



Liberia Hosts High Level Panel

Vision 2030: A Pledge to Transform Liberia

Liberia Launches First Justice and Security Hub

Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



Last year drew to a close with a series of notable accomplishments. In December, the Government launched the National Vision 2030, a blueprint for Liberia's development, which articulates Liberia's economic and social aspirations. In conjunction with the launch, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf introduced the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation and the Agenda for Transformation, which, together, will chart a path for the country to realize its economic, social and political goals by 2030. Partnership between the Government and all sectors of society are essential for the success of this ambitious agenda. The UN family in Liberia remains steadfast in our support to the people of Liberia, as they make their vision a reality.

In January, Liberia hosted a meeting of the High Level Panel of Eminent Persons addressing the Post-2015 Development Agenda, allowing the country to showcase its peaceful progress and its readiness to engage with the rest of the world on global issues. The outcome of the meeting was agreement on a transformational agenda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015, and a single and cohesive post-2015 development agenda, including sustainable growth and equity; creating wealth through sustainable and transparent natural resource management; and partnerships in pursuit of a common agenda. The UN and our international partners will play a role in supporting this agenda in Liberia, and beyond.

In February, the UN and the Government officially launched the UN One Programme, a joint initiative to unify their development interventions and 'Deliver as One' under a common strategic framework, aligned with the Agenda for Transformation and the National Vision 2030. February also witnessed the inauguration of the Justice and Security Hub in Gbarnga, by President Johnson Sirleaf. The first of five such regional hubs, the event marked an important step in the extension of state authority and improving access to justice throughout the country. Support from the UN Peacebuilding Fund enabled the Hub's development. It will now be incumbent on Liberia,

with UN support, to deliver the intended justice and security services to the benefit of those most in need.

As the year progresses, UNMIL will support the process of reviewing Liberia's Constitution, which presents Liberians with a historic opportunity to create, or redefine, their common vision for their state, in ways that can have a lasting impact on peace and stability. An inclusive and participatory consultative process, with an outcome that reflects the wishes of all major stakeholders in Liberian society, will imbue the Constitution with popular legitimacy. As such, both the process and the end result will play a central role in peacebuilding, state-building and democratic governance in Liberia.

Support for the implementation of the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation will also be a UN priority this year. It remains as important as ever that the underlying divisions in Liberia's past are reconciled to further consolidate the unbroken peace Liberians have enjoyed for nearly a decade.

I am optimistic that together, we can achieve what the people of Liberia deeply desire – a peaceful, prosperous and democratic nation that upholds the rule of law and offers all its citizens opportunities to benefit from the dividends of a hard-fought peace.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Karin Landgren', written over a white background.

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



4. Liberia Hosts High Level Panel

By hosting the High Level Panel of eminent leaders tasked with re-framing the post-2015 global development agenda, Liberia showcases its peaceful progress and its readiness to engage with the rest of the world on global issues.



6. Vision 2030: A Pledge to Transform Liberia

Liberia recently launched "Vision 2030", an ambitious blueprint for development aimed at equitable and inclusive growth that will eventually secure the nation the status of a middle-income country by 2030.



10. Liberia Launches Justice and Security Hub

The first regional Justice and Security Hub has been launched in Gbarnga, Bong County, bringing justice and security services closer to the people of the region. Four more such hubs to follow in other regions.

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Presidents Yudhoyono and Sirleaf

Liberia Hosts High Level Panel

By Ruby Ofori

The High Level Panel of 27 eminent leaders tasked by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon with reframing the global development agenda after 2015 concluded a resoundingly successful conference in

Monrovia on 2 February. According to the three co-chairs of the panel -- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia, Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom and President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia -- a new post-2015 vision for poverty eradication is emerging as a result of these consultations.

"I can say that the talks were positive and we have made much progress in finding our focus on some very crucial issues," said President Johnson Sirleaf at the concluding press conference with her two co-chairs. She said a new post-2015 development paradigm is evolving from these discussions which is transformational



nd Sirleaf and Prime Minister Cameron address the media

el Panel

and “integrates economic growth, social inclusion and environment sustainability.”

The Liberian President reaffirmed her nation’s commitment to poverty eradication based on this evolving vision. “We have set ourselves far reaching targets to reduce child mortality and connect people, homes

and cities, build new roads and make sure that we expand our national electricity grid. Liberia will play our part in tackling the challenges faced by all around the world and we hope that all together these meetings will provide and make the world a better place for all our children,” she stressed.

Prime Minister David Cameron praised Liberia and its leader for the progress made in recovering from the devastation of armed conflict

remains much to be done in order to produce a solid final report of the panel. “Yet I am confident that with the progress we achieved so far, we will be able to live up to our mandate in accordance with our time frame,” he added.

Following their first meeting in New York in January 2012, the panelists issued a communiqué pledging to consult with representatives of the communities whose lives they are seeking to uplift. That promise was

Following their first meeting in New York in January 2012, the panelists issued a communiqué pledging to consult with representatives of the communities whose lives they are seeking to uplift. That promise was upheld in Monrovia where over 300 stakeholders took part.

and for proving that donor aid “can make a difference.” He said Liberia’s experience shows that the real agenda of how you lift people from poverty to prosperity goes so much further than aid. “It requires the rule of law, it requires honest transparent government, and it

upheld in Monrovia where over 300 stakeholders took part. These included representatives of women’s rights organizations, youths, farmers, children, small business owners, the elderly, the disabled and civil society groups based in Liberian and from around the world.

Prime Minister David Cameron praised Liberia and its leader for the progress made in recovering from the devastation of armed conflict and for proving that donor aid “can make a difference.”

needs infrastructure and education. It needs clear rules for business so that countries benefit from their raw materials and resources and are not stripped of them and above all it needs a strong private sector providing the growth and the jobs and the wealth that is going to lift the people up and lift the country up,” he said.

President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono of Indonesia said there

While the second meeting of the Panel in London focused on individual and household level poverty, in Monrovia the theme was national building blocks for sustained prosperity. The fourth meeting takes place in Bali from 25-27 March 2013. The Panel will submit a report containing recommendations to the Secretary-General in May 2013. ■



Vision 2030: A Pledge to

By Daniel Mensah Brande

After nine years of unbroken peace, heralded by two successful presidential and parliamentary elections, Liberia is now confidently eyeing the status of a middle-income country by 2030. En route to that destination, Liberians intend to showcase their country as economically prosperous, socially harmonious, democratically buoyant, environmentally beautiful, culturally vibrant, and technologically innovative.

This ambitious goal is being propelled by a go-getting blueprint known as “Vision 2030,” prepared

through popular consultations with Liberians at home and abroad. The groundbreaking plan of action, adopted together with two other documents at a national conference in the Liberian central city of Gbarnga, will for the next 18 years define the country’s strategic growth path. The other two documents - “Agenda for Transformation” and “Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peace-building and Reconciliation” - are indispensable accessories to Vision 2030.

While the Agenda for Transformation, a US\$5-billion five-year development plan with nearly 600 interventions, is to put the country on a sustainable, equitable and inclusive growth path by drastically

reducing poverty and creating wealth for all Liberians, the Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peace-building and Reconciliation is to reconcile and unite the country to move in unison for the attainment of Vision 2030.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf described Vision 2030 as a national mantra, a national mission statement, a call to national transformation - reinventing national institutions and re-aligning national norms to move Liberia towards a modern African state that participates fully in the African renaissance.

“We have together launched Vision 2030, which we hope and pray, will take our people along the challenging and promising path to national solidarity and national progress,”



President Sirleaf at the launch of Vision 2030

18 years to make the grade to join West African neighbours Nigeria, Ghana, Cape Verde, Côte d'Ivoire and Senegal in the moderately elite club of lower middle-income nations, which also include countries like India, Ukraine, Albania, Indonesia, Philippines, Egypt, Morocco, Bolivia, and Pakistan.

It is an enormous task. "The task ahead is huge. We as a Government cannot alone turn this great ship of state. We need all hands on deck – the private sector, civil society, NGOs, political leaders, different organizations and all Liberians," said President Sirleaf.

Vision 2030 spells out various socio-economic interventions such as building of roads, bridges, hospitals and clinics, schools, and telecommunications facilities; provision of safe drinking water; generation of reliable electricity to power industries and light homes; and above all, creation of the human capital capable of steering the economy to a middle-income standing.

As Liberia's Finance Minister Amara Konneh sees it, in the next 18 years, more than 60 per cent of

with all Liberians.

"It can only be achieved through partnership between Government and all sectors of society – political parties, civil society, the private sector, and communities," the UN envoy stressed. She promised continued commitment of the UN to "thinking, working, and delivering as one" to support the government and the people of Liberia make their vision a reality.

Development aspirations such as Vision 2030 are not new to Liberians. In the 1970s, President William R. Tolbert came out with rallying calls of "Total Involvement for Higher Heights," and "From Mat to Mattress," to get Liberians involved in moving their country to the summit of progress. In the 1980s, President Samuel Kanyon Doe also introduced the Green Revolution philosophy to boost food production in the country, while President Charles Taylor, in the late 1990s, devised the Vision 2024 master plan to catalyze the country's development process. But many Liberians say the hope-nourishing ideas enshrined in all these documents

to Transform Liberia

President Sirleaf told the 500 delegates at the Gbarnga conference, adding, "We hope the vision will rebrand and re-identify Liberia."

With current Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of about US\$240, Liberia has to turn around its economy about four times to achieve the lower middle-income benchmark of GNI per capita of US\$1,026. According to the World Bank ranking, countries with GNI per capita of US\$1,026-US\$4,035 fall within the lower middle-income bracket, while those with GNI per capita of US\$4,036-US\$12,475 are designated upper middle-income nations.

It means that Liberia has to maintain an average annual economic growth of about 9 per cent for the next

Liberians will have to be moved out of poverty into a middle class, and at the same time, efforts made to address the inequities and social cleavages that have afflicted Liberians for generations.

In addition, Liberia has to put in place mechanisms to be very competitive on the African market to attract foreign investments. Institutions of state have to be strengthened to promote good governance and enhance decentralization at all levels.

In a message delivered on her behalf at the closing session of the conference, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren applauded Liberians for developing a vision to transform their country, and reminded them that such a framework could only be achieved in partnership

appeared to have been thrown into the dustbin of history as none of them made any significant positive impact on the lives of the people.

However, having been developed after thorough consultations among Liberians from all stations of life, Vision 2030, unlike previous development agendas, seems to have emanated from the people and owned by the people, and looks like a pledge by all Liberians to re-enact their destiny, as President Sirleaf stated at the closing session of the Gbarnga conference.

"This is our collective pledge. This is our collective commitment – a pledge and commitment to do development differently, and to work relentlessly, to advance the transformation of our country in our service to our people." ■

Liberia Launches First Justice and Security Hub



President Sirleaf inaugurates the Hub

Landgren, said: "As we celebrate this event, we are looking at the future of Liberia – a future where justice and security are brought closer to all Liberians, and where greater fairness and accountability increase confidence in the rule of law. It is a future of greater security, contributing to the Government and UNMIL's overall security transition strategy."

Assistant Secretary-General for Peacebuilding Support, Judy Cheng-Hopkins, who also attended the event stated: "The United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund are proud to be associated with this important endeavour. With funding of up to \$13.3 million for all five hubs, this is the most ambitious project undertaken by the Fund thus far."

The opening of Liberia's first justice and security hub in Gbarnga is an important step in the decentralization of Government services for all

On 12 February, the Government of Liberia, in collaboration with the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) and the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), launched Liberia's first regional justice and security hub in Gbarnga, Bong County, northeast of the country's capital. With funding from the UN Peacebuilding Fund amounting to over \$13 million, the Government of Liberia plans to open a network of five regional justice and security hubs to increase citizens' access to justice and security services throughout the country.

The Gbarnga hub will be staffed by 139 personnel, including police officers, human rights monitors, public defenders, prosecutors, and probation and immigration officers, and will serve communities in Bong, Lofa and Nimba counties with an overall population of over one million people. The hub concept shows Liberia's commitment to the justice and security sectors working together, including police and other law enforcement, the courts, state prosecution and defense, and corrections.

Some hub services are already operational, including specialized services from the sexual and gender based violence crimes unit. Liberia National Police Officers have also begun patrols to help build confidence

and trust amongst local communities. Community advisory and dispute resolution services will be developed at the hub in the coming months.

Speaking at the launching ceremony, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said: "The opening of this first hub, in the nation's heartland, is confirmation that we mean what we say about decentralizing services

"The opening of this first hub, in the nation's heartland, is confirmation that we mean what we say about decentralizing services to all parts of this country, and that Monrovia is not Liberia! The decentralization of governmental services to the people is a mark of good governance. The presence of this hub, and the others to follow, will ensure access to justice and to quality security service for all Liberians."

- President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

to all parts of this country, and that Monrovia is not Liberia! The decentralization of governmental services to the people is a mark of good governance. The presence of this hub, and the others to follow, will ensure access to justice and to quality security service for all Liberians."

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia, Karin

Liberians. Once the base of the rebellion launched by Charles Taylor in the 1990s, Gbarnga today symbolizes the enormous progress made by Liberia with support of international partners in the provision of justice and security services to Liberian citizens beyond the capital.

(Article courtesy Peacebuilding Support Office) ■

Women Encouraged to Join Police

By James S. King

A renewed campaign to recruit more women into Liberia National Police (LNP) is currently in full swing, this time targeting women in Liberia's rural communities. Ministry of Gender and Development, UN Women, UNDP, LNP, and UN Police are partners involved in the exercise.

Previous female recruitment campaign activities were mainly conducted in Monrovia, Montserrado County, with a target of 20 per cent female representation in the LNP. Up to date 17.4 per cent of that target has been reached. However, many of those recruited, settled down in Monrovia with their family, are not inclined to take assignments in leeward communities where social services are limited. Therefore, UNPOL and LNP are teaming up to recruit



More young women are set to join LNP

The under-representation of women in Liberia's security sector has been recognized as a serious challenge to peace and security in the country as it impedes progress toward gender equality, violates women's right to participation and representation and prevents the security sector from being truly representative.

female officers from rural areas and to deploy them back in their original communities.

The under-representation of women in Liberia's security sector has been recognized as a serious challenge to peace and security in the country as it impedes progress toward gender equality, violates women's right to participation and representation and prevents the security sector from being truly representative. Not too

many females hold senior ranks in the current LNP establishment.

"Retention of police officers in leeward communities serves to empower female police personnel by assigning them more responsibilities that boost their esteem within their communities," says a report by UNPOL. The new recruitment campaign began in January 2013 with no planned end but an evaluation based on "perceived impact" is

expected by the end of the year.

Conceived as a long term process, the decentralization of LNP recruitment process is meant to be sustainable and locally owned. Ministry of Gender and Development, with its resources and staff members already deployed in rural areas, is a key partner in the campaign to attract more women into LNP, especially rural women. Media and community outreach, distribution of leaflets and application forms, are all part of the campaign.

As a way of helping Liberia strengthen its justice and security sector, UNMIL through its Quick Impact Project has refurbished and constructed several police depots and magisterial courts across Liberia. UNPOL is currently increasing its personnel strength, with particular emphasis on experts in training, so as to assist with the development of Liberia National Police into a fully professional and well-trained law enforcement agency. ■



“Strong” Liberian Women Impress Shirin Ebadi

By Vanessa Curney

In late January, four distinguished women, all of them Nobel Peace Laureates, converged in the Liberian capital of Monrovia. UN FOCUS caught up with Shirin Ebadi of Iran, one of the laureates, who is visiting Liberia for the first time.

First impressions? “Over the past few days I’ve spent in Liberia, I’ve been fortunate enough to meet members of civil society, women in particular,” she recounts in Persian through a translator. “I’ve been extremely impressed by the way Liberian women are so strong and have such a will for peace. In any society, in order to achieve peace

it must start at the grassroots level and from the people of that country themselves, and it has to start from an early age.”

Shirin Ebadi and fellow Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams took the lead in launching the Nobel Women’s Initiative, drawing in others, such as Liberia’s Leymah Gbowee. A quote on its website says: Demilitarization



Shirin Ebadi

isn't a dirty word; nonviolence isn't non-action; and real peace isn't for wimps. The goal of the organization is to fight for peace but not only with jaw-jaw. "It's not just about hope and ideas. It's about action," says Ebadi.

She would know. Ebadi was one of Iran's first female judges, serving as Tehran's city court president between 1975 and 1979. Then came radical political change in her country. She was demoted from Chief Justice to a clerk in the court over which she once presided. She eventually secured early retirement, and set up a private practice. There was no looking back. Controversial cases representing political dissidents followed and she was arrested several times. She set up several NGOs in Iran and wrote

several books that have given people an insight into her country. These have been some of the defining elements of her life and work. When asked whether she sees any parallels between Liberian and Iranian women she replies, "all women want equality, they are strong and they are not giving up easily."

Ebadi and Leymah Gbowee, Mairead Maguire and Jody Williams have been meeting with women from Rockhill in Monrovia and Totota in

women to begin their own businesses so that they can make a living from that," Ebadi adds.

I tell her about an FAO/Danish Government project under which women in Lofa, Nimba and Bong counties are running their own farms rearing chickens and growing rice. They have access to bank accounts and are provided with agricultural products and generators from the project to further strengthen their businesses.

"In any society, in order to achieve peace it must start at the grassroots level and from the people of that country themselves, and it has to start from an early age."

Bongo County. Despite progress, Ebadi believes education -- including vocational training -- is still a much needed key component of Liberia's advancement. "In the short time I've spent here I've noticed that there is a dire shortage of schools," she says. "Not only that -- sometimes the boys

"Yes, that's extremely important. Once women in Liberia feel they are empowered enough and have economic independence, then they can stand on their own feet."

What's your greatest achievement? Almost without skipping a beat she answers: "showing that Islam is not

"The Liberian Government must also give priority to training women in skills -- they should encourage these women to begin their own businesses so that they can make a living from that."

and girls must walk for miles, or cross rivers, to get to the ones that exist. It would be very helpful if the UN could help to construct more schools. Teachers' training is very important. The UN and other international bodies must set up special programmes for teachers."

"The Liberian Government must also give priority to training women in skills -- they should encourage these

incompatible with democracy and human rights, and that even under Islam, women can have equal rights with men."

"My message to the women of Liberia is that you must have self-confidence and you must continue with what you are doing - and I am sure that your future will be much better than today". ■



Identity Protection for

By Romeo Togba

“A few years ago, as a member of legal team representing a ten year old girl who was allegedly raped in Monrovia, I was stunned and shaken when my client was put forward to testify in an open court, before the glare of a group of men who had stormed the court in support of the alleged rapist,” Associate Supreme Court Justice Jamesetta Howard-Wolokollie recounted. The little girl was asked all sorts of humiliating questions in the full glare of the public and the alleged perpetrator.”

Thanks to the UN Joint Programme

on Gender Based Violence, such a scenario is unlikely to be repeated at courts hearing rape cases in Liberia.

With support from the Swedish

violence testifying in court.

And Justice Wolokollie, speaking during the presentation of the screens at the Temple of Justice, described

With support from the Swedish Development Agency (SIDA), mobile in-camera screens are now helping protect the identity of survivors of rapes or other forms of gender based violence testifying in court.

Development Agency (SIDA), mobile in-camera screens are now helping protect the identity of survivors of rapes or other forms of gender based

the initiative as a big step forward in ensuring justice for survivors of rape. “This effort gives our young girls who have been raped a stronger reason to



In-camera screens on display

Rape Survivors

come to court and testify and for us to prosecute the alleged perpetrators.”

Liberia’s Justice Minister Christiana Tah also shares the view that the mobile partition protecting the identity of a survivor of rape gives hope to efforts aimed at prosecuting rape cases.

“When a child is raped, that child becomes traumatized and bringing her to testify in an open court adds to the trauma. But with these mobile partitions, the victims of rape will have the courage to come to court and testify as their identities will be concealed.”

Tah called for collective efforts to combat rape in the society. “Majority of the victims are children under 12. This is sickening. This malady should

not continue with impunity in our society,” Tah stressed.

The Justice Minister said there should be no compromise of rape cases in the country. “It is disheartening when a law enforcement officer

supervises the settlement of a rape case between a parent and the perpetrator.” She said anyone who attempts to or compromises a rape case must face the law.

Tah announced that the government, in its bid to curb rape in the society, is undertaking DNA testing in the prosecution of perpetrators of rape. “This is also a step forward to stop rape in our society. We must explore all fronts in the prosecution of rape cases. Our children should grow up without being abused by heartless people.”

The then Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Louis Aucoin, described the initiative as a very important contribution to protect children during criminal justice process.

“The children need a very special treatment and I think the use of the screens is only really a first step and I think we also have to be giving a lot of thoughts as to how the children should be dealt with in terms of questioning and testimony and participating as witnesses,” Aucoin noted. “The screens present a huge first step in prosecuting rape cases.”

The Head of the SGBV Crimes Unit at the Ministry of Justice, Felecia Coleman, said the move is a boost to the Unit’s efforts to ensure justice for victims of rape and other forms of gender based violence. Coleman disclosed that since the establishment of the Unit in 2009, it has prosecuted over 28 rape cases with 61 percent conviction. ■

Minister Tah at the launch





Empowering Women Fishmongers

By Moses M. Zangar, Jr.

Thirty-six women groups under the aegis of the Rural Women Structure of Rivercess County are well on their way to financial security thanks to a fishing project funded by the United Nations Mission in Liberia for women in rural communities. The US\$ 23,000 project is the first of its kind, and the women now see it as an opportunity to tackle poverty at household and community levels.

The Quick Impact Project titled “Enhancing Livelihoods for Women through Fish Processing,” which started in 2011, is aimed at improving the livelihoods of women engaged in fishing activities. Most of the beneficiary women are semi-illiterate or illiterate and are heads of households.

The project has three freezers, two generators, 18 fishing nets, a canoe, as well as an outboard boat machine, all presented by UNMIL. While handing over the equipment late last year, Head of Field Office in Rivercess

County, Wesley Bokati Natana, urged the women to take full ownership of the project items and facilities. Upbeat about the project, the head of the Rural Women Structure in the county, Teeta Lloyd, praised UNMIL for the efforts to improve the livelihoods of women in rural communities, saying the income generated would enable them to cover domestic and personal expenses such as food, clothing, healthcare, school fees, etc.

“UNMIL continues to open up opportunities for women empowerment. This fishing project will enhance the economic significance of our women for the functioning and development of their communities and families,” Rivercess County Superintendent Wellington Geevon-Smith pointed out.



Moses M. Zangar, Jr./UNMIL

A group of rural women happily surround the donation

Already, members of the rural women structure have started assembling fishing nets in readiness for fishing. Six women groups out of the registered 36 are the first to benefit from phase-one of the project.

The roles of fishermen and women fish traders are distinct under the scheme: Men do the fishing and fix the fishing gear and boats while the women take over as soon as the catch is unloaded from the boats. They transport and market the fish, and in some cases transform it into dried or salted fish. In turn, they may commit to paying the fishermen back in cash after the product is sold or pay back in dried or salted fish. The main idea is to ensure that these women fish traders become a social and economic force in their community.

The handling, processing, and marketing of fish products are essential complementary functions of the local fishing industry. Women traditionally have played a major role in these activities. In most fishing

communities, for example, women dominate the markets either as buyers or sellers of food.

With funding from UN Women, functional literacy classes are conducted for the benefit of women in Cestos by Childrensmile, a local organization. They are being taught leadership, entrepreneurial and good management skills, especially basics of book-keeping and writing and numeracy skills.

“UNMIL Civil Affairs Section in collaboration with the Ministry of Gender and Development will continue to provide technical support

consolidate their position as traders as rural women are often not acquainted with official credit facilities.

For rural women, the first hurdle to setting up a business is access to credit. Getting a loan from a commercial bank is a nightmare of form-filling and intrusive questioning. Moreover, the absence of a commercial bank in Rivercess County adds to their woes.

Women play an important role in the fishing sector in Liberia. A good number of women in traditional fishing communities such as Cestos are in one way or another involved in fishery activity. The artisanal fishing fleet in



Moses M. Zangar, Jr./UNMIL

UNMIL Head of Field Office in Rivercess County, Wesley Natana turns over the items to Superintendent Wellington Geevon-Smith

to the groups in the management of the project,” says Irene Amongin, the Civil Affairs expert assigned to Rivercess County.

Oretha Quaye, a mother of seven children, is the main initiator of the fishing project. She thinks equal access to credit and participation in market development for women is needed to

Cestos consists of about 50 small canoes or boats with oars and approximately 75 boats with outboard motors. This means that a semi-industrial fishing sector does exist in the city. This sector is vital to livelihoods and food security because people directly depend on these fisheries for food and income. ■

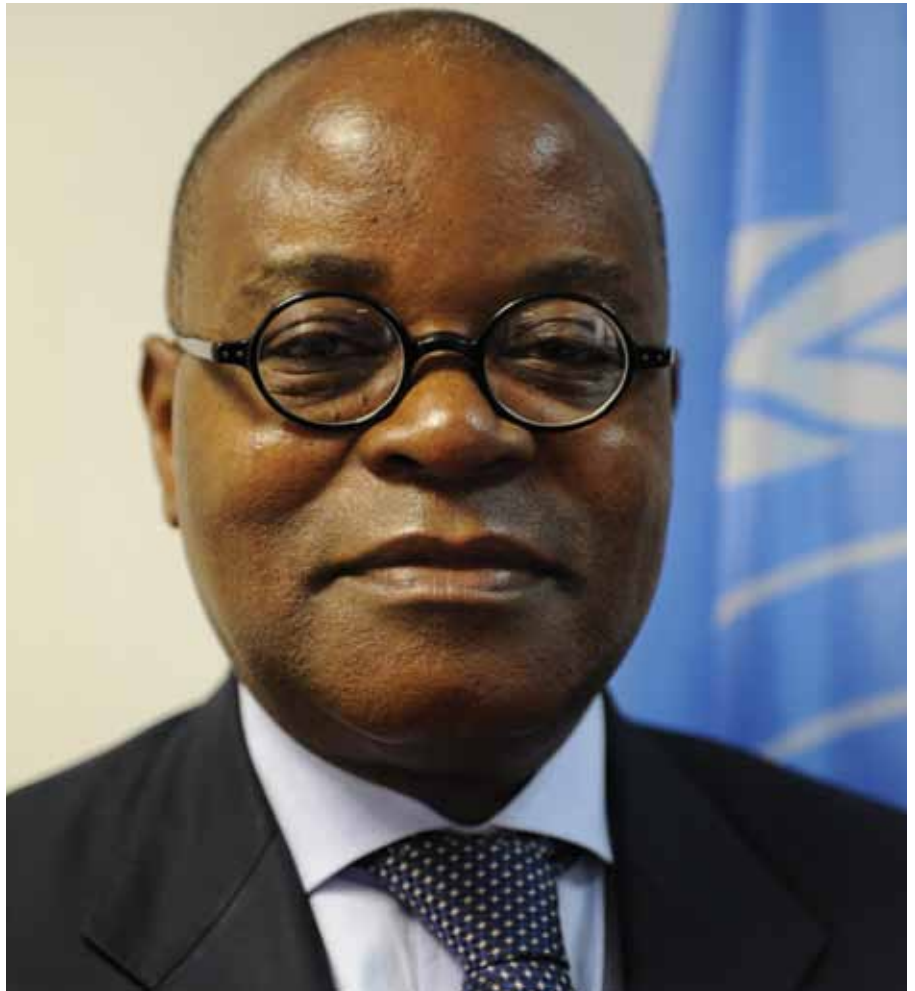
IN CONVERSATION: AENEAS C. CHUMA

“Reconciliation must be buttressed by investment and development...”

Aeneas C. Chuma joined the UN Mission in Liberia as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Consolidation of Democratic Governance in December 2012. A veteran UN diplomat with extensive experience in the field of development, he also serves as UN’s Resident Coordinator, UNDP Resident Representative and Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia. In an interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, the UN envoy discusses Liberia’s progress towards democracy, the importance of reconciliation, and the UN’s partnership with the Government, among other issues.

UN FOCUS: It has been a few months since you joined UNMIL as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Consolidation of Democratic Governance. What are your initial impressions about Liberia?

DSRSG Chuma: I had never been to Liberia before; this is my first time to be here. But I know the history of Liberia’s civil war which took an incredible toll on the general population. One cannot help but feel a sense of optimism because of the prevailing peace since the Accra peace accord ten years ago. The country has gone through a second national election. Liberia has begun to re-engage with the international community. My impression is that despite its difficult past, Liberia is now on the right path. But that does not mean that things are perfect. There is a need for more development, particularly infrastructure and the need to rebuild primary and secondary learning institutions and vocational institutions. More importantly there is need to create employment for the general population and for the youth in particular.



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

Yes, indeed, one of the major causes of the civil strife was poor governance, unaccountable and unresponsive to the wishes of the people. It is not unique to Liberia but a global problem, particularly in the developing world. Everybody now realizes the problem. That is why attempts are being made to revisit the Constitution to make it more responsive through decentralized governance. It is about spreading authority to the counties and beyond, and equally importantly, bringing service delivery closer to the population. There are also ongoing efforts to reform the Judiciary as well as state institutions such as the Liberia National Police and the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. This is a multifaceted approach to consolidate democratic governance.

Liberia has been a victim of prolonged violence, lawlessness and authoritarian regimes. Turning such a country into a democracy can be a very slow and difficult process. Is democracy taking a firm root in the country?

I think Liberia has resolutely begun the journey toward democratic governance. The reforms that are now being implemented, the Vision 2030, the Agenda for Transformation, the attempts to forge national cohesion and reconciliation, and the efforts to decentralize authority are all part of this journey. But it is not an easy journey but a difficult and long-term one. You have to continuously tighten, polish and modernize institutions so that they don't become dormant and complacent. This is not new; even developed countries go through reforms. This journey will require eternal vigilance and they cannot happen by themselves. One will have to inculcate a mentality and a mindset that support change.

What do you think is the role of reconciliation in this process?

I think reconciliation is an extremely important part of this process. The Strategic Roadmap for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation, which President Johnson Sirleaf recently introduced, is an important instrument to achieve this. A divided house cannot make progress. So it is extremely important that the Government and its partners invest in promoting reconciliation nationally. Reconciliation alone is not enough; there must be evidence to alleviate the hardships of common people. People will want to see evidence of development. It will be a lot easier for reconciliation if there is simultaneous progress in development. Because, historically, part of the grievance was that the division also meant exclusion of certain groups. Reconciliation must be buttressed by investment and development all over equitably. Reconciliation cannot be approached from a missionary point of view, purely by preaching. It must go along with demonstrable evidence of development, particularly in areas that have long been deprived.

You are also the Resident Representative of UNDP in Liberia. Where does Liberia stand today in achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015?

My impression is that Liberia has made some significant progress. But clearly Liberia is not going to meet all the goals because it started late. But what is important in Liberia are the efforts to reduce child mortality and to improve school attendance. For Liberia, the goals will remain valid for a much longer period beyond 2015.

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

UNMIL will be here for quite a long time but in different form. The military will gradually draw down. The strategy now is to build, strengthen and modernize the institutions responsible for internal security, the Liberia National Police, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, and, to some extent the Armed Forces of Liberia and also the justice system. UNMIL is not working in isolation. It works continuously to fit into the national vision and the Agenda for Transformation. The UN development agencies will step in to fill some of the vacuums. But it is not just the UN Country Team; it applies also to the Liberian Government and other development partners.

Do you expect a favorable response to the recently launched Humanitarian Appeal?

I am hoping that the partners of Liberia will continue to be generous and recognize the need to support the critical humanitarian gaps particularly in the south eastern counties of Liberia that were initially affected by the humanitarian crisis of 2010/2011. OCHA, through the special Emergency Response Fund, already has committed US\$3 million. Some countries are identifying other areas of possible support, especially water and sanitation. The needs are quite acute. Fragile communities in those regions also need some assistance even though they did not host refugees as other communities. I have to remain optimistic. We are talking to the partners hoping that they respond generously.

On a personal note - how do you feel about your posting to Liberia as the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General?

I feel lucky to be here. Most of my work has been with UNDP, dealing with development issues. And now I have an opportunity to combine development issues with urgent peace consolidation issues. It is an incredible and fascinating challenge for me.



Liberia Makes Progress

By Vanessa Curney

Varney Dargo, an orphan in Voogbor Community, northwest of Liberia's Grand Cape Mount County, has been suffering from a disease in the leg for more than six years now. He says his relatives refuse to treat him at a hospital but rather take him to one herbalist after another because they believe his illness is linked to witchcraft, thus making him an outcast.

Almost paralyzed, this young boy

faces several forms of ill-treatment including child labor, as he is forced to crack palm kernel for LD20 per bag; abandonment, as he is left alone to navigate the lavatory, feeding, laundry; and poor sanitary conditions.

Mohammed Sambullah, Varney's uncle, says the family remains firmly of the belief that the boy is very much linked to witchcraft, given that witchdoctors have made all efforts to heal him and have failed.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was created to protect children such as Varney and is the

world's most endorsed human rights treaty – only Somalia, South Sudan and the United States have yet to ratify. It blossomed out of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – not itself a legally binding document, but which set a strong moral framework for the six core human rights conventions that were to come, including the CRC.

As Varney's story shows, it's one thing to have the legally binding treaty and another to actually put that law into practice. In September 2012, a Liberian Delegation of Government Ministers presented the country's periodic



Liberian children demand education and security



such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Liberia has also developed policies and plans such as the National Action Plan for the Prevention and Management of Gender-based Violence, along with

juvenile justice. Among other things, it wants a review of all domestic laws and a national action plan linked to the national budget. It also wants a National Well-Being Council set up urgently.

At a UNICEF, Government of

ss in Children's Rights

reports to the Child Rights Committee in Geneva. The Committee monitors how well all state parties are putting the convention into action in their own countries.

The Committee concludes that Liberia has made some important advances in children's rights over the last twelve years: it has created several laws that benefit children including the Children's Law, Education Reform Act, Anti-Corruption Law, the Rape Law and the Anti-trafficking Law. Liberia has also signed several international and regional human rights instruments

structures to promote those rights including the Women and Children's Protection Section within Liberia National Police, and the Criminal Court which presides over cases of violence against women and girls. (Liberia recently launched mobile partitions at Criminal Court E in Monrovia to help protect the identity of child and women rape survivors).

Now, Liberia needs to forge ahead, says the Committee. It wants to see the Children's Law fall in line with the CRC, especially in the areas of the minimum marital age, adoption and

Liberia and Child Protection Network presentation of the findings in Monrovia in December, UNICEF's Representative in Liberia, Isabel Crowley, reinforced the Committee's recommendation to translate the children's law "from words into action" and talked about progressing and moving forward, even though not everything "is perfect". Ministers also promised the audience comprising schoolchildren, journalists and other adults that they would bear down heavily on the practice of female genital mutilation which is currently not outlawed in the country. ■



ASG Simonovic Urges Refugees to Help Build

By Napoleon Viban

Visiting Côte d'Ivoire late last November to appraise the country's human rights situation, UN Assistant Secretary General for Human Rights, Ivan

Simonovic crossed over briefly to commune with Ivorian refugees in the Liberian border County of Grand Gedeh.

And when he met with the refugee leadership at Solo Camp, some 15 km north of the County capital Zwedru, the ASG insisted that the restoration

of peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire was the shared responsibility of all Ivorians, at home or in exile.

"As leaders, you have the huge responsibility to lift the spirits and keep the hope alive among the refugees," Simonovic told the camp leaders, urging them to guide their



Napoleon Vrbani/UNMIL

Simonovic meets with Ivorian refugees

host communities across the region, notwithstanding calls encouraging them to move into the safe confines of the camps.

ASG Simonovic told the refugees that he was in Liberia to appraise their situation firsthand, noting that their plight was critical to the process of national healing and reconciliation in Côte d'Ivoire.

"My understanding of the situation in Côte d'Ivoire wouldn't be complete if I didn't come over to hear your concerns and hopes," he told the refugees.

Although a voluntary repatriation programme run by UNHCR in collaboration with the LRRRC has been ongoing for several months, many refugees remain hesitant to make the return journey, citing insecurity back home.

"We continue to hear of arbitrary arrests, and our forests are still in the hands of foreign occupants," a spokesperson for the refugees complained to the ASG during his meeting with the camp leaders.

Acknowledging their fears, Simonovic told the refugees he had discussed these and other concerns with Ivorian government authorities.

He said equal rights for all Ivorians, regardless of their political, ethnic or

Ivorian Peace

compatriots away from feelings of revenge.

Some 68,000 refugees, who fled the 2010 post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and the intermittent skirmishes that have since followed, were still living in southeastern Liberia by the close of 2012. Officials from

Some 68,000 refugees, who fled the 2010 post-election crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and the intermittent skirmishes that have since followed, were still living in southeastern Liberia by the close of 2012. Officials from the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) said about 28,000 still live in some 54 host communities across the region, notwithstanding calls encouraging them to move into the safe confines of the camps.

the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) said about 28,000 still live in some 54

religious affiliations was fundamental to forging reconciliation and building trust between communities. ■



Repatriation to Côte d'Ivoire Momentum

By Sulaiman Momodu

It is a very busy morning in Bahn Refugee Camp on 26 February as dozens of excited Ivorian refugees converge at the assembly point to get on the convoy for a journey back home. Many of those travelling had woken up early enough to gather all their possessions including pots, mattresses, mats, food stuff and other personal effects.

One by one, staff of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the

Liberia Refugees Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) call out the names of refugees who had registered to return home. Dai-Narcisse is one among them, waiting patiently with his wife and three kids to hear their names called out. As his name is finally called out to board the truck, Dai-Narcisse, a well-known cultural dancer in the camp, is all smiles. Back home, the 30-year-old is also a professional driver.

There are 395 refugees returning home on this convoy comprising

10 passenger trucks, three luggage trucks, one back-up truck and three light vehicles, including an ambulance. The refugees are heading to places such as Danane and Man in Côte d'Ivoire singing heartily. Friends they had made while in refuge wave them goodbye.

Following disputed presidential run-off elections in November 2010, more than 200,000 Ivoirians fled into Liberia to seek refuge. The Bahn Refugee Camp in Nimba County was the first camp established in February 2011. The other camps are Solo, Dougee and PTP camp (former Prime Timber Production compound) in Grand Gedeh County and Little Wlebo in Maryland County. Ziah Refugee Camp in Grand Gedeh



Peter Zangama/UNHCR

The journey back home begins

ire Gains

County had been closed as part of camp consolidation efforts as refugee population decreases with many returning home on their own.

After about two hours of driving from Bahn camp, occasionally stopping in between to allow refugees to have light refreshment and answer the call of nature, the convoy finally arrives at Liberia's Luogwato border crossing point. Here, UN peacekeepers of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Operations in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) are at hand to assist the convoy to cross over into Côte d'Ivoire.

On Ivorian soil, security and immigration personnel screen the refugees and the green light is given for the convoy to continue with

UNOCI peacekeepers providing escort. In Danane, Ivorian authorities welcome the former refugees now known as returnees and assure them of security. Dai-Narcisse and his fellow returnees thank the Government of Liberia, UNHCR and partners for taking care of them while in refuge and for safely transporting them back home. Assistance to returnees include a cash grant as well as some food and non-food items.

"There is increasing interest and number of Ivorian refugees in Bahn Refugee Camp who want to return home," explains UNHCR's Alex Woart, noting that before this year, repatriation from the camp to Danane was done through a very long route. "There was a broken bridge on the road to the Luogwato border which was a serious challenge. Basically, we had to facilitate repatriation by going in a circle through Toe Town Transit Centre where refugees had to overnight and then take them to Toulepleu Transit Centre in Côte d'Ivoire the following day where some of them will again overnight. The journey was two days while it is now a matter of hours," says Woart, delightedly.

The repatriation process was interrupted in June 2012 following the killing of seven UN peacekeepers in the Tai region in Côte d'Ivoire near the border with Liberia as many refugees re-evaluated their interest to return. The incident prompted the closure of the Liberian border with Côte d'Ivoire although it remained open to humanitarian activities. Also, some refugees who had been repatriated returned to Liberia citing security concerns. By the end of 2012,

there were more than 64,800 Ivorian refugees in Liberia although UNHCR was expecting a much lower figure.

Since the beginning of 2013, hundreds of refugees have been registering to return home especially from Bahn and Dougee camps. "For January and February of this year alone, we have repatriated more than 4,500 Ivorian refugees compared to about 6,000 in 2011 and 2012. This is an indication of improvement in safety and security in Côte d'Ivoire," remarks Acting UNHCR Representative Robert Tibagwa. In January of this year, 996 Ivorian refugees, comprising 693 individuals from Dougee and 303 from Bahn, repatriated in one day, the highest return in a day since facilitated Voluntary Repatriation of Ivorian refugees started in late 2011.

The general security situation along the border has improved with UNMIL and UNOCI peacekeepers together with national security personnel conducting regular border patrols. At a meeting held at the UN Mission in Liberia Headquarters in mid-February, Acting Deputy UNHCR Representative Andrew Mbogori briefed Assistant Secretary-General Edmond Mulet of the Department of Peacekeeping Operation, the two Special Representatives of the Secretary-General of UNMIL and UNOCI, Karin Langren and Albert Koenders, as well as senior UN officials about the increase in the number of Ivorian refugees returning home. "Our repatriation planning figure for this year is 16,000, but we are hopeful that we will exceed this target," said Mbogori, allaying fears of a protracted refugee situation in Liberia. ■

Refugees assemble for briefing in Danane



Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR



Sensitizing Refugees on Responsibilities and Rep

By Sulaiman Momodu

With cultural performances and loudspeakers belting out familiar songs, a carnival atmosphere was recently created in camps and communities hosting Ivorian refugees with enthusiastic crowds demonstrating their dancing prowess as a mass information sensitization campaign got underway. The campaign on “the Rights and Responsibilities of Refugees” and the on-going “Facilitated Voluntary Repatriation” was organized by the United Nations High Commissioner

for Refugees (UNHCR) in collaboration with the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), UN agencies and other partners. The exercise was more than welcome news to more than 64,000 Ivorian refugees in Liberia.

Launched in Maryland County on 21 January, all Ivorian refugee camps and some communities in Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties benefited from the campaign over a ten-day period. In Grand Gedeh County, the sensitization team visited PTP, Solo and Dougee refugee camps in addition to Tuzon, Toe’s Town, Blown Town, Janzon, Bayweede,

New Pohan & Old Pohan, Boe Town and Zleh Town hosting communities. In Maryland County, the Little Wlebo Refugee Camp and Gbon Town were visited while sensitization also took place in Bahn Refugee Camp, Saclepea Refugee Camp and Old Yourpea in Nimba County. Messages were passed on in appropriate languages and refugees had the opportunity to ask questions. UNMIL Radio covered the exercise and discussion programmes were organized on community radio stations.

“The objective of this campaign is to ensure that the civilian character of asylum and refugee camps is maintained and that refugee camps



Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR
Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR



A sensitization session in progress

Rights, repatriation

remain a place of peace and protection. Generally, refugees are among the most vulnerable people in the world," remarked the UNHCR Acting Representative, Robert Tibagwa.

Among other things, refugees were informed that the message on "Rights and Responsibilities" was aimed at ensuring that refugees do not come into conflict with the law as had been witnessed on some occasions when some individuals had either taken the law into their hands or had instigated others to disturb the peace in camps. They were reminded that refugees are civilians and not military personnel or armed elements and that everybody on Liberian soil is obliged to respect

and obey the laws of Liberia. As UNMIL transition continues with the gradual handing over of security in some areas already in progress, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Karin Landgren, had visited Ivorian refugee camps and urged the refugees to remain law abiding as the UNHCR and partners facilitate repatriation.

In line with relevant Conventions and Protocols, refugees were reminded that the UNHCR is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems, but the primary responsibility to ensure that refugees access their rights is the State in which they are seeking refuge. "Refugees have rights, but they also have responsibility to obey the laws of the country in which they are seeking refuge," reiterated the Executive Director of the LRRRC, Cllr. Wheatonia Y. Dixon Barnes.

The message that the security situation in Côte d'Ivoire has relatively improved in most parts of the country was received with cheers and applause. Many refugees, especially in Dougee and Bahn refugee camps, expressed their desire to register and

return home. All questions and issues raised by refugees were clarified. Among the questions were: "Can my safety and security be guaranteed should I return home?"; Can I be assisted to repatriate when I do not live in a refugee camp?; When can I express my desire to return?; Will UNHCR Liberia transport me to my final destination in Côte d'Ivoire?; What assistance will I receive when I arrive in Côte d'Ivoire?

The refugees were informed that upon return to Côte d'Ivoire they will receive a cash grant equivalent of US\$ 150 (75,000 CFA) per adult and US\$100 (50,000 CFA) per child under 18 years, non-food items, food supplied by WFP and any other assistance from various organizations that will sustain their return.

Although it was not the first mass information campaign organized for Ivorian refugees, the exercise clearly reinforced the need for refugees to know their rights and obligations, as well as updates on repatriation. The campaign continues on the airwaves with messages being aired on the biweekly French programme from UNMIL Radio transmitters in Zwedru and Harper. ■

Improved Security Sparks Demand to



Napoleon Viban/UNMIL

A border security meeting in progress

By Napoleon Viban

The idea for Liberian and Ivorian security forces to crisscross their common border in joint patrols supported by UNMIL and UNOCI peacekeepers is gaining increasing traction. But even as the two parties ponder the implications of a common watch, the reinforcement in recent months of separate border patrols on their respective flanks is beginning to pay off.

Reacting to reports about suspected Ivorian fugitives raiding border towns in Côte d'Ivoire from rear bases on the Liberian frontier, Liberia launched a military operation in June last year to secure the country's southeastern borders. And as *Operation Restore Hope* gathered pace, UNMIL and UNOCI forces equally revved up ground and air patrols, which they jointly conduct with Liberian and Ivorian security agencies.

Seven months on, UN military

observers and their Liberian and Ivorian counterparts alike affirm a significant decrease in security threat levels at the borders.

Following months of undisturbed quiet, there have been calls lately from several quarters urging the Government of Liberia to reopen the border with Côte d'Ivoire. It was closed in August 2012, two months after an ambush on a UNOCI ground patrol in the Ivorian border town of Tai. Seven UN peacekeepers were killed in the 8 June attack.

The only other major incident in western Côte d'Ivoire since Tai, dates back to 13 August 2012 when unidentified attackers seized and held two Ivorian border posts for several hours before government forces regained control.

"The border closure is severely affecting our operations," Henson S. Kayee, Senior Customs Collector at the Toe Town Customs Collectorate in Grand Gedeh County bemoaned recently at a meeting of *Operation*

Mayo, the framework under which UNMIL and UNOCI, along with Ivorian and Liberian security agencies consult on cross-border security and cooperation.

As business in the border Counties reeled from the impact, Kayee seized the chance at the meeting, which was held last 5 February in the Liberian border town of B'hai, to press his case, arguing that all was now calm at the frontiers.

So severe was the crunch further down south in Maryland County that the authorities in Liberia ceded to a public outcry and in mid September 2012, eased the restrictions a little. A partial opening allowed limited daylight movement of goods through the border crossing at Pedebo – a lifeline on the Cavalla River through which essential commodities from Côte d'Ivoire reach Maryland's markets. Otherwise, the border remains closed to all movement, excepting humanitarian interventions, notably the voluntary repatriation of

Reopen Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire Border

refugees.

Moaning over the closure has by no means been confined to Liberia's small-time cross-border traders and revenue collectors. Between the Liberian and Ivorian communities that straddle the border, ties of family and kinship intertwine and overlap. Little wonder that at the *Operation Mayo*

debriefing in B'hai, UNOCI observers from the Sector West Team Site of Toulepleu reported similar clamour on the Ivorian side for the border to be reopened.

The contention was advanced, too, about the futility of a prolonged closure, considering that scores of unmanned border crossings dot

the 700 km Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire frontier. Team Site Toulepleu cited locals as affirming that the closure notwithstanding, clandestine crossings on foot continue across these unmanned corridors. The team noted that of some seven known crossing points within their area of responsibility, only one was official. ■

BIN Outpost Gets a Modern Face

Since the inception of the forum, almost every session of *Operation Mayo* has resonated with complaints from the Liberian Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization (BIN) about shortfalls in basic infrastructure and logistic support.

But as the curtains fell on 2012, BIN agents in Grand Gedeh County had more to celebrate besides the Feast of the Nativity and the advent of a New Year. Late last November, UNMIL officially handed over to the Bureau a newly constructed office for the border post of Zaway in Garley Town, funded under the Mission's Quick Impact Projects.

The modern edifice, poles apart from the make-shift thatch hut that housed the outpost until then, comprises four office rooms, a charge quarter, two detention cells, a well, and a water pump.

"It's the first time we've seen a building of this kind around here since the border post was established in 1972," Zaway resident Augustine Gear confessed at the brief hand-over ceremony.

The facility, along with some office equipment and stationery, was officially turned over to the BIN on 20 November 2012 by Thomas Mtaisi, Head of the UN Field Office in Grand Gedeh.

Receiving the new office



From its previous bamboo structure, the BIN office has moved to the new building



building, BIN County Commander Dweh Tarlue assured UNMIL of its maintenance and upkeep. Tarlue nonetheless appealed for possible additional support, including the acquisition of a power generator and water storage tanks.

Mtaisi urged continued BIN vigilance to ensure security along Liberia's border with Côte d'Ivoire. Like Gear, he too acknowledged how far the border post had come

in recent years. Mtaisi recalled that when he first visited Zaway in 2009, town elders conceded it was the first time since 1985 that a vehicle had braved the bad road to the area, which at the time was derelict and impassable. It was upon experiencing the challenge firsthand, that Mtaisi arranged for UNMIL's Chinese Engineer Company to step in the following year and rehabilitate the road.



Members of the cooperatives get together

Farmers' Cooperatives

By James S. King

Members of eight farmers' associations, comprising predominantly rural women, are currently benefiting from training on sustainable agriculture. Supported by the World Food Programme (WFP), the training is carried out by Cooperative Development Agency (CDA), the government agency that regulates farmers' cooperatives in Liberia. The combined membership of the associations stands at 453 farmers of which 293 are women. They are from Liberia's main food growing regions of Bong, Gbarpolu, Lofa, and Nimba Counties. The training exercises will end in late March 2013 following which the farmers' association will be transformed into cooperatives.

Conducted at community level in selected counties, the training exercise covers methods of sustainable farming, HIV/AIDS, Gender Based

Violence, conflict resolution, peace building, report writing, agricultural development with societies in mining, entrepreneurship, microenterprise development and utilization of market information.

WFP and CDA have teamed up to enhance organizational development and empowerment of women in agricultural cooperatives. The effort is intended to reverse the present trend of subsistence farming in rural communities into market-driven agricultural communities with women as principal beneficiaries. Creation of awareness, good governance, audit, capacity building, forming new cooperatives and reactivation of dormant cooperatives are identified significant components of a vibrant agro sector.

"Agricultural cooperatives can help end global hunger," says FAO Director-General José Grazizno da Silva Silva, adding that it was "unacceptable" that close to eight hundred seventy million people continue to suffer from severe

malnutrition in a world that produces enough food for all.

WFP is purchasing locally produced rice from members of agricultural associations under its Purchase for Progress (P4P) initiative designed to provide meals to students in Liberian schools as well as to improve incomes and reduce poverty among small farm holders. Provision of high grade seed rice by WFP to farmers associations has resulted in increased local food production. From 85,000 metric tons in 2006, rice production in Liberia increased to about 200,000 metric tons in 2009.

Women in rural communities in Liberia play key roles in production and supply of agricultural food products, principally for domestic consumption. However, WFP's support for enhanced knowledge of sustainable farming is expected to enable Liberian farmers, particularly women, accrue better rewards. Awareness created under the WFP/CDA initiative has empowered community farmers to make informed decisions on farmers' cooperative societies. There is now increasing interest amongst farmers who want to join cooperatives as a means to self sufficiency. ■



Facts About UNMIL's Transition

What does UNMIL's transition mean for Liberia?

The gradual reduction of UNMIL forces in the transition process is a sign of progress – Liberia has moved from a humanitarian emergency to a peace consolidation phase. UNMIL's reduction of troop figures does not mean a total withdrawal of UN staff. The UN has been in Liberia for decades. The 16 UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes, and the World Bank will continue to work in Liberia in the years ahead.

An integrated UN, driven by a common vision, ensures greater cohesion at the country level, allowing the UN to deliver in a more coordinated and consistent fashion for the benefit of the Liberian people.

What is the difference between drawdown and withdrawal?

Many people appear to associate the words “drawdown” and “withdrawal” with “premature exit” or “departure.” What UNMIL is going through with the Mission's transition is an “Adjustment,” and “Restructuring,” as recommended by an inter-agency United Nations Technical Assessment Mission, conducted in February 2012. UNMIL is restructuring and readjusting to better serve Liberia, as the country's institutions develop further and Liberia's security agencies in particular become increasingly capable to take on additional security responsibilities.

When will the UN in Liberia leave?

The UN family is committed to Liberia and the transition process of UNMIL does not mean that the UN is leaving Liberia. As UNMIL decreases

its presence throughout the country, it will work closely with other UN agencies to ensure that agencies' engagement is complementary and takes the work of the Mission into the future. UNMIL has been a fully integrated mission, with all parts of the UN system in Liberia working together as one under the leadership of the SRSG (and Coordinator of UN operations in Liberia). An adjustment in the presence and focus of the Mission will be made to enable a gradual and calibrated transition away from peacekeeping to a full United Nations peace building effort. Although the number of peacekeepers will be decreasing, UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, WHO and other UN bodies will remain strong and committed in Liberia.

What will UNMIL's strength be now that the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2066 in September 2012

The extension of UNMIL's mandate to September 2013 represents a strong commitment by the UN to maintain peace and security in Liberia. On 17 September 2012, the Security Council decided to decrease UNMIL's military strength by about 4,200 personnel, in three phases between August 2012 and July 2015. After this drawdown, the Mission's military strength will be at about 3,750 personnel by July 2015, whose presence throughout the country will be determined by ongoing assessments conducted in conjunction with the Government of Liberia.

While the Council decided to decrease UNMIL's military strength, it also approved the recommendation

made by a Technical Assessment Mission, conducted in February 2012, to increase the Mission's authorized number of formed police units by three. These units, each of which is comprised of 140 police, are equipped to respond to public disorder incidents. Those 420 police officers will be located strategically in counties where the Mission's military presence is being decreased. They will provide backup to government actors providing security in those areas, as well as to ensure that UNMIL is able to quickly and effectively respond to incidents that could cause major challenges to government institutions in these areas.

UNMIL has a civilian and military presence in each of Liberia's 15 counties, with some counties having additional military and police in county capitals. UNMIL Force has, since its original deployment, held a military presence in all counties. However, starting in October 2012, UNMIL military will begin to vacate some counties, and by June 2013, four counties -- Grand Bassa, River Cess, Sinoe and Grand Kru -- will most likely no longer have a permanent military presence. UNMIL Civilian and UN police presence, however, will remain in these counties.

These areas will continue to be covered by UNMIL's security umbrella, and UNMIL will work closely with government institutions to ensure that no security vacuum presents itself. Civilian staff will remain in all county capitals, as will UN Police teams, who continue to build the capacity of Liberia National Police throughout the country.

Liberian

How long should UN peace



Beyan B. Barnar Mechanic, Tubmanburg: I am jittery about UNMIL's departure. I would love for UNMIL to remain until 2018. I think by this time, the Liberian Government would have been well groomed to sustain the peace. Peace eluded us in the 1990s until UN formed the peacekeeping group that restored peace to Liberia after 14 years of hooliganism and self destruction.



Nyonbada D. Strother, Student, University of Liberia: For me I would like for UNMIL to stay in Liberia for at least three more years because there is no security in Liberia actually. There is no police presence if you walk the streets at night. Our government does not have structured security for UNMIL to leave Liberia now. Government is trying its best with security but it is not okay yet for UNMIL to leave.



Louise Flomo, Dietitian, Tubmanburg: For me 2015 is a steady timetable for UNMIL's departure from Liberia. The UN has done more than enough for us to the extent that we have developed a dependency syndrome. I need not mention how bad the shape of our security, justice, economic and infrastructure was in 2003 when UNMIL came. I know there is great need for improvement; that is why I am suggesting the departure of UNMIL by 2015 if not I would say 2014.



Flomo Tokpa, Retiree and Resident, Bernard Beach Community, Congo Town: I want UNMIL to remain because our country's security is not strong yet for UNMIL to leave Liberia. We don't have real security now. We still have some fears in us. I would like for UNMIL to remain in Liberia for additional two years beyond the time they have set to leave Liberia. UNMIL people have provided us security and we won't want them to leave Liberia anytime soon.



Abraham B. Dean, Resident, Sinkor: I feel that UNMIL should remain in Liberia for additional three or four years because there are a lot of services that UNMIL provides in Liberia. Most importantly our security lies in the hands of UNMIL. The security apparatuses in Liberia are not strong enough to secure Liberia in times of riot and other security challenges anywhere in Liberia. Until our country's security is strong to protect us, I don't think UNMIL should leave Liberia now. If UNMIL leaves now I think we will be insecure.

ns Speak

keepers stay in Liberia?



Janet Yei Dahn, Student, University of Liberia: I would like for UNMIL to leave Liberia at the time they have outlined because our war is over and we now have peace in Liberia. I don't think we can fight war amongst ourselves anymore. For this reason UNMIL cannot be here perpetually. Every organization operates according to plans. I believe the organization set a time schedule to leave Liberia, and when that time comes let them leave. UNMIL and other countries helped to restructure our army and police which we can rely on for security.



Anthony N. Davies, Jr. USAID-Monrovia: I think UNMIL should remain in Liberia due to the conditions of insecurity and fragile peace in Liberia. I don't think Armed Forces of Liberia or the Liberia National Police are 100% up to security task. UNMIL should stay in Liberia for next five years. We know Armed Forces of Liberia has conducted recruitment and training of personnel, but at the same time we hear that some of them had left the military. Liberian police and military require additional training to enable them provide required security.



Kou Wonokay, Monitoring & Evaluation Assistant, Ministry of Planning & Economic Affairs, Lofa County Development Office: For me one reason I want UN peacekeepers to remain in Liberia for at least six more years is the fact that Monrovia is not Liberia. Lofa County connects Liberia's borders with Guinea and Sierra Leone where security is not enough to protect lives and properties in case of crisis. Therefore, I think it is not prudent that UNMIL draw down significantly. Liberian government lacks capacity to handle security in the country.



Sam Jabbah, Delmas Shipping Liberia: We have a fragile peace in Liberia now. Regarding security, if you call 911 you won't get a rapid response. I would prefer UNMIL to stay for additional two years. The question of UNMIL leaving or remaining is a difficult one to answer. For UNMIL to leave it means Liberia National Police will have to take care of everything.



Moses Weah, National Youth Service Programme Officer, Lofa County: I want UNMIL to remain in Liberia up to the next presidential and legislative elections in 2017 and beyond. By this time Liberian security forces will be strengthened to handle the security challenges. Our security forces cannot handle security challenges now, thus the departure of UN peacekeepers at this time will pose a serious threat to Liberia. We are hopeful that the government will do all it can to beef up its security forces in few years to come, but for UNMIL to leave in two or three years time will be disastrous for Liberia.



Tokpah Tarnue, ELBC Radio Correspondent, Lofa County: I want UNMIL to stay in Liberia for many years to help with security. Lofa County is vulnerable in terms of peace and security due to tribal and religious conflicts. The presence of UNMIL security forces will buttress Liberia National Police, the Immigration Bureau and other Liberian security forces to combat crimes and violence. UNMIL is supporting the Liberian Joint Security personnel to monitor porous border points between Liberia and Guinea and Liberia and Sierra Leone corridors. Let UNMIL remain in Liberia until the Liberian government strengthens the Armed Forces of Liberia and the Immigration to secure our borders.



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