

# UNMIL FOCUS



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## A Vote of Confidence in Peace

Liberians Cross the Rubicon

A Heated Debate

Interview with Alan Doss

# From the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



**T**he past two months have been critical in Liberia's passage from an era of chaos and lawlessness to the beginning of a new chapter of order, stability and recovery. The success of the elections is significant on several levels. First and foremost, they were free, fair and transparent, second, the large turn-out provides the new Government genuine legitimacy to govern the country, and third, that complaints are being handled in accordance with strict procedures indicates a new respect for the rule of law.

Eleven October and 8 November were remarkable days. There were long lines during the first round of elections but people were patient, good humoured and excited to play their part in the historic event. During the second round, the queues were shorter, partly as a result of the simpler ballot, but turnout was still respectable. I travelled to several parts of the country on both days and was very pleased to

witness so many Liberian citizens exercising their right to vote. But with rights come responsibilities and now is the time for the Liberian people to take up the challenge of putting their country back on its feet.

With the peaceful and successful holding of the elections, the people of Liberia now have a unique window of opportunity to transform and develop their country. We all know that huge challenges lie ahead. It is important to identify the key areas so as to prioritise the Mission's focus in the coming months and years. Security sector reform, the restoration of basic services, the establishment of state authority and rule of law, the instituting of good economic governance are all vital for the country to move forward.

When I was in New York two months ago, I made a commitment to provide the Security Council, in March 2006, with UNMIL's transition strategy. In line with this the Mission will, over the coming weeks, establish goals in each of the above mentioned areas as well as identify partners to collaborate in the effort to achieve these goals. I should add that those I met with during my visit expressed appreciation for the work and progress of the Mission to date as well as an understanding that more time would be needed for us to consolidate the peace and begin the process of peacebuilding. The Council itself welcomed the

progress made and renewed the Mission's mandate for a further six months through March 2006.

The immediate next steps will involve a candid and open dialogue with the incoming new Government on the challenges ahead. And while we often refer to these challenges as huge or difficult, we should always recognize the potential of Liberia to succeed and indeed prosper. As we all know, Liberia is rich in resources beyond the dreams of many other countries; not only are there minerals but also a fertile and underutilized land combined with abundant rainfall; a spectacular coastline and natural parks; and abundant fisheries. I am optimistic for the country's future and I believe that if we -- the UN, the international community, civil society, the new Government and the people of Liberia -- all work together, then this country will rightfully enjoy durable peace and sustainable development based on respect for fundamental human rights.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan Doss". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "A" and a trailing flourish.

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



# Peacekeeping Operations Impact 200 Million People

**C**urrent United Nations peace operations had a direct effect on more than 200 million men, women and children whose lives had been torn apart by the scourge of war, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, told a Special Political and Decolonization meeting in New York late October.

He said that 18 peace operations, deployed around the world, comprised 83,000 troops, police and civilian personnel, a five-fold increase in field personnel since 2000. The peacekeepers were making a qualitative contribution to conflict resolution as the UN continued to support the stabilization of fragile peace agreements and assist political transition processes. In 2005 alone it had supported elections in five post-conflict countries, negotiating volatile environments through robust, responsive peacekeeping, in addition to carrying out comprehensive disarmament. It had successfully completed its mandate in Sierra Leone and Timor-Leste, and was responding to evolving, complex political environments in Côte d'Ivoire and Kosovo.

Requests by Member States for the effective use of peacekeeping resources had led to innovative new practices, he noted, citing the inter-mission cooperation in West Africa. Another example was the Organization's integrated disarmament, demobilization and reintegration standards.

Furthermore, the Department of Peacekeeping supported a growing number of field activities other than peacekeeping operations, such as the provision of logistics support to 13



Jean-Marie Guéhenno

United Nations special political missions and offices, he said. Another high-priority task was the provision of support to the African Union, particularly that regional body's mission in Darfur.

The UN was committed to implementing a zero-tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse by its peacekeepers, Guéhenno stressed. Over the past 20 months, more than 221 peacekeepers had been investigated, 10 civilians had been fired, and over 88 uniformed personnel repatriated. Conduct and discipline units had

been established at UN Headquarters and in eight peacekeeping missions to put preventive strategies in place that would eradicate sexual exploitation and abuse. Ultimately, the eradication of sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping missions depended on the enforcement of established standards by troop-contributing countries, he noted.

Guéhenno recalled that during the 2005 World Summit, Heads of State and Government had articulated key elements that must be pursued in addressing the peacekeeping challenges of the 21st century. They had underscored that peacekeeping was one of the Organization's core activities, and emphasized also that United Nations peacekeeping must be able to respond robustly to challenges on the ground. Commitment to a comprehensive, integrated approach to post-conflict countries and to the deployment of integrated missions in complex situations had been reinforced, and the importance of regional organizations in support of peace activities reiterated, Guéhenno added.

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By Mathew Elavanalithoduka

One of Africa's worst nightmares has come to an end. A country that has been laid waste by one of the continent's most brutal civil wars is reborn.

Liberia, Africa's oldest republic that reeled under 14 years of devastating civil conflict, is now decidedly on the trail of peace. The democratic elections on 11 October and the run-off on 8 November saw Liberians opting for ballot over bullet, marking a historic turning point for the war-ravaged nation. They also scored another first in history. For the first time on the African continent, a woman has

**The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), with a 15,000-strong peacekeeping force on the ground, provided extensive assistance and advice to the National Elections Commission,**

become president of a country through free and fair elections.

The national elections, assisted by the United Nations and the international community, was the first since a peace agreement in August 2003 ended the prolonged civil strife that turned this once prosperous country into one of the world's poorest, leaving nearly 200,000 people dead and the nation's infrastructure in tatters.

It was the culmination of a spirited eight-week political campaign during which hands that once wielded guns carried placards and other campaign materials in support of their favourite candidates. Supporters of rival candidates vied for attention from prospective voters without tearing into each other during the remark-

# A Vote of Confidence in Peace



ably peaceful campaign period.

On 11 October voters had begun queuing up as early as 2 a.m. to cast their ballots at polling stations set up in churches, schools, dilapidated public buildings and even tents and rural huts. Some of them carried benches to sit on and umbrellas to shield themselves from rain and sun. Queues spilled out of the voting precincts winding through streets. A whopping 74.9 per cent of the 1.35 million registered voters cast their ballots in the first round of elections, a remarkable voter turn-out by any standards and a rousing testimony to the people's desire for peace.

"We have all waited for this day to come," said Emma Korpeah, 48, a housewife who waited in the queue for five

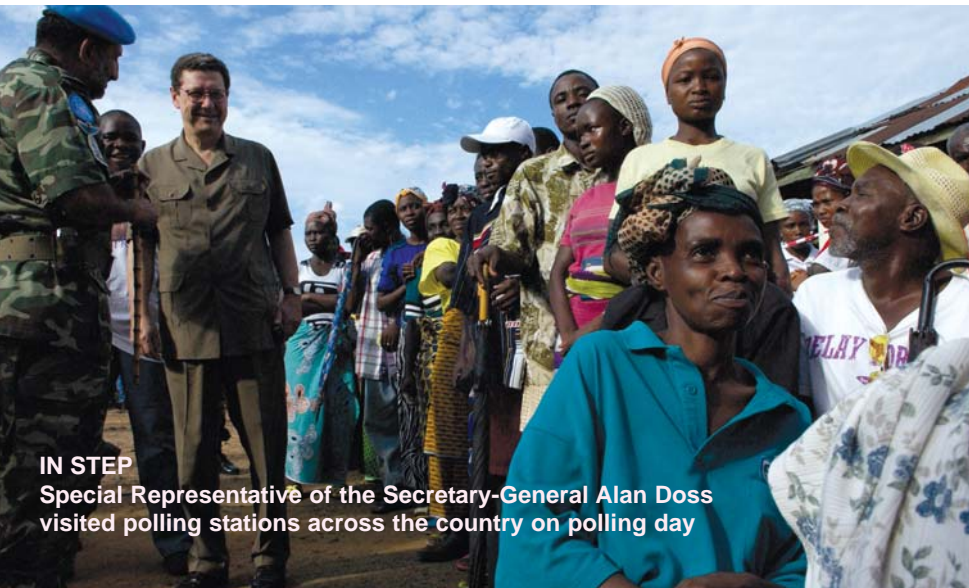
most precious right and responsibility," said Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary-General after visiting polling stations across the country. "Who would have thought two years ago that we would be here?"

Secretary-General Kofi Annan described the elections as a "new chapter" in the history of Liberia. "A chapter of reconciliation and reconstruction, underpinned by good governance, the rule of law and respect for human rights. On those foundations you can rebuild a nation of which all Liberians can be proud," he said.

Over 3,500 national and 421 international observers who monitored Liberia's first post-war elections endorsed the exercise as free and fair. "Following a remark-

National Elections Commission, responsible for conducting the elections. The peacekeeping mission also paid salaries for over 18,000 Liberian nationals who staffed the polling places, in addition to moving the ballots by truck, helicopter and even ship to coastal areas that could not be reached by land. For two months preceding the elections, UNMIL had conducted a nation-wide voter education campaign, exhorting voters to peacefully participate in the elections.

The challenges facing the newly elected government are immense. With no electricity or running water for over a decade, rebuilding the country's shattered infrastructure will be top on the list. More than 100,000 ex-combatants, many of them children, need to be reintegrated into the



**IN STEP**  
Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss visited polling stations across the country on polling day

**responsible for conducting the elections. By ushering in participatory democracy through free and fair elections, Liberia has reached the end of the tunnel and turned a new page in its history.**

hours before she could vote at a polling station in downtown Monrovia, world's only capital city without electricity and running water. That was a sentiment shared by many Liberians who saw the election as a historic chance for a new era, far removed from the country's bloody past.

In stark contrast to the killing fields Liberia had become during the civil war, the elections were remarkably peaceful. It looked like Liberians could teach a thing or two to people in other countries getting to grips with democratic governance.

"At all polling places I visited, I was struck by the patience, the determination, and the friendliness displayed by all Liberians as they set about exercising this

ably peaceful and highly competitive electoral campaign, voting across the country was virtually violence free, orderly and well administered in most of the areas," said a statement from the 40-member multinational observer delegation co-led by former US President Jimmy Carter.

"The Liberian people have sent out a strong signal to the leaders of the country," said Marie Ariette Carlotti, the head of the European Parliament's observer mission. "It will be up to these new leaders not to disappoint the population by ensuring that the daily life of all Liberians is changed for the better."

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), with a 15,000-strong peacekeeping force on the ground, provided extensive assistance and advice to the

war-scarred society. Unemployment currently stands at 85 per cent while hundreds of thousands of Liberian refugees still live in relief camps.

These are gloomy statistics indeed. But they are the legacy of bloody coups, despotic governance and civil wars that consumed much of the country's recent past. However, by ushering in participatory democracy through free and fair elections, Liberia has reached the end of the tunnel and turned a new page in its history.

That this has happened in a country that was not so long ago labelled "the worst place to live on Earth" is an extraordinary political breakthrough. And a tribute to the international rescue operation led by the United Nations Mission in Liberia. ♦

# Liberians Cross the R

Liberians, old and young, made 11 October a very special day in the history of their 158-year old republic as they joyously joined the first post-war Presidential and Legislative elections as a voter, polling worker, election observer or security officer. Hundreds of thousands of people flocked to more than 3,000 polling stations even before daybreak and later hundreds of thousands more lined up patiently in queues for hours to cast their ballots in the searing sun and occasional rain. Some 18,000 national polling staff worked from early morning until midnight to ensure the exercise went smoothly while 3,500 plus election observers from various local organizations watched the process closely. Nearly 4,000 officers from national security services stood at the polling centres or patrolled the streets to safeguard the entire process. Together with 15,000 troops and hundreds of electoral support staff with the UN Mission in Liberia, Liberians made Election Day a great triumph.



**DETERMINED**  
Voters queue up in  
a mud pool in front  
of a polling station

By Yuko Maeda

**T**he Free Pentecostal Global Mission Church in Monrovia was not yet fully awake. The room was still dark, and the air fresh and cool. Only two battery-operating lanterns dimly lit a dust-covered wooden table on which posters, stamp pads, pens and cardboard boxes were spread out. "These are non-sensitive

materials delivered last night," said Joseph Fayia, one of the polling staff. "We're still waiting for sensitive material -- ballot papers and counting forms -- to come."

Outside were hundreds of Monroviaans in baggie shorts and traditional wraps in queues silhouetted in the morning glow. Soon a UN military truck arrived and soldiers from the Nigerian Battalion 7 dropped off black plastic boxes carrying

ballot papers. The UN peacekeepers were tasked to safeguard all the election materials, including nearly five million ballot papers in total. It was still early, two more hours to go before the polls would start.

"It should go in a fairly peaceful manner," said Hallie Charyoe, the first in the line who saw off the truck leaving. "Today is our day! Many international people are here to organize this election for us. We do



# Rubicon

everything we can to make sure it goes fine.”

When the day broke, the front yard of the Nancy B Doe Jorkpentown General Market on Tubman Boulevard, the main road in capital Monrovia, was filled with people in colourful outfits. Police officers and electoral staff busily walked around to make lines orderly for four polling stations there and called the elderly, handicapped and mothers with babies to come forward to form another line. “They will go first,” a polling worker explained.

At the top floor of the market was a presiding officer explaining to political party representatives and election observers how the elections were to be conducted while a ballot issuer mechanically placed a new voting instruction sticker on each ballot paper for the Senatorial election. Less than two weeks before the polling day, the Liberian Supreme Court ruled each voter cast two ballots, not one, for Senators, and the National Elections Commission needed to issue new instructions to accommodate the last minute ruling.

Shortly after 8 a.m., another polling station in the market opened the gate to let the voters in. “Do you need someone to assist you, Ma?” Christopher Moore, chief presiding officer, smiled at an elderly woman in a Sunday church dress. He took the woman to a cardboard-made voting booth and stood by the old lady to help her mark the candidates of her choice.

“I’m very happy to vote,” beamed Kiazolu Musa, 68, right after casting his ballots next to the woman. “I need peace. I want my children to have better education. We don’t want any more war,” he declared while walking down the staircase. He said he keeps all his voter registration cards from previous elections as a historical record to pass on to his children. This time around he hopes no more bloodshed follows the elections.

A few minutes drive after the Red Light market is the Paynesville Community School where long queues lasted a kilometre along the main road.



## Rains Fail to Deter Lofans

By Eliane Van de Velde

“I wan schoo, I wan goo goo teachers, I wan hospital, and I wan goo roads,” This is what Abu Kamara, 9, had to say when asked what he wants his new president to do for him. He was not able to cast his vote on the election day, but he saw everything, and is impatiently waiting for his 18th birthday to be part of the democratic process that took place in his country early October. The queues were long and colourful in Voinjama, capital of Lofa county. All layers of society were represented. The old and disabled were given the front space, women wrapped in their best clothes with children on their backs and shoulders waited patiently in the punishing sun, for their turn to come. The lines were not only colourful, but also became a forum for political debate, everywhere women and men discussed the event. Roaming around the lines with pen and paper, cameras and recorders, journalists hurriedly interviewed people, looked for interesting angles and captured the mood of the voters.

There was relative calm inside the polling stations with people shuffling slowly from the verification desk to the election worker explaining how to fill in the ballot papers. “Two for blue, Ma.” Then, one disappears behind the cardboard box that ensures privacy. It takes a few minutes before they reappear, and when they do, it’s with a big smile.

Ballots folded and dropped, big white teeth, and an ugly brown mark on the thumb. Some polling stations are small and it’s hot, but in every one of them there were observers, national and international ones, watching over the process until the very end.

The Pakistani APC’s roam around for show of force and security. Despite the difficult times these soldiers have been going through with the earthquake in Pakistan devastating the lives of their kith and kin, they are not shying away from their responsibility to ensure security and facilitate the electoral process in Lofa county. Not only are they escorting electoral staff and providing security, but they have also helped repair the roads in advance of the elections. They have helped the NEC with communication facilities, electricity, food and logistical support, and the Lofans are feeling safe with the peacekeepers in their midst.

It rained in Voinjama during the last hour of voting, but that didn’t make people change their minds. All were there for a reason, and a little shower was not going to ruin their enthusiasm.

When the night slowly swallowed the day, people were back to their routine activities. Candle lights were lit and fireflies danced like little elves around town, chasing each other. Dogs frolicked in the sand. Children played, and men sat under the trees, drinking palm wine and discussing the days past and the new ones to come. ♦

"How come it takes so long? I've waited since 6 o'clock in the morning!" "Open the gate! Let us in. We're tired of just waiting outside!" People screamed in sweat, pushed one another and banged the gate as the searing sun became increasingly unbearable.

"We lined them up many times but the lines dispersed every time we let a small group of people in," sighed Martha Sonpon, a police officer assigned to the school polling precinct, who could only manage to control the queues inside the compound. "Because the process is slow, people are getting tired." A platoon commander from the Nibatt 7 patrolling the area came to her rescue, ordering his men to stand still outside the gate to control the front lines. The commotion receded.

war!" Augustine Zaza said in an oratorical tone at a school in the Soul Clinic IDP camp in the outskirts of Monrovia, eyeing the voters standing in the burning afternoon heat. Zaza, a 29-year-old instructor in computer science, understands his countrymen's mixed feelings of excitement, frustration and responsibility as he had voluntarily held neighbourhood meetings to discuss the importance of participating in the elections. "We got to be patient because we have to exercise our franchise!"

Soul Clinic was one of the most vocal IDP camps that threatened to boycott the polls when they realized that a large number of internally displaced persons could vote only for the Presidential Election, not for the parliamentarians, unless they return

people lined in queues patiently waited for their turn to come. "I now have a conviction that God will deliver the best results for people," Zaza proclaimed.

By 4:30 p.m., the market on Tubman Blvd. became deserted as all the people in the queues outside were gone. Polling staff circled around a nearby table to bite cooked plain rice from a big pot. "It's our late lunch," one of the staff said. "We didn't take any break until now."

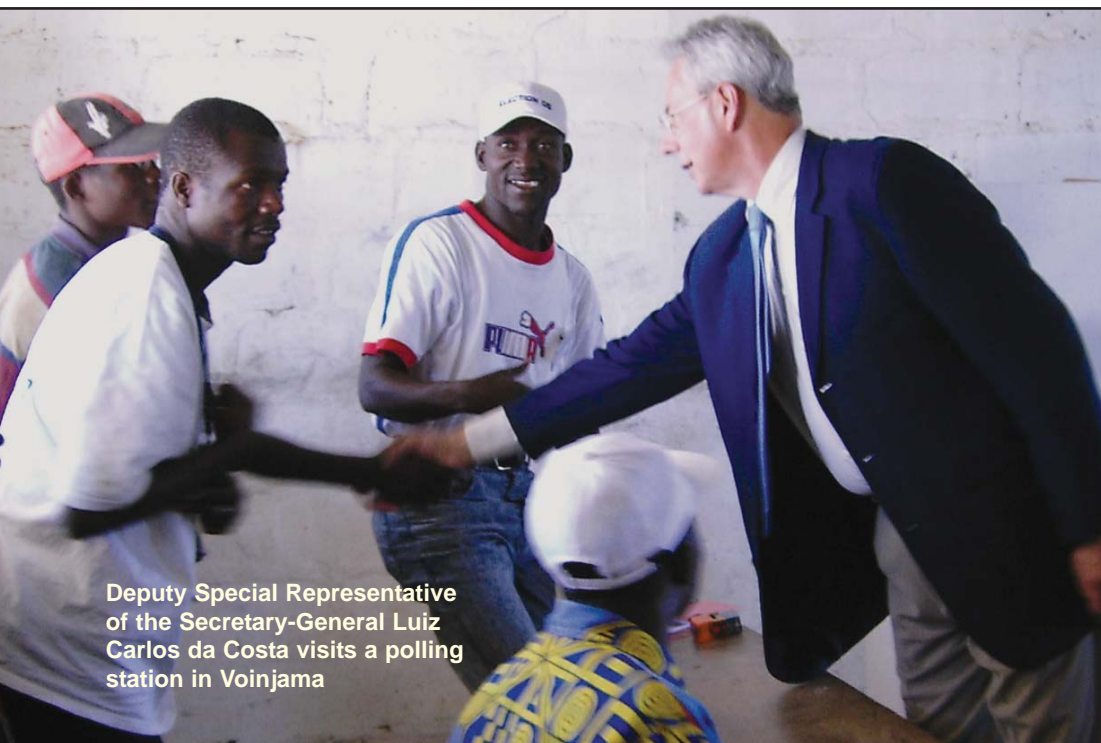
Jordan Benson, an election observer from a political party, watched them eat from her seat. "People understood the voting procedures. It went smoothly," she smiled satisfactorily. "I can see people want a peaceful country with a good president. Everybody was swearing to vote."

As night fell, most of the 3,070 voting precincts closed, although some remained open as late as midnight to enable those still in the queues to cast their ballots. Inside closed doors polling staff and observers had already begun counting the ballots in near darkness.

Back in the church in Monrovia's residential area, ballot counting was going on even at 11 p.m. While some of the observers lie on benches to rest after the long day, polling staff counted aloud the number of ballots one by one in the dimly lit room. Election Day was almost over, remarkably in peace.

An engine sound broke the silence outside. A mud-covered motorbike carrying two men rushed to the church's gate where a police officer and two Nigerian soldiers guarded the

entry. "We're here to vote," the driver told the police officer without getting off the bike. "Sorry, man, it's too late. You should have been here by 6 p.m.," the police officer said apologetically. The two men told the officer that they left Buchanan, about 110 km away, two nights ago but their vehicle broke down on their way on muddy, almost impassable roads and couldn't make it. "I'm sorry, but you can't. It's a rule." Disappointed, the motorbike disappeared into the darkness. ♦



Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Luiz Carlos da Costa visits a polling station in Voinjama

Eliane Van de Velde

"Everything is all right after the Nigerian soldiers came," Sonpon said with relief. "We are scared of the crowd, you know, because we are not armed."

On Election Day hundreds of thousands of voters stood in queues for hours, some more than eight hours, waiting for their turns. Many complained about the slow pace of the process, but none of them turned violent to spoil the whole process.

"Liberians are now waiting to make a sound decision. They're absolutely tired of

home. In the registration period in May, nearly 61,200 IDPs registered to vote and some 24,000 of them opted to cast their ballot in their county of origin. However, many of them failed to return to their hometown on time with no humanitarian assistance available, and the NEC made a special arrangement to allow them to vote only for President even in camps. This decision upset many remaining IDPs. Electoral officials and security forces anticipated a skirmish or two in camps, but



# Peacekeepers Safeguard Democracy

By Yuko Maeda

“**M**ove, move!” A Nigerian soldier chased off taxis blocking Tubman Boulevard, the main road running through Liberia’s capital city of Monrovia, tapping the sides of cars with a small tree branch. The traffic was chock-a-block as tens of thousands of supporters of former soccer star George Weah marched to his party headquarters along the highway. From yellow taxis to old pickup trucks to import-

ed sedans, trapped cars honked to find their way to move an inch forward but only made the traffic more chaotic.

“Too much, too much!” Another soldier screamed, running toward a cattle truck overloaded with people, and pulled off several young men clinging to the side of the iron hood. Other peacekeepers also stood along the centre line with a tree branch in their hands, dispersing the supporters standing even inside the sidelines and helping pedestrians cross the street.

It was the last Saturday before 11 October, the day the national elections took place. Three political parties includ-

ing Weah’s Congress for Democratic Change, organized rallies to wrap up the eight-week political campaign and make their final appeals to voters. From morning, the young and old carrying placards and posters of their favourite candidates marched the streets, feverishly singing and dancing. The traffic got congested gradually and marked its peak with a cheering crowd occupying the main road when Weah was approaching his headquarters that late afternoon.

“The rally is peaceful: they are just shouting, making noise and blocking the road. Nothing is like a panic,” said Maj.

## Civpols Watch Over



By Ashim Choudhury

A few days before polling began, the otherwise ubiquitous red and white cars of Civilian Police had suddenly disappeared from the streets of Monrovia. Called our Civpol contact Asif Rafique, a police officer from Pakistan, and he said, “I’m off to Zwedru.” Towfique Chowdhury, a police officer from Bangladesh, said he was headed for Sanniquellie. Like migratory birds most Civpol Officers had fled Monrovia starting 6 October, five days before D-day. In all, 380 Civpol officers fanned out to various corners of Liberia to oversee the law and order aspect of elections 2005. Their mere presence in the hinterland days ahead of the polls reassured the people with a sense of security.

“They will assist, advise and mentor the LNP and other national security services officers deployed all over the country,” IPS Commissioner, Mohammed Alhassan



## HELI HELP

Peacekeepers transport polling materials to remote areas using helicopters

Adam Ngulde Garba with the 850-strong Nigerian Battalion 7 that safeguards central Monrovia up to the Roberts International Airport. Responding to an order by the Sector 1 Commander, 60 men rushed to control the traffic along the boulevard from near the city hall to the ELWA junction. Garba commanded his men on the street by the CDC headquarters. "Although this is a peaceful gathering, because of the number of the crowd, there's a potential it would turn a security threat. That's the reason I am here."

The 15,000-strong peacekeepers from 47 countries with the UN Mission in Liberia have played a key role to secure the 111,000 square kilometres (43,000 square miles) of Liberia's entire territory since deployment in October 2003. When

the electoral process started earlier this year with preparations for voter registration, UNMIL's military component formed a four-man Election Cell to liaise with the mission's Electoral Division and the National Elections Commission to coordinate logistical support and protection of electoral staff and materials.

"The entire force is responsible for securing the country to ensure voters can exercise their right to vote without fear," said Maj. Monirul Islam Akhand with the election cell. UNMIL peacekeepers deployed all over the country get involved in both pre- and post-election period to create such a secure environment, he said. The peacekeepers disarmed more than 100,000 fighters and destroyed over 28,000 weapons and 33,000-plus heavy

munitions a year ago. They went out in the field with electoral staff to secure civic education campaigns, safeguarded more than 1,500 voter registration centres, escorted the delivery of registration materials to the remotest areas and watched over political rallies. "The election is a result of many successful phases such as the disarmament and demobilization process, voter registration, exhibition of the voters' roll and political campaign. In Africa, nothing can be taken for granted."

To provide maximum security for the elections, each contingent took internal security drills. On 20 September, for example, the Sector 1 Force comprising of Nibatt 6 and 7, Ghanaian Battalion 3 and Pakistan Engineering unit held a special exercise with electoral staff to prepare

said as he saw off most of his officers on 6 October. A day earlier nearly 4,000 officers mainly from the Liberian National Police (2,487), Immigration (787) and other security agencies including 226 Provisional Police Officers left for various destinations in distant corners of Liberia. "We are ready for Election Day," LNP Acting Inspector General, Joseph C. Kekula told a gathering of presspersons a day before their departure. While most of the police left by road, some left by heli-

copters. One batch of LNP officers also left by sea in the 'Catarina,' headed for Buchanan and Harper.

We asked Samuel Kanyenda, an Assistant Police Superintendent from Malawi, as he packed his bags for Tubmanburg, about his role as a Civpol officer during the polls. "We'll basically be watching the polling precincts from a distance, making sure the LNP are at their posts and advising them whenever necessary," he said. The actual policing would

be done by the LNP. For many of them it was their first exposure to elections and hence the need for assistance. In cases where the LNP did not have the necessary communication or transport equipment the Civpol provided support.

In addition to Civpol, the Formed Police Unit (FPU) was deployed in sensitive areas such as Ganta, Zwedru, Harper and Buchanan to back up the LNP officers. "These areas are hotspots and identified as strategic areas to expand our presence,"



themselves for the worst scenarios—a violent demonstration and a polling station hold-up. The mock exercise was to ensure proper deployment and also to review when and how to apply individual initiatives to control the situation without waiting for an order in emergency circumstances.

The peacekeepers developed special measures to beef up security control on and around Election Day. They created 61 temporary forward operation bases in the entire country to reduce response time as 255 out of 1,421 polling precincts are inaccessible by road. They conducted extensive patrolling by road and air, manned additional checkpoints to search for arms and maintained reserve forces in strategic points. The rest of the troops were assigned to guard polling precincts, escort electoral staff and deliver polling kits safely. Together with UNMIL's International Police Service and the Liberia National Police, the mission's military component also established a Joint Security Operations Centre in the LNP headquarters to coordinate security opera-

tions and to speedily react to any potential security threats.

"The coordination is wonderful," said Akhand. "The main purpose of UNMIL is to hold a free and fair election to create a democratically elected government. We're all working for one purpose."

On Election Day, more than one million voters turned out at 3,070 polling stations from early morning to late evening and cast their ballots in a remarkably violent-free environment. The peacekeepers guarded the polling centres, patrolled the streets with armoured trucks and tanks and flew the sky to deliver election materials or monitor the situation on the ground.

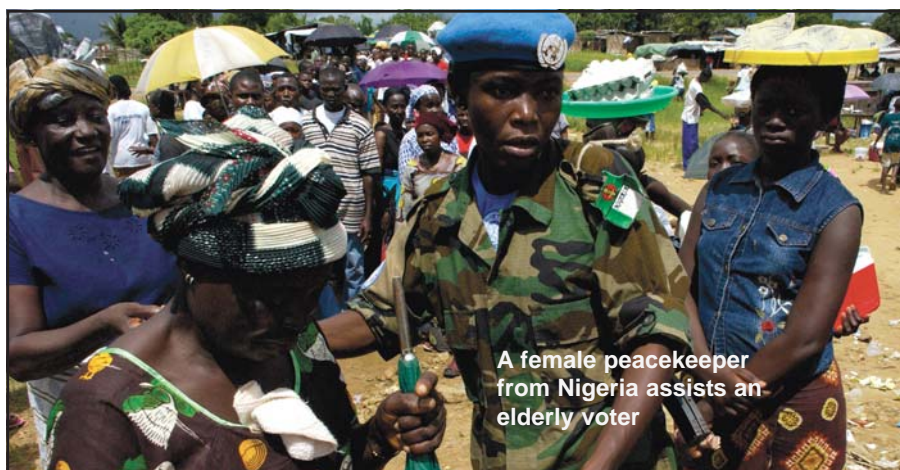
Off Monrovia, Sgt. Tanko Ibrahim with the Ghanaian Battalion's Quick Response Company busied himself walking around the compound at the Grace Baptist Church in Bardnersville, shouting to voters to be in line. There were hundreds of voters in queues for many hours in the scorching sun, often deflecting the lines frustrated by the slow pace of the voting process. Ibrahim raised his voice when he caught a young woman in a pink



**"International partners have stood solidly by our side and for that we are grateful." Frances Johnson-Morris, NEC Chairperson**

T-shirt and a mini-skirt sneaking into the line. "Wait, come out of the line! We got to talk!" Once he quieted down the irritated crowd and brought chaotic lines into order, the lined-up voters clapped their hands to praise him. "The Ghanaian Contingent is helping a lot. They are doing very well to control the crowd," commended Swenty Russel, an election presiding officer at the church. "Things are going fine with no confusion."

The polls ended with no significant security incident reported to the Joint Security Operation Centre. The 60-member EU Election Observation mission was quick to point out that the presence of UNMIL helped create a feeling of confidence and security among the voters. NEC Chair Frances Johnson-Morris also praised the peacekeepers and other international stakeholders. "Our international partners have stood solidly by our side and for that we are grateful," she said on the following day. ♦



**A female peacekeeper from Nigeria assists an elderly voter**

Commissioner Alhassan explained. The Civpol also coordinated with the military for logistical support in certain places. For instance, the FPU, and Civpol officers in some cases, stayed with the military. In many instances the military also facilitated transportation of LNP and other security forces.

To coordinate security arrangements at a national level on polling day, the Civpol also set up a nodal National Joint Operations Centre at the LNP headquar-

ters in Monrovia. According to Commissioner Alhassan, this centre coordinated communication from all agencies including Civpol, LNP, and other agencies including the military. "The Ops Room at the centre monitored the security situation all over the country on election day."

It was not until 4-5 days after the elections that the Civpols were back in Monrovia. Back from Tubmanburg, we asked a visibly tired-looking Kanyenda how it felt. "These elections were the most

important event for this country in the last several years. It feels good having been a part of the effort which accomplished the historic elections," he admitted. If the holding of elections was largely incident-free, much of that credit rightly goes to the International Police Service of UNMIL. And of course, the LNP and security forces, who kept vigil at each and every polling station across the country until the last ballot was dropped into the box. ♦



# A Heated

By Ashim Choudhury

Within days of the National Election Commission (NEC) announcing the eight-week campaign period from 15 August to 9 October, the tone for canvassing was set. First, posters of presidential candidates made an appearance on all conceivable places, walls, hoardings, cars and buses. Then came the lorries blaring loud music and louder slogan shouters, as they passed through Monrovia's main thoroughfares. Interestingly there were no clear, coherent messages, just lots of noise. Even wall graffiti was missing. All one saw was faces, Ellen, Weah, Sherman, Brumskine, Tubman, and the rest. Meanwhile, party headquarters, where faithful gathered, became a beehive of activity. People had a field day enjoying the pantomime.

The CDC headquarters on Tubman Boulevard, till the other day a derelict house in the middle of a huge compound, looked always crowded. The Unity Party offices on Broad Street and near Sinkor too was teeming with people, many women, donning Vote Ellen T-shirts. In comparison, the NPP headquarters on Fifth Street Sinkor and Liberty Party office on Old Road were less crowded. Some other party offices looked forlorn. Remarkably, party clashes, so common a

feature in nascent democracies, was barely visible. The occasional tearing of party posters by rival supporters in the early days of campaigning also ended once the NEC Chairperson issued a warning.

In the communities too there was an expectant air. Overnight, people were debating candidates and their politics. They had long waited for this opportunity that would help wipe out the scourge and



Yuko Maeda

memories of war. Little grocery and tea shops became the scene of late-night rendezvous where ordinary Liberians discussed the fate of presidential candidates. Most of them were young people, excited about having a say in choosing their leader.

From time to time small bands of party supporters passed through streets chanting their favourite slogans. But street-corner meetings, where leaders tried to plead for

votes, were conspicuous by their absence. Even door-to-door campaigning by leaders was absent. In their place were rallies – with the regalia of motorcycles and cars – storming through little towns and villages. Rarely did leaders get out of their cars and speak to the people or explain why they should vote. It appeared like all the people wanted were T-shirts and posters. Pasting posters became a national pastime. In Monrovia and elsewhere political parties organized mammoth rallies to demonstrate their strength.

The early-September meeting George Weah organized at his CDC headquarters was a sellout. It was clear from the outset that he had a large fan following. Others were talking of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. As the days and weeks rolled by it became apparent that Weah and Ellen were the front runners. The names of Charles Brumskine, Varney Sherman and Winston Tubman did crop up from time to time, but as far as the presidential race was concerned, the remaining candidates were irrelevant.

Then the rains came on and off and somewhat slowed the tempo of the campaigning. On September 17 Weah called a press conference with the international media at his residence on the outskirts of Monrovia. The initial euphoria had subsided by now. "Very likely there will be a run off with Weah and Ellen," says a photographer from the US who had spent nearly a month in Liberia covering elec-





# Campaign

## ELECTION FEVER

Tens of thousand of supporters thronged political rallies to listen to their leaders

tions. Two days later, one of Weah's own aides admitted privately, "There are so many candidates, that's why there'll be a run off." (Later, that forecast proved right). Meanwhile, despite the rains and the mud roads, candidates and their supporters tried to make it to remote towns.

The brief lull in campaigning was broken by Charles Brumskine holding his rally at Monrovia's Antoinette Tubman stadium on 21 September. Nearly 30,000 supporters flocked to hear him speak. The city was chocked with his fans. This was touted as the biggest ever rally in Monrovia so far. At the rally, Theo, one of the rally organizers asserted, "He's a strong candidate....But it's unpredictable who'll win." Supporters chanted, "Brumskine will win! Brumskine will win!" Opponents, complacent until now, sat up and took notice. Brumskine was back in the reckoning. People were no longer talking of just Weah and Ellen as frontrunners. That evening, Weah supporters erected a large hoarding of their icon. 'Vote CDC for a better Liberia,' it read.

In a barber shop a few hundred yards away from where the Brumskine supporters had gathered we asked: "Who are you supporting?" Nataniel, the barber set aside his comb and scissors, put on a smile, and pulled out a poster of Weah. Why him? "I like him. He has done a lot for the country. He even went to Ghana to help the Liberian refugees there." Another young

man has yet to make up his mind. Yet another fellow is a Brumskine supporter. Why didn't he attend the rally? His party ID card was not ready. It didn't have his picture. But he also had an ID card of Varney Sherman's COTOL. "I'll not vote for him. But this card allows me to eat free chop in his restaurant," he confessed with a naughty smile.

So people had registered with more than one party! Others were on a spree to collect free T-shirts. Many people across the country proudly displayed T-shirts with the faces of aspiring presidents, senators and representatives. Some even carried plastic bags emblazoned with party emblems. "For me, I'm a member of every party," said Frances Clark of Maryland County. "I will wear any party's T-shirt once they give it to me, but I already know whom I will vote for." She admitted to having over four T-shirts from various candidates.

On 3 October Johnson-Sirleaf held her rally at the Tubman Stadium. It was a huge success. Till about 3 p.m. people kept pouring into the stadium. Those who had seen Brumskine's rally a few days ago said it was nothing compared to Ellen's show of strength. By the time Ellen made a dramatic entry into the stadium the crowds went berserk. It took her 30 minutes and a lot of jostling before she made it to the podium. With a hand held mike she spoke to the adulatory crowds, taking turns to

speak in different directions. There were crowds on all sides of the podium. A delighted supporter at the jam-packed stadium remarked, "Elections over O. Ellen is in the Mansion." The Executive Mansion is where the new President would be sitting. That evening Unity party supporters went home happily assured of victory.

But the mother of all rallies was yet to come! On 8 October, a day before the official end of campaigning, it came in the form of a human tidal wave. Columns and columns of people gathered on the streets of Liberia headed in the direction of SKD stadium and then the CDC headquarters. That historic day Tubman Boulevard became one big human mass right from ELWA junction up to Sinkor. Downtown Monrovia wore a deserted look as if its residents had abandoned the city. Children played football in empty streets. It was like an exodus. Many Liberians who had never seen such a massive gathering described it as a "human tsunami."

So big and unmanageable were the crowds that two people allegedly died of fatigue. Several dozens fainted in the scorching sun. After the long trek people had made from long distances to Monrovia, they had to endure hours without food or water before "King George" finally showed up. By the time the last of Weah's supporters reached home, it was well past midnight. ♦



# Voters Eye a Better Future



Mathew Eianvanalhoduka

By Yuko Maeda

“**I** exercised my franchise!” a young man with a baseball cap and knapsack exclaimed after his thumb nail was inked at the Monrovia City Hall on Election Day. “We waited for this day for a long time!” Salee Reed rose around 4 a.m. to rush to his polling station only to find the City Hall already packed. He was not the only person who hurried to grab the opportunity to decide the country’s future course.

College student Reed, 37, had every reason to be jubilant about the elections, the first since the brutal civil conflict ended two years ago. Growing up in a shanty town of Monrovia, he graduated from a high school in 1992 and proceeded

to a university in 1994 to study mass communications. But soon the intensified war cut him off from his studies and confined him at home. “I want to complete college and look forward to something good,” he said in a firm voice, praying that the polls would eventually open his horizon.

Reed is one of thousands of self-supported students in the poverty stricken country, where some 85 per cent of the labour force are unemployed. In the capital and other major towns, many young people including ex-child soldiers roam the streets, some selling scratch cards for mobile phones or CDs and DVDs and others just hanging around to kill their time. “They need more jobs. Many are self-supported to complete their education,” Reed said.

Free education and better employment

are some of the major issues Liberians hope an incoming new government will tackle first. “I’d expect a lot of improvement in this country. Especially I want to see free education and more job opportunity,” said Hallie Charyoe, a 25-year-old fresh graduate from a church-affiliated high school in Monrovia’s residential area. “I’d be happy to take any job to prove what I’m capable of.” That hope, and his determination to realize it, woke him up at 2 a.m. on the election day to beat an anticipated long queue.

For the war-ravaged country where no running water, electrical grid or nationwide telephone system exist, voters’ expectations for improvement are high.

“A new government should guarantee a good salary for civil servants and provide more medical facilities and schools,”



said Deddeh M. Kurboi who works at a public hospital as a nurse. The 28-year-old working mother of two children also wishes to see basic infrastructure in place. "We don't even have clean drinking water or electricity because of the prolonged war. We now want a normal life back."

Gregory Benson, a field monitor with the Independent National Commission of Human rights, hopes a democratic government will emerge out of the elections and it will provide adequate protection of basic human rights. "I'd like to see a new government that guarantees freedom of speech, freedom of movement and freedom of association and that delivers what you wish to do for your family," the 36 year-old human rights worker said before voting at a Monrovia market.

Absence of rule of law, corruption and the lack of an independent judiciary have all helped breed a culture of impunity in Liberia. Public figures openly misuse state funds, criminals walk free unpunished and angry villagers commit extrajudicial killings.

"Up to now many politicians are corrupt; they are thieves stealing public funds. Those politicians are supposed to be prosecuted but none of them are," Reed raised his voice as he lined up to vote. "We should change the attitude of politicians." Benson argues corruption is about not only politicians but also the rank-and-file civil servants. "I'd like to have a government free of corruption," he said, pointing out instances of low paid civil servants such as teachers and police officers demanding bribes for every single service they provide. "I expect to see a new government increase the salary of civil servants to stop

bribery."

People with handicaps feel they have long been marginalized in society and see the election as an opportunity to change the history of neglect. "Liberian governments haven't prioritized the issues of disabled people," said Rebecca Williams, a 42-year-old polio victim, who stumbled to climb up staircases with her crutches to reach a classroom to mark the ballots at a Paynesville polling station. She said no special education facilities or vocational training centres have been provided by any of the former governments to help the disabled become self-supportive. And none of the public buildings are barrier-free to accommodate their physical needs, she said. "Anything in Liberia is struggle, especially so for disabled people," she complained. "I want to see equal opportunity for everyone... I hope a new Liberia will take the plight of disabled people as a priority."

Liberia's prolonged war killed some 200,000 people and uprooted nearly a million, forcing them to live in camps in neighbouring countries or within the borders. Thousands of them have returned spontaneously or with assistance from humanitarian aid agencies, but majority of the refugees and some internally displaced people still remain in congested camps.

Going home is their ultimate dream.

"I want to go home as soon as possible, but need assistance to do so," Tarnue Jallah said while queuing at a polling centre in the Soul Clinic IDP camps, one of the largest IDP camps in the outskirts of

Mathew Elanvanathoduka



NO HANDICAP A blind man casts his ballot

Monrovia. The 36-year-old construction worker has lived in the camp for the last three years after fleeing from Lofa by foot. He said he is the bread-winner for his extended family including his grandmother and the money he makes is not enough to make a long trip back with them. "Life in the camp is very hard," he said. Heavy rains have destroyed many of the makeshift huts standing side by side in his camp. He hopes once the elections are over and the country becomes more stable, he will be able to go home with his family to re-establish his life there. "I want a fresh start in my hometown," he said.

Every single voter who braved the tropical heat and pouring rain on Election Day cast ballots to bring a positive change in Liberia. They voiced mounting challenges the country faces and said they are determined to make new leaders to do their job properly. But of all the important messages they delivered was a single hope: peace.

"If a new government comes, I'll be satisfied," said Joseph Zumo, 75, a man with a missing teeth and a whitened eye, who stood in a line at a Monrovia's polling station to cast his ballot. "I will be eating good, sleeping good. That'll be good. A hard time is already finished!"

The international community saw Liberians' strong determination and heard their plights right. "The Liberian people have sent out a strong signal to the leaders of the country," said Marie Ariette Carlotti, the head of the European Parliament delegation who was here to observe the historic polls. "It will be up to these new leaders not to disappoint the population by ensuring that the daily life of all Liberians is changed for the better." ♦



Yuko Maeda

# Comments from Election Observers

## National Democratic Institute/Carter Centre

“On the whole, election day went peacefully and smoothly, with short lines at most polling places. The national Elections Commission (NEC) is to be commended for their efforts to address many of the administrative and procedural problems noted by observers on October 11.”

## The International Republican Institute

“Under extraordinary circumstances, the National Elections Commission executed a run-off election 28 days after the country’s historic October 11 elections. IRI’s delegation witnessed an orderly and peaceful process, one that reflects Liberia’s commitment to build a democracy. IRI’s observers again saw election officials who were serious-minded, professional and recognized the importance of the task before them. Officials clarified key procedural instructions that resulted in a measurable improvement in secrecy of the ballot.

Party agents from the competing parties were in all polling places visited by IRI observers. Independent observation groups were also present in many of the polling stations IRI visited. These large numbers were critical to the transparency and legitimacy of the election and should dispel any allegations of cheating.”

## The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)

“After the initial debriefing of its members, the ECOWAS Observer Mission’s preliminary conclusion on the 8th November 2005 run-off Presidential election is that the election was generally peaceful, free, fair and transparent. However, the ECOWAS team notes the complaints arising from the elections and appeals that the due legal process should be the only avenue in handling such complaints to ensure justice and fairness in the entire electoral process.

The election is an important but passing phase of the peace process. For many Liberians, the focus is on the mammoth task of national reconstruction-restoration of basic facilities, fixing roads and re-launching the economy. For this to succeed, dialogue, reconciliation and unity are paramount.

While congratulating the political parties and candidates for making the electoral process a success, ECOWAS would like to remind them that elections are not a zero-sum process. The loser should accept the result with dignity and grace; the winner must acknowledge victory with humility and extend a hand of friendship to the other contestants.”

## European Union Election Observation Mission

“The 8 November presidential run-off election has so far been peaceful and generally well administered, consolidating the

achievements of the 11 October elections and advancing the process of returning Liberia to a normal functioning state. Voters were provided with a choice between two candidates in a genuinely competitive election process.

Voters turned out in significant numbers, again in a calm and orderly manner. Polling procedures were generally well followed and the secrecy of the ballot was generally well maintained. Representatives of both contestants were present in virtually all polling places visited by EU observers, and civil society domestic observers were present in around 60% of polling places visited, contributing to the transparency of the process.

The NEC, with the assistance of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), has so far administered the run-off election in a professional and impartial manner. In a positive development, the NEC corrected a number of shortcomings brought to its attention following the first round.”





# UNMIL Mandated to Arrest Charles Taylor

Just as the counting of the 8 November presidential run-off ballots was coming to a close, the UN Security Council on 11 November authorised the UN Mission in Liberia to arrest and transfer Charles Taylor to the Special Court for Sierra Leone should the former President return to Liberia.

The Security Council, determining that the return of former President Charles Taylor to Liberia would “constitute an impediment” to the country’s stability and a threat to its peace, decided to include in the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) the former leader’s “apprehension, detention and transfer” to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, in the event of his return to Liberia, said a Press release from the UN headquarters in New York.

Unanimously adopting resolution 1638 (2005) under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter, the Council decided also that, as a part of its additional man-

date, UNMIL should, in transferring or facilitating the former President’s transfer to the Special Court, keep the Governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone, as well as the Council, fully informed.

Stressing that Charles Taylor remained under indictment by the Court, and affirming Liberia’s political independence, the Council also expressed its appreciation to Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo for his country’s contribution to restoring stability in Liberia and the West African sub-region. The Council acknowledged that Nigeria had acted with broad international support in its decision to provide for Taylor’s temporary stay in the country.

The Special Court is an independent tribunal established jointly by the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone in 2002 to try serious violations of international humanitarian law, such as war crimes and crimes against humanity, committed since 1996, at the height of that country’s 1991-2002 civil war. Taylor and



Pewee Flomoku

Charles Taylor

11 others indicted by the Court are charged with war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law. All but two of the indictees, including Taylor, are in the custody of the Special Court in Freetown.

## “ELECTION QUOTES”

**“It does not need education for me to know that you need roads, water, light, schools and hospitals.”** **GEORGE WEAH**, responding to the argument that he has neither education nor political experience for the top job.

**“We’re not at war....We are one people.”** **ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF**, referring to violent trend in early campaigning among rival parties.

**“October 11 stands.... National interests are superior to any individual interests.”** **FRANCES JOHNSON-MORRIS**, while peace negotiators were trying to resolve the stalemate arising out of the Supreme Court ruling favouring independent candidates barred from join-

ing the Presidential race.

**“I was struck by the patience, the determination, and the friendliness displayed by all Liberians as they set about exercising this most precious right and responsibility.”** **ALAN DOSS, SRSG**, speaking to the press, after visiting several polling places at Tubmanburg, Bopolu and Kakata.

**“I almost cried...”** **SANDRA KISIELSKI**, a UN Volunteer from Germany, who was so touched by the sight of long queues of women waiting for hours in the sun just to cast their votes.

**“The US will work with anyone elected.”** Headline in *The Inquirer* quoting US Ambassador,

Donald Booth.

**“We do not need rulers.....we need leaders.”** **VARNEY SHERMAN**, speaking to his supporters in Tubmanburg.

**“Brumskine has all the qualities of Clinton.”** **WILLIAM STEVENS**, an American political lobbyist who was recently in Liberia.

**“Winston Tubman. He my pape. I from Sinoe.”** A blind man on his way to the polling station near Cece beach, when asked who he would vote for.

Compiled by Ashim Choudhury

# "The Task Is Awesome..."

By winning Liberia's presidential election, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, 67, popularly known as the "Iron Lady," has set an unbeatable double record. She is the first woman to be elected President of Liberia. By the same feat, Johnson-Sirleaf has also become the first ever elected President on the whole of the African continent. A former finance minister, the Harvard-educated economist has served the World Bank and the United Nations during her illustrious career spanning several decades. In an exclusive interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka, Johnson-Sirleaf discusses her priorities as President of the war-ravaged nation.



Mathew Elavanalthoduka

## What will be your priorities as President of Liberia?

Well, in the first instance, we want to make sure that we get the government working again. That means introducing systems and structures that will ensure proper management of the country's resources as well as efficiency and effectiveness in public service.

We want to tackle the issue of infrastructure. The fact that there are no lights

and water in our capital city for well over a decade is totally unacceptable.

Then we want to start on the whole reform agenda. The work that will be coming out of the Governance Reform Commission which I headed, and which has made a lot of progress in terms of decentralization, the restructuring of public service, reform of the judiciary, and all of those.

Of course, peace and security is something that cuts across all of these and if you don't have that you can't do those other things. I hope that we can persuade the UN to keep the support through the peace keeping force for at least two, three years to give the new government a chance to consolidate and to restructure the security forces, including the army.

The task is awesome. There's hardly anything you can think of that's not a priority in the country. We hope that we can come up with a realistic agenda that is time bound and we can progressively try to achieve the objectives.

## How do you intend to reduce unemployment, which is a major cause of worry for many people?

I hope that we can first start some labour-intensive public works rehabilitation programmes to build upon some of what is being done now in some of the counties with the UN support, farm-to-market roads, reconstruction, public buildings, and all of that. Then we want to revitalize the rubber sector because that's also a very labour-intensive operation.

We will create the environment that will lead to private sector investment, foreign direct investment, even investment by Liberians and Liberians in the Diaspora. It will take some time, but I hope we can reduce the level of unemployment very shortly.

## There is an unusual generational gap in education in this country, with the younger generation much less educated than the older one. How do you intend to bridge this gap?

That is the most unusual and unfortunate situation. We have to start some accelerated learning programme. That means getting as many of the young people back in school. It will take maybe a couple of decades to reverse the situation to make it normal again, because many of the young people who have not gone to school are those well over 20 years old and you may say that all we can do with them now is to teach them skills and to put them into vocational training schools.

If we can get the young kids, who are right now in the villages not going to school, into quality primary schools, qual-



ity secondary education right now, then maybe we'll start the process of reversing. It will take time.

**Liberian society is torn apart by the civil war. What do you intend to do to bring about genuine reconciliation among the people?**

Several things have to be done almost simultaneously. In the first instance, the new government has to be a government of inclusion and it must make sure that in appointments the full diversity of our nation is reflected so that everybody feels that they have a stake in the new government. I think the Truth and Reconciliation Commission need to be given more support to accelerate the process of contrition and forgiveness.

We need to start holding reconciliation conferences. Some have been held recently but they were more politicized than anything else because of the political season we are in. Now we can start some true reconciliation conferences in different counties, among groups where there have been tension, and we can really get the government to support it, and support open dialogue to discuss the root causes of the conflict and the tensions and the divisions; to recognize our history for what it is and see how we can realize that at this point, we are all Liberians. The war, in fact, has been a common denominator because the war has affected everybody.

**How do you view the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) that has been accepted by the NTGL? Will your government fully embrace it?**

First of all I'm glad that GEMAP has been signed; but I'm glad that it's signed revised because the original proposal as regards the judiciary is something that many of us had problems with because of the constitutional and statutory problems associated with it. But now that our partners have made it more reasonable and acceptable, it's signed, and we ought to now get on with it and I'm glad because that's going to restore the good relationship with our external partners which is necessary for us to carry on with the programme of reconstruction and reconciliation.

The tenure of the GEMAP is 36

months. We are going to accept GEMAP and we're going to use it because we're going to need gap filling skills. I'm not very worried about the need for financial management and oversight that comes out of a lack of confidence in government and government's own honesty and efficiency because we're going to correct that. This government is going to subscribe to sound financial management with honesty. People will serve under a code of conduct in which if they violate the public trust, they will bear the penalties as prescribed by that code.

So except for the technical gap filling, which will be necessary, for as long as it



Sando Moore/Daily Observer

is, we will accept it. But I think we will see that we can put Liberians of the right qualifications, of the right commitment, of the right level of honesty and efficiency, that GEMAP will not be necessary for 36 months. I am convinced that we can change this government and we can undertake and formulate the right policies. We can put in the right Liberians to the full satisfaction of our partners in terms of the management of our country's resources.

**For several decades, every government in Liberia has been neck deep in corruption and it is just customary on the part of politicians to say or promise that everything will be fine if they come to power. What makes you think that people should accept your claim that your government will be transparent and honest in financial management?**

My record precedes me. I was the finance minister in this country. It was not for a long period of time; but I was a deputy finance minister and an assistant finance minister and anyone who has worked with me, anyone with whom I've worked, both Liberians and others, know my record of fiscal discipline, my record of sound financial management and honesty. Everywhere I've served, I've left a record that's very credible.

This is one of my strong points and you're going to see a complete difference and this is not just talk and rhetoric. Like I say, I stand on my record on this one.

**Do you think Charles Taylor should face trial in a war crimes tribunal?**

Yes. If Taylor has broken the deal he made with the West African leaders -- that he could go into exile in Nigeria and he would cease to interfere in Liberian matters and West African matters. If as the record shows, he has broken it because he continues to try to manipulate situation here, then he ought to face his day in court.

**Even otherwise, even if he hasn't broken the deal, if he has committed war crimes, don't you think he should stand trial, he should be brought to justice so that the people who have been victimized by him can at least feel that they have found some justice?**

Yes. Mr. Taylor should be brought to justice. In fact, he should have been brought a long time ago. The reason I said if he's broken it is because we respect the position of our West African leaders who say that the deal was a life-saving deal for the Liberian people; but now if they no longer have that justification to keep him, then of course he ought to face the court. But yes, justice has to prevail.

I mean, even though I said truth and reconciliation is high on our agenda; but that is not at the sacrifice of justice. Those who are aggrieved and who want to settle their grievances in a court of law, they have every right to it and they will get the government support on this. People have a right to defend themselves, that's why we say it must be in accordance with the law; but justice is an important part of reconciliation and so, for the atrocities he has committed here, Mr. Taylor ought to face a court. There's no doubt about that. ♦

# “UNMIL Will Stay the Course...”

Special Representative of the Secretary-General **Alan Doss** is a veteran UN diplomat and, having served in Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone earlier, brings a wealth of regional experience to his recent posting as the head of the UN Mission in Liberia. In an interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, he discusses the just concluded elections, the daunting challenges facing the incoming government, the impact of the political impasse in Côte d'Ivoire, and reiterates continued support to Liberia from the international community.

**Now that the national elections are over, has UNMIL fully accomplished its mandate in this area?**

I certainly think we have fulfilled our mandate which was to assist the National Transitional Government to organize the elections through the National Elections Commission and to provide security for that process. Before, during and after the elections, we were able to ensure that the people of Liberia got to make their choices free of violence and intimidation. This has not really happened before in Liberia and I think therefore it's a great step forward and the UN, along with other partners, can claim credit for that.

Above all, of course, the credit belongs to the people of Liberia who got out in significant numbers during both rounds to vote for the candidates of their choice.

**Is it the presence of 15,000 peacekeepers that ensured peaceful elections or have Liberians evolved to embrace peace and democracy?**

I think the combination of both. First and foremost, Liberians, after many years of violence and devastation, have clearly voted for peace in their country. Our support for the electoral process was critical in the security context - 15,000 peacekeepers, 1,200 policemen - ensuring a safe and secure environment. The Mission's technical, organizational and logistical help through our Electoral Division to the NEC was also critical and contributed to the success of these elections.

**The election results are contested, with one party raising allegations of fraud...**

You know, in all elections there are winners and losers and there are disappointments, of course. I think the reports of the international and domestic observers are very clear. This, in their view, was a free and fair election and held in a transparent manner.

The allegations of irregularities are being investigated by the NEC. I hope they will do so expeditiously and do so with full public disclosure.

We ourselves are looking at the broader systemic issues of chain of custody and the control of the ballots. I have so far no evidence to suggest that there

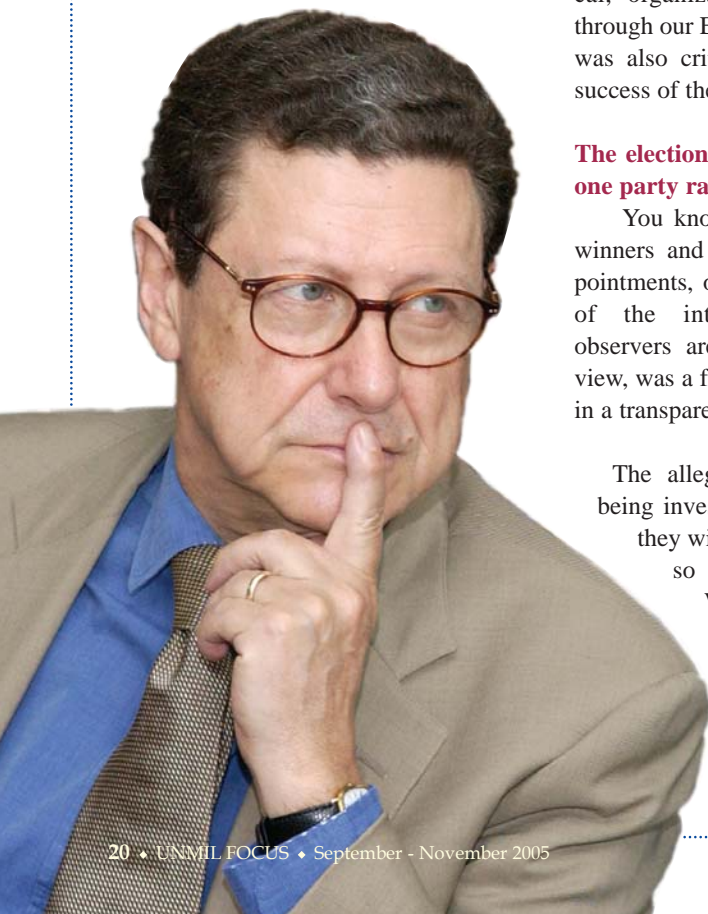
was systemic fraud, but in the interest of transparency and reconciliation, and future peace, I have asked the Electoral Division to conduct a thorough review of the procedures which I hope will be ready very shortly.

I have seen nothing so far to call into question the findings of the international and domestic observers. The party representatives, thousands of them, were present at polling stations throughout the country. To my knowledge, very few, if any, queried the results.

**Considering the daunting challenges facing the new government, what would be UNMIL's role and that of the international community in supporting the new government?**

There are short term challenges and challenges that will have to be met in the medium to long term. Obviously the immediate challenge is to ensure security so that the new government can take office in a peaceful atmosphere and set about the huge tasks ahead. So our first priority must be working with the national authorities to bolster security while the national security forces are being restructured, retrained and recruited. That will all take some time and I think UNMIL's presence here will remain an important guarantee for the future.

The second is to work with the new government as it endeavors to grapple with the legacy of the many years of instability and war. That means dealing with issues of reintegration, reconciliation, rebuilding the productive capacity of the economy without which there cannot be jobs. Jobs are absolutely vital for the





future stability of this country.

Then, beginning the task of reducing poverty and protecting human rights. All of these elements are essential but all can't be done immediately. It will take some time and the international community along with UNMIL and the rest of the UN system here will have an important role to provide support, encouragement, constructive criticism where needed, to help with, for example, economic governance, to work with the government to prevent corruption and so on. There's a lot to be done.

**One outstanding issue seems to be the reintegration of ex-combatants. Are there huge numbers of disarmed ex-combatants who haven't benefited from the reintegration programmes?**

There are large numbers ex-combatants although they represent a small proportion of the huge number of young men and women in this country looking for jobs and gainful economic activity. We have to see it in the context that they are part of a much bigger army -- the army of the unemployed, dispossessed, of the poor.

A large percentage of the ex-combatants, I am told, have received some form of post-disarmament assistance for skills training, some for formal education. We have roughly about 10,000 who remain to be enrolled in the programme and funding is being actively sought to include them.

Nevertheless, it's still in my view a significant achievement. We've done all this at a time when the country is in desperate economic straits -- we've had to organize an election, bring back the internally displaced and refugees, hundreds of thousands, all of that in one year.

I would certainly hope that come this time next year those programmes for reintegration of internally displaced, refugees and ex-combatants would have been completed. That would have covered roughly half a million people in one category or another. Then we must increasingly deal with the underlying problems of massive poverty in this country.

**Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme was originally supposed to be endorsed by the Security Council but that never happened. Does it mean that it has been weakened or is it now less binding?**

An agreement is binding if it is signed by the parties and it was signed by the parties. So it's binding. What the Council did was to welcome GEMAP and to ask to be kept fully informed about its progress. So that is in the resolution and that is what will happen.

**How does the stalled peace process in Côte d'Ivoire impact stabilisation in Liberia?**

We are obviously very concerned about the seeming lack of progress on the settlement of the political problems in Côte d'Ivoire. If the situation were to deteriorate on the Ivorian side of the border, there is a risk of spill over into Liberia by the refugees and displaced people in the border areas or possibly combatants seeking refuge. That happened before when hostilities flared up in the western part of Côte d'Ivoire. Another dimension linked to that of course is the rumors that are circulating about efforts by some in Côte d'Ivoire to recruit child combatants in Liberia. We are following that very closely, we are monitoring the border; we are working with agencies like UNICEF to check out these stories because it would be totally unacceptable to recruit child soldiers. The recruitment of child soldiers is now considered a war crime. But recruitment of adults would also be most unwelcome. It would mean again drawing Liberia into a conflict that it doesn't need.

Côte d'Ivoire has been an economic power house in this sub-region and as such it has helped to produce growth in the entire sub-region. So obviously both for the people of Cote d'Ivoire and more generally for the sub-region, a prosperous and peaceful Côte d'Ivoire is a plus for everyone.

**There is a widespread feeling that the international community will soon disengage from Liberia, especially with the elections going smoothly. Shouldn't UNMIL and the international community have a long-term commitment to Liberia?**

I think the international community will stay the course. When I met with the Security Council in September, I didn't sense any desire to rush to the exit -- to have an election, declare victory, and leave. I think there was a real understanding that in a country that was emerging from a quarter of a century of instability, devastation and wars, all the problems would not be solved in a few months particularly in the security sector.

We have been asked to go back to the Security Council in March with a transitional plan which will map out certain benchmarks that, by the way, must take into account the sub-regional situation, particularly in Côte d'Ivoire. On that basis, the Council will look at the future of the Mission. I do believe that there is a broad measure of understanding in the Council that the Mission and the international community will have to provide significant support and will have to stay the course.

That being said, this is not a blank cheque. The Mission obviously will have to be seen to be performing well in all its dimensions, and there are many. It's not just the blue helmets and police. It's also about the rule of law, the justice system, human rights, and support for the restoration of state authority in every county and so on.

**On the recent Security Council resolution mandating UNMIL to arrest and transfer Charles Taylor -- do you think there is any significance to the timing of the resolution, coming close on the heels of the elections?**

I think the resolution speaks for itself. I'm not sure whether I can or wish to qualify or characterize it. It gives us a very specific responsibility. We'll exercise that responsibility if we need to. I think it's clear, it's straight forward and we will do what the Council expects us to do.

# ELECTION

By Yuko Maeda

## Huge Turnout

Elections 2005 drew a massive turnout, reflecting Liberians' enthusiasm to have a say in their country's nation-building process. More than one million registered voters, or 74.9 per cent of the 1.35 million electorate, turned up to cast their ballots on 11 October for the national elections for President, Senate and House of Representatives.

The turnout varied from county to county, ranging from the highest turnout of 78.8 per cent in Montserrado County to the lowest of 62 per cent in Lofa County. The largest number of voters was recorded in Montserrado with nearly 382,000 voters, followed by Nimba with about 142,000. Together, these two counties account for more than half of the total turnout.

In the Presidential run-off elections on 8 November, Montserrado and Grand Gedeh counties maintained high turnouts with 72.9 per cent and 71.8 per cent respectively. However, less than half of the registered voters showed up in the three counties of Grand Bassa, River Cess and River Gee. Still, 61 per cent of all the electorate, or about 826,000 voters, braved to

travel to the polling stations in the searing sun for the second time.

## Technocrat over Populist

Through the two rounds of elections for the Presidential office, Liberians picked former World Bank economist Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as their next leader, turning down soccer icon George Weah, who was the front-runner among 22 candidates in the first-round presidential race winning 28.3 per cent of the votes.

In Liberia, an absolute majority rule is applied for the Presidential election where a candidate needs "50 per cent plus one vote" to win the race. As none of the 22 candidates secured an absolute majority in the first round, the two leading candidates needed to contest in the runoff election.

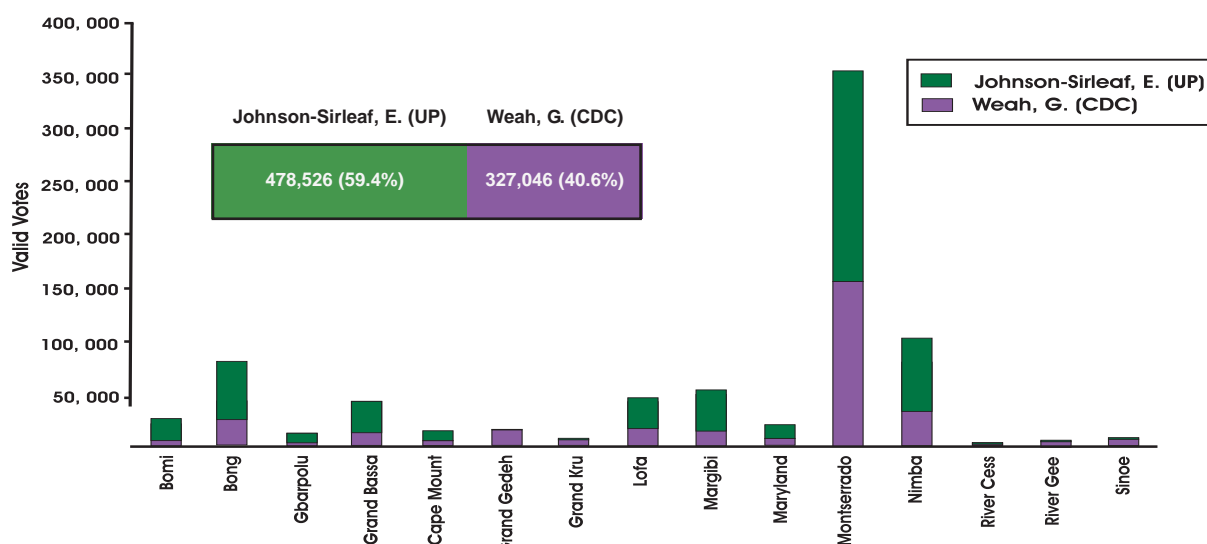
In the second round, Johnson-Sirleaf received 59.4 per cent of the votes, or nearly 479,000 ballots, winning a 19-point lead over rival Weah who got a little over 327,000 votes. She secured a majority vote in most of the counties where other major contenders, including Charles Brumskine, Winston Tubman and Varney Sherman, held the lead in the first-round. She also won a majority vote in Montserrado and Nimba, the two largest counties, which initially favoured Weah.

Johnson-Sirleaf, leader of the Unity Party, will become the first female president on the African continent on 16 January 2006 at the presidential inauguration, taking over from Charles Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia, who has run the country for the last two years since the UN brokered a peace deal in 2003.

## Multi-Party Legislative Body

Liberia's first post-conflict elections embraced 718 candidates from 21 political parties for the House of Representatives and the Senate. While 513 candidates contested the race for the 64-seat House, 205 contenders vied for the 30-seat Senate. As a result, Liberia's new legislative body will have representatives from 11 political parties with George Weah's Congress for Democratic Change as the leading party.

In the House of Representatives, the CDC secured 15 seats, the Liberty Party nine seats, and the Coalition for Transformation of Liberia (COTOL) and the UP eight seats each. The COTOL will be the leading party in the Senate with seven seats.



## Runoff Presidential Election

8 November

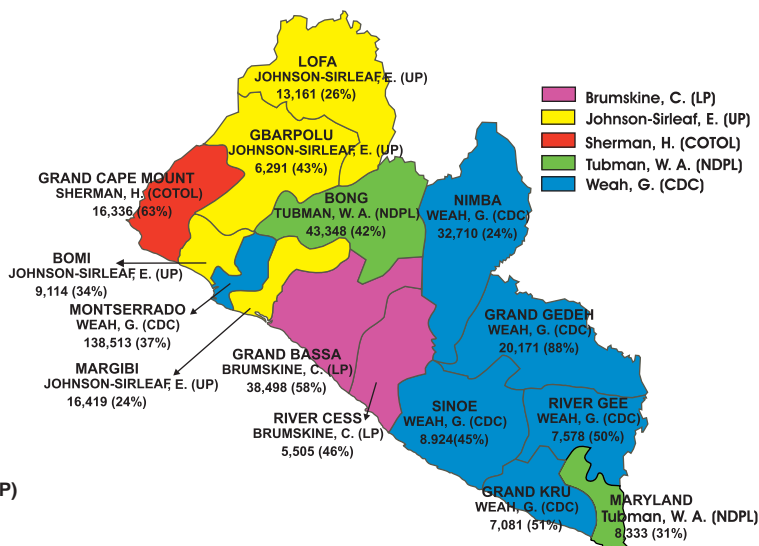
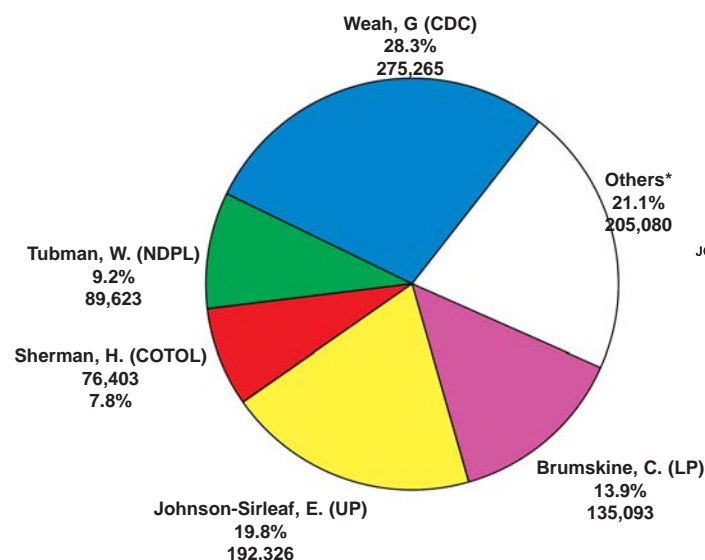


# RESULTS

## National Elections

11 October

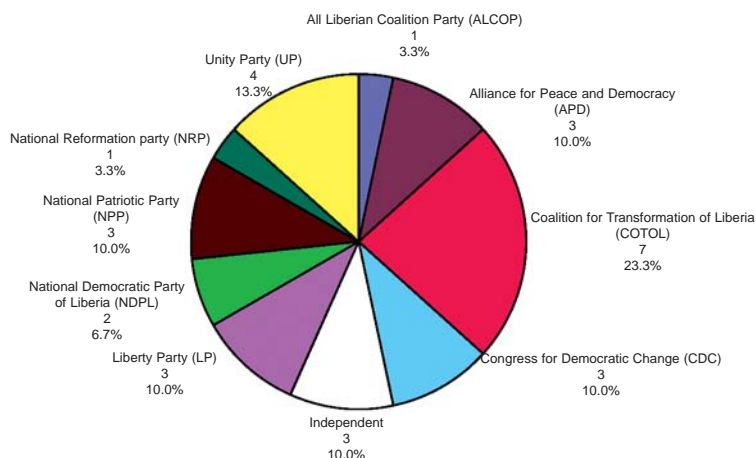
## Leading Presidential Candidates



## New Legislative Body

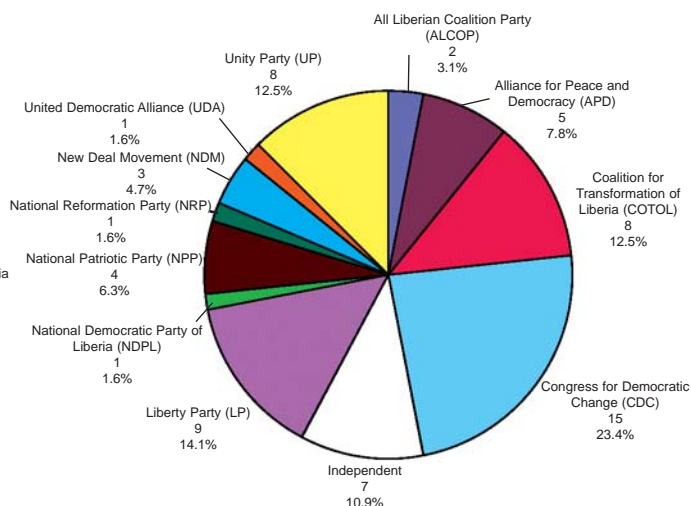
### Senate

Seats by Political Party



### House of Representatives

Seats by Political Party



Data from NEC National Tally Centre



# Women Advance in Politics

President-elect Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf may be the only nationally known female politician in Liberia's male-dominated political arena, but other aspiring women also made significant strides to advance their representation in the country's legislature. Female candidates secured eight seats in the House of Representatives and another five in the Senate, making their representation in the Legislature nearly 14 per cent. Grassroots women also did not lag behind, first by registering to vote in large numbers -- making up more than half of the 1.35 million registered voters -- and heading to the polling stations on Election Day in droves. With the first post-war elections, Liberian women have become a force to reckon with in deciding the country's future.

By Yuko Maeda

“As I promised, I made it! I became a new Senator!” In a silky lavender dress with a matching turban, Joyce Freeman widely beamed right after the National Elections

Commission officially declared she was a winner for Montserrado County in the October's Senatorial election. She captured the senior Senator position in Liberia's most competitive county among the 15 county electoral districts, beating 17 other contenders with more than 86,000 votes, the highest figure any single senatorial candidate received. “I was confident I

would be elected. I'm very fine to be the first Senator.”

As Liberia's national coordinator of the women's committee of the International Transport Workers Federation, Freeman has been a vocal advocate for workers' basic rights and women's advancement in politics. Back in March on the International Women's Day, while speaking at a rally on women and politics, she had raised concern over the severe discrimination faced by women in the transport sector and demanded the issue be addressed as a political one at a government level. “We must get into political activities,” she said at the time. “We have to make sure people who can understand the issues of women's workers to be elected.”

In the legislative elections, 205 candidates fought for the 30-seat Senate and another 513 vied for the 64-seat House of Representatives. Women candidates numbered 108, just about 15 per cent of all the candidates. Female winners account for eight (12.5 %) in the House and five (16.7 %) in the Senate, together representing one in seven legislators. It is significant, as traditionally less than 6 per cent of all the



legislative seats were occupied by women in the past. According to the International Parliamentary Union, Liberia needs only two more percentage increase to catch up with the world average of women's representation.

"My only regret is we (women) didn't make 30 per cent of representation in the candidates or legislature," said labour activist Freeman. Backed by the Ministry of Gender Development and the Office of the Gender Advisor of the UN Mission in Liberia, women activists including Freeman have long advocated to ensure women make up 30 per cent in the selection of party candidates and sought affirmative action to reserve half of the parliamentary seats for women. Although neither of them was achieved this time, Freeman said it is the beginning of a new Liberia where more women take up leadership roles in politics. "This is a start," she said firmly. "We will ensure more women participate in the decision-making process in a new structure."

In Liberia, women have long been left out of politics, relegated solely to child-bearing and homemaking. Much worse, during the 14-year civil conflict women were routinely subjected to physical abuse and sexual violence and still struggle to recover from the trauma. Backed by UN Resolution 1325 and the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement calling for gender equality in peace-building, UNMIL's gender office has co-organized a series of workshops, forums and awareness-raising campaigns to urge Liberian women to actively participate in the electoral process as voters, party members and candidates.

"We as women can only achieve political equity when we rise above all the petty issues and get actively involved in politics," Cerue Carlo of the Women in Peace Building Network told thousands of women gathered at the Women's Day event back in March. "We'll use our votes as bargaining tools for equality, justice and economic empowerment for every Liberian woman!"

Grassroots women answered that call by registering to vote, joining election campaign teams or running for presidential and legislative offices. More than 657,000 women registered to vote in May,

outnumbering the men by 50. Despite all odds, including financial difficulties, 110 women including two presidential candidates ran for office.

Not to waste the positive efforts women had made thus far, the Gender Ministry and women's groups launched late September a final campaign calling on women to wake up early to vote. "This is a crucial time for women's history in Liberia," said Etweda Cooper, chairperson of the Liberia Women's Initiative, at the launching ceremony. "We must participate in the decision-making process. We must help create a new government that will ensure our children go to school and people have jobs... We have to ensure our hopes are realized."

On Election Day, a vast majority of registered women marched to the polling stations to vote. Taking care of children, doing house chores or working in the unofficial economic sector—none of them deterred enthusiastic female voters from participating in the first post-conflict elections.

Deddeh M. Kurboi, 28-year-old working mother of two children, stayed up all night on 10 October to line up first to cast her ballot. "Unlike men who go home to do nothing but rest after the polling,

women have so many things to do even on Election Day," she said while waiting for her turn to come. As a full-time nurse at a public hospital, she hardly finds spare time to enjoy herself, she said. "Women got to tie on waist, be strong, to carry out lots of responsibilities." For her and many other women, the responsibilities now include being part of the national politics through the elections.

Elizabeth D. Satie took her new responsibility seriously. Lulling her little baby tied on her back in a ragged colourful wrapper, the teenage mother stood in the searing sun at a polling station in the outskirts of Monrovia. "This time around, the election is everybody's business, not only men's," she said, determined to have a say in the selection of the country's new leaders. "We want a better future for our children. We're voting to help it happen."

That is a common aspiration all the women who were elected share. "We're going to make a difference, a huge difference," said Hannah Brent, junior Senator-elect for Montserrado County, which includes Liberia's capital city of Monrovia. "We're going to work for the future of our children. We'll make education and children's welfare priorities." ♦

**WOMEN POWER** Female voters came out in large numbers to choose the new government





# Volunteers Play Crucial



By Yuko Maeda

Holding a notepad and a pen in one hand and a hand radio in the other, Poo Lin Stefano-Wong walked busily through a polling place to another at a voting precinct in the capital city of Monrovia all the while giving detailed instructions to national staff.

"Please make sure they (voters) dry the ink before rubbing the finger with sands or something," she reminded an inker of the importance of eliminating any possibility of double-voting as the ink on the forefinger is the proof of a voter casting the ballot. "Please ask voters if they need any assistance before they enter the polling centre, and if yes, let them bring someone to assist them," she instructed a presiding officer when a middle-aged woman looked confused behind the voting screen. No voter was supposed to get out of a polling centre to seek assistance after receiving a

blank ballot paper and until casting the ballots.

Seeing some of the voting screens were placed near open windows of the bamboo wall, Stefano-Wong rushed to bring large sheets of paper to block the view. "It (voting) must not be seen," she explained, highlighting the need to maintain secrecy as she taped the papers. "Keep an eye on that. Nobody must spy." She ordered and walked into the next polling place. "Oh, no, don't put a pen on this table! Make sure a pen is kept away from the (blank) ballot papers." She reminded a ballot paper issuer so that no one would suspect him of marking the ballots before issuing them to voters.

For Stefano-Wong, whom the national polling staff affectionately call "Major" for her tough commanding style, keeping an eye on every aspect of the voting process is the only way to ensure the elections are free, fair and transparent. As an Electoral Support Officer with UNMIL's

Electoral Division in charge of six voting precincts in the greater Monrovia area, she could not allow any procedural neglect which might jeopardize the integrity of the polling process.

"Believe me, we are running around like an idiot," she chuckled in the car on the run-off election day. On 8 November, her day started at 3 a.m. with the delivery of "sensitive" polling materials to her six precincts from the warehouse. Once polling began at 8 a.m., she repeatedly circled around the 33 polling places in her six precincts to monitor the operation, replace broken lamps, stamps or seals with reserves at the warehouse and give on-the-spot instructions to the national staff. When night fell, she again drove around the precincts to monitor ballot-counting before retrieving the ballot papers to the warehouse and the tally sheets to the county tally centre around midnight. Still she said it was much easier than the first round national elections. "On October 11, we



# Role



**COUNTING** Poll workers count ballots under lantern light

worked 36 hours non-stop without food, water and sleep, finishing up all the work 10:30 next morning.”

Stefano-Wong was one of 183 UN Volunteers with the Mission’s Electoral Division that worked side by side with the NEC to support every aspect of the electoral process to maintain international standards. The UN Volunteers, accounting for nearly 90 per cent of the entire Electoral manpower, were literally in the forefront of the electoral exercise.

Since October 2004, scores of UN Volunteers have been engaged in all aspects of the preparations for the elections. They played a vital role in conducting the polls, helped register 1.35 million voters across the country, carried out civic education campaigns travelling on foot to the remotest villages, identified more than 1,500 registration centres and 3,070 polling stations, and trained over 18,000 national staff. Other teams of Electoral UN Volunteers also advised on legal matters,

designed ballot papers and public information materials and ran a data/tally centre where all the data of registration and polling results were processed.

“This is clearly an instance of UN Volunteers helping make history,” said Ray Kennedy, Director of the Electoral Division.

Joan Bao-In, County Electoral Advisor for the Upper Montserrado District, was part of the history-making team. On 8 November, she went around her district hopping in and out of polling centres while coordinating the movement of ESOs and

the UNMIL security force over hand radios and monitoring the polling operation. “I believe in what we’re doing,” she said at a rural polling centre. “It’s very rewarding and gives you satisfaction.”

With the elections coming to a successful conclusion, a sense of fulfilment was palpable among the Volunteer teams. “We were imparting our skills and our experience to Liberians in such an important process by setting an example,” said Stefano-Wong. “Hopefully they watched what we did and learned something from it.” ♦

## Electoral Support

**E**stablished in May 2004, the mission’s Electoral Division closely worked with the NEC with each one of the Electoral staff assigned to a national counterpart. With the three sections of Operations, External Relations and Legal and Administrative Services in its structure, the Electoral Division provided technical and operational assistance to the NEC to organize a free, fair and transparent election.

**Logistic Support:** During the electoral process, the NEC and UNMIL handled a massive volume of materials, from ballot papers to civic education posters to inkpads and cotton buds. The volume amounted to 32 truck loads, three coastal shipping movements, 28 shipping containers and 31 helicopter movements. Voting materials alone weighed 140 tons, including 21 tons of ballot papers.



**Field Coordination:** The recruitment of over 18,000 polling staff was one of the most challenging jobs UNMIL field coordinators faced in the preparation process as nearly four in five Liberians are illiterate. Despite acute shortage of training

facilities in most parts of the country, they managed to conduct training by improvising -- from borrowing a dining table from a villager or storing training materials at the store room of a local shop.

**National Tally:** After the polls, all the tally data from the 3,070 polling stations were collected at a data centre. Both NEC and UNMIL staff worked day and night to file the data in a database, cross check them with other records and processed them into the national tally. The NEC announced the progressive results at its daily press briefings at the Media Centre and through the NEC website.



**Legal Advice:** The 2005 elections were organized and conducted within the framework of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the Liberian Constitution and the Electoral Reform Law. UNMIL legal advisors jointly researched, drafted and created legal documents and instruments to govern the elections. Together with the NEC’s team of lawyers, they handled all the complaints made against the electoral process. ♦

# Spreading the Message

By Osman Benk Sankoh

Carrying out civic and voter education among a largely illiterate population, some residing in very remote parts of a country ruined by prolonged civil war, can be daunting. That was the task before UNMIL as Liberia prepared for national elections. First there

sands, became very popular. Dancers, comedians and musicians fanned out into the countryside, entertaining village and town folks but at the same time conveying crucial messages. Sporting events, especially football matches, drew in large crowds, offering a perfect setting to pass on critical messages on the election process.

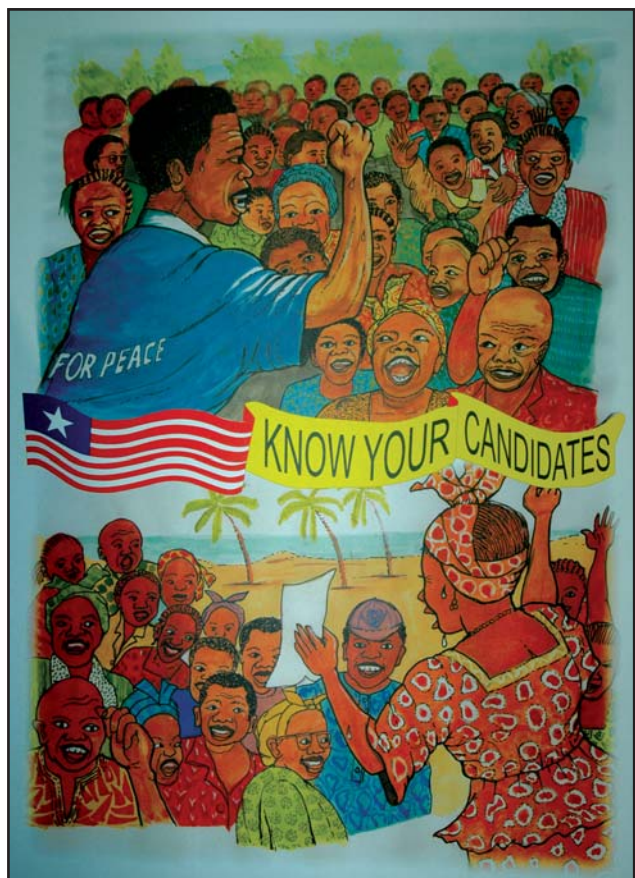
Six months leading up to the elections, the Community Outreach Unit of UNMIL's Public Information distributed 65,000 T-shirts, 245,000 flyers and 200,000 posters. The Unit also organized scores of soccer tournaments across the country and two major peace concerts, with artists and dancers from other countries in West Africa participating that attracted up to 4,000 and 12,000 persons respectively.

Some 15 groups of traditional communicators, including dance, music and comedy groups, visited at least 300 locations throughout the country during this period. Familiar with local dialects, these groups immediately connect with the rural folks and

makeshift landing pad in the town to welcome him. Boutini, together with the Barawala International Cultural Group and the Liberian Musicians Union, seized the township and its surrounding environs for four days with entertainment interspersed with messages on the importance of peace and non-violence during the elections.

The visit by the cultural groups to Zorzor was even more spectacular. Before Boutini's arrival, former combatants had declared war on all elections banners put up by UNMIL's Electoral Division and the National Elections Commission. For them, the banners had to be either those of their political parties or nothing else. The police tried to pacify them but without success. The local authorities including the Paramount Chief also tried but failed. Then came Boutini.

Following an announcement on a local radio station, the team of drummers, singers and dancers began their perform-

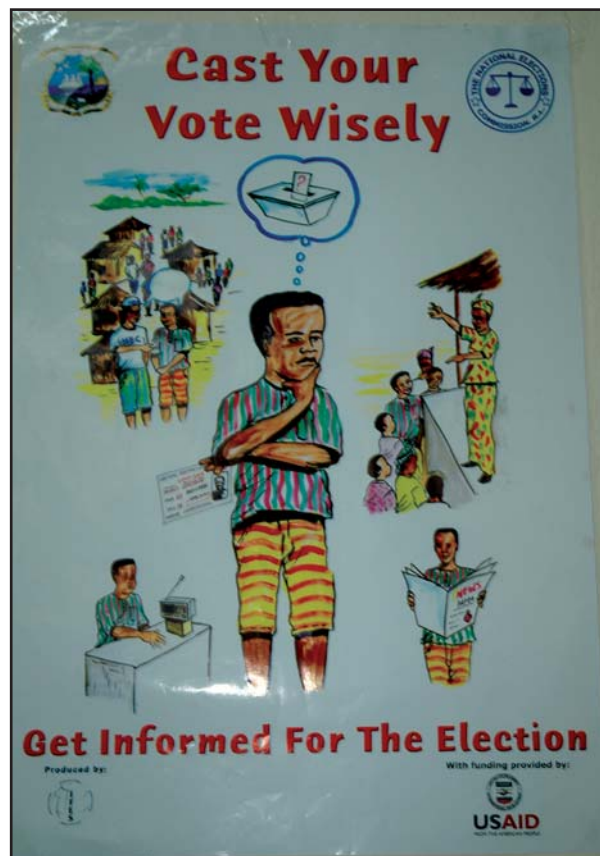


was the voter apathy as the country has been bedevilled by bad governance and people hardly had faith in elections. Even more compounding was the lack of reach by the conventional media -- newspapers with limited circulation, a handful of TV stations accessible only in the capital and a few radio stations with no national reach, excepting UNMIL's own radio.

So novel ways to reach out to the population had to be devised. T-shirts with election messages, distributed in thou-

are often transported to remote areas by helicopter due to poor road conditions.

Ace comedian George Tamba, popularly known as Boutini, has been a major asset of the Outreach Unit as his messages resonate well with the people. When he recently visited the remote township of Foya, thousands of residents stormed the





ance at a local gas station. With the audience now captivated, time was ripe for Boutini to step in with a popular Ghanaian song but now changed with words urging Liberians to go out on 11 October and vote. The song stopped abruptly after five minutes and Boutini then called on those that had removed the elections banners to place them back. “Yor’ ello ma pepul, yor please bring da banner ur na take from up here,” he said in Liberian English. That worked like magic and before the show ended two hours later, the banners were up!

Trekking for miles and sometimes crossing rivers by canoes, these traditional communicators have travelled to distant corners of Liberia -- from Zwedru on the Ivorian border to Robertsport on the Sierra Leonean border to Koindu in Lofa along the border with Guinea – spreading election messages to the largely illiterate population. ♦



**REACHING OUT** Civic education campaigners take election messages to remote villages

## The Role of Civil Affairs

By Munyaradzi Motsi

**T**he Civil Affairs Section of UNMIL played a significant part in ensuring the national elections were successful. Its involvement in the electoral process began even before the establishment of the Electoral Division as the Section was the focal point for the elections in the Mission. In that capacity, it supported the assessment visits by electoral consultants from UN headquarters by providing necessary information to enable them to make appropriate contacts and taking them to visits outside of Monrovia.

Once the Electoral Division was established, the Section’s support consisted mainly of assisting the Division with some of the basic logistical issues involved in the preparation for the election as well as in its aftermath. The most direct assistance consisted of Civil Affairs staff driving far into the bush, in extreme conditions at times, to deliver and later retrieve balloting materials. They also assisted in spreading election messages through civic

and voter education mainly by interfacing with county and other authorities.

A number of Civil Affairs officers were assigned to the Electoral Division during the elections and worked as election support officers. They backstopped field electoral support officers who had oversight functions at several voting precincts. They assisted with the supervision of the training of polling staff for the conduct of the elections, carried out quality control check of elections materials and assisted with the distribution and retrieval of non-sensitive as well as sensitive election materials during and after the elections.

On Election Day, Civil Affairs Officers also monitored the polls, including the counting of ballots, paying particular attention to the activities of polling staff in order to ensure smooth functioning of the process. They helped retrieve election results and transported them to the tallying centres and assisted in reconciling the electoral materials retrieved from the field after the elections. Another set of Civil Affairs Officers assisted with the payment

of remuneration to the electoral staff and made useful observations which could help improve the payment system in future elections.

The Civil Affairs Section, both at headquarters and in the counties, has also been engaged in political reporting, and monitoring of the process from an analytical perspective, during the campaign period and after the first round, to keep track of how parties viewed the process and to decipher whether they would ultimately accept the results. Another objective was to remind political parties about the code of conduct they had signed prior to the elections, in order to make sure that the elections were held in an environment free of politically-motivated violence.

The Civil Affairs officers have also been liaising with electoral observers on the ground, having given them background information on the various counties and the regions. Following the elections, they also met with observers in order to get their analysis of how the process had gone. ♦

# Election-packed Airwaves

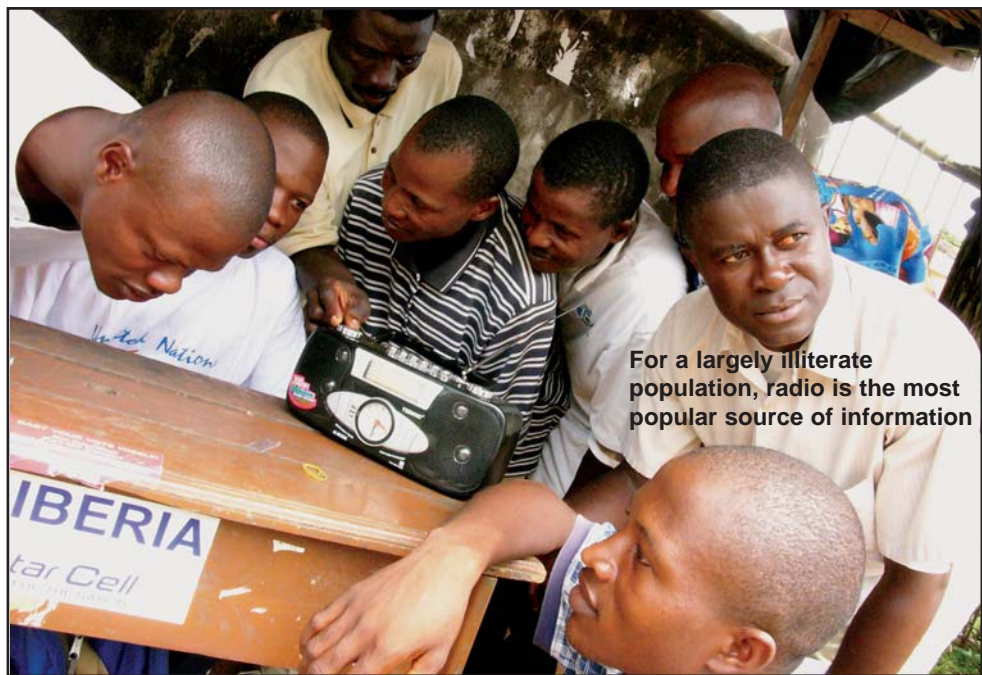
If Liberians won kudos for the massive but peaceful and orderly turnout for the national elections, much of the credit for this near miracle goes to the 24-hour radio station, UNMIL Radio, operated by the UN Mission in Liberia. For it was the Mission's radio station that packed the airwaves with information and education that galvanized Liberians to welcome the elections as an opportunity to chart a better future for their country.

UNMIL Radio's preparations for the elections were extensive. Many weeks before the polls, the station's technical crew worked tirelessly to ensure that UNMIL Radio reaches all parts of Liberia. With a national coverage under its belt, the station began focusing on airing innovative programmes that provided the information and education required to motivate Liberians at every stage of the electoral process.

Skits, dramas, live audience-participation shows, magazines, talks and discussions as well as features and documentaries were among the usual fare. The programmes had their own unique objectives with some of them encouraging the electorate to exercise their political rights on Election Day. Others gave the electorate a detailed lesson on the voting procedure or explained the importance of holding the polls in a violence-free environment.

A week before the polls, UNMIL changed its programming make-up, operating four 6-hour teams that gave 24 hours-a-day interactive broadcasting, preparing the electorate for election day. To give a sense of belonging to the people, UNMIL Radio gave the new programmes names which are common in the working dictionary of Liberians. There were programmes like "Le Put Heads Together," "What You Say,?" "Are We in the Same Camp?" "Le Lecture," "Talking Serious Thing" and "What About US?"

Through these programmes, UNMIL



For a largely illiterate population, radio is the most popular source of information

Radio was able to reach out to the majority of the registered voters and appeal to them to consider the polls as the country's interim leader Charles Gyude Bryant put it, a "judgment day" to decide the fate of their tomorrow. These appeals were made through messages from prominent international diplomats like UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and his Special Representative for Liberia, Alan Doss, US Ambassador Donald Booth and ECOWAS Chief Mediator in the Liberian peace process and former Nigerian President General Abdulsalami Abubakar. In Liberia itself, messages came from the Chairman of the National Transitional Government, Gyude Bryant, the head of the National Elections Commission, Frances Johnson-Morris, as well as religious and traditional leaders.

To provide an effective opportunity for the NEC to disseminate timely information to the people, UNMIL Radio established a studio at the Commission's headquarters. This made it possible for the station to carry live the commission's daily

press briefings. From this studio, it also provided a platform for the international and local media as well as local and international observers, political parties and candidates to comment on the electoral process.

On Election Day, UNMIL Radio deployed more than 70 reporters to different parts of the country who filed in up-to-the-minute reports on the voting process. These reports calmed tensions and helped correct anomalies by making it possible for the NEC to give the appropriate directives at the right time.

UNMIL Radio made it possible for the people to manage the electoral process through its outside broadcast programmes which moved from communities to communities in Monrovia. The people used the station to express their views on various aspects of the elections – the kind of leaders they want, the importance of unity and reconciliation and their post-conflict needs – jobs, infrastructural development, public utilities, education and health. ♦



# Economic Governance Set to Improve

By Yuko Maeda

**B**y agreeing to adopt a robust approach to economic governance and fiscal management with the signing of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) early September, Liberia has secured continued international support for its recovery and development.

GEMAP is a radical assistance package to ensure the state revenues are fully utilized for the benefit of the ordinary Liberian people. By placing international experts with binding co-signature authority in key state financial institutions, it aims at strengthening the nation's revenue and expenditure management. It also aims at putting a strong anti-corruption mechanism in place and developing local human resources to run a financially accountable government.

The three-year programme was signed on 9 September by representatives of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and the International Contact Group for Liberia (ICGL), an umbrella organization of donors including the UN, the Economic Community of West African States, the African Union, the European Commission, the US, Nigeria, Ghana, the UK, France, Germany and Sweden.

"The signing of the GEMAP is a critical step to secure further donor support," Luigi Giovine, a senior country officer of the World Bank's local branch, said at a press conference held on 14 September at the headquarters of the UN Mission in Liberia. The World Bank is an observer of the ICGL. "The implementation of GEMAP is the only condition for donor countries to maintain the current level of financial support."

Liberia had been under pressure from the international development partners tired of gross malfeasance in public institutions to clean up the stables. Donors had repeatedly expressed grave concerns over mismanagement of the state coffers, rampant corruption and absence of rule of law under the NTGL that came to power following the peace accord signed by warring

factions in August 2003. With concrete findings of high level corruption from investigations conducted by ECOWAS and the EC in late 2004 and early 2005, donors had urged the Transitional Government to tackle corruption and better manage public funds at the Copenhagen meeting of the Results Focused Transitional Framework in May. Subsequently, the ICGL proposed an economic governance action plan for Liberia.

"GEMAP is a product of a negotiated arrangement for the implementation of an economic assistance programme for Liberia," Planning and Economic Affairs Minister Christian Herbert told reporters. "It would raise the stature of the Liberian financial management system to international standards that would lead to direct support by donors to the national budget."

By intervening in key areas of the country's economic management, especially in revenue collection and expenditure, it is expected that GEMAP would improve accountability and transparency in the handling of public funds. Internationally recruited experts will sit in the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank of Liberia, and state-owned enterprises to oversee the overall process of revenue collection, the budget formulation and execution processes and the bank's internal controls and audits. All of the experts to be employed under the scheme will hold binding co-signature authority in their respective areas of work.

GEMAP goes further to intervene in the rule of law over corruption. The new scheme will lead to the establishment of an independent Anti-Corruption Commission with full prosecutorial powers, consisting of both Liberian and international commissioners to deal with serious fraud, corruption and economic crimes. The international community will send legal experts to work with Liberia's Judiciary to moni-

tor and advise on the dispensation of justice.

The programme will also help upgrade technology in financial management, introducing a new Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS), which will link core expenditure and procurement modules with other databases in debt management, aid and revenue management. The international partners will assist Liberian counterparts in capacity building so that better economic governance will take root even after the assistance programme ends. The programme is set for three years, but can be extended if Liberia fails to meet the benchmarks.

"GEMAP is designed to ensure that the revenues of the Liberian Government will be captured for the benefit of all the people of Liberia," US Ambassador Donald Booth said at the press conference. He said "leakage of resources and national budgets" was widespread in the past and it hindered the country's recovery and peace-building. "GEMAP is trying to address the root causes of the conflict," he said.

UNMIL welcomed the signing of GEMAP, calling it "one of the most significant achievements of the National Transitional Government of Liberia." The mission expects these "robust measures" would "change the quality of life of the Liberian people for the better," according to its statement issued soon after the signing.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan hinted in New York earlier in September that Liberia's success with GEMAP would lead to the country's return to the league of respectable nations. "The programme would help Liberia to meet the requirements for the lifting of the sanctions imposed on Liberia by the Security Council," he said. ♦





# Gentle, But Firm

By Ashim Choudhury

**O**n 14 Sept, less than a month before voting day, Ghanaian Battalion-3 soldiers in Freeport were rounding up a bunch of Liberian protesters who had disrupted and ransacked a polling booth! Minutes later more Ghanbatt troops were on the road in front of the port operating Plan B. They put up road blocks, flagged down and searched 'suspicious' vehicles for weapons and mischief makers. "It is possible that the group that disrupted the polling station may be getting more people and weapons to disrupt the elections. That's why we are searching the cars," one of the officers explained. Even though it was a mock exercise, the soldiers were not taking any chances with security lapses. Obviously, if such a real scenario got enacted during voting day, the Ghanaians – 850 of them, including 40 Officers – were well prepared to handle it.

When it comes to keeping law and

order the Ghanaians are very professional and never found lacking. Recall the violence in October 2004? Much of that flare up was quelled by the Ghanaian Quick Reaction Company. More recently, during the 'rebellion' in Freeport, when laid-off workers jammed the port gates, it was the Ghanaians who stopped them - not at gun point, but through reasoning and dialogue. "But for the Ghanbatt we would not have relented," one of the protesting workers said. "They listen to us," Lt. Edward Okai, a Platoon Commander at the port, asserted. Similarly, when they rounded up ex-combatants at the Firestone plantation and handed them over to the authorities, the Manager remarked: "But anybody else would have 'disciplined' them!" The Ghanaians just handed them over to the relevant authorities and felt that 'disciplining' was beyond their mandate.

The Ghanaian military pride themselves on not applying force as long as it can be avoided. "We're more gentle.... As much as possible we engage according to the terms of operations. That is why we

apply force only when there's no other alternative," says the tall and lanky Lt. Col. Nicholas Kporku, Commanding Officer, Ghanbatt-3. Prior to deployment the battalions undergo a thorough training at the Kofi Annan Institute of Peace keeping in Accra, Ghana. No wonder Ghanbatt soldiers are so professional, they have a long history in peacekeeping. Ghana was amongst the first countries in West Africa to send troops to the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia known as ECOMIL. When ECOMIL was re-hatted to become UNMIL, Ghana beefed-up its troops to a Battalion strength and so far, has contributed the third Battalion which is currently deployed in Monrovia's Freeport, Kakata, Camp Schefflin, Careysburg and Fendell under the Command of Lt. Col. Kporku.

With the approach of October elections, the frequency of Ghanaian military activity in their area of responsibility (AOR) also intensified. They were preparing for any untoward eventuality before, during and after the elections. There were many election related tasks to be performed besides providing security to the nearly 200 polling stations in their AOR. To each of these the troops would also be transporting the logistical materials such as chairs, tables and ballot boxes the day before elections. Sensitive materials like ballot papers, marker ink and poll registers would be dispatched on the very morning of election-day. "In some cases our men will have to leave for the polling stations as early as 2 a.m. to reach there before 8 a.m.," an officer claimed.

Meanwhile, Ghanbatt-3 continues to provide protection to important installations in and around Monrovia such as the water treatment plant in Bensonville, the Freeport of Monrovia, the Bong Mines, Cemenco, LPRC and the ESS warehouse that supplies food to UNMIL. Also they continue to perform their regular checkpoint duties, escorting, and cordon and search operations. The latter was one of their key tasks in the run up to the elections. "We have to make sure that all arms and ammunitions are flushed out before the critical election period," Col. Kporku had said. Obviously, their preparations had paid off, as the smooth conduct of elections proved. ♦





Executive Governor of Borno State Ali Modu Sheriff presents a special award to an outstanding cadet

Mathew Elavanalthoduka

## Nigeria Trains Liberian Police

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Some 200 Liberian police cadets stood in sweltering September heat at the Mobile Police Training College grounds in Maiduguri, capital of Nigeria's Borno State that borders Chad, Niger and Cameroon. Handpicked from among the graduates of Liberia's Police Academy, they had travelled in mid August to this remote town, 850 km northeast of capital Abuja. In a friendly gesture, Nigeria had offered a one-month specialized training to 300 members of Liberia's nascent police force, among them 22 women. Today, it's their passing-out parade, having completed their rigorous course at Nigeria's elite police training college.

A look at the course syllabus can be intimidating. Ambush/counter ambush, cordon/searches, APC manoeuvre, terrorism, disaster management... The list is almost endless. The pride of having successfully completed this rigorous regimen is writ large on their faces, covered in rivulets of sweat.

The national flags of Liberia and Nigeria flutter vigorously. A host of luminaries have already arrived to honour the achievement of the new graduates. The Executive Governor of Borno State, Sen. (Dr.) Ali Modu Sheriff, is flanked by Nigeria's Inspector General of Police, Sunday Ehindero and the Minister of State for Internal Affairs, Dr. Joseph Itotoh. Liberia's Minister of Justice and Attorney General, Kabineh Ja'neh, Acting Inspector General Joseph Kekula and UNMIL's Civilian Police Commissioner

Mohammed Alhassan had taken a Nigerian Air Force jet from Abuja to Maiduguri early in the morning to witness the proud moment.

Liberia's national anthem fills the air.

It is time for a few drills. New formations take shape in an instant. Rifles clack. Two hundred pairs of boots thump the ground in impeccable unison. Thundering applause from the audience rents the air.

"The skills you have acquired over the weeks, the new discipline you have learnt and the patience you have endured are critical elements in developing a new law-enforcement mindset in Liberia, particularly as we move to the election day a few weeks from now," Minister of Justice Kabineh Ja'neh reminds the new graduates. He thanked the Government of Nigeria for offering specialized training to members of the Liberian National Police. "The training opportunity accorded to these officers by Nigeria is bound to further consolidate peace in Liberia," he said.

"Are you happy to have undergone the training?" I ask a cadet who had just bagged a special award for outstanding performance from the Governor of Borno State. "Oh yes. Me happy. We learned many new things," he beams. "Also, to be in another country is a good experience," another cadet chips in.

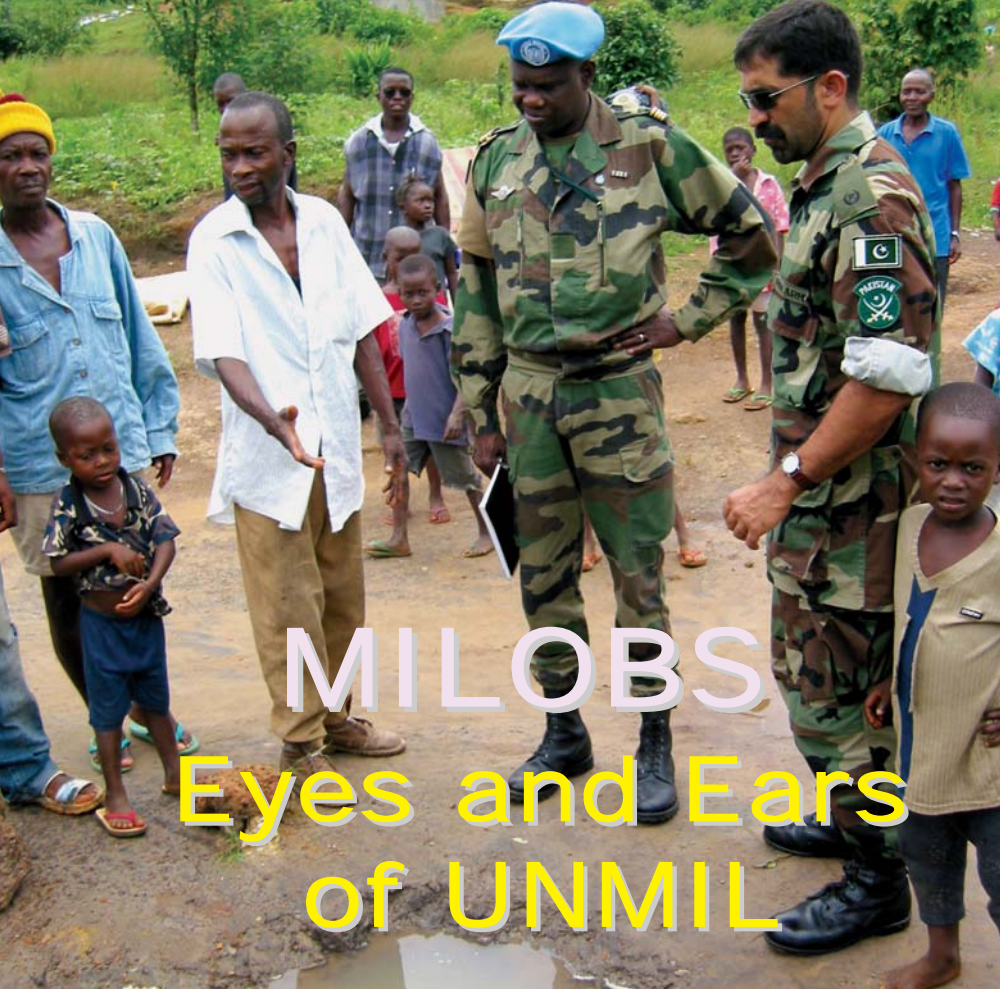
It is time for us, the delegation from Liberia, to return to Abuja. One hundred cadets, who had travelled in advance to Abuja by road, are waiting for us to return to Liberia on UNMIL's Boeing 727. In fact, they are only 94 now. Previous day, four of them had sustained injuries in a road accident on their way to Abuja and

were admitted to a hospital. Two of their colleagues are staying back to look after them. Luckily they had not suffered serious injuries, we learn.

We board the 16-seater Air Force jet for our two and a half hour flight to the Nigerian capital. Two hours into the flight, the small jet suddenly jerks violently and dips. We are almost thrown off our seats. Nothing is visible through the window as the aircraft is slicing through huge, ominously dark clouds. More jerks, more dips follow. Inside the jet, packed to full capacity, there is eerie silence. Somewhere up in the Nigerian sky a few hundred kilometers from Abuja, 16 people are invoking all the gods in the universe. The prayers seem to have reached their intended destination as our jet finally lands at Abuja airport safely. Out on the tarmac, Commissioner Alhassan gives me a hug. Shaken but relieved, we all scamper on to UNMIL's Boeing 727 for the three-hour Abuja-Monrovia leg.

Settling down in a "business class" seat and eager to banish the thoughts of the just ended scare, I pull out the book I had left half read – *Almost French* by Sarah Turnbull. The Australian author, struggling to adapt to her new life in France, recalls the words of a man she once met in the Greek island of Samos. "Once you leave your birthplace nothing is ever the same."

How true, I tell myself. Doesn't it apply to most of the UN workers around the globe? In some ways, it also applies to these Liberian police officers returning home after their short stint in a foreign country. ♦



Yuko Maeda

# MILOBS Eyes and Ears of UNMIL

By Yuko Maeda

As soon as two men in foreign military uniforms stepped off a UN car, dozens of villagers started assembling in a deteriorated community hall to see what brought them to a mostly forgotten settlement in the outskirts of Monrovia.

"We're here to listen to any problems you may have to report in a way to improve the society," said Maj. Islam Haroon from Pakistan after introducing himself to the crowd, maintaining a friendly smile on his face. "You are free to speak about anything you want to share with us."

Haroon and his partner Maj. Robane Sene from Benin visited for the first time the so-called Coca Cola Factory Community off the Monrovia-Gbarnga Highway on a sunny September day. It was a routine "community patrol" some 200 UN Military Observers (UNMOS) conduct daily around the country "to get the pulse of the overall situation" on the ground. Haroon and Sene sat on the ter-

race of the dilapidated community hall and took note of basic figures: 3-400 villagers in the settlement; about 8,000 people in the entire community; and four community-owned schools.

"The problem we face is education," said a middle-aged man stepping out of the circle. "For us, sending children to school is the biggest issue. We have many single-parent families who have no money." Urged by the officers to continue, the vocal man said most of the parents cannot afford school fees, uniforms and text books that schools impose on pupils, and explained this has something to do with high unemployment rates in the community.

Soon others chimed in with a litany of socio-economic problems they face on a daily basis. The villagers said no health clinic exists in the community and the sick are required to walk eight kilometers to the nearest private clinic. A well and a shared latrine in the settlement are no longer functional or clean enough to use, they complained. The settlement has only one dirt road connecting it to the main high-

way, half of the route impassable by regular cars. "We've written letters requesting NGOs to come. But not a single NGO has come to help us," said Village Secretary Johnson Freeman. When asked about security situation there, the villagers told the officers about a shooting incident that took place in the settlement a few nights ago and received no police response to their 911 call. They said they cannot feel safe enough unless the UN peacekeepers conduct night patrols inside the community.

"What about the up-coming elections? Do you have any concerns?" Haroon probed further. Some complained illiterate Liberians were not ready to vote for the right person and the international community was rushing to hold the elections without giving the local population enough time to study all the candidates. Others shared their mistrust toward many presidential candidates who they claimed stayed away from Liberia all the while Liberians suffered from the civil conflict and political turmoil.

The two officers expressed no judgemental comments over the villagers' opinions and grievances during their interaction that went on for more than an hour. Instead, they encouraged the gathering to speak out by ensuring a sympathetic environment. "I have nothing in my pocket to share with you," Haroon told the villagers when their discussion tailed off. "But I can promise all of you whatever concerns you have expressed today, I will put in my report and pass it to the highest position (in the mission)."

That's the major task the UNMOS play day to day. They conduct patrols to assess not only security situations on the ground but also community's living conditions, and make a daily report on the findings and write recommendations to the Force Commander and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in the UN Mission in Liberia.

They also perform liaison visits to NGOs and UN agencies to exchange information on socio-economic situations. "Military Observers are the 'eyes and ears' of SRSB and FC," says Capt. Aminu Umar, an information officer at the UNMOS headquarters. "Security is only a part of our responsibilities. We monitor the



electoral process, assess water and sanitation situations, see what UN agencies and NGOs have done to villagers and find out any other community problems.”

The first team of military observers arrived in Liberia in October 2003 which was soon deployed in Sector 1. It rapidly grew and now has 204 officers from 38 countries assigned to 13 teams that operate all over the country. The largest contributing country is Nigeria with 19 officers, followed by Bangladesh and Ethiopia with 17 officers each. Each team sends two or three patrols every day to conduct security assessment and community assessment in their areas of responsibility. “We make frequent interactions with locals to get the pulse of the overall situation,” Haroon said. “And we’re absolutely free to report whatever we observe, even things adverse to us. We’re making impartial and unbiased reports.”

When the mission focused on disarmament and demobilisation of former fighters which officially ended last year, the Military Observers were tasked to liaise with leaders of warring factions and monitor reintegration of ex-combatants. While peacekeepers disarmed more than 100,000 fighters and collected and destroyed over 28,000 weapons and some 33,000 heavy munitions, the Military Observers became custodians of arms surrendered and supervised their destruction. Since early this year, their focus had shifted to supporting the electoral process by locating less known villages, providing security assessment of the communities, and monitoring registration, civic education and political campaigns, among others.

“UNMIL is unique in a way,” says Col. Lunxing Tang, UNMOS’ Chief of Staff. “Monitor and report: that’s the essential duties we are carrying out, but here we do more. We were directly involved in the DD process last year and this year we’re helping with the elections, from registration through campaigns and polling. The election is the major task for us now.”

Back in the Coca Cola Factory community, villagers surrounded Haroon and Sene to shake hands after the meeting ended. “I appreciate their visit,” said Kazelee Ballawu, 34. “What brought them here is to let us express our concerns. It was nice.”

## UN Expert Urges Liberia Improve Human Rights Environment

By Yuko Maeda

A visiting UN human rights expert urged early October Liberia make further efforts to improve its human rights record, specifically calling for speedy establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and an independent National Human Rights Commission.

Addressing the media in Monrovia on 6 October at the end of an 11-day visit to Liberia, Dr. Charlotte Abaka, UN’s independent expert on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Liberia, said the TRC’s nine commissioners should be selected without any further delay to start its daunting work to create a better human rights environment. She noted the Commission’s work would change “a culture of impunity which is deeply imbedded in Liberian society.” She also expressed her dissatisfaction with the slow progress in establishing an independent Human Rights Commission since its ratification by the National Transitional Legislature in March. “That’s my disappointment,” she said.

Abaka was in Liberia to gather first-hand information on Liberia’s human rights situation for her updated report to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva. Arriving in Monrovia on 25 September, she met with senior officials of the UN Mission in Liberia and the National Transitional Government of Liberia as well as representatives of the diplomatic corps, UN agencies, the Economic Community of West African States, the National Elections Commission and civil society organizations. She also visited the Guthrie Rubber Plantation near Tubmanburg, one of a few rubber plantations where ex-combatants conduct illicit businesses and gross human rights violations are rampant.

“There has been tremendous improvement in civic and political rights in Liberia

for the last few months,” said Abaka who was here in April for the last time, noting security improvement in general and increased numbers of children attending school and people openly speaking about politics in particular. “That was not a situation last time I visited here,” she said. However, she pointed out that about 85 per cent of the population are still illiterate and four in five labour force remain unemployed. “Lots more needs to be done to ensure and guarantee economic, social and cultural rights of people,” she said.

Abaka’s visit came as the country was gearing up for October’s presidential and legislative elections. She welcomed the successful voter registration despite logistical and physical constraints and the peaceful political campaigns going on all over the country. “I’m very satisfied with the way the electoral process has gone so far,” she said. “I’m privileged to witness the preparations going smoothly.”

Shortly before her arrival, Liberia signed 103 international treaties in a wide range of areas including human rights at the UN Security Council in September. Abaka commended Liberia’s ratification of the treaties and urged speedy implementation these universal instruments to protect and promote individual human rights. She also praised a draft amendment to the existing Rape Law, supporting the removal of a death penalty provision and the inclusion of marital rape in the legal definition of rape. “When we talk about human rights, we must be aware of victim’s rights as well as perpetrator’s rights,” she said.

Abaka was first appointed as an independent expert on Liberia’s human rights in October 2003 and has since returned to the country every six months. This was her fourth visit.



Charlotte Abaka

By Philip Smucker

**S**apo National Park's dense and humid jungle is home to a number of endangered animal species, including the pygmy hippo, the zebra duiker, the leopard, the hairy forest elephant, and the Diana monkey. But even as UNMIL peacekeepers deployed to the remotest corners of Liberia in 2003 and 2004, thousands of illicit gold miners entered the Park to join forces with displaced persons who had set up shop there during the war.

With their shovels, sifts and portable generators, they left a path of destruction wherever they went.

Conservation International, backed by Fauna and Flora International, led the cry, "Save Sapo!" and UNMIL accepted the challenge, vowing to use its forces to help clear illegal inhabitants from the Park. Though a risky experiment, UNMIL's decision to help preserve Liberia's environment was an integral part of its original mandate to help the Transitional Government restore proper administration of the country's natural resources.

The strategy was simple: UNMIL, along with its NGO partners and Liberian counterparts, would try to persuade the gold miners to leave between May and August, 2005. They would be given a "last chance" to evacuate the Park from 18 August to 22 August 2005 assisted by UNMIL transportation, which would take them to their homes.

When the Sector IV Public Information team arrived on the scene at the start of the evacuation to make a documentary of the conservation efforts, we sought the help of persons who had previously engaged in destructive activities inside the park. Among them was a young



"Animal Rebel" leads community watch team to persuade miners to leave Sapo Park

Philip Smucker

# Saving Sapo

man, Alfonso T. Sneh, famous across the region for his penchant for hunting down and killing endangered species. As an animal hunter, whose *nom de guerre* was "Animal Rebel," Alfonso was an odd choice for this special mission, but his views held great sway within the local tribal circles.

"Now, I've really decided that I will be one of those that will be heading into the park with UNMIL to convince the people to come out," he told us on camera.

With Animal Rebel on our side, the Public Information team and the Forestry Development Authority of Liberia entered the Park at the launch of the "Evacuation" on 18 August for a seven-hour walk to our destination, locally known as "Afghanistan."

The scenes inside "Afghanistan" were sad and familiar. We found a few hundred gold miners fast at work destroying the fragile eco-system. They ripped at the roots of trees, shovelled pile after pile of soil and sifted through it for booty.

But their lives in the bush were filled with hardship; no electricity, no health care and plenty of other worse perils like snake bites, malaria and thievery.

On our last day in "Afghanistan," we resort to our secret weapon – Animal rebel – a man who has spent much of his youth destroying the park.

His own personal tale is a mirror

image of Liberia's own tragic modern history. Liberian rebels executed his father – a former judge in the city of Zwedru – on a bridge just north of Sapo National Park in the early 90s. Still a child, Alfonso fled into the forest with his high school sweetheart where he took up hunting and began raising four children from the sale and consumption of forest products – mostly wild meat.

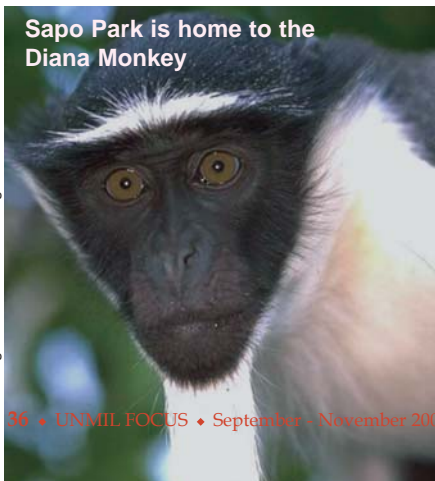
Alfonso addressed a group of former hunters with his concerns that the resources inside SAPO Park are being depleted. "As I stand before you – Alfonso T. Sneh – Animal Rebel – I was one of you," he said as he addressed a gaggle of gold miners and hunters. "What we are doing to this park is illegal. It is time for us to save Sapo Park."

Though reluctant to leave, some of the miners appear to be considering Animal's request. On the morning of our second day in the camp, the miners appear prepared to start moving out – though some still bargain for more time.

As we leave the region to piece together our documentary, not all the miners are following. Still, we believe we've crossed a crucial psychological barrier by taking our conservation concerns directly to the heart of the forest. We find out a few days later that the evacuation has been successful – beyond all expectations. The miners have left.

Sapo is Saved. ♦

Sapo Park is home to the Diana Monkey



Pierluigi Bombi/Universita degli Studi - Roma Tre



# Women and Children's Protection Unit at LNP

By Patrick Slavin

**I**t was a big day for women and children. On 2 September 2005, the foundation for a new Women and Children's Protection Unit was laid at Liberian National Police (LNP) Headquarters. The new Unit would provide services to women and child victims of sexual violence, sexual abuse, and gender-based violence. The day also saw the graduation of 25 police officers who completed three-weeks of training in the handling and management of sexual violence, sexual abuse, and gender-based violence cases. The officers, trained by the LNP and UNMIL Civilian Police, with support from UNICEF and NGOs, will serve in the new Unit.

The trained police officers will not only investigate crimes of sexual violence, sexual abuse, and gender-based violence, but also provide sensitive care to the victims of these heinous acts. "Both of these actions are 'firsts' for Liberia: it's the first law enforcement facility intended to protect the rights and needs of women and

children and it's the first time Liberia has a Women and Children's Protection Unit as part of its police force," said UNICEF Liberia Representative Angela Kearney. "UNICEF and its partners are committed to expanding these services over the next three years until the Women and Children's Protection Unit is deployed nationwide."

Nine of the newly trained officers are women, including the commander of the Women and Children Protection Section, LNP Assistant Commissioner Asatu Bah-Kenneth.

"The most important lesson we learnt is that we can't blame the victims of these crimes. We have to protect the victims," Bah-Kenneth said. Attorney Lois Brutus, President of the Association of Female Lawyers in Liberia, described the day as the culmination of more than a decade of hard work against sexual violence, sexual abuse, and gender-based violence.

Two trainers from neighbouring Sierra Leone, including Assistant Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police Kadi Fakondo, and a team of trainers from



Liberia led the certification course. "The victims of these crimes are too often powerless to protect themselves, so we need to have effective Women and Children's Protection Units not just in Liberia, but across the continent of Africa," Fakondo said. ♦

## UNDP/USAID Pledge Continued Help

By J. Wesley Washington

**T**wo of Liberia's most significant reconstruction and development partners, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Aid for International Development (USAID) recently pledged to continue responding to Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction challenges.

Recently, at the head of a joint UNDP/USAID delegation, UNDP's Country Director Steven Ursino and the USAID Director, Dr. Wilbur Thomas visited ongoing projects in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties.

The UNDP-Liberia operates one of the largest programmes in Africa synthesized around six intertwined pillars – Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR), Community-Based Recovery

(CBR), Governance, Human Rights and Protection, HIV/AIDS and Bio-diversity.

UNDP has established operational projects with 17 District Development Committees (DDCs) in three counties – Bong, Nimba and Grand Gedeh - providing skills in community mobilization, communication, priority problem diagnosis, monitoring and reporting.

Ursino said the joint team's visit was intended to coordinate and articulate the needs of communities, determine what assistance they may need to monitor the implementation of these programmes and widen their scope of activities to include income generating activities.

At a cost of over US\$ 1.7 million, UNDP has initiated 145 micro-projects that are benefiting over 600,000 rural inhabitants in 155 communities. Priority projects for the UNDP include water and sanitation, education, health, road reha-

bilitation and economic infrastructure.

As part of the US Government's strategy to address critical infrastructure needs and to rebuild the social fabric of the war-ravaged country, the USAID is funding the Liberia Community Infrastructure Program (LCIP) to create partnerships with communities. The LCIP supports the reintegration of 18,500 ex-combatants and 6,500 other war-affected persons. USAID has donated US\$35.4 million as part of the reintegration package committed to Liberia by the US Government.

"We all have to work together to consolidate peace. We could see signs of return; signs of reconstruction. Some may lack some resources and we're going to try to bridge those gaps," said USAID Director Dr. Wilbur Thomas. ♦

## Deputy Special Representative Appointed

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the appointment of Luiz Carlos da Costa as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Operations and Rule of Law on 17 August, 2005.

da Costa, a Brazilian national, is a veteran of UN peacekeeping operations. He most recently served, since June 2003, as the Director of the Logistics Support Division, Office of Mission Support in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York. Previously, da Costa was the Director of Administration at the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) from November 2002, a post which he had also held from July 2000 to August 2001. Between August 2001 and November 2002, da Costa served as Principal Officer for Change Management in the



Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.

From November 1992 to June 2000, da Costa was Chief, Personnel Management and Support Service, in the Field Administration and Logistics Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York. Prior to that, da Costa served in a number of other positions at United Nations Headquarters, including with the Office of Human Resources Management and the then Department of Conference Services, having joined the organization in 1969.

da Costa was born on 4 June, 1949. He graduated from New York University in 1978 with an M.A. in international business and political science. He is married and has two daughters.

## Annan Appoints Expert Team

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has appointed a group of legal experts to conduct a study on the best ways to ensure that United Nations staff members and experts on mission who serve in peacekeeping operations and who commit crimes during their peacekeeping assignments can be held criminally accountable in a manner consistent with due process of law.

The appointment of the Group of Experts is part of the broad package of reforms of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) to improve conduct and discipline in United Nations operations.

The project is among the wide range of recommended actions proposed by Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein, Annan's Adviser on Sexual Exploitation

and Abuse by United Nations Peacekeeping Personnel, in his report submitted to the Secretary-General and adopted by the General Assembly last June.

United Nations staff serving on peacekeeping operations have functional immunity to ensure that they are able to undertake their functions in connection with the United Nations in an independent manner. Prince Zeid's report noted that the absence of a functioning judicial system in some peacekeeping locations mean that it was not feasible to waive immunity in those jurisdictions. As a result, there is a risk that United Nations staff members and experts on mission may be effectively exempt from the consequences of criminal acts. The Group of Experts has been tasked to study the best way to deal with this issue.

The Group of Experts began work at

United Nations Headquarters in New York in October. It is expected to submit a report of its findings and recommendations to the Secretary-General in January 2006. The Secretary-General will then submit the report to the General Assembly. Funding is being provided by the Government of Norway to support the work of the Group. ♦





# LIBERIANS SPEAK

**"What are your expectations of the new government?"**



**Blagba Ponny (35)**  
**Unemployed**

"I'll expect the new government to restore electricity to the country; rehabilitate the road network; see schools reopened and children provided free education; as well as see new companies come to Liberia where we, the unemployed, will be able to find jobs."

"I would also like the new government to put into place better security and strengthen the brotherly ties between her neighbors. If we have good relationship with these countries, I think our security will be guaranteed."



**William E. Bannah (25)**  
**Petty Trader**

"Actually, I'll like this new government to provide opportunities for employment. Security is also another important issue for the new government, especially with the rising crime rate. If the new government can tackle these, we will have genuine peace and prosperity in the country."



**Eugene Carr (37)**  
**Civil Servant**

"I expect the new government to ensure good governance and accountability which are most essential. Our country has been plagued by a lot of corruption; as such, we haven't been able to develop the country. Once this is put into place, all other things will fall into place – development, education, health, security."



**Theresa Toe (50)**  
**Petty Trader**

"I would like the new government to rebuild the country and do good things."



**A.B. Brown (43)**  
**Politician**

"It's time for the Liberian people to tell the world that we are tired of war. This is why we should elect a government that is peaceful; one that will promote the image of the country and bring it back among the comity of nations."



**Jerome Kulee (27)**  
**Student**

"I would expect the in-coming president to revitalize basic social services by providing us with electricity, safe drinking water and the reconstruction of roads. I would also expect the new administration to place emphasis on education for the youth that constitute a high percentage of the illiterate population."



**Nathan Clarke (25)**  
**Petty Trader**

"We are praying that the new government will care for the poor and deliver us from the suffering."



**Jutar Davis (36)**  
**University Student**

"For me, I'll expect the government to reunify the country. Once the people are unified, they will be able to initiate their projects and programmes for development."



**Moses Elliot (77)**  
**Construction Worker**

"I would expect that whoever wins the elections should be in the interest of the Liberian people."





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