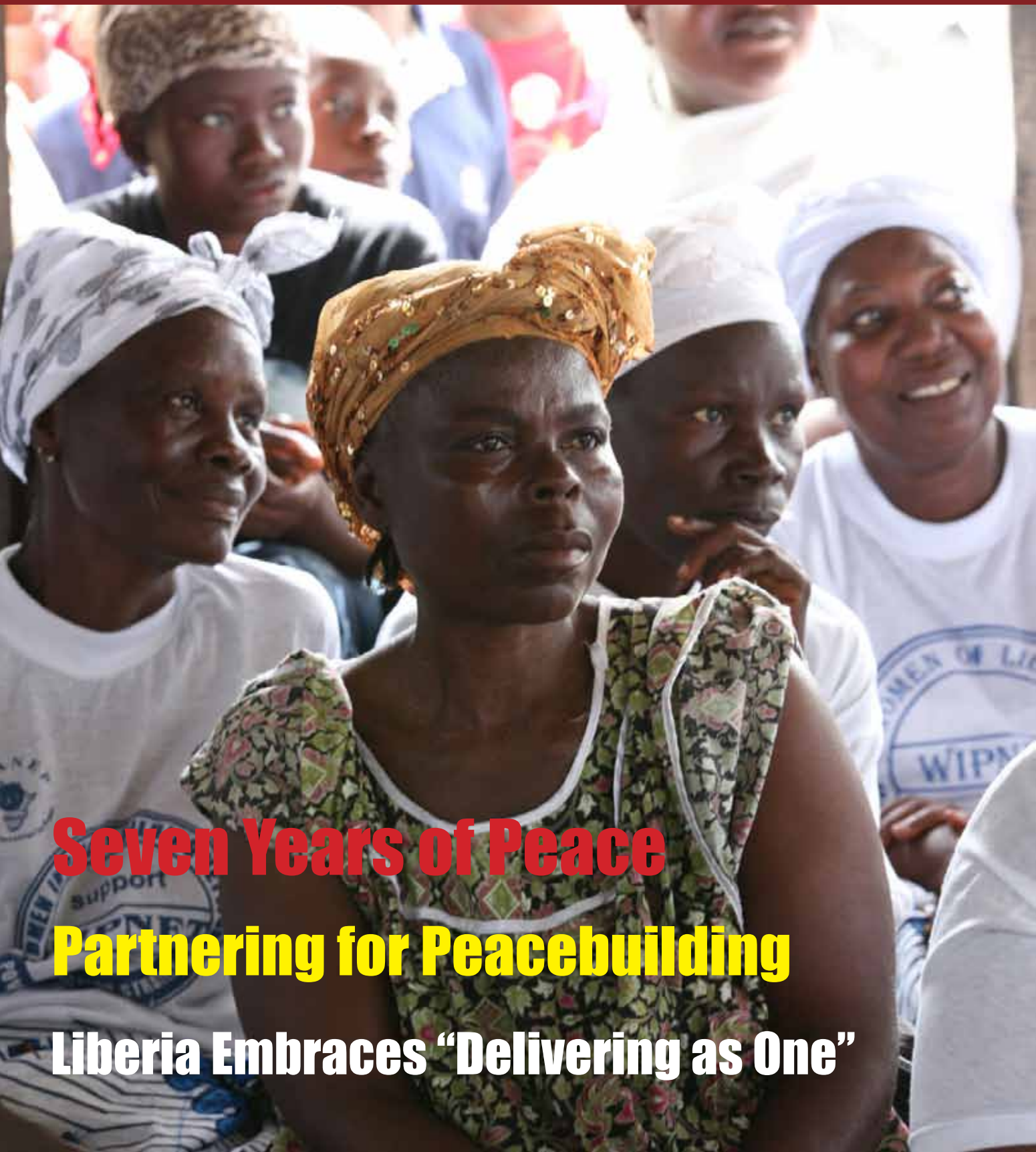


UN FOCUS

Vol. 7, No. 01



September - November 2010



Seven Years of Peace

Partnering for Peacebuilding

Liberia Embraces “Delivering as One”

Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



As Liberia notched up seven years of unbroken peace since UNMIL deployed in 2003, I had the opportunity in September to brief the Security Council on the remarkable progress the country is making and highlighted Liberia's need for continued support from the international community. Amidst many challenges and as the country strives to consolidate peace during the forthcoming year, the support of the international community is paramount to consolidate the outstanding achievements of the Liberian people.

Acknowledging the progress made thus far as well as the significant challenges that remain across all sectors, the Security Council demonstrated its support to Liberia by unanimously extending the mandate of UNMIL for another year at its current strength. Noting that the elections of 2011 will be a critical milestone for Liberia that will test the capacity of national institutions, the Security Council also authorized the Mission to provide assistance to Liberia's Government to undertake the 2011 presidential and legislative elections. The Security Council has called upon the Government of Liberia, in coordination with UNMIL, the UN family and international partners, to redouble efforts to develop national security and rule of law institutions that are fully and independently operational.

In this regard, I welcome the decision of the Government of Liberia, which was endorsed by the Security Council, for the country to come on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC). Furthermore, the request of the Government that the PBC engagement be focused on security sector reform, rule of law and national reconciliation was timely and strategic. It will ensure that additional resources and attention are fo-

cused on these critical areas that are vital for sustainable peace and a successful transition of security responsibilities from UNMIL to the Government of Liberia.

I am encouraged by the progress already recorded in the short time since the initial request by the Government in May 2010 to be placed on the agenda of the PBC. A PBC assessment mission visited Liberia in August 2010. On 16 September 2010, the Organizational Committee of the Peacebuilding Commission formally decided to place Liberia on its agenda, at its own request, and elected Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al Hussein, the Permanent Representative of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the UN, as Chair of the country-specific configuration. Prince Zeid's subsequent visit to Liberia in early November, during which the Statement of Mutual Commitments on Peacebuilding in Liberia was adopted, has given great momentum and energy to the peacebuilding agenda in Liberia and eased the avenues of its implementation.

The participation of the Liberian President at the formal meeting of the Liberia configuration of the PBC via video tele-conference was a clear testimony of the Government of Liberia's commitment at the highest level. In her address to the members of the Liberia configuration, President Johnson Sirleaf welcomed the Statement underscoring that it encapsulates the peacebuilding priorities identified by the Government of Liberia, and declared her government's readiness to fulfill all of its obligations. The President described the November groundbreaking ceremony in Gbarnga, the location of the first of five regional security and justice hubs, as an important step. She promised that the country would sustain these hubs beyond the life span of the PBC engagement. The commitment of the Peacebuilding Support Office was also demonstrated by the presence of the ASG for Peacebuilding Support, Judy Cheng-Hopkins, who announced that an initial \$3 million has been quickly approved by her Office, in order to begin immediate work on the security and justice hub in Gbarnga.

As I indicated in my remarks during the same meeting, Liberia is the first country on the PBC agenda with a peacekeeping operation on the ground. This fact provides us all with a unique opportunity to ensure that we support the Liberia Government to keep the peace and build the peace simultaneously. The PBC priorities identified by the Government of Liberia, namely; Security Sector Reform, Rule of Law and National Recon-

ciliation, are crucial areas for the implementation of UNMIL's mandate. These priorities clearly illustrate that peacekeeping and peacebuilding are two sides of the same coin. With support from the PBC on these crucial issues, we can make further progress on the UNMIL transition planning process and collectively enable the Government of Liberia to assume responsibility for the safety and security of its citizens under the rule of law. These are the necessary foundations for future economic growth and the sustained development of the country.

The challenge now for the PBC and indeed for all of us is to keep up the momentum and to ensure the proper funding so that concrete progress is made to set the stage for sustainable peace in the country. This will entail financial support beyond what the PBF can provide and I wish to appeal to all of Liberia's partners to donate generously towards the priorities articulated in the priority plan.

Meanwhile, in October Liberia launched the initiative to be a "Delivering as One" self-starter country, underscoring the urgent need for development partners to align with Liberia's development strategies and ensuring the Government's leadership in planning and coordinating development activities. "Delivering as One", is about coordinated action and an imaginative response to address the pressing needs identified by the Liberian government. The initiative also recognizes, in view of the transition of UNMIL, the need for a smooth delegation of responsibilities to the Government of Liberia, UN Agencies, Programmes and Funds.

Working with the Liberian government, the UN has taken many steps in helping to keep, build and sustain the peace in Liberia in 2010. As we approach 2011, a pivotal year in which the international community will continue to stand behind Liberia in its efforts to achieve peace and prosperity, my message to all Liberians is to keep up the momentum towards a peaceful and hitch free elections. Since this is the last edition of UN Focus for the year 2010, let me take this opportunity to extend to all Liberians, all members of the UN family and the international community present in the country, season's greetings and best wishes for a happy, peaceful and prosperous New Year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ellen Margrethe Løj".

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



4. Seven Years of Peace

In October this year, Liberia marked seven years of unbroken peace since the deployment of UN peacekeepers on 1 October 2003. Since then the country has notched up significant progress in many areas following the disarmament of former fighters and their reintegration into society, with tens of thousands of refugees returning to the country, successful national elections in 2005 that witnessed the election of the first female President on the African continent, and the once repressed Liberian women scoring significant advances in many areas.



6. Partnering for Peacebuilding

The UN Peacebuilding Commission and the Government of Liberia have come together to strengthen their partnership in promoting rule of law, security sector reform and national reconciliation with the visiting Chair of the PBC Liberia Configuration, Prince Zeid Al-Hussein, breaking ground for a Peace Hub in Gbarnga that would serve as central Liberia's one-stop shop for accessing justice.



12. Liberia Embraces "Delivering as One"

Liberia has launched the initiative to be a "Delivering as One" self-starter country, stressing the need for development partners to align with the country's development strategies and ensuring the government's leadership in planning and coordinating development activities.

4. Seven Years of Peace
6. Partnering for Peacebuilding
8. Liberia Embraces "Delivering as One"
10. Liberia Makes MDG Progress
12. Education is Key, says Princess Mathilde
14. Asst. Secretary-General Titov Visits Liberia
16. Liberia is vulnerable to HIV/AIDS...
18. Commemorating 1325 Anniversary
20. Land Commission Hosts National Urban Conference
22. YES: New hope for Liberian youths
24. BIN Launches Strategic Plan
26. Building Liberia's Capacity
28. Slow Progress at Millennium Village
30. Liberians Speak



Chief of Public Information
George Somerwill

Editor and Head of Publications
Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Staff Writers
Sulaiman Momodu
J. Wesley Washington

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

Photos
Staton Winter
Emmanuel Tobey

Published by the Public
Information Office, United Nations
Mission in Liberia

unfocus@unmil.org
www.unmil.org

Printed by Buck Press Ltd., Accra, Ghana



Seven Y

For Liberia, it has been a remarkable journey of seven years so far. Seven years of unbroken peace. Moving further away from the ghastly past of the 14-year civil conflict. And now, once again, heading to the polls to elect a new president and legislature come 2011.

The Liberian civil war broke out on Christmas Eve 1989, with peace only restored in 2003 following the deployment of UN peacekeepers, followed by the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration of former combatants. During the disarmament and demobilization process, more than 101,000 former fighters were disarmed and demobilized, including 22,000 women and 11,000 children. Over 123,000 refugees have also been assisted or spontaneously returned home.

In her remarks in September at the lighting of the African Union's "Flame of Peace" in Liberia, commemorating "the Year of Peace and Security in Africa", President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said for Liberia, the event is not merely the fulfillment of the declaration of the regional organization. "It also represents an occasion for reflection about a sad period in our history, and the untold suffering, the sorrow, and devastation visited upon this nation."

"The peace we enjoy today, now going on seven years, came at a very high price – in countless lives lost, a people traumatized, a nation shattered. In pursuit of peace, our people signed a series of accords, and hosted four peacekeeping operations. It is our fervent prayer that the current operation, UNMIL (UN Mission in Liberia), will be the last," she said in remarks delivered by Minister of Internal Affairs Harrison Karnwea.

Stressing that peace must be maintained to ensure that those who died trying to gain and preserve it did not sacrifice in vain, President Sirleaf said: "We salute the many hundreds of West African and other peacekeepers who came to help restore the peace, and who perished on these shores. We memorialize them, and are forever in-

It is seven years since
guns have fallen silent
in Liberia

Eric Kanalstein/UN

Years of Peace

debted for their sacrifices.”

Liberia is consolidating peace and security through the establishment of a new Liberian army of more than 2,000 men and women and the new Liberian National Police of over 3,500 personnel. The country has reactivated the Liberian National Coast Guard, with a mandate to improve security of the country’s coastline and control smuggling and illegal fishing, and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization has established border patrols to protect porous borders against illegal activities.

“Our Liberia National Police, with the reforms underway, is one of the basic building-blocks for Liberia’s new security architecture. Some of our officers are also training to participate in the ECOWAS Standby Force to contribute to the stability of our sub-region and to Africa when called upon. We know only too well that none of these measures to sustain the peace will succeed if we do not rebuild and revitalize our economy so that people can find jobs and lift themselves out of poverty. We know that we must promote governance and the rule of law, so that the rights of all Liberians, and their access to quality justice, will be protected. We also know that we must rebuild the physical and social infrastructure that were to-

tally destroyed, and empower and propel our people to achieve sustainable peace and growth and development,” President Sirleaf pointed out.

Acknowledging the role of those helping to keep the peace, President Sirleaf said Liberia is “indebted and grateful for your contributions and your sacrifices – both financial and in lives lost. Blessed are the peacemakers!” She noted that international partners have contributed in large measure to Liberia’s peace and development. “Because of their efforts, Liberians are today constructively engaged in nation-building,” she said, calling upon all Liberians to safeguard the peace.

In September, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Ellen Margrethe Løj, congratulated Liberians for seven years of peace. In a briefing to the UN Security Council, she said the achievement is remarkable, but noted that substantial international support and assistance are still needed for sustainable peace and development.

The UN envoy commended the Government’s efforts in reaching the Completion Point of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative, calling it a “milestone” critical to Liberia’s success in implementing its Poverty Reduction Strategy. She noted that despite the progress

made, much work remains in consolidating Liberia’s fragile peace, including in the areas of rule of law, security sector reform and national reconciliation. The UN envoy said the 2011 elections will be a critical test for Liberia on its path to democratic stability.

Most Liberians wax lyrical about the peace they are enjoying these days. They say the forthcoming elections will be the first time for the country to elect a successor government in recent history.

“These elections are going to prove, if successful, that we have truly transitioned from conflict to peace. It will be the first time Liberia would have had successive democratic elections, that is the 2005 elections followed by another election in 2011 after a complete presidential term which had not happened in our recent history,” observes Jerome J. Verdier, former chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. “If that happens, it sends out a clear message to Liberians and our partners that indeed we are on our path towards genuine peace.”

SM

Over 100,000 former fighters were disarmed



Eric Kanakstein/UN

Peaceful elections gave way to democracy





Prince Al-Hussein interacts with residents of a local community

Partnering for Peacebuilding

The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) and the Government of Liberia in November set forth the terms of their partnership to strengthen the rule of law, support security-sector reform and promote national reconciliation, adding momentum to the consolidation of peace in the country.

The Chair of the PBC, Liberian configuration, Prince Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein, convened the meeting of the Liberia configuration via videoconference at the end of his nine-day visit to the post-war nation. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Løj and the Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding, Judy Cheng-Hopkins addressed the configuration from Monrovia followed by the adoption of the statement of Mutual Commitments.

The Peace Building Commission, a subsidiary body of the General Assembly and the Security Council, pledged to work

for the consolidation of Liberia's peacebuilding efforts and to strengthen the Government's capacity to assume the many critical functions currently performed by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations country team.

Since 2008, the Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) had provided US\$ 15 million to fund initiatives intended to consolidate peace in Liberia by furthering national reconciliation and promoting national dialogue and peaceful resolution of disputes. Following a mid-term review, the PBF approved more than US\$ 1 million in additional funds to support the operations of Liberia's land and anti-corruption commissions.

President Sirleaf welcomed the draft statement of Mutual Commitments, noting that it encapsulates the peacebuilding priorities identified by the Government of Liberia. Expressing the hope that the international community, including re-

gional partners would continue to support Liberia, the Liberian leader declared her Government's readiness to fulfill all of its obligations. "Lasting peace is irreversible in Liberia," she said, underscoring the people's determination to ensure reconciliation over the past and to build a vibrant nation. Six key conflict factors identified by the Liberian government include: access to justice, the management of land and natural resources, political polarization, the relationship between the State and its citizens, and youth issues, particularly concerning employment.

Noting that the simultaneous involvement of UNMIL and the PBC presented a unique opportunity, Special Representative Løj said it was important that a close and constructive relationship between the two has already been established. She underscored the linkage between the peacebuilding priorities identified by the Government and the achievement of the UN Mission, including the transition. The UN

envoy said the Commission's work would help build and sustain peace in the country, pointing out that peacekeeping and peace-building were two sides of the same coin.

Prince Zeid said despite Liberia's remarkable progress, further support was needed to consolidate peace and enable the country to assume full control of security management, build State institutions based on the rule of law, and facilitate reconciliation over the past. He pledged the Configuration's support in achieving those aims.

Assistant Secretary-General Cheng-Hopkins announced that US\$ 3 million had been disbursed for the quick start priority plan that will finance the Peace Hub in central Liberia, which is the first of five regional security hubs being established in the country (see side bar). Cheng-Hopkins said the Commission had initiated many innovations in adding Liberia to its agenda, including adopting the first-ever Statement of Mutual Commitment and closely

uilding

aligning it with the priority plan.

Accompanied by the Assistant Secretary-General, Prince Zeid and members of the delegation inspected various peace-building projects and held several meetings with Liberian government officials, political parties' representatives, UN personnel and members of the civil society, among others.

The first and second meetings of the PBC Liberia Country Configuration were held in October in New York with Special Representative Løj joining the first meeting from Monrovia via video telephone conference while Deputy Special Representative Mustapha Soumaré joined the second meeting from Monrovia via the same process during which the Statement of Mutual Commitment was adopted and a referendum, to be endorsed at the meeting that has now taken place. The Government of Liberia requested the Secretary-General to place Liberia on the agenda of the PBC in May 2010.

In stark contrast to the days of civil war, a Peace Hub comes up in the heart of Liberia

In Liberia's central city of Gbarnga, once the theatre of fierce battles during the brutal civil war that ravaged the nation, a fitting tribute to the return of peace is taking shape. In a gesture that would cement seven years of unbroken peace since the 14-year civil war ended in 2003, Prince Zeid Bin Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein of Jordan performed the ground-breaking ceremony for the construction of a regional "Peace Hub" on 13 November. The \$3.7 million hub, funded by the UN Peace Building Fund, will house regional offices, barracks and training centres for the police, immigration and prison services, as well as courts and offices of the Ministry of Justice. It will be central Liberia's one-stop-shop for accessing justice, and will expand the ambit of rule of law, a commodity that was denied Liberians for a long time.

Prince Zeid Al-Hussein, the Chair of the UN Peace Building Commission Coun-

of national reconciliation. He noted that "reconciliation is a challenge that many countries shy away from," and said he was encouraged by the recognition by Liberians of the importance of addressing the issues that cause conflict and threaten peace in their country.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Rule of Law in Liberia, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, noted that the collapse of the rule of law laid at the heart of Liberia's civil war. She said the idea of a hub was born out of the desire to maximize action in the area of the rule of law, in the midst of limited resources.

Prince Al-Hussein, accompanied by Assistant Secretary-General for Peace Building Support, Judy Cheng-Hopkins, inspected facilities of the police, immigration, prison and courts in various parts of the country. They also interacted with local government officials, heads of security



Ground-breaking of the Peace Hub

try Configuration for Liberia, has been on a nine-day tour of the West African nation that is busy consolidating its new found peace. "The rule of law is a core function of the state; and at the heart of the rule of law is the protection of and justice for citizens," he said during the ground-breaking ceremony. He noted that the 14-year civil war had severely handicapped the Liberian Government's ability to protect its citizens and deliver justice.

Describing the Peace Hub as a symbol of building solid links between all state elements to enable them deliver protection and justice, Prince Al-Hussein said deliberations in the hub needed to be complemented by activities that help the process

agencies, the civil society, motorcycle taxi operators and women's advocacy groups known as WIPNET. In all the places they visited, local residents expressed the desire for lasting peace and security in Liberia.

The visiting delegation received several peace building proposals and resolutions from the Inter-religious Council of Liberia, Youth Ambassadors of Lofa County and other groups. Commending the various groups for the initiatives they have taken to bring peace to their country, Prince Al-Hussein promised that the Commission would be paying frequent visits to work with the citizens to ensure that the peace building effort in Liberia is moving in the right direction.



Minister Amara Konneh, Moustapha Soumaré and Ellen Margrethe Løj at the event

Liberia Embraces “Delivering as One”

In October, a High Level Meeting of the Government of Liberia, United Nations family and development partners held in the Liberian capital Monrovia brought together several stakeholders to consider and adopt the “Concept Note on Delivering as One” and the establishment of a Joint Steering Committee.

Commending the Government of Liberia for taking the initiative to request to become a Delivering as One “self-starter” country, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj said: “This is further evidence that Liberia seeks to shape its own development.”

Delivering as One (DaO) is the UN System’s response to the global reform process on aid effectiveness and builds on the reform agenda set by UN member

states, which aims to increase the coherence, effectiveness and relevance of UN operations in the field. The main objective of the initiative in Liberia is to enhance the UN System’s impact by building on achievements, increasing Government ownership, more coordinated delivery, effective and efficient assistance, and ensuring a smooth transition of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

In 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness set out five key principles for making aid more effective and to maximize its development impact -- ownership, harmonization, alignment, mutual accountability and managing for results. In 2006, the UN Secretary-General convened a high-level panel on UN system-wide coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian assistance, and the

environment. “That panel found that while the UN is uniquely positioned to champion progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, its capacity to assist governments could be improved. Too often, UN development work was found to be fragmented and weak. Inefficient and ineffective governance and unpredictable funding have resulted in policy incoherence, duplication and operational ineffectiveness...at the heart of reforming the way the UN does development work is the “One UN - Delivering as One” framework,” said Løj.

Since 2007, eight countries have piloted the DaO initiative and a few others, now including Liberia, have requested to be “self-starters.” The UN envoy said results from pilot countries have been positive and point to a better relationship be-



come a model for quickly turning peace dividends into accelerated recovery and development which other UN peacekeeping operations and development agencies could follow.

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance, Moustapha Soumaré reiterated that DaO is important to both the Government of Liberia and the UN System. Pointing out that the UN in Liberia is cited as one of the most UN integrated missions, Soumaré said the UN working in Liberia will now have one programme with the Government which will be transparent, will review different processes such as procurement, the use of technology, and the UN will be talking as one voice.

Ambassador Carin Wall of Sweden, who represented the donor community, applauded the Liberian government for requesting to be a self-starter country. She noted that DaO will promote better division of labour, a clear focus on results and more efficient partnership.

The Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Amara Konneh, representing the Government of Liberia, read out the Resolution on behalf of all stakehold-

ers. Among other things, the Resolution stated that the meeting recognized the United Nations Mission in Liberia's transition and the processes currently underway to ensure smooth delegation of relevant responsibilities to the Government of Liberia, UN Agencies, Programmes and Funds and, within that context, underlines the relevance and urgency in actualizing the DaO initiative to effect a more efficient transition. "The High Level Meeting hereby endorses the Delivering as One Concept Note and agrees to establish the tripartite Joint Steering Committee to comprise of representatives from the Government of Liberia, United Nations and Development Partners as prescribed in the document "DaO Governance Structure," states the Resolution. Participants called for the speedy implementation of the initiative.

Thanking the UN and other partners for supporting the Government of Liberia over the past four years, Konneh emphasized that the initiative is government led. "The idea is to lead our destiny and we will," he assured, noting: "The challenges are still there, they are enormous, but working together and learning from some of the challenges we had faced will prevail on the gains we have made to respond and improve our working relationship so that we can deliver for the Liberian people. I now formally declare the DaO launched."

SM

Delivering as One"

tween governments and the UN System, including greater national ownership; better planning capability and oversight; and, more effective cooperation between UN agencies and with development partners. She noted that though some pilot countries have experienced challenges, Liberia has the advantage of studying how each pilot and self-starter country has applied the DaO initiative and learn from their lessons. The Special Representative emphasized that "Delivering as One" is not a "one size fits all" process and pointed out that every context is different. "We must work hard to turn it into "Delivering as One Liberia," she said, pointing out that this is the first time that DaO will be implemented in a post-conflict country with an integrated peacekeeping mission. She said the initiative in Liberia could be-





Liberia Makes MDG Pro

When the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were launched at the Millennium Summit in 2000, Liberia was in the throes of a ghastly civil conflict and carried the infamous tag of a failed state. So the country could only embrace the MDG concept after the civil war ended in 2003, a few years behind the rest of the world. Yet, in September this year, the Liberian government was recognized for progress at achieving MDG 3 -- for promoting gender equality and empowering women.

The MDGs are eight international development goals that all UN member states have agreed to achieve by the year 2015. They aim to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; achieve universal primary education; promote gender equality and empowerment; reduce child mortality; improve maternal health; combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; ensure environmental sustainability; and develop a global partnership for development. It is expected that the achievement of these goals will dramatically improve living conditions around the world.

Addressing the MDGs Summit in New

York in September, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said poverty, illiteracy, disease and inequality did not belong in the twenty-first century. "We share a common purpose: to eradicate these ills for the benefit of all. And we share a common tool to achieve this: the Millennium Development Goals." The Liberian leader observed that the MDGs were universal, but their impact would be greatest in the world's poorest nations, mainly those in sub-Saharan Africa, "like my own country, Liberia."

The Liberian leader, who is also a Goodwill Ambassador for Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) in Africa, said



Liberia is making steady progress in many areas

Progress

her country has made appreciable progress especially on MDG 3; MDG 4 (infant mortality); MDG 6 (HIV/AIDS and TB); MDG 7 (access to clean drinking water and sanitation); and MDG 8 (global partnership for development). Despite the progress, President Sirleaf admitted that substantial effort was still needed to advance poverty reduction, achieve universal primary education, reduce maternal mortality and ensure access to sanitation.

Following the restoration of peace in Liberia with the deployment of UN peacekeepers in 2003, the United Nations System in Liberia and other partners have

been working in collaboration with the Liberian government to achieve the country's priorities in various sectors which are invariably linked to the MDGs. At a High-Level Meeting of the Government of Liberia, United Nations System and Development Partners in the Liberian capital Monrovia to launch the Delivering as One" initiative, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Ellen Margarethe Løj noted that aid that is managed and delivered effectively will help to consolidate peace, accelerate reconstruction and development, and boost Liberia as it strives to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

The Lift Liberia - Poverty Reduction Strategy, which was launched in 2008, is the Liberian government's main vehicle for achieving the MDGs. It outlines Liberia's plans for national development in four key areas including: consolidating peace and security; revitalizing the econo-

The Lift Liberia - Poverty Reduction Strategy, which was launched in 2008, is the Liberian government's main vehicle for achieving the MDGs. It outlines Liberia's plans for national development in four key areas including: consolidating peace and security; revitalizing the economy; strengthening governance and the rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services.

my; strengthening governance and the rule of law; and rehabilitating infrastructure and delivering basic services.

In November, three flagship reports: Liberia's Millennium Development Goals Report; the Liberia National Human Development Report; and the Global Human Development Report, were launched in the Liberian capital Monrovia.

As the Government and the United Nations continue to review progress in meeting development priorities in Liberia, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance Moustapha Soumaré said: The 2010 report on Liberia's achievements towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals shows some positive progress, which we commend. Yet, there are many critical challenges that frustrate the sizeable changes and reforms that Liberia

needs."

With just five more years left to reach 2015, could Liberia achieve the MDGs? "It is better late than never. It is good that Liberia came onboard the MDGs and is fully onboard," says the National MDGs Coordinator at the UNDP, George Benjamin Gould. The Liberian government feels strongly that successes have been made towards achieving some Goals. "If managed well, achieving some goals is possible, but this can only be determined in the end. Implementation could be a challenge; there are issues of governance, infrastructure, human capacity; transparency and accountability; and there is a need for reinforcing policy and programming to be more MDG-based than the PRS," says Gould.

Liberia's MDGs 2010 Report: "Progress, challenges and prospects towards achieving the MDGs" states that in addition to other Goals, the post-war

nation is unlikely to reduce poverty from 63.8% (2007) to 27.55% by 2015, with an average annual decrease of 1.8 per cent. However, it states that "Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women" will be likely met added to "Goal 6: Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases."

The Report shows there are no quantifiable indicators under the targets for "MDG 8 - Develop a Global Partnership for Development" but points out that qualitative measures and international best practices and standards show Liberia has made enormous progress. The Report also recognizes the support of the international community through various UN agencies, and UNMIL for guiding the peacekeeping and peace building process in Liberia.

SM



Education is Key, says Princess Mathilde

On her first official visit to Liberia in October, the UNICEF and UNAIDS Goodwill Ambassador, Princess Mathilde of Belgium, emphasized that education is key to nation-building and challenged the Liberian government to do more in this regard.

Participating in various activities including the launch of the “Agenda for Accelerating Country Action on Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV/AIDS” in the Liberian capital Monrovia, the Goodwill Ambassador maintained that when the vast majority of the population is educated

most of the social vices will be contained.

At the launch of the Agenda, which was organized by UNICEF and UNAIDS, the

Sirleaf’s commitment to the fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. “During your visit to Belgium, Madam Presi-

“During your visit to Belgium, Madam President, I was touched by your message of hope, wherein you declared that children’s rights are universal; the promotion thereof is indelibly linked to the fight against poverty.”

UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Gender and Development, Princess Mathilde lauded President Johnson

dent, I was touched by your message of hope, wherein you declared that children’s rights are universal; the promotion thereof is indelibly linked to the fight against



Princess Mathilde interacts with UN peacekeepers

poverty.” She pointed out that what Liberia does with the Agenda will direct other countries since Liberia is the pilot country for the launch of the project.

Officially launching the Agenda, President Sirleaf renewed her Government’s commitment to support education and disclosed that the Belgium Committee for UNICEF has made available US\$750,000 as contribution to Liberia’s birth registration programme. “We do accept the twin challenges by taking into consideration the Princess’ suggestion to do more for education and to also make sure that together with the partners we will have more people living with HIV and AIDS to speak out,” said President Sirleaf. Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Ellen Margarethe Løj said to turn efforts into real gains much remains to be done but pointed out that the Agenda will guide against gender inequality.

During her trip, the Belgian princess visited schools, hospitals and held meetings all aimed at raising AIDS awareness, mostly among women and children. Pay-



Paying a one-day visit to Bomi County, Princess Mathilde met with members of the Union of Muslim Associations of Bomi County in Klay District, who are actively involved in HIV and AIDS education and awareness campaign in local communities. She lauded their initiative and urged them to do more to educate locals on HIV/AIDS.

ing a one-day visit to Bomi County, Princess Mathilde met with members of the Union of Muslim Associations of Bomi County in Klay District, who are actively involved in HIV and AIDS education and awareness campaigns in local communities. She lauded their initiative and urged them to do more to educate locals on HIV/AIDS. She also toured the facilities of the Liberian Government Hospital in Tubmanburg with focus on the Prevention of Mothers to Children Transmission of HIV (PMTCT), Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART), Pediatric-HIV Care, Fistula and Therapeutic Feeding Programmes. The Princess praised the County Health Team for the system put in place for health delivery to the needy and urged them to work assiduously for more success.

Following the tour of the hospital, Princess Mathilde launched the “Facts for Life” publication which is developed jointly by UNICEF, UNAIDS, WHO, UNFPA, UNDP, WFP, UNESCO and the World Bank as a vital resource. The publication contains essential information on how to prevent child and maternal deaths, diseases, HIV and AIDS, injuries and violence.

She requested that the book be circulated in schools and every segment of the Liberian society and urged Liberians to read the publication, pointing out that information contained in the book is important for the growth of the post-war nation. The princess, who also interacted with UN peacekeepers, thanked the UN agencies and all those who contributed to the publication of the resource material for survival.

UNMIL Radio is currently developing the “Facts for Life” radio programme which will expound on the themes in the book. Also visiting Liberia in October together with the Goodwill Ambassador was Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS, who interacted with Liberian youths at the UN Mission’s headquarters during which a Liberian teenage girl explained how she contracted HIV and how she has been positively living with the virus. He also visited various health facilities and held discussions with a wide array of stakeholders.

SM

Siebo Williams contributed to this article



Titov at a meeting in Bomi



Asst. Secretary-General Titov

Although tremendous progress is being made in Liberia in the areas of security and the rule of law with assistance from the United Nations and its international partners, much more remains to be done, according to Dmitry Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for the Rule of Law and Security Institutions.

“We have seen a lot of achievements altogether in the country and in the conduct of UN operations and the work of the UN Country Team,” Titov said, noting that now is also an opportune moment to think ahead of what the Mission and its partners could do better and how to prioritize activities especially in light of the forthcoming report of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Titov made the comments during a working visit to Liberia in early October,

his second visit to the country in three years that also coincided with the seventh anniversary of the UN Mission in Liberia, deployed on 1 October 2003. During his trip, he toured a number of judicial and security institutions in Bomi, Grand Cape

Mount County.

On his assessment of the security and rule of law sector in Liberia since his last visit, Titov said though there has been considerable progress, much more needs to be done. “Liberians would like to see better

“Liberians would like to see better access to justice; it means understanding what court system means, what criminal justice entails and how transparent and efficient the whole system could be.”

Mount and Montserrado counties. He held meetings with UN and Liberian Government officials in the security and rule of law sectors and visited judicial and security institutions. He also dedicated the Tiene Magisterial Court, an UNMIL Quick Impact Project, situated in Tiene, Grand Cape

access to justice; it means understanding what court system means, what criminal justice entails and how transparent and efficient the whole system could be,” he said pointing out that security and rule of law are the sovereign responsibility of any government. He observed that the Libe-



Titov meets LNP officers in Grand Cape Mount County

Titov Visits Liberia

rian Government is attempting to fulfil its obligations in this regard. He also stressed the importance of ensuring that the Liberian Government is capable of addressing major security responsibilities once the UN Mission draws down.

Titov stressed that without the notion of rule of law, there is very little sustainability for development in the country. He noted that citizens and potential investors will need to see that the rule of law is upheld and all cases are properly adjudicated.

During field visits to Bomi and Grand Cape Mount counties, Titov visited the Klay Agricultural Training Centre, Sime Darby Plantation, met with UNMIL staff, as well as the Joint Security Task Force at Bo Waterside, near the border with Sierra Leone.

The highlight of that field visit was his dedication of the Tiene Magisterial Court.

He pointed out that Liberians have suffered a lot and it's now time to concentrate efforts on building foundations of peace through the rule of law institutions and security sector. He urged the residents to preserve the investment, though a small building, but it represents a very big hope – “hope for your town, region and for Liberia.”

In Montserrado County, besides meeting with the UN leadership, government officials of the security and rule of law sector, Titov visited Liberia National Police (LNP) depots, Corrections and Bureau of Immigration & Naturalization facilities, National Police Training Academy, the headquarters of the LNP Emergency Response Unit, UNMIL Indian Formed Police Unit as well as judicial institutions.

Following his visit to the Monrovia Central Prison, Titov said he was heartened to see improvement. “Security has been strengthened; a new cell block has been in service which has decongested other areas considerably. Conditions there have improved,” he noted. He pointed out that pre-trial detention remains to be a serious issue though the Liberian Government is trying to address it. Titov emphasized that the whole justice chain process has to be improved including case tracking records and quicker access to justice for the prison population.

JWW

Handing over magisterial court



Liberia is vulnerable

Her Royal Highness Princess Mathilde of Belgium, UNICEF and UNAIDS Special Representative for Children and AIDS, and Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS visited Liberia in October. In an exclusive interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka, Executive Director Sidibé spoke about the progress and challenges facing the battle against HIV/AIDS globally and in Liberia. Excerpts:

How has your visit been so far?

It has been very interesting coming into the country after almost 20 years of crisis. It's interesting to see hope; to see social transformation starting, seeing people in the government thinking that we need to place a few things at the centre of our response which means, for example, women's role in society, looking at issues like justice, looking at issues like security, how we can stop violence against vulnerable groups. Those are things which are fundamental to rebuilding society, restoring dignity of people and creating space for most of the population. So I am leaving with that hope.

At the same time I am seeing some major challenges in the fight against HIV/AIDS. In a country where the health system has been completely destroyed, where violence against women continues, the major challenge is how to really contain the epidemic. Huge number of young girls between 13 and 24 are having unwanted pregnancies and most of those pregnancies lead to unsafe abortion. We know the risk of the transmission of HIV because of the conditions in which they found themselves in those sexual relationships. Keeping people on treatment also is a major challenge.

Could you describe for our readers the purpose of your visit to Liberia?

My visit is to bring people like the Princess of Belgium [Mathilde], she's our Ambassador, to be able to see what is happening in a country like Liberia. So our objective was two-fold: to learn from the experience and try to advocate for what is happening and helping to complement the effort of the UN system and particularly the country; but also to launch the agenda

for accelerated action for gender equality and HIV.

You have visited hospitals, health teams, and now you are familiar with the health infrastructure in Liberia – where does Liberia stand in the fight against HIV/AIDS today?

I think Liberia is like most West African countries. You know there is an epidemic that we can consider as generalized but with a low level of infection, 1.5 or 1.7 per cent of the population infected. But what is making us very scared in the case of Liberia is the risk factors or very high risk of infection. First, you have a health system which is not functioning; second, there is a high level of stigma and discrimination; third, there is high rate of violence against women. You have an educational system which is not functioning. So we have in Liberia a series of risks which could lead to a major infection if we don't pay attention to.

Do you find the HIV/AIDS demographics in Liberia in any way significantly different from neighbouring West African countries?

Yes, if you take a country like Ivory Coast, where the epidemic is higher. But the biggest similarity factor is that the women are the most infected. You take Liberia today, amongst people who are HIV positive, 58 percent are women. So, you have this vulnerability which we have seen in different parts of the region.

One of the Millennium Development Goals aims at halting and beginning the reversal of HIV/AIDS by 2015. Are we making progress in that direction globally, and where does Liberia stand in achieving this goal?

We are making huge progress. First of all we have been able to break the conspiracy of silence which is very important because it has been able to reduce stigma and discrimination, and restore dignity to the people.

More than that, in the last five years we have been increasing the number of people on treatment by 12-fold. So there are more than 5 million people on treatment today. We have to remember that when we were launching the Millennium Development Goals we did not have 10,000 or 20,000 people on treatment in Africa. Today, we have almost 4 to 5 million people on treatment in Africa; but the biggest news in my view is that we are seeing a decline in new infection. That is the most important news



to HIV/AIDS...

we need to share with the world.

For the first time we have 25 per cent reduction on new infection amongst 22 countries, the most affected and infected in the world. If we don't stop new infection we will not alter and reverse the epidemic. It's the same as Liberia. In Liberia we have managed to increase the number of health centers who would really deal with AIDS patients, transmission from mother to child, services as well as increase the number of people on treatment. But we still have a major challenge because today you have 3,400 people on treatment while there are 10,000 people in need of treatment and you have the problem of new infection that is still growing.

Treatment is a major problem in the world because we have 10 million people not having access to treatment while most people on treatment are on first-line treatment. So in a country like Liberia where you have a major problem with adherence, major nutritional problems, people will have to move quickly from first-line to second-line treatment.

In 2001, at the first-ever Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly



on HIV/AIDS, it was acknowledged that the AIDS epidemic constitutes a “global emergency and one of the most formidable challenges to human life and dignity.” Is that still the case ten years on?

What is really making me scared today is people most at risk, I'm talking about people without a voice, I'm talking about sex workers, drug users, men having sex with men, they still need universal access, treatment and care. Those people are facing universal obstacles today.

That is the major challenge because in China last year, 33 per cent of new infections occurred amongst men having sex with men. In Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where we have the fastest epidemic in the world today, even more than in Africa, more than 67 percent of new infections are occurring among drug users and they are still considered as criminals. As such, they do not have access to services. So those are the issues - the prison setting - you have so many issues linking us to the vulnerability of the society.

You take Asia where 50 million women are at risk to be infected with HIV by their intimate partners because they are clients of sex workers and how do we deal with that one? It's not the issue of drugs. We need community driven approach where you bring cultural debate, where you bring societal change. That's why these issues remain real. You take a country like South Africa - although after 10 years of inertia, we're seeing South Africa coming back with good programmes -- but still we have 1,000 deaths every day due to HIV in South Africa alone.

The Durban International AIDS Conference of 2000 dubbed the magnitude of the HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa as pandemic. Is AIDS still a pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa?

In Africa almost 22 million people are infected, with 1,900,000 people dying every year. For me it is a serious issue. It is not just a health issue by the way. It's a governance issue affecting the governance system. If you look at a country like

Botswana, the life expectancy should have been around 64-65 years, but because of AIDS, life expectancy remains around 40-41 years. So it is a serious issue.

We have almost 10 million people worldwide waiting for treatment; seven million of those people who are not on treatment are in Africa and we are not producing drugs. Thanks to an emerging nation like India because they've been able to produce generic medicines, they give a different dimension. They make world understand that innovation can also be for poor people. Eighty-eight percent of people who are on treatment in Africa today are on treatment because of generic medicines from India. So AIDS is bringing us to the debate of trade, to the debate of which type of new partnership we need. What types of shifts in paradigms of partnership that we need to have in the coming years?

Peacekeepers have been identified as a group particularly vulnerable to HIV/AIDS due to the circumstances in which they work. Are you satisfied with the troop contributing countries' efforts in offering pre-deployment orientation training on HIV/AIDS for potential peacekeepers before they are deployed?

I think we have made a lot of progress. Remember we went to the Security Council. We have tens of thousands of uniformed personnel serving in peacekeeping in addition to others. We made progress by exposing them but we need to do more than that. We know that anything which is linked to the intimacy of people is not generally rational, it's emotional, but we need to prepare our people better because generally they are exposed in areas where HIV is high. You can take Eastern Congo or a different part of the world where we have a breakdown in the system. Efforts need to be done before they leave for deployment and when they are there to continue to explain to them about this pandemic. We are working closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and others to make sure we can improve that. It is important and a critical point. I can see that you did your homework very well I enjoy having those questions.

Thank you.



Vice President Joseph Boakai addresses the participants



Commemorating 1325 Anniversary

After months of preparations and activities, in mid-November, women from all Liberia's 15 counties converged in the capital Monrovia for the grand commemoration of the tenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" under the theme: "A decade of promoting equity and justice for women and peace for all".

The occasion was officially marked on 31 October, the day the landmark Resolution was passed in 2000 by the Security

Council. The Resolution recognizes the disproportionate effects of war and conflict on women, the importance of women's role in preventing conflicts, and the need for their full involvement in peace negotiations and post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Vice President Joseph N. Boakai hailed Liberian women for the role they played in ending the country's 14-year conflict. "It was the women of Liberia's Mass Action for Peace that forced the parties in the Liberian conflict to reach an agreement at the Accra peace talks," he said, pointing

out that women stood up and demanded an end to the conflict and advocated for their rights. "We continue to support women's efforts on improving their capacities to function at the same level as their male counterparts," said the Vice President, adding that women in Liberia are serving shoulder-to-shoulder with their male counterparts in every facet of life.

The Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, said there is a global consensus amongst stakeholders that not enough is being done to pre-



vent the horrendous sexual violence and abuse perpetrated against women and girls in times of conflict and post-conflict. The deputy UN envoy stressed the need to take a harder look at what must be done to stop conflicts and promote peace in concrete ways. "All of us and the UN in particular need to do deeper analysis and design appropriate strategies to ensure the protection of civilians and especially women and girls from being specific targets of abuse and sexual violence in times of conflict." Commending Liberians for making history by electing Africa's first ever female president, the deputy envoy said President Johnson Sirleaf has demonstrated strong commitment to implement Resolution 1325.

Acting minister for the Ministry of Gender and Development, Andrew G. Tehmeh, said the ministry is committed to working with all sectors of the society to achieve the goals and objectives of the Liberia National Action Plan (LNAP), an important framework for its implementation. Liberia is widely acclaimed for being

one of the first African countries to produce the action plan.

As part of the tenth anniversary activities, in June, Liberian women peace leaders presented a policy statement to Special Representative of UN Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj highlighting sexual violence, peace-building and security sector reforms as areas of concern with proposed actions under each area required to promote peace and security in Liberia. The policy statement was issued during the "Global Open Day on 1325". Participating in events out of Liberia, Løj was chief guest at the launch of an institute on "Women, Peace and Security" at the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre in Accra, Ghana. In her home country, Denmark, the Special Representative also delivered remarks at the opening of an international conference on: "Women's role in global security".

Since its establishment in 2003, the UN Mission in Liberia has been actively promoting UNSCR 1325. The Office of Gender Advisor (OGA) is mandated to support the implementation of UNSCR 1325 (2000) and 1820 (2008) on Sexual Violence, and to promote gender sensitive approaches in the delivery of the Mission's mandate. OGA oversaw the technical production of the LNAP in 2008-09 which is currently being implemented by many stakeholders including the Govern-

ment, national and international CSOs, the UN and bilateral donors.

Reiterating that because much still needs to be done, Carole Doucet, the Mission's Senior Gender Advisor says "people prefer to talk about commemorating rather than celebrating the tenth anniversary" noting, however, that Liberia has an enabling environment, political will and commitment to gender equality. "I think this country has achieved a lot in a short time by putting in place good policies and frameworks to advance women's rights and gender equality. We all agree that the next steps have to do with implementing the policies and translating them into concrete actions that improve the lives of women and men, girls and boys in Liberia," says Doucet, pointing out that having the all-female Indian Formed Police Unit serving in the UN Mission is very inspiring for many Liberian women. One of the challenges of the Resolution, according to Doucet, is that it is still difficult for people to understand what it stands for. "It is a strategy to improve the lives of Liberians and to help maintain peace and security which is critical."

Activities at the grand commemoration included exhibition of various agri-cultural and textile products, which some guests patronized, putting some cash in the purses of women and smiles on their faces.

SM





President Sirleaf flanked by some participants at the conference

Land Commission Hosts N

With Liberia's urban population today estimated at more than 40 per cent, it is expected that by the end of the decade the country's population will be primarily urban. No wonder then that the first National Urban Conference held recently in Monrovia has identified urban land issues and land conflicts as critical priorities the country's Land Commission and its partners must tackle. The conference also advanced several recommendations aimed at addressing these issues and conflicts.

Participants called for the preparation of a national urban land policy through a participatory and inclusive process. They suggested that the Land Commission prepare new strategic urban plans for Liberia's cities and towns, and simultaneously identify and implement strategic interventions to address hot spots. They want Acts that created cities revised in order to rationalize the number of cities and harmonize city borders.

Other proposals include reforming the zoning laws and building codes; developing and implementing a national policy for

slum upgrading and prevention; developing an efficient land record system with records that are accessible at the local level; identifying and implementing measures to promote security of tenure for all; and ensuring equal rights for land ownership. Another proposal urged the Land Commission to undertake an inventory of public land in cities and reform the policy and law for public land sales.

Participants recommended the enforcement of punitive measures against corruption and mismanagement in the Land sector.

The three-day National Urban Conference under the theme, "Managing the Urban Interface" was organized in partnership with UN-HABITAT and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC). Participants included, among others, the Ministries of Lands, Mines, & Energy, Agriculture, Public Works, Labor, Gender and Development, superintendents and municipal authorities from the 15 counties, civil society organizations such as the Slum Dwellers Association, other partners including the World Bank, Millennium Challenge Corporation, UNDP, UNICEF, UNMIL, private sector representatives,

universities and donors. The conference acknowledged that urban land is a critical asset and its strategic management and administration are key to achieving sustainable and inclusive urban development. The Land Commission, established in August 2009, is mandated by the Government to propose, advocate and coordinate reforms of land policy, laws and programmes in the country.

Liberia's cities and towns have often been neglected, especially during the years of conflict with no new investments

UNDP C



in infrastructure and a decline in existing services. The participants noted that this neglect has today resulted in urban centers that are overcrowded, lacking up-dated planning and zoning, decent and affordable shelter, housing and basic services. They named the lack of transparent procedures for acquiring land in urban areas and the lack of public and reliable maps and records as giving space to corruption and mismanagement of land.

At the opening of the conference, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf challenged the participants to address the long-standing issues the country faces. She named land tenure in the form of communal land as an issue that needed to be scrutinized to better respond to the development of communities.

President Johnson Sirleaf emphasized that her administration will not shy away



President Sirleaf at the conference

ational Urban Conference

from land redistribution, noting that past governments had given large portions of land to concessions, religious bodies and various investors. As a result, most of these lands were sitting unused. She said that they needed to be reassessed and returned to the various communities for redistribution and urged the Land Commission to examine the practices in other countries where undeveloped land, after a specific period, reverts to the Government to be put to proper use. "We are not going to allow Liberians to become tenants in

Country Director Dominic Sam addresses the closing programme



their own country," she stressed.

"The pressures on land, land use, management and administration of land in cities put enormous pressures on society and as cities are growing, the need for us to begin developing policies that can address adequate use and management within the cities are very critical to the Commission," said Dr. Othello Brandy, Chairman of the Land Commission. UN-HABITAT Representative Maria Guglielma da Passano,

at the Conference are areas of great concern not only to the Land Commission but also to NRC, whose mandate is to assist displaced persons and secure global solutions for their displacement. She said as NRC is progressing for their eventual exit from the country, it has been reflecting on how they can strengthen their support in securing durable solutions to the Government and vulnerable communities in urban areas throughout Liberia. She hoped that

Liberia's cities and towns have often been neglected, especially during the years of conflict with no new investments in infrastructure and a decline in existing services. The participants noted that this neglect has today resulted in urban centers that are overcrowded, lacking up-dated planning and zoning, decent and affordable shelter, housing and basic services.

also technical advisor to the Commission, promised her agency's continued support in the Commission's work.

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)-Liberia Country Director Astrid Everine Sletten noted that all the issues discussed

the government will ratify the Agreement on the Rights of the Displaced, known as the AU-Kampala Convention.

JWW

YES: New hope for Lib

Following a request in 2009 by Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to the World Bank for assistance in the area of addressing youth unemployment, the World Bank and the Government of Liberia (GoL) in September launched a US\$16 million Youth, Employment, Skills (YES) project.

The project, consisting of US\$6 million from the International Development

years after the civil conflict came to an end. It is estimated that 63.8 per cent of Liberia's 3.5 million people live below the poverty line with 47.9 per cent living in extreme poverty.

Launching the project in the Liberian capital Monrovia much to the delight of the country's teeming unemployed youth population, President Sirleaf thanked the Bank for its intervention and particularly commended the World Bank Managing

one of the greatest challenges confronting the country despite the great deal of progress over the past few years, Country Manager Nyanin said the project will drive Liberia into a future where a child can expect to grow up and have the opportunity to achieve, contribute and succeed. "The YES Project will address some of the urgent needs of the Liberian people by helping reduce poverty through immediate short-term job opportunities and by building skills of young people," he said. He thanked donors and partners of Liberia for the coordinated effort to help its people foster sustainable human development.

The project aims to contribute to the Government's efforts to reduce poverty in the post-war nation by scaling up existing temporary employment programmes, ensuring that they are well grounded in communities, and demonstrating how job-oriented and demand-driven skills development can lead effectively to employment.

The YES initiative comprise two components which will focus on bridging the unemployment gap exacerbated by the global financial crisis, and financing formal and informal skills training pro-

Unemployment among the youth, including those caught up in the civil war as perpetrators or victims, is a critical social issue in Liberia today, seven years after the civil conflict came to an end. It is estimated that 63.8 per cent of Liberia's 3.5 million people live below the poverty line with 47.9 per cent living in extreme poverty.

Association (IDA) Crisis Response Window (CRW) and US\$10 million from the Africa Catalytic Growth Fund, aims to create employment opportunities for Liberian youth. Unemployment among the youth, including those caught up in the civil war as perpetrators or victims, is a critical social issue in Liberia today, seven

Director, Ngozi N. Okonjo-Iweala, and the Country Manager, Ohene Owusu Nyanin, for their effort in bringing the project to fruition. The Liberian leader expressed the hope that communities and young people would take advantage of the YES Project to improve and build their lives.

Noting that human development is

President Sirleaf launches the YES project



Liberian youths

programmes with the purpose of improving youth employability and employment. It will also support government initiatives to strengthen its Social Protection sector, including technical assistance on temporary employment programmes as well as monitoring and supervision. In addition, institutional development for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) will be provided as it relates to certification, policy development, monitoring and evaluation, project management, and impact assessment.

Emily Weedon, the social protection consultant of the Bank in Liberia, explains: "The temporary employment component of the YES project builds on the World Bank financed cash for work project which LACE did over the past two years. That project employed 17,000 people, the new project will employ 45,000, so we have scaled up significantly." She adds that the participants will receive one day of life skills training per week and the curriculum will be linked as best as possible to the experiences of community work project. The daily wage rate for unskilled workers has been fixed at US\$3 in order not to entice people away from their regular livelihood

activities.

LACE is currently mobilizing the various arms of implementation for the temporary employment activities. "It is recruiting local NGOs in the counties to assist LACE in the day-to-day implementation of the temporary employment project and working with local authorities such as county superintendents to identify communities where the temporary employment activities will be undertaken. The first component of the YES project will be implement-

the long term," says Weedon. The Ministry of Youth and Sports is the Bank's main partners for the second component which will target 4,500 youths for trainings relevant to both the formal and informal sectors. The emphasis is to ensure that these trainings and the TVET sector in Liberia are structured to respond to private sector demand for employees. The GoL is currently in the process of recruiting an organization to oversee the implementation of these activities.

The YES project will last for three years during which other structures of the government are expected to have developed to handle the issues that the project will be addressing --youth, employment and skills. Although experts agree that

The YES initiative comprise two components which will focus on bridging the unemployment gap exacerbated by the global financial crisis, and financing formal and informal skills training programmes with the purpose of improving youth employability and employment.

ed in all of Liberia's 15 counties.

"The skills component (of the project) is brand new. This will be the first time the World Bank will be involved in a project in Liberia that deals with vocational technical training. While we are engaged on the temporary employment as there is an immediate need for it, we are also looking at

youth unemployment will not go away overnight, the YES initiative has given a new sense of hope to many Liberian youths as they look forward to the project's implementation.

SM





BIN Launches Strategic

The Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) has launched its Strategic Plan which provides a roadmap for key stakeholders and partners to guide the rebuilding, transformation and revitalization of the organization into a professional and operationally effective Immigration Service in Liberia.

As part of its Strategic Plan, the BIN has earmarked over US\$24.6 million for projects of immediate priority that include the relocation and construction of the BIN headquarters, building 32 BIN border posts and border custom offices, the establishment of a Fraud Detection Unit at the Roberts International Airport, and the purchase of 32 4X4 double cabin pickups.

Other priority projects are the purchase of communication equipment for national coverage, purchase of BIN uniforms for all levels of officers, establishment and construction of a BIN Training Academy,

and administrative and in-house support for an additional deployment of 1,153 officers.

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, speaking at the launch held at the Monrovia City Hall, said achieving effective border security and immigration management is essential to the economic future of any country and urged the international community to support the BIN Strategic Plan.

She pointed out that though Liberia is blessed with enormous natural resources, it is vulnerable to those who would seek to exploit its potential for their own benefit; noting that one only has to look elsewhere in the world and in the sub-region to see the destabilizing effects of unrestrained access by all to unprotected national boundaries ranging from increased incidence of human trafficking, through transnational organized crime to international

terrorism.

“Therefore, rebuilding and strengthening the BIN is not only one of the ways of reducing the vulnerability of Liberia to such predatory activities, but also a means of positioning it to play an effective role in the economic revitalization of Liberia,” Mensa-Bonsu said.

The UN Deputy Envoy emphasized that the launch of the BIN Strategic Plan is “significant” because it seeks to attract appropriate funding support from development partners who have invested much already in strengthening the security sector. “As the security sector is an integral whole, it brings into sharp relief the old adage that the strength of a chain lies in its weakest link,” She noted that BIN is the weakest institution in Liberia’s security sector that will determine the success of all the restructuring and reform efforts that have gone on so far, and support from partners would be critical in helping to



Liberian President Sirleaf at the launch

c Plan

maintain the momentum of the reform and restructuring of that entire sector.

She reminded international partners that the Justice and Security Trust Fund which has been established by the UNDP to receive contributions for the BIN, the Liberia National Police and Bureau of Corrections require a total of US\$51 million to reform these agencies. She pointed out that though the amount might seem colossal, it would be quite cheaper than the cost of failing to invest in the security sector reform in post-conflict Liberia.

Mensa-Bonsu challenged the BIN leadership to strive to implement the Strategic Plan, particularly those that require little or no funding as this will motivate friends and others to help out. She reminded them that there will be challenges but the true test of their leadership will not be judged by how uncomplicated things are for them, but by how well they manage the challenges ahead. She pledged the com-

mitment of the UN family to strengthen the advisory support and cooperation that BIN requires to achieve the vision set out in the Strategic Plan.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who graced the occasion, urged the BIN to shift from Strategic Planning to Strategic Action by ensuring an effective timeline and roadmap to achieve the objective. "You must develop a roadmap that will set targets for the achievement of all of the goals that you have so carefully planned and formulated in the five-year Strategic Plan just launched," she pointed out.

The Liberian leader described the BIN and the Liberia National Fire Service as "orphans of the security service," but promised her administration's support to work with the BIN. "From now onward,

people interactions" with those who cross the borders, "as they enhance the movement of people, monitoring their activities to ensure that in cases where they need documentations, they can help."

Earlier, BIN Commissioner Attorney-at-Law Clarence Massaquoi, in welcome remarks, said the Strategic Plan serves as a roadmap which seeks to address critical national issues aimed at buttressing Government's Poverty Reduction Strategy considering that the BIN functions from a triangular dimension (economic, security and political). "It considers protection of the Liberian economy in terms of strengthening our borders against illegal cross-border trade which robs Government of its just revenues, and to ensure prevention of the illegal exploitation of the natural re-



BIN officers at the launch

the Bureau will enjoy similar support given to other security agencies in the country," she assured.

She stated that while Liberia is committed to all the ECOWAS Protocols regarding free movement, she expects the Bureau to be vigilant in ensuring that those who enter Liberia to enjoy the country's hospitality do not participate in criminal activities by using Liberian territory for illegal exploitation of its resources.

President Johnson Sirleaf, who inspected the BIN officers prior to the launch, expressed satisfaction over their performance and recommitted her pledge to ensure that the organization receives similar support given to other security apparatuses in the country. She said that efficiency and effectiveness of the BIN personnel helps to promote "people-to-

sources by illegal aliens.

"From the security perspective, the Strategic Plan also seeks to ensure the effective protection of our borders against the influx of illegal aliens through our many porous crossing points, especially in the wake of Liberia's pending 2011 Presidential and Legislative Elections, as well as to further ensure that no alien fraudulently infiltrates our electoral voting process," Commissioner Massaquoi emphasized.

Representatives of the donor nations including the United States of America, Great Britain, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Nigeria and Ghana pledged their continuous support to the BIN until it can become professionally functional in all its activities.

JWW



Buildin

The wounds that Liberia's prolonged civil war inflicted on the society are still palpable, seven years after the conflict ended in 2003. Apart from the killings, rapes and other brutalities, the civil war displaced hundreds of thousands of people and destroyed the education sector so much so that Liberia may be the only country in the world where the younger generation is less educated than the older ones. A direct consequence is the severe dearth of qualified professionals to satisfy the emerging job market.

"With the emerging prospects for oil, for instance, the country does not have petro chemical engineers. Not one that I know of," says McNeil Wilson of the UN Development Programme. To address the crippling lack of qualified professionals, Liberia is now preparing to implement a decade-long capacity development strategy.

Wilson, who is project coordinator of the National Capacity Development Unit with offices at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (MPEA), says many companies operating in the country are struggling to find suitable expertise to handle their operations. "The capacity level across all sectors is between poor and fair. That means there is a lot of work to do," he says, pointing out that the gap level differs from sector to sector.

A one-day National Capacity Summit was convened in June at the Monrovia City Hall to validate and launch a 10-year National Capacity Development Strategy (NCDS). "We have had now many years of peace and stability and we are beginning to enjoy the right conditions for building capacity and achieving prosperity. So, there are no excuses for our capacity gaps," said Liberia's Vice President Joseph Boakai at the launch. While the lack of capacity can be explained by the years of devastating conflict that Liberia endured, the Vice President said that this is no longer tenable. "We can fill these gaps and transform our people and institutions."

Liberia is struggling to up its human capacity

g Liberia's Capacity

Moustapha Soumaré, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, expressed the UN's full support to the capacity strides and congratulated the Government for the milestone. "The NCDS will have to grapple with the need to prioritize and for this, there must be a candid engagement with stakeholders to define and develop a common and coherent understanding of the capacity challenge and build consensus on the priorities amongst priorities."

Currently, the UNDP is the leading partner for the capacity development efforts and works closely with the MPEA.

Essentially, the NCDS looks at strengthening institutions under three windows: individual, institutions and the enabling environment. At the individual level, in the case of doctors for instance, the MPEA will work with the Ministry of Health to map out how many doctors are needed, in which specialties and which training they need.

But four months after its launch, when will the implementation commence? "We are now moving to the implementation stage," explains the project's coordinator, adding that in October, all 15 county development officers were brought to Monrovia and orientated on the upcoming national capacity development regional consultations to further brief local authorities on the NCDS process and get their inputs.

Essentially, the NCDS looks at strengthening institutions under three windows: individual, institutions and the enabling environment. At the individual level, in the case of doctors for instance,

the MPEA through the NCDU has been working and will continue to work with the Ministry of Health to map out how many doctors are needed, in which specialties and which training they need. At the institutional level, the framework of the mandate and structure of that institution will be looked at to find out if the tools are available for the individual to work: office space, computers, desk and so on, as well as institutional policy framework. The enabling environment refers to the legal or regulatory framework that would be required.

"Our purpose is to coordinate the capacity development activities of different capacity development institutions to ensure that they are aligned with the national development strategy of the Government. That is our goal," says the project coordinator. The development strategy will ensure that technical and vocational institutions across the country engage in the traditional training of expertise but also look at 21st century scenario and emerging possibilities of the markets. Experts maintain that universities, as well as technical and vocational training and education (TVET) institutions need to infuse in their curricula expertise in line with emerging

trends. It was discovered throughout the NCDS formulation that there is a huge mismatch between what the universities and other institutions are producing and what the market requires. One of the responsibilities of the NCDS is to correct the mismatch.

While cabinet approval of the strategy is expected soon, what should Liberians looking for jobs do to increase their chances of worthwhile employment? "Individuals should start looking at themselves and ask what they need to make them productive. Job acquisition and job maintenance is predicated on the person's ability to be prepared," reminds Wilson. The vision for the capacity development strategy is to advance capacity gains across all sectors in a manner that is sustainable, inclusive, results-oriented, and aligned with Liberia's broader development agenda.

The UN in Liberia, including the UN Mission, has been involved in various aspects of capacity building ranging from training to infrastructural development. In some cases UN peacekeepers assist as lecturers in universities and teachers in high schools as stop-gap capacity building measures.

SM





District Superintendent Joseph W. Flomo discusses with locals at the Millennium Village

Slow Progress at Millennium Village

As world leaders were meeting in New York in early October before the 65th Session of the United Nations General Assembly to discuss progress of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), beneficiaries of Liberia's first millennium village project in Kokoyah Statutory District were also meeting to discuss the project's progress and the challenges it faces.

The Kokoyah Millennium Villages Project (KMVP) – implemented by UNDP

in partnership with the Liberian Government, the beneficiary communities, the Bamako-based MDGs Center, and the Norwegian Government which provides the funding – is an integrated community-based rural development project being implemented within a five-year time-frame (2008-2013).

Linked to the national Poverty Reduction Strategy and the Bong County Development Agenda, the project brings together public and private institutions to work with communities across Kokoyah

to ensure the practice of participatory decision-making in the development process as well as to attain the established project goals.

Primarily, the goal is to plan and implement a rural development project that will transform subsistence livelihoods into small-scale commercial entrepreneurship and provide robust guidelines for how villages can achieve the MDGs by the target date. The sectors involved include agriculture, health, education, water and sanitation, community development and local



governance with the cross-cutting themes of gender, youth, environment and information and communication technology (ICT).

During a meeting of youth leaders, elders, chiefs and the KMVP manager at the district's headquarters, Botota, beneficiaries were emphatic that two years after the project's launch, progress has been frustratingly slow. Speaker after speaker said that they had been made to believe that the district would have been transformed into a small "New York" with regular electricity, water supply, paved roads, senior high school, hospital, mobile telecommunications network, among others.

"If you all are unable to complete this project, please leave us alone and go! What kind of small "New York" is this where we walk miles to a clinic most times carrying the sick in hammock?" questioned a female elder mournfully stating that quite recently a pregnant woman died as a result of the lack of a medical facil-

ity. "Please don't mislead us," said a youth leader. The KMVP manger Stephen Kolee responded by apologizing. "I'm sorry that the projects are late," he began, adding: "The millennium villages project have not failed, it has only slowed down."

Kolee used the opportunity to inform the meeting that though the project was formally launched in September 2008, actual implementation activities didn't get underway until January 2009, commencing with series of community entry-point activities including community consultations, focus group discussions, community sensitization and awareness training workshops. The project was launched without the necessary logistics and even an office to work from, he added. On the illusion that the district will be small "New York", the project manager dispelled the notion as false. "Even Monrovia is not, nor will it ever be a small "New York".

Kolee noted is that the funding for the KMVP is inadequate for the population and area being covered. He pointed out that most Millennium Villages Projects are planned for an estimated population of approximately 15000 persons covering only a few villages, not a district. The KMVP covers an estimated 930 square kilometres with a population slightly under 24,000. The Norwegian Government has committed US\$5.4 million that is being remitted in instalments over the five year period.

In May, during a visit to the KMVP, UNDP Country Director Dominic Sam identified the lack of effective communication as one of the key issues undermining the confidence of the people in the project, and called for a clear strategy to communicate the goals, achievements and challenges of the project to the people. Sam noted that the leadership of the local communities forms the Steering Committee of the project, and should keep their people informed about the various aspects of the project.

Bong County Superintendent Ranney Jackson also noted that the beneficiaries have high expectations, but forgot to realize that it would require time for the implementation of all the projects. He also highlighted successes so far, mainly in the agricultural sector including the construction of the Botota warehouse, distribution of high-yielding, short cycle rice seeds

combined with training and extension services to farmers across Kokoyah.

In an interview with UN FOCUS later, Kolee stressed the serious challenges that his team faces in achieving the objectives and targets it set out in its 2010 work plan. He pointed out the delay in disbursement of funds for 2010 as the major challenge that has slowed down the implementation of planned activities; noting that up to the end of June 2010, funding had not been disbursed. "As a consequence, most activities planned for the first and second quarters could not be implemented. This delay will certainly affect the overall achievement of the objectives and targets set forth in the 2010 work plan." Most of the activities planned to be implemented in the education, health, water and sanitation, community and gender sectors were put on hold due primarily to the lack of funding.

Another major challenge is the low capacity of local contractors selected to implement construction projects. "These contractors not only delay the work well beyond the agreed timeframe, but often abandon projects because of the lack of capacity," Kolee pointed out. He cited the construction of two clinics in Yolo Town and Rock Crusher which were abandoned by the contractors after months of delay. They even absconded with the remaining funds meant to complete the projects.

The project manager named poor access roads, especially during the rainy season, which hamper the movement of staff and materials in project areas across Kokoyah as another challenge. "This will continue to be a challenge since bridge construction and road improvement works were not included in the cost-sharing agreement but left to be funded by government and/or other donors."

During a visit to the KMVP recently, Deputy UN Envoy for Recovery and Governance Moustapha Soumaré described the project as a great concept aimed at achieving the MDGs and called for effective local participation to ensure its sustainability. The Norwegian Embassy Consular Torvald Boye, whose government is sponsoring the project, expressed satisfaction over the level of work done so far, especially in the area of agriculture.

JWW

Liberian

How should Liberia tackle



Rodney D. Sieh – Managing Editor, FrontPage Africa “First of all Government needs to make jobs available in the different counties, not just Monrovia. Though a good number of youth are in Monrovia, a lot of them are also in the counties. A lot of the counties lack basic infrastructure like hotels and restaurants that would create job opportunities for Liberians in those areas. We really need good planning to be able to sway youth off the street.”



Bishop Dr. M. Leo Simpson – Administrator/Principal, Haywood Mission Institute “Liberia being a country of youth, government has a big task ahead of her. If you want to create employable people, you have to educate them though that’s a long process. You might also want to train them in vocational or agricultural skills to become productive so that they can help themselves and help the country in the process. Government also has to create the middle-class here in Liberia. To the youth, you better get an education.”



Gloria Kimba – Student, Bishop James W. Ferguson School “Some of the youth do not have the qualification to apply for a job. So for me, I think youth should be educated to make them marketable; likewise educated on how to apply for jobs.”



Attorney Cole Bangalu – Assistant Minister of Labour for Trade Union Affairs “First we need to understand that youth in their large numbers are unemployable. To be employed you must be employable. That which is required is to continue to engage in programs such as vocational training programs and other initiatives. As such the best way we can tackle youth unemployment is to invest in improving their employability that will be through the vocational training and other programs. Again, youth must be attracted to these programs. Remember, during the DDDR program for ex-combatants, a good number of youth that should have benefitted sold their spaces for money. Those youth today are lingering around saying that they are unemployed. However, I strongly believe that Government needs to invest in vocational educational programs.”



Rev. Isaac Zally, Sr. – Principal, R.C. Lawson Institute “Look at our youth, are they qualified for employment? The yearly West African Examinations Council results will tell you that our youth are not prepared to work. Instead of talking about youth unemployment, we should be addressing the problem of youth education. Are they educated? Can they take over? That’s the question we have to answer. Frankly, the youth are not prepared for employment. Preferably, let them put emphasis on their education.” Once one prepares for a job, they will get it. The jobs are available for the ones that are prepared.”



Elizabeth Zoe – Adult Literacy Instructor, Ministry of Youth & Sports “Authorities at the Ministry of Youth & Sports have been trying their best to create job opportunities for Liberian youth. During school’s annual break, the Ministry has created job opportunities for students to work and earn an income to be able to assist them return to school the following academic year. But I would want to encourage youth to take advantage of training opportunities to upgrade their skills to make them marketable.”

s Speak

le youth unemployment?



Ida F. Ajavon – Student, University of Liberia “Liberian youth need to enroll in vocational skills training to sharpen their skills for the job market. The Ministry of Youth & Sports has opened a vocational skills training school here at the SK Doe Sports Complex to teach the idle youth various professions. Once they graduate if they do not readily get a job, they could become self-employed which in a way would reduce unemployment.”



Darius D. George – Student, International Educational Foundation School “Government should assist the youth to find employment. It’s because of the job situation that youth are involved in crime and other activities that are against the law. Government should also provide these youth with free education to upgrade their skills for the job market.”



Patience Aridi – Student, Bishop James W. Ferguson School “Government should invest in youth development. I’m making reference to those who are youth who are serious about their future. This can be done through academic or vocational training. Government should establish these institutions throughout the country so that the youth be educated to contribute to Liberia’s reconstruction.”



Christiana Dennis Dean – Special Assistant to the Assistant Minister for Administration, Ministry of Youth & Sports “There are so many ways to empower the youth. Education is one way; skills’ training is another way. I would suggest to government to pay more attention to skills training for our youth. Opening more vocational training institutions throughout the country will go a long way in assisting our youth gain marketable skills which is very important when we’re talking about youth unemployment.”



Edith Smallwood – Secretary, Youth Services, Ministry of Youth & Sports “If government provides the avenue and encourage more companies to come into the country to invest, this would create a lot of job opportunities for our youth. These companies should be spread around the country so that this would halt the migration to Monrovia in search for job opportunities. There are some skilled unemployed youth that could fit into these companies but government will have to create the enabling environment for these companies to come in and lessen the pressure on it.”



Martin Brownell – Student, Body of Christ International Mission “Again, for me still a high school student, government should create the avenue to establish vocational training centers to teach youth vocational skills. Liberians are too much involved in the academic education, but lack the employable skills needed to rebuild the country. I refer to the carpenters, masons, mechanics, et cetera. So when one has vocational skills, they can live on it while at the same time furthering my education by pursuing undergraduate studies.”

