

# UNMIL FOCUS



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Liberia Reborn

Interview: Dr. Ibn Chambas

Refugee Returns Surge

Classrooms Come Alive

## From the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



**W**ith the inauguration of the new democratically elected government, Liberia has begun a new chapter in its history. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is the first woman in Africa to be elected Head of State. This is a historic moment not only for Liberia but for all of Africa.

UNMIL has been a constant companion of Liberia on its long march to peace. By maintaining security throughout the country and helping organize the national elections, UNMIL, since its deployment in October 2003, has significantly contributed to transforming Liberia from a brutal battle to a peaceful nation. With over 100,000 combatants disarmed and former warring factions disbanded, a stable security environment prevails across the nation today. State authority has been consolidated and tens of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons have returned home. Skills training programmes to reintegrate disarmed combatants into mainstream society continue. A Truth and Reconciliation Commission has been established, security sector reforms have been launched and the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) has been initiated.

These achievements have laid the founda-

tions for the return of peace and prosperity to the country. The people of Liberia now have an opportunity to transform and develop their country, endowed, as it is, with abundant natural resources and enjoying significant international goodwill.

Like any country emerging from conflict, Liberia faces formidable challenges -- economic recovery, poverty reduction, provision of basic services such as water and electricity, and ensuring effective governance as well as physical security. Other pressing priorities include reintegration of war-affected persons and former combatants, promoting human rights, rehabilitating the judicial system, and genuine social reconciliation to heal the wounds of war.

Restoring a failed state is an arduous task but past experiences have taught us that an incomplete peace is often the prelude to renewed conflict. The international community must stay the course and help the country consolidate the achievements made so far. Investing in effective peace-building efforts in Liberia will pay dividends not only to this country but also to the whole region of West Africa, which has witnessed conflict engulf neighbouring countries.

UNMIL remains committed to Liberia and looks forward to working with the new government and our international and regional partners to build on the foundations laid during the past two years.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan Doss".

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



6 With the inauguration of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, Liberia has begun a new chapter in its history. Although the new government faces daunting challenges, Liberians today are determined to take their

country on the path of peace and democracy.



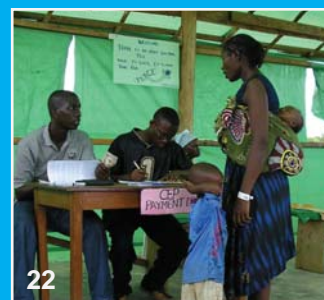
12 The Economic Community of West African States has been a major actor in Liberia's peace process. ECOWAS Executive

Secretary Dr. Ibn Chambas discusses the organization's role in Liberia and the West African region.



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President.



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Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia  
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# NEW MIND-SET, HIGH HOPES

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Some call it a revolution. Only a handful of countries in the world have seen women rising to the pinnacle of leadership. This ultimate political privilege has eluded women even in many rich and powerful countries boasting long years of democracy and the belief in the ballot.

The disbelief surrounding the election of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf as Liberia's president, and Africa's first female president, is still very much in the air. Killed, raped, enslaved and abused, women and girls in Liberia have been among the most brutalized in the world for decades. They were the principal victims of 14 years of bloodshed in the country. Can the rise of one among them to the pinnacle of their country's political leadership be any less momentous than a revolution?

That is a question many keep asking. But there are more questions. Can she deliver? Can she help her country rise from its ashes?

No one can envy the challenges facing President Johnson-Sirleaf as the leader of war-ravaged Liberia, literally reduced to ashes with no electricity or running water, high illiteracy and unemployment, and tens of thousands of young, scalded men and women living on the margins of the society after surrendering their weapons. Many Liberians still remain in displaced camps and refugee shelters in neighbouring countries. The unresolved conflict in Côte d'Ivoire, which shares a porous border with Liberia, can potentially unravel the nascent peace in the country.

Yet, Johnson-Sirleaf's electrifying speech at her inauguration was proof enough that the Harvard-educated economist is unfazed. "We will create the social and economic opportunities that will restore our people's dignity and self-worth," thundered the "Iron Lady," soon after recalling the inhumanity of confinement, the terror of attempted rape and the ostracism of exile she had herself experienced in the past. Describing Liberians as a "strong and resilient" people, she exhorted them to come together "to heal and rebuild" the nation, regardless of their

political affiliations.

The deep wounds that need healing were inflicted by men as was the mindless destruction of the economy that now needs to be built from scratch. Liberians are upbeat about having *Ma Ellen* -- a grandmother and a technocrat to boot -- to lead the healing and rebuilding efforts in the country. "She's our man," they had declared during the electioneering, dispelling doubts about any perceived gender inadequacy of their new leader who once worked as a waitress to support her education and later climbed career heights at the UN and the World Bank. No wonder many Liberians look up to Johnson-Sirleaf, a former finance minister known for her integrity, as their saviour.

"Let us be proud that we were able to ultimately rise above our intense political and other differences in a renewed determination as a people to foster dialogue instead of violence, promote unity rather than disharmony and engender hope rather than disillusionment and despair," she said at her inauguration. Words of inspiration for a people who have witnessed nothing but violence for more than a generation. A

wake-up call to a blighted continent that has the largest concentration of dictators lording over the poorest people in the world.

Johnson-Sirleaf acknowledges the international community's significant investment to bring peace to Liberia. But she knows only too well that the new-found peace cannot be consolidated and sustained without bringing development to the people for which Liberia needs continued international assistance.

Secretary-General Kofi Annan was quick to recognize the "pressing challenges" facing the country's new post-war administration. Congratulating the people of Liberia on the peaceful and transparent elections that handed down a "historic mandate" to Johnson-Sirleaf, he called on the international community to assist the new government to "consolidate its authority, build upon the stability established so far and deliver basic services to the people." Annan also assured Liberia continued support from the United Nations, which has deployed a 15,000-strong peacekeeping force in Liberia since October 2003 to help the country's transition from anarchy to peace.

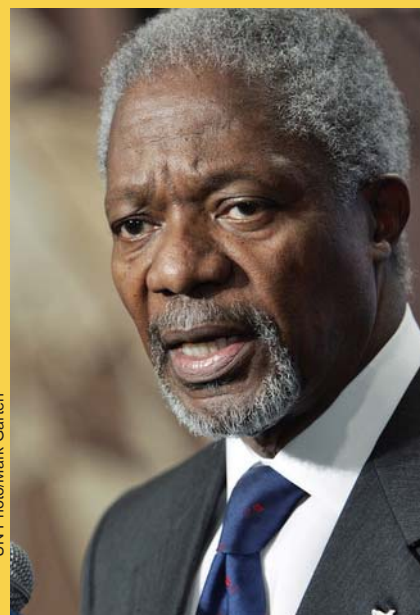
"Our immediate priority will be to consolidate peace and maintain security," says the Secretary-General's Special Representative Alan Doss, who heads the peacekeeping mission that has disarmed over 100,000 combatants and helped conduct the national elections that saw Africa's oldest republic making history by choosing a woman as their leader. "I think

## SECRETARY-GENERAL'S MESSAGE

"I extend my warmest congratulations to Ellen Johnson Sirleaf on her inauguration as President of the Republic of Liberia and Africa's first elected woman Head of State. I also congratulate the people of Liberia who, through a peaceful and transparent electoral process, have given Mrs. Johnson Sirleaf an historic mandate to lead the nation towards a future of lasting peace and stability.

The establishment of a democratically elected Government in Liberia brings to a close the two year transitional period stipulated in the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 18 August 2003. I commend Charles Gyude Bryant for his leadership of the National Transitional Government of Liberia during the transition period.

The new democratically elected Government faces a number of pressing challenges, including restructuring the security sector, strengthening economic governance, stimulating economic growth, strengthening the rule of law and the protection of human rights, consolidating State authority throughout the country and re-establishing basic services. In the face of these challenges, the people of Liberia are being given a unique opportunity to join together, to build a just and inclusive society, which assures the participation of all people,



UN Photo/Mark Garten

irrespective of political or ethnic affiliation.

I call on the international community to assist the new Government to consolidate its authority, build upon the stability established so far and deliver basic services to the people. Allow me also to assure the new Government of the continued support of the United Nations family, as Liberia lays the foundation for a better future built on peace, stability, democracy and rule of law. Today, I wish all Liberians strength and courage in the work to rebuild a nation of which all its citizens can be proud." ♦

"We have to retain a strong profile and a large footprint in Liberia until the national security institutions are ready to take over."

- Alan Doss



we have to retain a strong profile and a large footprint in Liberia until the national security institutions are ready to take over," adds Doss, anxious to dispel widespread fear that the international community may prematurely abandon Liberia without consolidating stability that will encourage badly needed investment, trade and economic opportunities.

No doubt Liberia's resolve to tread the path of peace and democracy has earned the country significant international goodwill. Coupled with *Ma Ellen* at the helm, Liberians today are palpably optimistic, eager to bury the sad chapter in their recent history and smile again. ♦

# Liberia Reborn

Amid high expectations for a better future and good governance, Liberia has entered a new era as Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf took the Presidential oath as the country's first elected female Head of State in mid-January and vowed to take the war-ravaged nation to greater heights. Faced with daunting challenges, the path ahead is unquestionably bumpy, but Liberians are eager to join hands with their international partners to revive the 158-year-old republic, **Yuko Maeda** reports.



**HELLO EVERY ONE**  
Johnson-Sirleaf arrives at the Capitol for her inauguration

**O**n 16 January, Johnson-Sirleaf stood firm on the red carpet in the courtyard of the Capitol Hill to address the nation soon after she was sworn in as Liberia's 23rd President. As she walked to the podium, she broadly smiled at thousands of cheering crowds—both international dignitaries and fellow Liberians—and for a moment looked straight ahead to the Executive Mansion which houses her presidential office before renewing her vow to lead the country's taxing reconstruction work.

"We pledge to live up to your expecta-

tions of creating a government that is attentive and responsive to your needs, your concerns and the development and progress of our country," she told the audience amidst thunderous applause.

Minutes earlier, Johnson-Sirleaf, in a cream dress and a matching headgear, had placed her hand on the Bible to take the oath while the cheering crowd greeted her with shouts of "Queen of Africa!" She won the second round of presidential ballot in November, beating soccer legend George Weah by a nearly 20 per cent lead, thus becoming the first female elected president of Liberia as well as Africa. The

UN-backed elections, which international observers widely endorsed as free, fair and transparent, marked a milestone in the peace process that began with the ECOW-AS-brokered Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2003 leading to the warring factions surrendering their weapons after 14 years of bloodshed.

"Your vote was a vote for change; a vote for peace, security and stability; and a vote for healing and leadership. We have heard you loudly, and we humbly accept your vote of confidence and your mandate!" The powerful voice of the Harvard-educated former World Bank economist

met with loud cheers of “Yes!” and “Amen!”

The historic inauguration drew wide attention to the poverty-stricken West African country of some 3 million people, attracting quite a few Heads of State from Africa as well as high-ranking officials from the world over to celebrate Liberia’s singular moment in history. Among the dignitaries who attended the ceremony were Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, Ghanaian President John Kufuor and President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa. Louise Fréchette, UN’s Deputy Secretary-General, and European Union Commissioner Louis Michel also joined the ceremony. The presence of America’s First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice signified a renewal of Liberia’s long-standing special relations with the United States.

“I urge all of us to commit ourselves to a new era of democracy in Liberia,” Johnson-Sirleaf beseeched fellow Liberians. “In our new democracy, we will tolerate even if we disagree; we will co-exist even if we consider our neighbour unfriendly, and we will find common ground on the many vexing issues that face our nation.”

Finding common ground is not an easy job in a country where mistrust and greed prevail. Liberia’s modern history is filled with ethnic hatred, violence and corruption. Due to decades of political unrest and civil strife, which came to an end just about two and a half years ago, the country is reduced to ashes with no electricity or running water in place, four out of five Liberians illiterate and unemployed and public institutions dysfunctional.

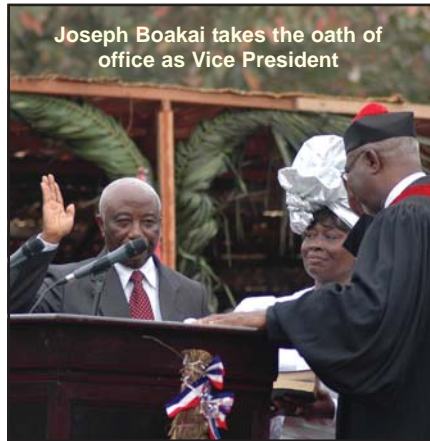
The challenges facing Liberia are tremendous. The country needs to restructure the security sector, strengthen economic governance, create jobs, institute the rule of law, protect human rights and re-establish basic public services, among others.

Liberia’s “Iron Lady”—also affectionately called “Ma Ellen”—understands all of this and seeks whatever help she can get to meet the challenges. She called on her countrymen and women to stand by her to work on national reconstruction, appealed to Liberians in the diaspora to return home to join hands with their brothers and sis-

ters, and asked the international community to provide continuous support. In exchange, she promised to make an accountable, transparent government which is inclusive, attentive and free of corruption.

“It is time for us to come together to heal and rebuild our nation,” she told the audience. “We must put Liberians back to work again and we must put our economy and financial house in order.”

In her well-constructed and comprehensive inaugural speech, Johnson-Sirleaf set the focus of her administration and mapped out the path on which she would lead the country. She vowed to fight corruption, calling it the “number one public enemy.” As a start, she promised the disclosure of assets will be a prerequisite for public officials to take office. She set a tar-



get for her first 150 days in office -- attract US\$1 billion in foreign investment, hammer out a reconstruction plan to relieve Liberia of its debt burden and restore electricity to Monrovia. She also asserted Liberia will no longer serve as fertile ground for subversion in neighbouring countries.

“Let us begin anew, moving forward into a future that is filled with hope and promise!”

Blue, red and white buntings and balloons brightened up Monrovia’s rundown buildings and pothole-ridden streets on the inauguration day. Cheerful Liberians in colourful attires took to the streets, dancing to the beat of drumming and waving the “Lone Star” national flag.

“I’m excited!” said Boima Gbee, a young man who spontaneously joined a group of street performers on Monrovia’s

main street to celebrate the inauguration. “I’m very happy because it’s a new day for Liberia!” He said he took a day off and had been on the street since early in the morning to have a glimpse of Johnson-Sirleaf travelling the road to the Capitol Hill. He believes her professional credentials would guarantee international support and a better future for the country.

“She is capable of delivering what she promised,” he said. “She has worked with all the UN, World Bank and other international institutions. She is not a novice, but a veteran in politics and development. She is up to the task.”

Like Gbee, thousands of Monrovia’s stood along the main streets for hours to show their support to the new leader. Holding a portable radio and a Liberian flag, Augustine Sumu, a 21 year-old high school student, walked hours to the outside of the Capitol Hill to get a feel of the national celebration. Sumu was among 4,000 youth who picked up brooms, spades and paintbrushes to clean up the city prior to the inauguration. “The new president told us she would work hard to make the country move forward. I believe she can do it as she promised,” he beamed.

The jubilant atmosphere was a reminder of how far the country has come in the past two years. During that period, the UN Mission in Liberia supported national efforts to achieve the transition to democracy by providing a secure environment, disarming more than 100,000 ex-combatants, facilitating the return of tens of thousands of displaced persons and refugees and helping organize the recent elections.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan hailed the inauguration of the first woman to lead an African nation. “I congratulate the people of Liberia who, through a peaceful and transparent electoral process, have given Mrs. Johnson-Sirleaf an historic mandate to lead the nation towards a future of lasting peace and stability,” he said in his statement issued from New York. Calling on the international community to assist the new government to consolidate its authority, he assured that the UN family will provide “the continued support... as Liberia lays the foundation for a better future built on peace, stability, democracy and rule of law.” ♦

# READY, SET, GO !



**BROOMS, NOT BULLETS**  
Liberian youths tidy up the Capital

By Yuko Maeda

A young woman in a white tunic and a turban sang in her native tongue while ethnic performers beat the drums and played traditional musical instruments in the courtyard of the Executive Mansion that houses the presidential office. Dressed in colourful African attires, clan chiefs from various tribes across the country circled around newly sworn-in President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and, one by one, surrendered to her tribal symbols of power—a fish net, a wood carving mask and chickens.

“You are ‘Mother of Land!’” an elder declared while a hundred clan chiefs and other traditional leaders watched the cere-

monial rituals. “We, traditional leaders, hand over the power to rule our land to you as the leader of this country!” The elder then presented a chieftain dress to Johnson-Sirleaf to complete the power-succession ritual.

The century-old ritual broke one of the most crucial traditions: the ruling power, which has been passed on from men to men for generations, was now bestowed on a female leader.

“We are happy to have her as our leader,” said Asmana Kamara, the governor of the Madingo tribe. “She is now the mother of our land and allowed to lead the country. It’s not against our traditions. We will support her as much as we can.”

The ceremonial ritual mirrors a new wave of democracy, which has begun to

take root in Liberia. With Johnson-Sirleaf taking over the national leadership, making a historic debut as the first female elected Head of State in Africa, Liberians and its international friends alike seem eager to participate in the nation-building efforts.

“We must have a new understanding,” Johnson-Sirleaf reminded fellow Liberians in her inaugural address in January, urging them to work with her to create a better country. “Your job as a citizen is to work for your family and your country. Your country’s only job is to work for you!”

Youth groups were among the first to stand up to join the new idea of participatory democracy. Nearly 4,000 young people volunteered to clean up the city prior to

the inauguration, which brought over 100 international journalists to Monrovia eager to report on Liberia's miraculous transformation to the rest of the world.

The youth volunteers, many of whom wielded guns during the civil conflict, removed more than 250 truckloads of garbage, brushed and painted roadsides, patched potholes and repainted many buildings, bridges and road signs throughout Liberia's capital. Three local youth groups initially managed to gather only 1,000 volunteers to join this "Youth in Action" initiative, but the number soon swelled to 4,000 young men and women by the end of the 10-day exercise.

"You are the future of Liberia; you are the ones who are going to stand up and take this country forward," Johnson-Sirleaf commended on their noble act while touring the city to thank the youth.

Liberians now living in other countries are also keen to return home to take part in the rebuilding of the ruined nation. Responding to a call by Johnson-Sirleaf, who appealed to overseas Liberians to return after acknowledging brain drain in various fields as a serious issue, some expatriates living abroad have joined the

new government as heads of office while others are seeking opportunities for investments and professional practice.

Refugees who fled to neighbouring countries to escape the civil war are also coming home. Within three weeks after the inauguration, around 3,000 refugees, mostly from Guinea and Sierra Leone, headed back home with the UN refugee agency's repatriation assistance. As Johnson-Sirleaf has reassured her government would do all it could to assist them to resettle, a massive flow of the remaining 187,000 registered refugees is expected in the coming months.

Johnson-Sirleaf's professional credentials in the area of development and her commitment to creating an accountable government seem to be encouraging Liberia's international partners to come forward to assist the new government in its rebuilding efforts. Since her inauguration, the Executive Mansion has been receiving visitors from international aid agencies, donor countries and major consultancy firms on a daily basis.

The European Commission pledged in January another US\$82 million aid package to Liberia for the next three years to

help develop infrastructure, the education sector and governance while the largest donor, the United States, currently supporting the restructuring of the country's security sector along with UNMIL, is seeking to funnel US\$250 in aid for the coming year.

The UN family is following suit. A visiting senior official of the World Bank recently reiterated its irreversible commitment to Liberia's reconstruction efforts with a number of "quick win" projects, especially in the area of road rehabilitation. The UN Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, pledged US\$500,000 to support the Ministry of Gender and Development and women's organizations to promote gender equality. Alan Doss, head of the peacekeeping mission, also reassured that UNMIL will stay the course to consolidate the achievements so far.

Although the challenges facing the country are immense, with the growing participation of Liberians, both domestic and overseas, and the support from its international partners, Liberia's new democracy looks set for a smooth take-off. ♦

## World Bank Promises "Quick Win" Projects

**C**ommitted to supporting Liberia's reconstruction, the World Bank intends to implement a number of "quick win" projects, a visiting senior World Bank official recently told representatives of the UN Mission in Liberia.

Robin Cleveland, Counsellor to World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz, met with Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and his deputy for Recovery and Governance, Jordan Ryan, during her three-day visit to Liberia in late January.

At the meeting, Cleveland reassured UNMIL that the World Bank is committed to providing necessary assistance to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's government to carry out the national reconstruction work with various "quick win" proj-

ects. So far, the Bank has targeted the rehabilitation of roads as a priority to enable the government to focus on better delivery of public services to communities.

Ryan, in turn, urged the Bank to consider debt relief for Liberia, the impoverished war-ravaged country that needs to tackle a national debt of US\$3.5 billion, and scale up its assistance to support the new government in improving the country's infrastructure. He also suggested the bank finance labour-intensive projects in order to create more jobs, especially for Liberia's youth. As four out of five Liberians nationwide are currently unemployed, such projects would curb the high unemployment rate, he said.

Cleveland's visit came shortly after Johnson-Sirleaf was sworn in as the first female elected president of Liberia as well

as Africa. The senior official held consultative meetings with the new President and international partners including US Ambassador Donald Booth and representatives of the European Commission and other development organizations.

In her meeting with Doss, the two exchanged their views over the challenges facing the new government and discussed structural reform, the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme and the rehabilitation of roads across the country.

During her short stay, Cleveland travelled to Margibi County and the southeastern cities of Barclayville and Harper. She was accompanied by Mats Karlsson, the Bank's Country Director for Liberia, Ghana and Sierra Leone, and Sarah Cliffe, the Programme Coordinator for Low Income Countries under Stress. ♦

# A NEW-LOOK CABINET

By J. Wesley Washington

**B**arely a day after taking the oath of office, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf began naming her cabinet team as well as officials of various ministries and parastatals. Liberians and the donor community have been anxiously waiting for the line-up of the new administration to see whether Johnson-Sirleaf will stick to her pre-election stance -- that her government will not be a repeat of past governments and that anyone selected to serve in her cabinet will have to pass three basic tests: integrity, competence and a good human rights record.

One of the earliest appointments, that of George W. Wallace, Jr. as Minister of Foreign Affairs, eloquently delivered the message Liberians have been waiting to hear. Wallace, a career diplomat, lawyer and administrator, is one of Liberia's most celebrated diplomats, having joined the then Department of State in 1954 as a



Antoinette Sayeh

cadet and rising through the ranks. His diplomatic route had seen all the important port of calls in Africa and elsewhere in the world, including the Court of St. James and the United States. Just before his appointment as the chief diplomat of the country he was a Senior Ambassador-at-Large.

At his confirmation hearing with the House of Senate Foreign Relations Committee recently, Wallace pledged to combine his experience and expertise acquired over the decades to restore Liberia's lost image on the world stage. "I'll strive to strengthen our relations with other nations, especially our neighbors, and clearing the stigma of a failed state. Our challenging task is to break out of the ring of alienation, regain our lost image and restore international confidence and credibility in our country," he said.

Another highly acclaimed appointment was that of Antoinette Sayeh as the Finance Minister. For many years, Liberia's Ministry of Finance has been

J. Wesley Washington

## Legislators Cho

By J. Wesley Washington

**L**iberia's new 94-member bicameral Legislature recently elected its leadership after an initial tussle over transfer of power from the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA), which was cobbled together as part of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. A Joint Session at Capitol Building, the seat of the Legislature, agreed on the Acting Speaker of the NTLA inducting the new members and subsequently conducting leadership elections.

The elections, held on 13 January, a few days before the Presidential inauguration, threw up some surprises.

Montserrado County's District No. 5 Representative Edwin Snowe, former son-in-law of Liberia's ex-president Charles Taylor, was elected Speaker of the 64-member House of Representatives. According to the Constitution, the Speaker ranks third in the government. In the event of both the President and Vice President being unable to function as President of Liberia, the Speaker of the House of Representatives takes over.

Grand Gedeh County Senior Senator Isaac Nyenebo, a former advisor and

Secretary-General of the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), which fought against the Taylor government from 1999 to 2003, was elected Senate President Pro Tempore. On the ticket of the National Democratic Party of Liberia (NDPL), he won the election with a single vote, 15 to 14 with one abstention, over his contender Grand Kru County Senior Senator Cletus Wotorson, a presidential candidate during the 1997 elections.

Representative Snowe, an independent candidate, defeated Montserrado County's District No. 4 Representative and long-time political activist, Dusty Wolokollie of



**Vabah Gayflor**

considered to be a symbol of entrenched corruption and mismanagement. By choosing Sayeh, the second female Finance Minister in the country, to head the critical finance portfolio, Johnson-Sirleaf seemed keen to offer Liberians a clean and accountable government in line with her branding corruption as “enemy number one.” Sayeh comes to the job with

extensive experience working at the World Bank in financial, capacity building and economic development areas. She once served as the World Bank’s Country Director in Togo, Niger and Benin.

Equipped with a Ph. D. in International and Development Economics and a Master of Law and Diplomacy, International and Development Economics, both from Fletcher School, Tufts University, in the US state of Massachusetts, Sayeh looks set to rid corruption from the corridors of the government. She termed corruption as “an economic crime” but reminded Liberians that it would take more than the government alone to fight the vice. “The problem of corruption should be tackled by all Liberians. Giving better remuneration to civil servants is one of the ways of fighting corruption,” she said.

The reappointment of Vabah Kazaku Gayflor as the Minister of Gender and Development reflects the importance the new administration attaches to gender-related issues. Liberia’s women have been the principal victims of the civil war but they have lately become a strong political force demanding their voices to be heard. Gayflor served the National Transitional government in the same capacity and has been a vocal campaigner for the advancement of women’s rights.

With the appointments of personalities with impeccable credentials to her

Cabinet, Johnson-Sirleaf has raised the bar of governance several notches higher. With bad governance cited as one of the root causes of the country’s devastating civil wars, long-suffering Liberians are today looking up to the new president for a transparent and accountable government that will use the country’s rich resources for the benefit of its citizens. ♦



**George W. Wallace, Jr.**

J. Wesley Washington

## ose Leadership

Unity Party, by 48 to 13 votes.

“We want to inform the President-elect at this time that this body, in the interest of Liberia, will work hand in hand for the betterment of our people,” the newly elected Speaker told reporters following his win. Snowe is one of four newly elected legislators who are on a United Nations Security Council Travel Ban and Assets Freeze List for “on-going ties with ex-president Charles Taylor.”

Recently, the UN enforced the ban on Snowe and three of his colleagues – Taylor’s former wife, Jewel Howard Taylor, and two former rebel commanders, Adolphus Dolo and Kai Farley – by stop-

ping them from travelling to Ghana to attend a World Bank-sponsored training session for members of Liberia’s new legislature.

When asked how he will function in light of a travel ban, Snowe said, “We will engage the international community constructively and give reasons why we think they should lift the ban. I will be appealing to them for the good of Liberia to promote true democracy in Liberia and that we are prepared to work for peace and stability in Liberia, the sub-region and the world.”

The new Speaker came to political limelight as head of the youth wing of ex-president Taylor’s National Patriotic Party.

Snowe represented the power-sharing transitional government as Managing Director of the Liberia Petroleum Refinery Company, while President Pro Tempore Nyenebo was Liberia’s Comptroller-General in the Ministry of Finance.

For the position of Deputy Speaker, Bong County’s Representative for District No. 5, Thomas Mulbah of the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC), emerged victorious against three others with 38 votes. Nimba County’s Nohn Kidau of COTOL came second with 13 votes. ♦

The 15-member regional organization, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), has been in the forefront of the quest for peace in Liberia from the very beginning of the civil conflict that began in 1989. ECOWAS is also actively involved in efforts to bring to an end conflicts raging in other parts of West Africa. The Executive Secretary of ECOWAS, **Dr. Mohamed Ibn Chambas**, was among the dignitaries who flew in to witness the inauguration of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, following peaceful and democratic elections as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement brokered by the organization in 2003. In an interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, he discusses the organization's role in the region, the issue of Charles Taylor and the elusive peace in Côte d'Ivoire.

#### What role did ECOWAS play in bringing peace to Liberia?

ECOWAS has been engaged in the search for peace in Liberia from the very outbreak of civil war in December 1989. ECOWAS sought mediation between the rebel groups and then government of President Doe by calling the first meetings between the two sides in Freetown, Sierra Leone. When all peaceful means failed at that initial phase and the conflict escalated, ECOWAS went a step further by introducing an inter-positional force - ECOMOG - to be a separation force between the government and the rebels while maintaining the political and diplomatic efforts. It was entirely a West African initiative funded by member states who volunteered troops and paid for those troops to come in [followed by] the UN and the international community down the line in conducting the elections that brought Charles Taylor to power.



Mathew Elavanalthoduka

## “DEFEND Peace Jealously..”

The expectation then was that durable peace would return to Liberia but we now know what happened. When the second civil war started with the attacks from the LURD rebels and later MODEL, ECOWAS once again took the initiative to start the peace process that led to, first and foremost, the departure of Mr. Taylor, the introduction of another ECOWAS force, ECOMIL, which was transformed into UNMIL.

Of course this was going parallel with a political and diplomatic initiative which led to the signing in Accra of the

Comprehensive Peace Accord under the Chairmanship of President John Kufour of Ghana who was Chairman of ECOWAS. All Liberian stakeholders – former government of Liberia, the rebel groups, civil society, religious groups, women's groups – came together and fashioned out the agreement which has brought us to this happy end. ECOWAS has remained a major player, a very dependable partner of the Liberian people.

**How can ECOWAS help Liberia sustain the new found peace and democracy?**

Liberia has found peace and democracy but it is still very precarious, still very fragile because Liberia has also inherited huge problems - a total collapse of state, security, public and financial sector institutions. All these need to be reconstructed. There are huge social problems because of the breakdown of economic and social infrastructure - children have not been to school for many years, health sector is in ruins, roads are destroyed. We also need to rebuild the army.

Liberia needs the continued engagement, particularly of ECOWAS and cer-

tainly the wider international community. That's why we will stay to work very closely with the new government. We will keep the ECOWAS office open here to accompany the government in this Herculean task of post-conflict reconstruction.

**Nigeria has been under immense pressure to hand over Charles Taylor to the Special Court in Sierra Leone. What is ECOWAS' position on this issue?**

The position of ECOWAS has been that the issue of Mr. Taylor should be put in the right context. It's an internationally negotiated agreement which took Mr. Taylor to Nigeria and in fact we should be very grateful to Nigeria for accepting Mr. Taylor and for bringing in the first two battalions which maintained some level of stability that allowed the peace process to take off. ECOWAS certainly does not believe that Nigeria should be harassed on the issue of Mr. Taylor.

The other factor we should take into account is that the new government in Liberia should be given time and space. It would be very unfair to put huge pressure on this new government over a very potentially destabilizing issue such as of Mr. Taylor. The ECOWAS position is a pragmatic one so we can consolidate this fragile peace which we are trying to build here in Liberia, providing this new government all the support it needs without burdening it initially with a very difficult political and diplomatic issue such as that of Mr. Taylor.

The time is not ripe to immediately raise this issue with the new government or to put unnecessary pressure on it when it should be concentrating its efforts in the initial period on forming the government, trying to get institutions functioning, trying to address urgent questions on critical sectors of the population such as the youth and former combatants who have not been properly integrated, in trying to build a new armed forces.

**So you're saying that Charles Taylor should be left to enjoy his freedom?**

I did not say that. I'm not talking about Mr. Taylor enjoying his freedom. What I'm saying is that, first, Nigeria should not be harassed on the issue of Mr. Taylor. Nigeria fulfilled its part of an international arrangement and we ought to be thankful

to Nigeria for accepting to host him. Second, the new government needs some space and time, and in my judgment it is not good to put a lot of pressure on it when it has many immediate and pressing problems.

**The continued impasse in Côte d'Ivoire's peace process is a threat to sustaining the fragile peace in Liberia and Sierra Leone. What is the involvement of ECOWAS in Côte d'Ivoire?**

ECOWAS is deeply involved in the search for peace in Côte d'Ivoire. We were the first to move in there when trouble started brewing. It is the second biggest economy in West Africa, was a major pillar of stability in the region, and we would like to see Côte d'Ivoire overcome this problem very quickly.

ECOWAS, of course, is responsible for various ceasefires. We negotiated bringing an end to the fighting between the government forces and the New Forces (Forces Nouvelle). We have been involved in peace talks and negotiations. Right now we are part of the current initiative which started with the ECOWAS Summit on 30 September 2005 that came out with the new framework for UN Resolution 1643.

We have an office in Côte d'Ivoire tracking the peace process. We are playing the facilitating role, trying to get all the Ivorians to work together in a government of national unity under the new Prime Minister Konan Banney to take the country out of the civil crisis.

**In what ways can Liberia benefit from the New Partnership for African Development, NEPAD?**

NEPAD is a framework for African development, to ensure that there is democracy, good governance, peace, stability and economic development. Liberia can work to ensure that this new peace is defended, the new stability is consolidated within the context of good governance, democracy and transparency, fighting corruption, all the things that President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has committed herself to.

It is clear to me that she's positioning Liberia to play an active role in the NEPAD framework and I think that there are very bright prospects for Liberia in moving forward. We will bring Liberia on board of all the programmes and projects related to NEPAD the country was not

involved in the past because of the conflict in order to quickly enable Liberia benefit fully.

**Now that Liberia has moved away from conflict and has embraced democracy and peace, what message do you have for the people of Liberia?**

Liberia should defend very jealously this newly won peace and democracy. Peace is essential for sustainable development and fighting poverty, for achieving any level of progress and prosperity.

Liberians have learnt their lesson, I would like to believe. They know the pain, the suffering that war can bring and has brought to their country. I'll urge them to be determined to ensure that never again would they allow their country to go through the kind of destruction, the suffering and pain they have endured.

Additionally, we need to really show a strong commitment to the country, develop it, help bring about an end to the extreme levels of poverty which we now see.

The other thing I would like to remind Liberians is that 20 years ago, this country enjoyed a per capita income of close to US\$1,000. So it has been done before; it is doable and they should get themselves shaped up so that they realize their full potential. There is no reason why this country should be in the shape which it is in.

**What progress has been achieved in relation to the setting up of a standby military force by ECOWAS?**

ECOWAS, within the context of an African standby force, has developed the strategy for a brigade -- 6,500 soldiers who can be deployed initially. We've gone as far as finding the headquarters of this brigade and various positions have already been assigned to member states. The Hastings Airfield has been handed over by the government of Sierra Leone to ECOWAS to use as a base for a logistics depot.

We enjoy very good support from a number of bilateral partners -- US, UK, France, primarily -- but also a lot of technical support from the UN system. We have received very good cooperation from UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations in the development of the concepts for the standby force. ♦

# Women: "It's Our Time!"

By Yuko Maeda

Never before have women in Liberia -- and Africa -- felt so proud of their gender. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's dramatic debut as the first female elected Head of State on the African continent has electrified women, boosting their self-esteem and inspiring their collective advancement.

"So many of you have been with me in this long road to victory," Johnson-Sirleaf told more than 250 women from around the globe who had gathered at a women's forum at Liberia's Ministry of Gender and Development one afternoon in January. "We shared misery with you. We shared struggle with you. We shared agony with you. Today, we can say: 'Our time has come.'"

"Our time" meant women's time. It's the time for women to feel valued and respected; the time to lead the country and decide on the path it takes. Women in Africa, particularly in Liberia, have long been marginalised in society for centuries. They were left out of the decision-making process that affects their lives. Discriminated against in a male-dominated society, they were restricted to child-bearing and home-making roles for generations. Much worse, during the decades of political unrest and civil strife, women were so often subjected to physical violence, gang rape and sexual slavery.

Ironically, that was the time Liberian women rose up from a child-bearer and homemaker to be the head of the household and the community. As men fought and killed, women became a symbol of survival. They needed to find food to feed the family. They needed to find shelter to let the children feel secure and a way to support each other to survive. When the war intensified in 2002, they stood up to become crusaders and mobilised thousands of women for peace prayers across the country.

Now that peace prevails, women demand to be part of the country's recon-

struction efforts. They want to heal the wounds of war and mend the broken society. They also want to be nation-builders beyond their role as peacemakers.

"Because women have long suffered too much, this time around we need our rights back," says Ester Kettor, a mother of five who took part in the women's peace movement and every week joined its mass sit-in-action on the field near the Fish Market in Monrovia to pray for peace. The sit-in peace action lasted for the past two years and ended last December. She now hopes Johnson-Sirleaf, a symbol of women's achievement, supports women's collective dream to come true. "I hope she will make our children go to school, get our husbands have a job and get paid and help women to work hard. We're ready to join her for that." That is a sentiment shared by most of Liberia's women today.

"We were waiting for too long to have a female president in Africa. Now we've got Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf!" exclaimed Aminita Bangaur Ndiaya, Senegal's former Minister of Gender and a member of the Pan-African Women Parliament, at the women's forum. She said Johnson-Sirleaf's election opened the long-closed door for women to play a leadership role and it was time for women to consolidate all the efforts to secure women's advancement. "She needs all solidarity from all women from the African continent."

Vabah Gaylor, Minister for Gender and Development, who has retained her position in the new government, hopes Johnson-Sirleaf's election is a beginning of the gender-mainstreaming movement at

international, national and grassroots levels. "We won't stop at the victory of Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf," she said at the opening of the forum. "We will make sure it will translate into social, economic, political and cultural advancement of women in the region."

At the grassroots level, Liberian women have started reinforcing their network to mainstream women in politics and development. The Women NGOs Secretariat of Liberia, an umbrella body of nearly 200 women's groups across the country, has recently reorganised its structure to help each group become more active and effective. With technical support and funding from UNMIL's Office of Gender Advisor, they are now making a strategic plan, developing its constitution and creating new programmes to build the capacity of women so that they can advocate their rights and make women's concerns reflected in the government's agenda.

"We have to have an effective organization to advocate the newly elected president to keep her promises," says Etweda Cooper, former Acting Chairman of the Secretariat who stepped down to be an advisor to the President.

As Liberian women resolutely battle for their rights and strive for a better society, Johnson-Sirleaf vows to be their role model. "We'll do what we can to make women proud; we'll do what we can to make women excel; and we'll do what we can to make women follow my foot step, so that a decade from now, there are many Madam Presidents!"



# Humanitarian Appeal Launched



Josephine Guerrero

By Yuko Maeda

**L**iberia's humanitarian actors launched early December an appeal for US\$121 million to fund humanitarian aid programmes such as immunization, food assistance and school rehabilitation for the next 12 months as the country treads the path of recovery and development.

The UN family in Liberia, the transitional government -- predecessor to President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's government -- and humanitarian partners consolidated the financial requirements to carry out their activities across the country to meet humanitarian needs through 2006, and made the joint appeal for funding.

The money is needed to provide basic social services and protection to vulnerable populations, including those affected by HIV/AIDS, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), revitalize communities and strengthen the capacity of local authorities to support the recovery process, the humanitarian actors said.

"Liberia has made tremendous progress in the political, security, social and the humanitarian fronts despite the many problems. But it is far too early to declare victory and just leave," said Alan Doss, the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, at the launch. "Humanitarian support is still urgently needed. There are hundreds of thousands

of IDPs and refugees that remain in camps that need to come home and restart their lives."

Although he acknowledged that the gap between humanitarian assistance and development is not easily bridged, he expects this appeal to be "the last major humanitarian appeal for Liberia because it is time to move forward on to recovery and development."

The Consolidated Appeal for Liberia outlines the assessment of needs in various sectors and detailed activities each of the 29 humanitarian actors plans for this year. The funding will cover 84 projects altogether, from water sanitation to education to ex-combatants' reintegration, with 25 projects in the health sector followed by 16 projects in agriculture.

In the health sector, for example, a number of UN agencies and NGOs will work on polio immunization, reproductive health education and the revitalization of primary health care services, among others. In the agriculture sector, the UN agriculture agency FAO plans to provide seeds and agricultural tools to returnees, ex-combatants and war-affected farmers in nine counties, build community-based extension capacity in 73 districts around the country and develop a National Food Security and Nutrition Strategy.

The refugee agency UNHCR is requesting US\$51 million -- the largest amount -- to help people return to their homes. Out of this, US\$37 million would be used for assisting over 16,000 Sierra

Leonean and Ivorian refugees living in Liberia, repatriating about 100,000 Liberian refugees from neighbouring countries and reintegrating and protecting the returnees, according to the appeal. The rest of the money would be spent for assistance activities to 260,000 IDPs.

"We, the humanitarian community, count on donor support to implement these projects to respond to ongoing urgent needs of the Liberian people," said Angela Kearney, head of the children's agency UNICEF. She noted the money donated will not be channelled through the local government but go directly to implementing organizations.

Per Bjerre, representative of the Monitoring and Steering Group, an umbrella body of 52 international NGOs in Liberia, fully supported the Consolidated Appeal process to coordinate humanitarian activities here and urged donors to pledge generously.

The appeal is part of the global 2006 Humanitarian Appeal of US\$4.7 billion for 18 locations worldwide, launched by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 30 November last year. Sudan is the largest requesting country with an appeal of US\$1.5 billion while the Republic of Congo asking US\$30.5 million is the smallest. The process of the Consolidated Appeal is the international community's most important tool for raising financial resources for humanitarian action and provides a unified framework for a strategic response to humanitarian needs. ♦

# Japanese Donation Benefits Liberian Children

A few days before President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was inaugurated, Liberia's long suffering children received a shot in the arm with the government of Japan contributing US\$2.25 million to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Liberia to protect the country's young population from infectious diseases, including malaria and acute respiratory infections.

"We are very grateful to the government of Japan for their continued commitment to assist Liberia's vulnerable children," said UNICEF Liberia Representative Angela Kearney, who represented the United Nations agency at an Exchange of Notes ceremony, held at the Embassy of Japan in Accra, Ghana. "This generous contribution will make an enormous difference in helping Liberia's Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and other UNICEF key partners protect hundreds of thousands of children from malaria, acute respiratory infections, measles

and diarrhea."

UNICEF will use Japan's contribution to strengthen health facilities in seven focus counties -- Bomi, Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Maryland, Montserrado, and Nimba -- and the impact is estimated to increase immunization coverage from 70 per cent to 90 per cent.

The funding is targeted to provide the Expanded Programme of Immunization (EPI) services to more than 450,000 Liberian children and training and supplies to strengthen the capacity of health care workers at the community level to treat and prevent childhood illnesses. To protect children from malaria, long lasting insecticide-treated bed nets will be distributed to every child under the age of 5 and to all pregnant women in Lofa, Grand Gedeh, and Maryland counties. Pregnant women in the three counties will also be targeted to receive two-doses of the ant-malarial drug sulfadoxine-pyrimethamine.

"These three counties were badly dam-

aged during Liberia's 14-year civil war and are now areas that are expected to have a high return of displaced population and refugees," said Japan's Ambassador to Ghana, Masamichi Ishikawa. "Consequently, my government is partnering with UNICEF to help provide basic health care services to people who need support and protection as they work to rebuild their homes and communities."

"The major cause of morbidity in Liberian children under age 5 is malaria," said Yoshiteru Uramoto, Director of UNICEF's Country Office in Japan. "Use of treated nets has been shown to reduce deaths from malaria by about one quarter. In addition to reducing maternal morbidity, pregnant women's use of treated nets helps protect infant health, as malaria contributes significantly to low birth weight. That's a major reason why the government of Japan's contribution will make such a critical difference in saving young lives in Liberia." ♦

## UN Fund Pledges \$500,000

The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) announced in January a pledge of \$500,000 to Liberia while congratulating the country on the inauguration of its new President, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first female to head an African nation. The money will be used to support Liberia's Ministry of Gender and Development and women's organisations that promote gender equality and peace in the country. Liberian women have borne the brunt of

the protracted civil war in the country as victims of rape, assault and enslavement. Some of them were forced take up weapons on behalf of one rebel faction or another.

"UNIFEM is proud to have supported the Ministry of Gender and Development, and women's organisations throughout Liberia to reach this truly historic achievement," said Noeleen Heyzer, the Fund's executive director, who attended the inauguration.

Vabah Gayflor, Liberia's reappointed Minister of Gender and Development, paid tribute to UNIFEM's long history of working with Liberian women. "They stood with us when we were mobilizing to support women's candidacy and leadership in the parliamentary and presidential elections."

UNIFEM said it will mobilize its partners to respond to Liberia's priorities in promoting gender equality. ♦

## European Commission Offers Aid

The European Commission (EC) announced in January a financial assistance package worth Euros 68.4 million (US\$ 82 million) to support the new post-war government in its recovery and development efforts for the next three years.

"As we all know, the challenges facing Ms. Johnson-Sirleaf are immense. We have to rise to them together, by stepping up the cooperation we began after the

peace agreement was signed," said Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid.

The financial assistance from the European Commission, among the largest donors to Liberia, will help revive electricity and water supplies, and will also support the country's health and education sectors that had been badly hit by the prolonged civil war.

A key player in Liberia's development,

the EC has provided the country over Euros 186.5 million (US\$ 224 million) since the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003. Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programmes, food security operations and rural development programmes are among the areas that have benefited from European Commission's assistance to the war-ravaged nation. ♦

# Annan Appoints Sanctions Experts

In late January, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed a five-member Panel of Experts to monitor the renewed sanctions regime the Security Council imposed on Liberia after receiving reports that the West African country's natural resources were not being used to benefit its people.

The latest Panel of Experts comprises Arthur Gregory Blundell of Canada as Chairman, Damien Callamand of France, Caspar Fithen of the United Kingdom, Tommy Garnett of Sierra Leone and Rajiva Bhushan Sinha of India.

In December 2005 the Security Council renewed the sanctions it had first imposed on Liberia in May 2001 and which now include timber, travel, arms and diamond embargoes. The Council also re-established the Panel of Experts to conduct follow-up assessments of the sanctions and said it would review the measures, with a view to ending them, at the request of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's new government.

The Council welcomed the determination of President Johnson-Sirleaf to meet its conditions and has encouraged her government to implement reforms, especially



UN Photo/Evan Schneider

in the management of the country's timber and diamond resources.

The Council initially approved the Liberian sanctions after determining that former President Charles Taylor's government had helped the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone fight against the government there during the country's brutal decade-long civil war.

In 2003, citing Liberia's "active support" of rebel groups which were having a destabilizing effect on West Africa, the Council renewed and expanded the sanctions, and decided the measures would remain in effect until peace was maintained, export transparency was estab-

lished and the government controlled the national forests.

A Panel of Experts appointed in July 2005 to assess the implementation and impact of the sanctions regime in Liberia noted that the requirements for lifting the embargo on Liberian rough diamonds and timber had not been met. In addition, agreements reached on iron ore exports suggested that Liberians could not rely on their government or on the international community to protect their interests. Instead, it said, the country needed transparent business negotiations. ♦

## UNMIL to Help End Sanctions

The Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia, Alan Doss, meanwhile, has called on the international community to work with the country's government to pave the way for the lifting of the sanctions banning diamond exports by putting in place the necessary mechanisms.

"Liberians are anxious to get the sanctions lifted so that people are not deprived of a legitimate source of income," he said after meeting Mark Van Bockstael, the founding chair of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme (KPCS) Working Group of Diamond Experts, and Leslie Wright, a KPCS consulting geologist. The meeting took place in Monrovia early February.

Expressing his appreciation for the



efforts made by the Kimberly Process in Liberia, Doss said that UNMIL would continue to help the government by providing air support for surveillance activities in the mining areas. UNMIL is also prepared to assist the Land, Mines and Energy Ministry in the mapping of mining

areas, he noted.

Van Bockstael, who originated the global certificate scheme for diamonds, underlined the importance of carrying out a geological assessment in Liberia and putting in place the tracking and internal control system which would also prevent diamonds smuggled from other countries from passing through Liberia.

The KPCS delegation was in Liberia to help the government meet the benchmarks for compliance and eventual membership with the scheme, a necessary step to lift the UN Security Council sanctions on the export of Liberian rough diamonds. The sanctions have been in place since 2001 and are reviewed by the Security Council every six months, most recently on 20 December. ♦

# Inauguration P

First Lady of the United States, Laura Bush, and daughter Barbara touch down in Monrovia



A French delegation arrives at Roberts International Airport



President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, accompanied by his wife, flies in to join the inauguration of the first female Head of State in Africa



Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo arrives



President John Kufuor of Ghana is welcomed on arrival



Airport arrival photos  
by Michal Broza/UNMIL

# Photo Gallery



US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and First Lady Laura Bush at the Capitol



Soccer legend George Weah keenly follows the inauguration proceedings



Chief Justice Henry Cooper greets the audience



UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette flanked by Presidents Obasanjo and Mbeki

# “Rule of Law Faces Immense Challenges...”

Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General **Luiz Carlos da Costa**, a veteran of several UN peacekeeping missions, is in charge of Operations and Rule of Law dockets at UNMIL. In an interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, he discusses the challenges facing Liberia in reintroducing respect for the Rule of Law after several years of civil strife, UNMIL’s efforts to nurture a culture of human rights in the country and the role the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can play in healing the wounds of war.

**As the Secretary-General’s Deputy Special Representative in Liberia, you are tasked to help improve the Rule of Law situation in a country that has just begun recovering from a prolonged civil strife. What are the major challenges in this area?**

There has been a total collapse of law enforcement agencies in Liberia during the 14 years of civil war, so the challenges to reintroduce respect for Rule of Law in the country are immense. Courts didn’t work, law enforcers themselves had become law-breakers, might was right. It was like a Hobbesian scenario.

UNMIL is currently involved in restructuring and reforming the police and rehabilitating the judicial and corrections systems. We are also in the forefront of protecting and promoting human rights in addition to our efforts to help Liberia stamp out gender-based violence and discrimination.

**How is UNMIL helping rebuild a professional police in Liberia?**

UNMIL’s mandate includes building a professional, well-trained police force in Liberia as part of a broad security sector reform. We began the training programme

for a new police force in July 2004 at the newly reopened National Police Academy in Paynesville, Monrovia. More than 2,000 police recruits have so far undergone training and the majority of them are already deployed throughout the country. These newly trained police played a significant part in maintaining security during the recent elections. We continue monitoring and mentoring them. Members of the

Liberian National Police and UNMIL Civilian Police conduct joint patrols regularly. Our target is to have a properly trained and equipped police force of 3,500 men and women who will uphold international policing standards and respect for human rights.

Simultaneously, we have also been assisting Liberian authorities to rehabilitate and reopen the dilapidated police stations throughout the country. So far, 62 police stations have been renovated and re-commissioned, covering all the 15 counties in the country. With help from UNMIL, UNICEF and NGOs, Liberia now has a Women and Children Protection Unit. This must be looked at against the fact that women and children constituted the most vulnerable segment of the Liberian society during the civil war.

However, Liberia’s national police face severe restrictions, of resources, infrastructure, logistics and equipment. A majority of police facilities are in a state of disrepair and the availability of basic



requirements and supplies is minimal.

Security sector reform also has another critical component - that of restructuring and rebuilding a new armed forces for Liberia. A professionally trained army that will be fully subjected to civilian control. We are still in the early stages of the restructuring and rebuilding of the army, but the United States has taken the lead in this area and committed the badly needed funds for this.

**Liberia is a country where human rights have been trampled upon for many years, where only jungle laws prevailed. What is the role of UNMIL in helping Liberia develop a human rights culture?**

This is indeed a huge task. Implementing human rights in a post-conflict situation is by itself a major challenge. In the case of Liberia, this is even more due to the long years of human rights violations carried out with impunity. To begin with, this is an issue of changing the whole mind-set of a people. The majority of them have seen only war in their entire lives.

UNMIL has supported the creation of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, which was adopted by the National Transitional Assembly in March last year. This was part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The Commission will monitor Liberia's compliance with international human rights standards, promote human rights education and work with national and international partners to promote human rights protection in the country. UNMIL will continue supporting the effective operation of the Commission.

Another significant achievement in the human rights area is the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the country. In both these cases -- TRC and the Human Rights Commission -- UNMIL worked very hard with the National Transitional Government to bring these institutions into a reality.

In addition, by providing human rights training as part of the curriculum, we are

instilling respect for human rights among the newly trained police force in the country. UNMIL has also started a bi-monthly report on the human rights situation in Liberia, which has received widespread media coverage. We have human rights monitors assigned to the regions and we also provide support to human rights victims in various ways.



**Recruits train at the Police Academy**

**Can the TRC help end the culture of impunity in this country and foster reconciliation?**

The TRC is a critical institution envisaged in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and is designed to address the issues of impunity. In addition, it will also address the root causes of the Liberian crisis and recommend measures to rehabilitate the victims of human rights violations. It will conduct thorough investigations into gross human rights violations in the country starting from January 1979. It can play an invaluable role in healing the wounds of war and bring about reconciliation in the society. Already, all the nine Commissioners of the TRC have been appointed and the Commission is set to start its work very soon. UNMIL will continue to offer full support for the work of the Commission.

**In what way is the international community assisting the reform of Liberia's**

**Judiciary?**

Liberia's Judiciary has been starved of funding for many years. Members of the Judiciary have been paid pitifully low salaries, and some of them haven't received their salaries for many years. The situation has been exacerbated by the lack of qualified lawyers, prosecutors and defence counsel. There are only some 200 lawyers in the entire country, with just about 50 in the private bar. So many magisterial and specialized courts continue to be staffed by unqualified personnel.

UNMIL has helped in the completion of the vetting process and commissioning of judicial officers for all circuit, specialized and magisterial courts. We have also helped the reopening of most of the courts in the counties. Under UNMIL's Quick Impact Projects, 13 courts have been earmarked for renovation and currently six such projects are underway with two of them already completed.

UNMIL has also assisted the national authorities in bringing about legislative reforms such as the landmark Rape Law, Human Trafficking Law, the Jury Law, and a law offering the Judiciary financial autonomy. UNMIL has also conducted several training workshops for prosecutors, county attorneys, solicitors, court clerks and legal aid providers in addition to providing basic assistance to the Louise Arthur Law School.

The challenges in the judicial sector remain serious. Without an effectively functioning judiciary, law-enforcement, human rights protection and corrections cannot function properly.

**Corruption has been a running theme in Liberia's recent history, including even in the Transitional Government. Is UNMIL supporting efforts to root out corruption that is so ingrained in the society?**

Corruption undermines the Rule of Law. We are particularly encouraged by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf naming corruption as "enemy number one." UNMIL will do everything possible to assist the new government in stamping out corruption in the country.



# REFUGEE RETURNS

By Annette Rehr

**T**he day Thomas Kamara returned with his family from a refugee camp in Guinea back to Liberia was one of the brightest days in his life. After having lived for 13 years in the neighbouring country where two of his children had been born, he reached Voinjama in May 2005 to start life anew.

"I'm the happiest man today. I'm home. I came back, because I want to be part of the new society which is growing in Liberia. We need to do something for our country," he said on arrival, tears welling up in his eyes. While his family settled temporarily with relatives in Lofa County, the trained social worker headed to Monrovia to look for a job.

Eight months later he is now occupied with two different jobs and has brought his beloved ones to the capital. "With the new government, I'm confident that things will move on. Though it's still difficult, I never regret that we came back. It was the right thing to do," says Thomas when asked how he was faring.

Kamara is only one of nearly 47,000 Liberian refugees\* who dared to start

anew by coming back to Liberia through UNHCR's voluntary repatriation operation that began in October 2004. While most of the 340,000 Liberian refugees to be repatriated within a three-year time-frame expressed in 2005 their desire to await the outcome of the elections first before making a definite decision, the repatriation movement has witnessed a considerable surge since the new government has been installed. Within just three weeks after the inauguration of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, close to 3,000 refugees, mainly from Guinea and Sierra Leone, have headed back home.

Almost 50 per cent of all these returnees went back to Lofa County, making it UNHCR's top area of return, followed by Maryland, Nimba and Montserrado.

Taking advantage of the dry season and passable roads as well as the planting season which goes until April, the refugee agency has set every mechanism in place to repatriate as many refugees as possible within the first half of 2006. About 100,000 refugees are expected to come back during this year, including spontaneous returnees. UNHCR is currently planning to open new satellite

offices in Foya in Lofa County, and Fishtown in River Gee, to assist the arriving returnees.

Meanwhile, urban refugees from Nigeria and Ghana also are registering in increasing numbers for repatriation. With Master's degrees in their pockets, acquired during their years in exile, they come back by chartered flights.

Given the high diversity within the returnee population, ranging from farmers going back to remote areas to skilled teachers and nurses, UNHCR has established a variety of reintegration programmes aimed at making communities self-sufficient again. Community Empowerment Projects (CEPs), including agricultural projects, like swamp rice, cassava or coffee plantations, skills training, micro-loan programmes, income generating activities, capacity building for women, shelter for the vulnerable population, water and sanitation projects as well as the reconstruction of schools, clinics and health centers, will therefore continue to be of high priority to the refugee agency. Up to today, over 1,000 such projects have been completed in major areas of return. Since communities do decide themselves what they need and are



# SURGE

involved from the planning stage to the completion of the projects, sustainability is guaranteed.

Nyamah Weedor, for example, a single mother of two, approached UNHCR's implementing partner, American Refugee Committee, in early 2005. The returnee from Guinea, where she had spent three years in a refugee camp in Kissidougou, wanted to engage in a small business. Together with six other women she proposed a business plan and applied for a micro loan. Today she has established a rice shop at Duala market, Monrovia, while her friends sell toiletries, second-

hand clothes and household articles nearby. Weedor's rice sells so well that she now thinks of expanding her business and move into a bigger place. "I make enough profit to feed my children, send them to school and to put some money aside," she says. "Without the start-up help of the micro loan, it would have been impossible."

While home -coming Liberians receive immediate assistance, counselling and their return package, comprising non-food items, travel cash grants and the first tranche of a four-month's food ration upon arrival in the Transit Centres, UNHCR's protection monitoring and the implementation of reintegration programmes carry on even long after their return. Currently, the agency, in close cooperation with its implementing partners and together with members of the Joint Action Plan, UNICEF, UNDP and WFP, is working out strategies to have tailored reintegration packages ready as soon as skilled individuals, like teachers, arrive. "Collaboration with UN agencies and other partners will ensure success of UNHCR's efforts and will be subsumed under the longer-term development of Liberia," says UNHCR Representative Mengesha Kebede, stressing the need for pulling together.

Major reconstruction programmes, like the rehabilitation of roads and bridges, are also going on. In 2005 alone, UNHCR rehabilitated 230 km of roads and 24 bridges, mostly on the main repatriation axis. A 75 km-long road linking Saclepea to Logatoo on the Ivorian border will be finished in February.

Liberia's internally displaced persons

(IDPs) do of course benefit likewise from UNHCR's reintegration programmes. Out of 314,000 IDPs, which the agency had committed itself to assisting through the inter-agency collaborative approach, over 282,000 have already returned to their places of origin. Once back home, former IDPs, returnees and the residing local community are encouraged to engage in a wide range of activities UNHCR's Implementing Partners offer. Such activities also aim to enhance the reconciliation process between Liberians.

One good example is the town of Balama in Bong County where returnees, former IDPs and the local community who remained during the war are joining hands to rebuild a UNHCR funded primary school, which will benefit children from several nearby villages. "The war is over," town chief John Golokay says. "Now we all must help together, to rebuild our country."

That's exactly the mind-set Liberia's newly elected President is encouraging everyone to emulate. In a statement addressed to the remaining Liberian refugees and IDPs, disseminated through UNHCR's mass information campaign, Johnson-Sirleaf promised to work closely with UNHCR to create a viable environment for returnees to cohabit peacefully: "Please be assured that your government wants you home," she called Liberians in exile. "Your other compatriots are awaiting you to join hands with them in the rebuilding of our nation." ♦

*\* Figures as of 2 February 2006*

*The writer is a Public Information Officer, UNHCR, Liberia*

## Violence Affects Refugees

Attacks in mid-January on the offices of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Côte d'Ivoire left 10,000 Liberians who had fled their country without assistance. As violence struck Guiglo, near the Liberian border, the UN agency's office there was destroyed after protesters looted the premises and set fire to the building.

"All files were lost, as well as five cars, one motorcycle and three genera-

tors. Other UN agencies and several international NGOs have suffered similar losses. Warehouses containing relief items and food were also looted," spokesman Ron Redmond said.

The agency was forced to evacuate its staff from the area after violence spread as hundreds of protesters converged on the UN compound. Those incidents followed similar protests against the UN in Abidjan.

"UNHCR is shocked at the level of the violence and saddened that its staff and

other UN and humanitarian workers were targeted," Mr. Redmond said. "UNHCR has been in Guiglo for more than 10 years, working on behalf of refugees and the local host population."

He voiced concern that the agency has no staff left on the ground to assist more than 10,000 Liberian refugees, while relief items -- including food -- destined for them have been looted, as have the vehicles needed to reach beneficiaries and distribute aid. ♦

# MAKING LIBERIA GUN-FREE

By Elma Shaw

**T**wo thousand weapons collected in the past two years. That's what a group of young Liberians have done in a door-to-door campaign to rid Liberian neighbourhoods of arms left over from the back to back civil wars. They call themselves Liberians United to Expose Hidden Weapons (LUEHW), and their work has won kudos from the UNDP Small Arms Control Programme, UNMIL security forces and Landmine Action. Together, these organizations are working to make Liberia a gun-free society.

LUEHW was recently chosen by the UNDP Small Arms Control Programme to help create awareness for the Community Arms Collection for Development (CACD) project in the Bain-Garr Chiefdom of Nimba County. The CACD

is part of a comprehensive plan to rid Liberia of illicit weapons. Participating chiefdoms have until June 2006 to return remaining weapons in exchange for funds from the Small Arms Control Programme for community development projects. Other components of the plan are the revision of the 1956 Firearms Traffic Act, the establishment of a National Commission on Small Arms, and a national public awareness campaign on the dangers of small arms.

The CACD was launched in the three counties of Lofa, Nimba and Grand Gedeh in January. These counties were chosen for the pilot programme because they served as major battlegrounds in the just ended civil war, and because they share borders with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire, all of which have a recent history of internal conflicts.

Fear is one of the challenges some-

times faced by the UNDP Small Arms Control Programme and its partners when it comes to convincing people to turn in their weapons. Official disarmament and demobilization ended in October 2004, and those who still possess weapons fear they could land in trouble with the authorities if they come out with them in public.

Another challenge, according to community members of the management committees set up to oversee the arms for development projects, is the tendency of people to hold out for individual incentives. Some of the ex-combatants and gun-owners want to be paid for their guns, just as those who participated in the official disarmament process were. Especially stubborn are those who tried to turn in weapons during the amnesty but were turned away, either because their weapons were non-functional, or because the programme ended despite the fact that the arms were still coming in.

Wilfred Kollie is one of those who hung on to his gun – a 45mm pistol – in the hopes of receiving something in return. "In the end I gave it up for the sake of the community," he said enthusiastically. Since turning in the pistol last June, he works with LUEHW to reach others who still have weapons.

Convincing people to give up their arms is not always an easy task. It takes patience, diplomacy and attention to weapon-safety issues. Although some members of the awareness teams and project management committees are former fighters who say they know how to handle them, bombs, grenades and unknown weapons are not to be touched or moved.

This is where UNMIL security forces and Landmine Action come in. Both work as technical partners with the UNDP Small Arms Control Programme to help collect and destroy small arms, light weapons and explosive devices. Landmine Action provides the green collection boxes – a large



**NO MORE GUNS**  
Weapons are destroyed  
after collection

Jasper Kai

one for guns and a small one for ammunition. Together with members of LUEHW, they demonstrate proper use of the boxes, help communities choose effective sites for their boxes and educate people about the proper procedure for dealing with explosives. Their work makes people confident that development and poverty reduction will be a consequence of arms removal from their communities. When an explosive device is found or ready to be turned in by its owner, the nearby UNMIL battalion is informed by the Liberia National Police. The area is soon fenced off, and red flags are placed around the perimeter to warn civilians to keep out. The UNMIL battalion's explosive ordnance experts are sent to take the device away as soon as possible, and the weapon is detonated safely.

On the first day of the CACD launch in Foya City, Lofa County, the UNDP Small Arms Control Programme staff was besieged by citizens who had weapons and explosives to turn in. Unlike their Ganta counterparts, the Foya citizens had no fear of arrest and requested no individual awards for doing what they saw as a service to their community and to their country. Lt. Zia ul Haq of Pakistan Battalion IV spent two busy days going with his troops to secure sites where explosives were uncovered. Among them were six RPG M-57s, several grenades and a Bangalore torpedo. In addition, six guns (five AK-MS and one Chinese 81-1), three magazines, 42 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition.

"This is the best time for the arms collection process," said Nick Sanders of Landmine Action. "It needs to be done while UNMIL is still here, otherwise children and farmers are going to be the unfortunate victims in this post-conflict situation."

Mansoor Sadiq Rana, Captain of Pakistan Battalion IV, was also pleased with the process. "This has exceeded my expectations," he said. "Usually it would take four or five months to recover what UNDP Small Arms has gotten in just two days." ♦

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*The writer is a National Media Consultant, UNDP Small Arms Control Programme*

# RECRUITMENT BEGINS FOR NEW ARMY

By J. Wesley Washington

**K**eenly aspiring to serve and defend Liberia, hundreds of unemployed youths, ex-combatants and even former members of the defunct Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) thronged a former military barracks in Monrovia mid January as a nationwide recruitment exercise for Liberia's new national army began.

"I've always wanted to join the army, but I didn't want to join an untrained army that was basically engaged in looting, vandalism and human rights abuses. Now that this army will be trained to international standards, I want to be a part of it," said Peter Tweh, 27, standing patiently in the queue. He recently returned to Liberia after living in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana as a refugee for 10 years.

Like Tweh, hundreds of men and women braved the scorching sun and cold nights on the concrete pavement outside the Barclay Training Center on the United Nations Drive. Liberians who fought against each other just a few years ago are now vying for a chance to serve together in a new restructured army.

Initial days saw brawls breaking out among enthusiastic applicants attempting to reach the registration desk, forcing police intervention to pacify the crowd. But a change in procedure soon helped improve the registration exercise considerably. Applicants were issued with admission tickets indicating the date they were expected to report for registration and initial tests in batches of 120, two days a week.

The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement among parties to the conflict called for the restructuring of the AFL which became a factional army after the start of the civil uprising in December

1989. The UN Security Council Resolution 1509 mandated UNMIL to assist the creation of a professional army for Liberia as part of a broad security sector reform.

The United States government has taken the lead in restructuring Liberia's armed forces. In early 2005, the US government contracted the project to a privately owned security company, DynCorp, a US-based government contractor. It will pay US\$100 million to DynCorp over three years to assist with recruiting, training and equipping of a new army of some 2,000 soldiers, including 94 civil servants for the Defence Ministry.

Initially planned for 4,000 strong, the size of the new army was scaled down due to government's budgetary constraints. The restructured army will reflect ethnic, religious and geographical balance and will include new recruits as well as eligible former soldiers. Applicants must have a minimum of a high school education, be able to pass an aptitude and physical fitness test, a medical exam, including an HIV and illegal drugs use test, and also must have a clean human rights record. All applicants, including the former soldiers will be put through a strict vetting process, which may run throughout the one-year mandatory probation for all recruits.

"Liberians who have been witnesses to or victims of any human rights violations by any of the applicants can call hotline numbers that will be published so that the allegations can be investigated," said a spokesperson for DynCorp.

Training is expected to be held over a 15-week period. Recruits will learn basic military rules and regulations, skills and techniques, and how to use weapons. They will also take courses in the Rule of Law, the Constitution, human rights and gender issues, while simultaneously attending classes to bolster their educational level.

A photograph of Cuttington University's main building, a long, single-story structure with a light-colored facade and a series of windows. In front of the building, three tall flagpoles stand, each flying a flag: the United States flag, the flag of Liberia, and the flag of the United Nations. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The title "Regaining the 'Cuttington Edge'" is overlaid on the image in large, stylized letters. "Regaining the" is in yellow with a black outline, and "'Cuttington Edge'" is in green with a black outline.

# Regaining the "Cuttington Edge"

By Serif Turgut

**T**wo years after Liberia's prolonged civil strife ended, the once famous Cuttington University is back to life and its sprawling 1,500-acre campus, dotted with tropical trees, is bustling with activity. The university is located just outside of Gbarnga, which Liberians call the second capital, in part because of the university, the only institution of higher learning outside of Monrovia.

The only private university in West and sub-Saharan Africa for decades, Cuttington was founded in 1889. It is the alma mater of prominent Liberian and African figures. At one time, just under half of Liberia's civil servants were Cuttington alumni. The majority of the country's doctors also graduated from this reputed institution. Numerous international scholars have graced the university's faculty. After graduation, many of its international and local students went abroad for further studies, mainly in the United States.

However, Cuttington's history could not save it from the war. It was closed in 1990 and was soon converted into a training ground by rebels belonging to Charles

Taylor's National Patriotic Front. When it reopened in 1998, during the brief respite from the civil war, Cuttington was a shell of its former self. Most of the professors had fled.

"All the international people and Liberians with Ph.Ds ran away. They may now be filtering back slowly. Cuttington is improving to become the very international university it used to be but it is very hard to rebuild academic excellence. That's our biggest struggle," says Professor James Gray, the Dean of Social Sciences and a former Peace Corps volunteer. The university is currently recruiting academicians from abroad while encouraging former Liberian instructors to return.

Cuttington's needs are not restricted to a better academic faculty. Rebel combatants had looted everything, including the Africana Museum collection. Several of the university's buildings were also totally destroyed including the libraries, laboratories, dormitories and classrooms.

"One of the things we ask the international community to help us with is to rebuild our laboratories. When we came back as the war ended, we had essentially a soup of toxic chemicals, dumped all over the chemistry labs. We had to clean our

laboratories and bury the chemicals here behind the campus. Our laboratories are not anywhere near international standards," adds Gray.

It was not until UNMIL peacekeepers established security in Bong County in 2004 that Cuttington was able to reopen the campus and begin its rebuilding. UNMIL also deployed Military Observers on the campus to ensure security.

"We feel more secure now with UNMIL," University President Henrique F. Tokpa says. "Quick impact projects, USAID and the Episcopal Church helped to build our roofs and buildings. We have several UN projects, like the UNICEF teacher training and certification programmes as well as projects supported by UNDP's Joint Implementation Unit."

The university has welcomed into its classrooms some of the very ex-combatants who had contributed to its decimation. Currently, Cuttington has 180 former combatants attending a UNDP-JIU funded agricultural training, producing vegetables and establishing chicken farms at the large university campus. In addition, 240 former fighters attend regular academic programmes with UNDP funding their tuition. "There is almost no difference between ex-combatants and regular students. Most



**NEW BEGINNING**  
Classes have resumed  
at Cuttington

people don't know who is who. We treat them equally," says Gray.

Cuttington is also the first university in Liberia which has an Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution. "The Institute is Cuttington's response to the instability in which Liberia has found itself since 1980. Beyond that, it is an example for how peace and stability can come to West Africa. The institute seeks to train scholars, researchers, decision makers catalyzing for peace," says its Director Dr. Joseph Saye Guannu, a historian and a former Liberian Ambassador to the U.S.

"We have a strong relationship with the University for Peace, with its headquarters in Costa Rica. It is a UN institution. They are supporting us in building our capacity. They send us to conferences to build our capacity and arrange workshops. Because we are connected to the UN University, we receive substantial assistance from UNDP and UNESCO. They give us books and cassettes. We have also received assistance from USAID," Guannu continues.

There is still a long way to go for this once famous institution. There is an acute shortage of course books. The university lacks even the most basic services like photocopying machines.

"Earlier, most of our grants and books were coming from the government. But now we don't receive any government support. Eighty per cent of our income is coming from the students' tuition, which is very hard to collect now," says Tokpa, himself a Cuttington graduate.

Cuttington University today has 1,549 students, nearly half of them female. All of them have dreams of a bright future. They

hope UNMIL will stay long in Liberia to offer them security and ask the international community to help them get books and laboratories. And with Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, who has walked the hallowed halls of the famous Harvard University, elected Liberia's new President, they await strong support for their university from the new government. Soon, they hope, the university will regain its "cutting edge." ♦



**GOOD OLD DAYS**  
Elegantly dressed female students at a garden party at the university in 1962

# Classrooms Come

By Annette Rehr

**O**n the top of a hill, outside the city of Gbarnga, a symbol of true prosperity overlooks Liberia's war-torn Bong County: it is Dolokelen Gboveh High School, once the most prestigious – indeed only – government-run secondary school in northern Liberia's Bong County.

Nimba, Lofa and Gbarpolu Counties, with up to 1,500 students attending per year.

Then the civil war came. All of a sudden education and culture became largely irrelevant – relegated to mere memories in the minds of those who longed for the return of peace and normality. In the mid-1990s, the school was partly destroyed by Charles Taylor's forces. Then, in 2002, armed rebels belonging to LURD (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy) vandalized or demolished

of Bong County. But by September, it had once more become a symbol of hope.

After two months of intense labour, 80 local workers had transformed it from a ruin back into an educational establishment and Dolokelen Gboveh High School reopened its doors to students.

The work was funded and supported in other ways – for example in the provision of 450 desks – by the UN refugee agency, UNHCR. Ahmed Conteh, the Project Manager for African Concern



**PICKING UP**  
Dolokelen School has reopened its doors

Since it first opened its doors in 1956, it laid solid academic foundations for several generations of future lawyers, doctors and scholars, some of whom later made their way to Europe and America – a fact that still fills the citizens of Gbarnga with pride even today. Over the decades, the school attracted thousands of young men and women from Bong and neighbouring

what was left.

Many of the gunmen belonging to the various armed factions that tore Liberia apart were children or teenagers, who a generation earlier would have been sitting behind a desk in a school, learning history or mathematics.

In early July 2005, the school still looked like an open wound to the people

International (ACI) – the agency's NGO partner – even attributes a reduction in the crime rate in Gbarnga to the employment of so many men to rebuild the school over several months.

The residents of Gbarnga have welcomed the reconstruction of the high school as an important step in the effort to steer Liberia's youth towards a more

# Alive

peaceful future. Volunteers patrol on a regular basis to ensure the safety of the compound and have promised to build a fence around it. They are eager not to see their school, and all the hopes that it has raised, ruined again.

"Our minds are finally reawakening," says the school's Principal, Edwin G. Kwakpae, who struggled through the terrible years following the school's destruction in 1997. Now, walking along the corridors past the nine classrooms in the building's two main wings, he exudes an air of renewed self-confidence: "This is a cardinal institution, not only for our County, but for the whole of northern Liberia. It's reassuring to see things improving."

The paint on the walls is still fresh. Inside the classrooms, students over the age of 15 (some in their early 20s) sit attentively at their desks, listening to the teacher. Today's timetable includes history, chemistry and mathematics lessons. They are excited. The students' association

wants to debate social concerns and embark on peace education and reconciliation workshops.

So far, some 200 students have enrolled. The Principal, however, expects the student population to rise to as many as 900. "Even some ex-fighters are serious about going back to school and learning now," he says. "We have to bring them back to school, if we want them to have a future." In the case of former child soldiers, the school's relatively modest fees (around US\$22 per semester) are paid by the UN Development Programme.

The situation confronting Liberian teachers is still creating headaches for Kwakpae: "Right now we have 26 teachers on the government's payroll," he says. "But their pay is too low. That's why they are looking for other jobs." As civil servants, teachers currently earn about 1,245 Liberian Dollars a month (around US\$21). However, some hope rests with the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) and of course, the new government of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Among other aims, GEMAP is expected to ensure regular payment of decent salaries to civil servants as part of the effort to reduce corruption in Liberia.

Meanwhile, UNHCR is encouraging Liberian teachers and doctors to come back from neighbouring countries of asylum, through its Skilled Labour Programme. The main aim of this reintegration project is to make it possible for skilled returnees like doctors, nurses, engineers or teachers to quickly assimilate into society, through the immediate provision of a livelihood, agricultural kits and assistance through micro-financing as well as a roof to sleep under.

Back in Dolokelen Gboveh High School, the school day comes to an end. Sarina, a 24 year-old student, sits quietly in the second row. She recently won a Bong County "Best Student" award, and will soon participate in the nation-wide contest. Everybody is proud of her.

"Girls and women can make a big difference," she says, smiling shyly. "We can do things men do. We do them even better. It's time for us to take over," she adds. Her classmates – male and female – agree.

Seeing them studying again, working eagerly towards a better future, should not come as a surprise. After all, they are students of the famous Dolokelen Gboveh High School. And a saying, written on the school's Auditorium wall, which has survived the destruction, reads: "Aim high."♦

## First Human Trafficking Case in Court

By Yuko Maeda

**A**fter seven months since the enactment of the Anti-Human Trafficking Law, a Liberian court is now trying a teenage girl for three counts of human trafficking offence for the first time in the country's history. The case, filed by the recently created Women's and Children's Protection Unit of the Liberian National Police (LNP), is a litmus test for Liberia's struggling justice system, emerging from years of war that saw crimes related to human

trafficking enjoy impunity.

According to the UN Police Trafficking in Persons Unit of the UN Mission in Liberia, which mentors the LNP's Women's and Children's Protection Unit, the teenage suspect allegedly deceived her 13-year-old step sister to follow her to Monrovia where the victim was sold for sex to a man at a night club. After the alleged rape, the UN Police says, the victim managed to run back to her grandmother, her legal custodian, who later reported the incident to the LNP's Protection Unit.

The LNP's detectives specialized in sexual abuse and gender-based violence immediately launched investigations while assisting the victim to receive medical examination and treatment. The LNP found enough evidence to file a case for human trafficking under the new law, based on the findings that the suspect reportedly brought the victim to her house without the knowledge of the victim's guardian, kept her there for a few days and facilitated her rape for money. "It constitutes human trafficking by law," says UN

*contd. page 30*

# The TRC Constituted

By Bipin Adhikari

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), one of the critical institutions envisaged by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, has now been constituted.

The Chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), Charles Gyude Bryant, appointed nine commissioners for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in October. The Commissioners were appointed after a long participatory process in accordance with the TRC Act which was passed by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly on 22 June 2005 amidst a complex and politically challenging environment. With this appointment, the controversy surrounding the TRC members appointed by Chairman Bryant in January 2004 without the authority of an enabling law, came to an end.

Additionally, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has already nominated two members to the TRC International Technical Advisory Committee (ITAC),

while the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) has nominated the third member. All ITAC members are ECOWAS nationals. These members enjoy all rights and privileges accorded to the Commissioners except that they do not have the right to vote.

While appointments are made, there has been debate among Commissioners whether the Commission should be inaugurated irrespective of the funding situation. The consensus seems to be that it would be desirable to proceed with the commissioning although such a move would set in motion the three month preparatory period provided for in the Act. Following the three months, the Commission must begin its activities in earnest. Commissioners argue that conferring authority on them would help them mobilize resources both within and outside Liberia. Prospects for funding are encouraging as the government of Liberia and the international community have taken considerable interest in the modalities of support for the TRC.

Intended to heal the wounds of the past and reconcile all political divisions in

Liberia, the TRC is mandated to conduct, among other things, a thorough investigation into gross human rights violations within two years and publish a report documenting its findings. The temporal jurisdiction of the TRC runs from January 1979 through 14 October 2003 with a window of opportunity to examine historical incidents that had a direct bearing on the civil war. The TRC will also "recommend" amnesty for persons who make full disclosures of their wrongs and express remorse for their acts. However, the amnesty will not apply to serious violations of international humanitarian law and crimes against humanity. The TRC will also make recommendations to the government about reparations and the need for legal and other institutional reforms in the country.

Once inaugurated, the TRC is likely to run for at least two years culminating in a final report. Thus, should the Commission be inaugurated in early March 2006, the process will run at least through March 2008. The newly elected President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, has already spoken of her full support to the TRC and its mandate. This indeed is a good beginning. ♦

police officer Mykola Martynov. The case was sent to the Juvenile Court at the end of January and hearings began in mid February.

According to the law enacted by the former National Transitional Government of Liberia in June last year, trafficking in persons involves the following three forms of criminal elements for the purpose of exploitation: (1) the recruitment, transportation, transfer or harbouring of human beings; (2) the receipt of persons by means of threat or use of force or coercion; or (3) by the exchange of payment or benefits to achieve consent of a person to have control over another person. Exploitation by definition can be keeping a person under slavery, compelling a person to provide forced labour, exploiting prostitution of another, engaging in any other form of

commercial sexual exploitation or illicit removal of human organs. If found guilty, perpetrators may face from one year to a maximum of life imprisonment.

The trafficking case in the juvenile court involving the two teenage girls marks a triumph of the specialized police unit of the Women's and Children's Protection established last September with support from the UN children's agency UNICEF, UNMIL police and NGOs.

Behind the successful arrest of the suspect and the filing of the case is the tireless assistance of UNMIL police's Trafficking in Persons Unit. The five-member unit monitors the activities of the Women's and Children's Unit day and night and mentors national police officers dealing with human trafficking cases. The UN police trafficking unit assists the national police

in taking statements from witnesses and interrogating suspects, and provides transport for emergency cases during investigations.

As a leading member of the National Task Force on Human Trafficking, the UN police trafficking unit is now engaged in developing a National Plan for the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons that contains training programmes for law enforcement agencies and other relevant organizations and information campaign activities for ordinary citizens. "The concept of human trafficking is still new to Liberia. It is not seen as a serious crime in the country," says Martynov. This first case of human trafficking may help change such a regressive cultural outlook. ♦

# First Corrections Officers Graduate

By Yuko Maeda

**F**irst graduates of a year-long corrections officers training course have been deployed to corrections facilities throughout Liberia for the first time in over two decades.

The 24 officers, including six women, graduated on 10 February from the training course run by the Ministry of Justice and the Corrections Advisory Unit of the UN Mission in Liberia. They underwent classroom lectures on rule of law, human rights, criminal justice and the role of a corrections officer and received intensive on-the-job training at corrections institutions in the country.

The first batch of the graduates was immediately deployed to four facilities in Monrovia, Kakata, Buchanan and Gbarnga. Liberia now has eight functional corrections facilities across the country, which house nearly 500 inmates in total.

Congratulating the new officers at a graduation ceremony held at the Police Academy on the outskirts of Monrovia, Luiz Carlos da Costa, Deputy Special Representative of UN Secretary-General for Operations and Rule of Law, reminded them of their crucial responsibility to

focus on the humane treatment of those individuals and groups incarcerated."

Also addressing the graduates, Marjo Callaghan, Head of UNMIL's Corrections Advisory Unit, cited the words of the famous Russian author Dostoevsky, who said "one can determine the morality of a country by the way it treats its prisoners." She urged the new officers to reflect on the statement when they perform their duties and cautioned that the role of a corrections officer is "not to punish" detainees but to keep their colleagues and prisoners safe.

In addition to UNMIL's corrections advisors, experts from the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Centre for Victims of Torture also gave lectures to the first graduating class. As representatives from the UNMIL and the two NGOs and proud friends and relatives of the graduating officers watched the ceremony, the new officers proudly received their certificates. ♦



Graduates receive certificates

uphold basic human rights protection. "As a corrections officer, you will be dealing with human beings who, although they have broken the law, have human rights and dignity. It is imperative that you also

## Anti-rape Campaign Launched

**T**he United Nations Mission in Liberia launched a nationwide anti-rape campaign early February to enhance public awareness of this serious crime and to encourage victims of rape to report it to the police and seek medical assistance. The campaign was kicked off at a concert at the Sports Commission in downtown Monrovia featuring musical and cultural artists, including popular Senegal-based Liberian musician, Peter Cole, and reigning Miss Liberia, Snorti Forh.

"We've ended one battle in Liberia, but now we must fight a new battle – the battle to protect the people, especially women and children, of this country," said Special Representative Alan Doss, flagging off the campaign. "Rape destroys lives just as easily as a bullet or a knife," he said, underlining the horror of the crime and the effects it has on the victims. He promised that the United Nations would campaign to ensure that victims have access to the help needed.

Describing rape as one of the cruelest forms of violence against women, Doss called on Liberia's men to protect the rights of women, not abuse them. He stressed the importance of reporting rape and pointed out that under Liberia's new Rape Law, perpetrators will receive life imprisonment. He also told the audience

sexual violence and abuse.

Forth, a role model for the Liberian youth, said that the rape rate had increased dramatically during Liberia's 14-year conflict and now that the country is at peace, it is time for everyone to resolutely address the issue. She urged victims of rape to report it to the Liberian National Police (LNP) and UN Police, adding that it was never too late to bring their abuser to justice. She also spoke about rape's relation to the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Cole, a West African pop icon, who postponed his return to Senegal in order to support the UN effort, led the audience in singing the song he wrote especially for the campaign: "It's my body, don't you force me. If you force me, it's a crime."

In the weeks ahead, UNMIL will carry out the anti-rape campaign across Liberia, starting with similar musical and cultural performances in Zwedru, Gbarnga and Tubmanburg. ♦



Snorti Forh spreads anti-rape message

that UN personnel serving in the country were not held to any different standard. "If any UN peacekeepers are guilty of this crime, let us know so that they can be held accountable," he said, reiterating the organization's zero tolerance policy against

# LET'S HEAR THE VOICE OF YOUTH

By Marjorea Ballada

**E**mmanuel Kolleh has a vision. He wakes up every morning with a belief that each sunrise takes him one step closer to his biggest dream in life -- to graduate from high school, earn a little money and buy his own taxi to make a living.

the rest of the world would enjoy. Kolleh now finds himself the oldest student in his 10th grade class.

"I feel fine that I'm back to school. It has always been my dream to finish school," he says about his delayed schooling. "It's about time that (the government leaders) pay attention to our problems... There are many other people like me who would like to go to school and live normal

the school-age children attend school due to poverty and three in four young people cannot find formal employment on the job market. Frustrated with the cycle of poverty, poor education and vocational skills and lack of opportunities, some resort to substance abuse or criminal activities.

Now that peace has returned and a new government is in place, they want change. They want their voice heard and their gov-



**HEAR OUR VOICE!**  
Liberian youth through a political rally during the election campaign

So every morning, the 28-year-old dons his bright yellow uniform and heads to school with his vision in mind. Sometimes, during his long walks to school, he recalls the days he spent hiding in the bush to escape the cruelty of the gangsters marauding the streets in his town in Bong County. Sadly, the long years of civil war disrupted his schooling and other normal activities the teenagers in

lives."

Kolleh is one of tens of thousands of young Liberians who lost their normal adolescence to the civil war. In the destructive culture of violence and hatred, many youngsters were neglected and forced to find a way to survive. A number of youth mastered the art of looting and random killing of their own people. The wounds are deep. Still now, only half of

ernment to respond to their needs. Young Liberians say they yearn for what they missed out -- access to quality education and vocational training, better employment opportunities, improved health services and organizational strength to influence national policies on youth.

That is the essence of the Kakata Declaration, adopted in August last year at a national youth conference in Kakata,

Margibi County, by youth representatives from all over the country. More than 200 representatives attended the conference, where they mapped out issues and concerns the youth currently face, adopted a resolution for each of the issues and declared their renewed commitment to the national reconstruction efforts.

In the declaration, the young population points out a variety of issues: lack of gender equity, inadequate educational facilities, shortage of qualified teaching staff, poor job training and opportunities, acute poverty and hunger, impunity, crisis of traditional culture, high prevalence of HIV/AIDS and widespread drug abuse. They also discuss the needs of the disabled, the participation of youth in politics and the information gap between urban and rural Liberia.

"We had the idea that we were going to Kakata to listen to the young people," recalled Gilbert Ngesu, a Civil Affairs officer with the UN Mission in Liberia, one of the driving forces to organize the conference. It was a joint effort by the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the umbrella body Federation of Liberian Youth, the UN family including UNDP and UNICEF and international NGOs to let the voice of youth heard and integrated in the government's development agenda. "We needed to hear them talk about what really are their key issues. So we brought them together and motivated them to talk."

The essence of the declaration was later consolidated into the first-ever draft National Youth Policy, a guiding principle for designing and implementing national activities and programmes for the development of youth. The draft policy, accepted by youth representatives in December at another national conference in Monrovia and to be submitted to the new legislature for adoption into a law, addresses a number of key issues on youth and suggests a national action plan to deliver what the youth need.

In the action plan, for example, the youth demand a new school curriculum addressing the needs of drop-outs and the disabled, youth-friendly credit schemes promoting entrepreneurship, and better access to public health education. They also call for an increase in training programmes for traditional artisans, the



**New President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is well aware of youth's concerns and has reassured her government's commitment to meeting their needs. "We will build your capacity and empower you to enable you meaningfully participate in the reconstruction of your country," she told the youth in her inaugural speech.**

improvement of information access, and the enactment of laws prohibiting discrimination against young women. These objectives are linked to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals, which aim to achieve the eradication of extreme poverty, universal primary education and gender equality, among others.

New President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is well aware of youth's concerns and has reassured her government's commitment to meeting their needs. "We will build your capacity and empower you to enable you meaningfully participate in the reconstruction of your country," she told the youth in her inaugural speech. "We will

give you the education that you asked for and the skills training that we know you desire. We shall actively pursue the Kakata Declaration... and a National Youth Policy and Programme."

However, a lot of work has yet to be done to meet the goals specified in the declaration. It is apparent that the new government alone cannot deliver what young Liberians demand. Ngesu suggests much of the burden lies on the youth themselves.

"No one can ever pull you out of a pit. You have to pull yourself out of it. Others can only help you get out," he repeatedly tells the youth. "The energy to get out of that pit belongs to you. So there has to be commitment to your own cause."

Patience Heah, an Executive Board member and Treasurer of the Federation of Liberian Youth, says young individuals need to build their own capacity to achieve their goals. "They should organize themselves and form their own community-based organizations where they can utilize their talents," she says. "From there, their capacity will be built."

For Kolleh and many others, going back to school must be the first step to pull oneself out of a pit. They now need more support to help them walk the long road. ♦

# Safe Water Saves Lives

**B**efore the Community Managed Water Tank project in the Jallah Town community in eastern Monrovia was launched, Jallah Kollie and his family had to line up along the banks of the Messurado River to purchase water ferried in from Bushrod Island, some two kilometers away.

"The Bushrod Island water was contaminated, we had to boil it first and of course during the war, there were many times we couldn't do that," says Kollie, 72. "These UNICEF water tanks are of great help to us. Truly, we are very happy for this."

Jallah Town community is one of eight Monrovia communities that are currently benefiting from UNICEF's Community Managed Water Tank project. The project is designed to improve access to safe drinking water with the active participation of affected communities. Forty tanks have been installed, providing more than 6,000 people with safe water supply.

"By asking

households to contribute a portion of the cost to maintain the water tanks, UNICEF is encouraging communities to take an active interest in their local water supply," says UNICEF Liberia Representative Angela Kearney. "The communities are doing great projects with the small money raised from selling the water, including clearing away garbage heaps, an essential part in building a healthy environment in Monrovia, especially for children."

In Liberia, diarrhoea and cholera are big childkillers. Diarrhoea is responsible for 22 per cent of deaths in children under age 5.

Jallah Town Community has three new UNICEF water tanks managed by a team appointed by the community. Ebenezer Jallah is a member of the management group. "Contributions paid by the community towards the water supply are used as a revolving fund," says Jallah. "A portion of these contributions are used to pay for the maintenance of the facilities and another to pay an honorarium to the team that services the water tanks."

During and after Liberia's 14-year civil

war, the availability of safe drinking water has been a major problem confronting the most of the country's population. "We had found it very difficult to obtain safe drinking water and this led to cholera outbreaks which took lives," says Kollie.

In Monrovia, inadequate sanitary facilities, poor hygiene practices and the ingestion of contaminated water is a major health problem, especially as the capital's main water supply facility located in nearby White Plains was destroyed during the conflict in 1990.

Despite the continuing efforts of the government and UNICEF, as well as the increasing involvement of households themselves, more than 50 per cent of Monrovia's population still does not have access to safe drinking water. Less than a third of Monrovia's population has access to adequate sanitation.

In the fight against preventable water-borne diseases such as diarrhea and cholera, UNICEF is supporting the Liberian government and the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) to provide safe drinking water.

Over the past three years UNICEF has also supported the Cholera Unit at Liberia's largest referral hospital, the John F. Kennedy Medical Center, and helped schools and local county authorities to construct sanitation and safe drinking water facilities in UNICEF's seven focus counties. As a result, more than 1,000 water facilities have been constructed or repaired, providing over 300,000 people, mostly schoolchildren, with safe drinking water. UNICEF is also supporting local community organizations in the promotion of healthy hygiene practices at the community level.

"By training teachers in hygiene promotion, UNICEF is promoting a child-friendly learning environment so that children themselves understand that unsafe water causes diseases such as cholera, which is endemic in Monrovia," says Kabuka Banda, UNICEF's Project Officer for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion. ♦



UNICEF/Robert Grossman

# Helping Victims of Leprosy

By Eliane Van De Velde

“Hotel Romeo 64, Victor Romeo 44, Foxtrot 12 and Papa India 1 are leaving for Kolahun district, confirm copy...roger, you are loud and clear, Zulu Base out.” A delegation of UNMIL Humanitarian Coordination Section (HCS), UNICEF, UNHCR protection unit, WFP and UNMIL's Public Information, is leaving Voinjama on a cloudy morning, on an assessment mission to Mbalotahun in the Kolahun district. “Mbalotahun” means “town of curative” in Mbandi dialect. And thereby hangs a tale.

The Episcopal Mission Hospital in Mbalotahun was founded about 30 years ago, specifically for the treatment of lepers. Because this was a unique institution in the region, patients were brought here from all over West Africa to receive treatment.

On the road, the thick red mud has changed into fine dust over the past months, creating small sand swirls in the rear view mirror of the car. Children, bags, blankets, bins and chickens are coming out of a convoy of UNHCR vehicles that has just arrived in Kolahun. Several refugees from neighbouring Guinea have returned and are warmly welcomed by their relatives. Past Kolahun, we turn left to Bolahun, once a big city in Lofa. One can still see the sad remains of the Bolahun Episcopal boarding school that once bred scholars, doctors and political leaders, and an adjacent basketball field, the sleeping quarters, and the imposing church between the thick, blossoming trees.

From Bolahun, we turn right into a narrow rocky path where the vegetation has obviously won the battle with the road. Almost an hour and many bumps later, we reach the small village of Mbalotahun that looks no different from other villages in the neighborhood, except for the people, many with missing limbs and other distorted body parts. The hospital looks over the village from the hill. Inside, rusty wheel-

chairs, clinic cards and prostheses remind us of the past glory of this once advanced medical centre.

“Welcome, you are welcome!” an old man in a wheelchair beams. He offers us what remains of his hands. His lifeless legs hang from a wheelchair. The town chief is consulted and HCS coordinates a meeting between the inhabitants and our delegation. Someone translates.

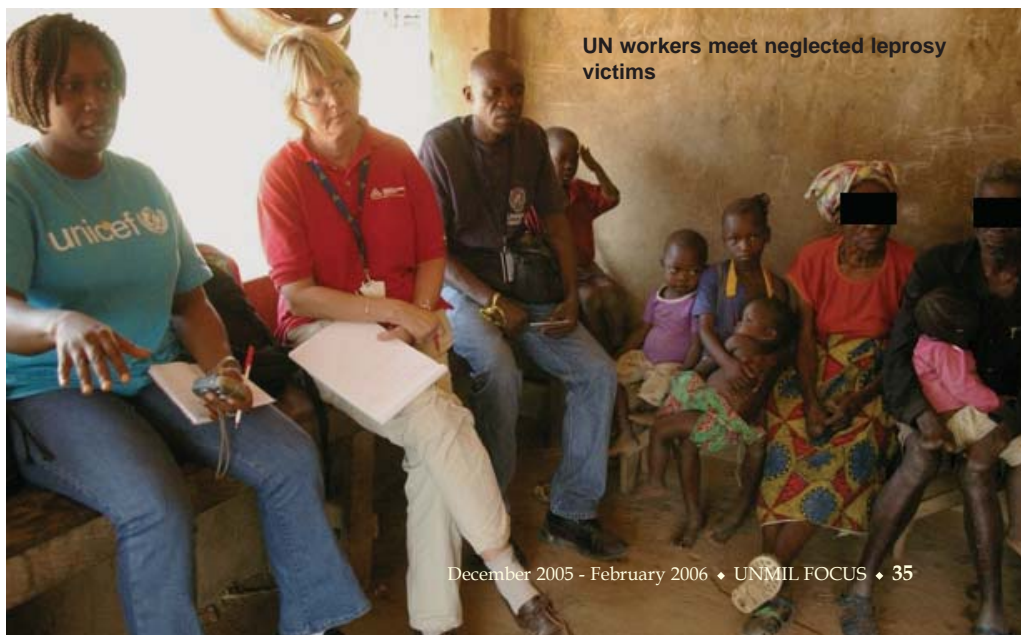
The purpose of this encounter is mainly to exchange information, and gather the needs of this destitute and marginalized community. A tentative count of the population gives us a number of approximately 200 people, many of them afflicted by leprosy. The youngest victim is 12 years old. Asked about educational facilities, the local nurse, who contracted the disease over the years, tells us that the children over age 6 walk to Bolahun for schooling but the younger ones can't reach there. The sole water pump in the village broke many years ago, so the creek is their only source of water. For food, some lay traps in the bush, and the healthier ones grow crops to share with the less fortunate ones. The belief in town holds that prosperous people get cursed with leprosy by others, jealous of their success.

Delegates from WFP, UNHCR, UNICEF and HCS have a long list of issues to query about – women's issues, protection, isolation, stigmatization and a host of others. After a short tour of the

town and some more specific and personal discussions, the convoy turns back in the direction of Kolahun where we visit Medecins Sans Frontieres. Ady Nadimpalli, the MSF coordinator is aware of the situation as his organization is currently trying to secure medical supplies for the patients. With help of the County Health Team, they carry out examinations of the creek water for bacteria related to the disease, and in collaboration with the International Medical Corps health centre in Bolahun, MSF sends a mobile team to change bandages of those who cannot walk to Bolahun anymore. WFP started food distribution in the past weeks, and will continue to do so according to the number of population currently being verified.

UNMIL HCS is coordinating activities of the different agencies and NGOs to assist the needy patients of this unique village. “The response from UN agencies, NGOs and the County Health Team was impressive, and all partners approached have taken action to address this issue,” says Monica Andersson, HCS officer for Lofa County.

Equipped with a flaskful of coffee and a bunch of bananas for the road, we drive back to base. Three hours later, as the sun begins to set, we shake the dust off our eyebrows and crave for a hot shower...with pressure! ♦



UN workers meet neglected leprosy victims

# Namibians Contribute to Peace

By J. Wesley Washington

Namibia, one of the countries that gained independence in Africa relatively recently, was born in the context of a United Nations peacekeeping operation. In April 1989, the United Nations Transition Assistance Group (UNTAG) was deployed throughout Namibia to monitor South Africa's withdrawal and provide electoral assistance. Elections were held in November 1989 and this south African country became independent on 21 March, 1990.

Three years on, in 1993, Namibia began helping keep peace in other lands when it heeded the call of the United Nations and dispatched a small contingent of 43 soldiers and equipment to work as part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC).

Between then and 2006, Namibia has participated in peacekeeping missions in Africa and other trouble spots around the world including Angola, Ethiopia/Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Apart from contributing to those missions, Namibia has also dispatched Military Observers to countries such as Eritrea, Kosovo, Egypt and Sudan, among others.

In 2004, Namibia responded to calls by the UN for troops to bring an end to the mayhem and carnage in Liberia. Deployed with the United Nations Mission in Liberia on 22 February 2004, the first Namibian contingent included 844 soldiers, six civilian police, four staff officers and three military observers.

Drawn from the 26th and 12th Brigades, 4th Artillery Brigade and Engineering Regiment of the Namibian Army, the battalion's responsibility was to secure and safeguard Liberia's western corridor in Sector 2.

Though initially faced resistance from the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) on arrival at Tienne, 6 km east of Bo Waterside, they weathered the storm and safely deployed. Like the rest of the



Namibian soldiers help maintain security in Liberia

UNMIL contingents, the first contingent of Namibian peacekeepers successfully oversaw the Disarmament and Demobilization exercise in their area of operation.

The second contingent, NAMBATT-2, played a significant role in facilitating the voters' registration and other aspects of the Liberian electoral process.

Currently deployed in Grand Cape Mount County, the third Namibian contingent (NAMBATT-3) is divided into an Infantry Motorized Company and Headquarters Company at Sinji; and one Infantry Company each at Bo Waterside, Robertspoint and Gbah where they provide both scheduled and unscheduled patrols.

In addition to these patrols, they provide escort to UN personnel and convoys when required mainly along the highways and in the towns and villages day and night. They are charged with the task of monitoring traffic movement along the Ibrahim Babangida highway from Klay to Bo Waterside that leads to Sierra Leone.

The unscheduled patrols are conducted in areas where there is no permanent UNMIL presence which could either be ground or aerial patrol, especially along the Liberia-Sierra Leone border.

Under the command of Lt. Col. Tsenaye Wellem Akaye, 860 Namibian troops proudly wear the blue helmets, among them 104 female soldiers. Deployed in Sector 2, the Namibians share responsibilities with the Pakistani contingent in Bomi, Gbarpolu and Lofa counties.

With the successful completion of Disarmament and Demobilization, NAMBATT-3 turned their focus to the electoral process. They provided security escort as well as transport and accommodation for both UNMIL and national electoral personnel involved in the 11 October elections and the presidential run-off on 8 November.

"I hope that soon the Liberian people will achieve their goal. Up to now, in my area of operation, there is no violation of any aspect of the peace process," said Akaye in a recent interview with UNMIL FOCUS.

He hoped that reconciliation be the hallmark of Liberia's new government. "If it is given priority, peace and unity will be achieved and with that, developing the country will be assured." ♦



Capt. Adam Folcker/SWECON

By Capt. Adam Folcker

**T**he rotor blades whipped up grass and sand against the visors as the soldiers boarded. The helicopters surged up and set course towards the north, en route to Sierra Leone's capital Freetown.

Since 1 January, the Irish-Swedish Battalion that forms UNMIL's Quick Reaction Force (QRF) has a new task: evacuation of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown, if the need arises. That is why in late January, Irish and Swedish troops took off from Monrovia by several MI-8 helicopters from their Camp Clara base in the capital over jungles and meandering rivers, crossing the border into the more hilly terrain of Sierra Leone. After a two-hour flight, the battle-ready UNMIL soldiers landed at several points in and around Freetown. Their mission this time was not to evacuate the Special Court, but only to get to know the area as well as to test the ability of the UNMIL QRF to carry out this new task.

Large MI-28 helicopters were simultaneously bringing in light armoured vehicles, and a convoy of vehicles was at the same time approaching the Sierra Leonean

capital over land. The different parties converged at Langata Camp near Mammy Yoko Hotel, headquarters of the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) on the tip of the Aberdeen peninsula in Freetown.

One of the officers in charge was Capt. Andre Saeden, 2IC the Swedish Mechanized Infantry Company: "A total of 160 soldiers participated. A pretty big operation, with air and land components and co-operation between Irish and Swedish as well as with the troops at the Special Court," said Saeden.

The Swedish Captain was referring to UNMIL's Mongolian Guard Force (MGF), the 250-man strong company in charge of security at the Special Court compound in central Freetown. The Mongolian soldiers were deployed following the decision by UN Security Council in September 2005 to entrust UNMIL with the security of the Special Court as the peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone was winding up. "They are very professional and are constantly working to increase the security around the Special Court," Saeden said.

One day in Freetown, a group of Swedish soldiers were on a foot patrol to recce along Cockerill Bay on the west side

of the Aberdeen peninsula. The soldiers were sweating in the heat even though the white sand on Lumley Beach almost felt like walking in deep snow. The group made its way to a place where they got an overview of the environment. "In case of an evacuation of the Special Court, one of our tasks would be to erect blocking positions in several locations," Lt. Erik Hopkins said as he pointed out the distance to different places across the wetland Aberdeen Creek. Upon seeing the familiar site of UN Soldiers in Sierra Leone once again, local fishermen greeted the soldiers with friendly smiles. "Glad to have you back," one of them said.

The Irish and Swedish troops also made several rounds through central Freetown to get to know the geography of the area. "The purpose was to gain knowledge about the terrain, especially the roads leading in to and out of the Special Court," Saeden said.

After spending five days in Freetown, the QRF contingent returned to Liberia using a combination of transport involving air, sea and land components. "A successful operation and a good test of our ability to get there and do the job," summed up the Swedish Captain. ♦

Members of UNMIL's Quick Reaction Force arrive in Freetown

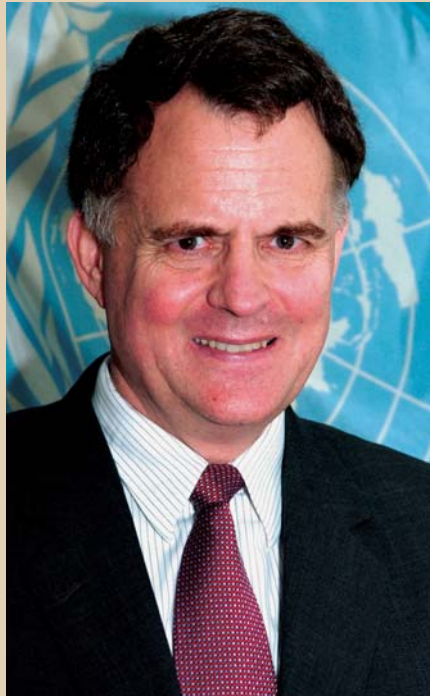


Capt. Adam Folcker/SWECON

## New Deputy Special Representative

**J**ordan Ryan of the United States was appointed by United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan as his Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Governance for Liberia, effective 1 January 2006.

Ryan, who also serves as the United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia, has had a long and distinguished career with the United Nations and brings a wealth of experience and demonstrated leadership abilities to his new assignment. Until his new appointment, he was the United Nations Resident Coordinator and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative in Viet Nam, where he negotiated with the Vietnamese government and achieved the introduction of explicit "rights based approach to development" in the UN country programme.



Prior to that, Ryan served as the Director of the Office of the Administrator, UNDP, in New York from 1997 to 2001.

Earlier in his career, Ryan held the positions of UNDP Deputy Resident Representative and Senior Assistant Resident Representative in Viet Nam. He was also the UNDP Assistant Resident Representative in China. Before joining the United Nations, Ryan worked as an attorney in New York and California, and as an international legal consultant in Asia and in the Middle East.

Ryan holds an M.A. in international affairs from Columbia University, a Jurist Doctorate from the National Law Centre at George Washington University, and a B.A. in anthropology from Yale University. He was a visiting fellow at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University in 2001.

## New Force Commander Takes Over

**N**igerian Lt. Gen. Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor has been appointed UNMIL's new Force Commander effective 1 January 2006. He becomes the third Force Commander since the mission's inception in 2003.

Lt. Gen. Obiakor replaces Lt.-Gen. Joseph Owonibi who served the mission from its inception in 2003, first as its Deputy Force Commander and Chief Military Observer until his appointment as Force Commander from 1 January 2005.

Lt. Gen. Obiakor has had a long and distinguished career with the Nigerian Army, beginning 1973, and has served various senior positions including as General Officer Commanding the Second Mechanized Division of the Army. The Nigerian General is no stranger to Liberia. A decade ago, from August 1996 to August 1997, he served in Liberia as the Commander of the



ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) Artillery Brigade for a year. He also served as ECOMOG Chief Coordinator of the Liberian elections in July 1997 and a member of the United Nations/African Union monitoring group and the independent election monitoring committee.

Born on 18 February, 1951 in Anambra State, Lt. Gen. Obiakor attended a number of prestigious military schools including the Nigerian Military School and the Nigerian Defence Academy. He holds a Masters degree in Strategic Studies from the University of Ibadan. He has participated in many military courses abroad, including the former USSR, the USA, Indonesia, Australia and various African countries.

Lt. Gen. Obiakor is married with children. He enjoys brainstorming, contemplation, listening to jazz, sports and photography.

# LIBERIANS SPEAK

## What will YOU do to rebuild Liberia?



**Moses Flomo**  
(30) Student

"I'm a teacher by profession so I have started tutoring some students who are ex-combatants. We are engaged with ex-combatants in such vocations as sewing, tie-dyeing. We are teaching them to become self-productive."



**Peter Cole**  
(32) Liberian musician based in Senegal

"My contribution will be anything I can do to educate the Liberian people through my music to help this infant government. I intend to work in the private sector - establishing a good recording studio, working with colleagues so we have a vibrant musician's union that can contribute to the development of Liberia through music. You know music is a medium that goes far and wide. We'll have to realize that what we've destroyed in 14 years cannot be rebuilt in a short time. It does take time."



**Julius Kanuba**  
(22) Journalist

"We as journalists have the task of reporting issues that unfold within the society. So basically, my contribution to the government is to first report on developmental issues and most importantly, highlight those issues where government is found wanting."



**Snorti Munah Forh**  
(24) Miss Liberia 2005-2006

"It's about the impact I can make on Liberian people in contributing to the rebuilding of our country. I'll like to talk about three things. First, before we start to make contributions, we'll have to value our self-esteem, prioritize our rights and obligations, and we should focus. We have to first of all believe in ourselves. What I will begin to do now is empower the youth around me."



**Harriet Chea**  
(37) Student

"As an individual, my role is to be a law abiding person; when I'm employed, get to work on time and spread the peace message."



**Chris Harris**  
(23) Student

"For me, my contribution will be to help beautify the city. I will challenge others to join me, for example, to help keep our city clean. I would advocate for a clean and tidy environment."



**George S. Lansana**  
(37) Student

"We have to make sure that the country remains peaceful, secure and stable. This provides the environment for government to work. If there is a security problem, funds earmarked in the budget for development will be redirected to ensure security."



**Grace Thomas**  
(35) Student

"My contribution will be talking to our youth to concentrate on education, because the minds of the youth should be developed for positive ventures rather than for destruction."



**Prince Dunbar**  
(31) Student/Journalist

"As a journalist, I'll endeavor to educate people on what we can contribute to make this government a vibrant one. I'll enlighten them that it is also our responsibility to make our contribution to government one way or the other. Also one major thing I will do is be regular in paying my taxes."



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