

issue 04, volume 9 | june - august 2013

# UN FOCUS



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SPECIAL ISSUE



# 10

YEARS OF PEACE

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

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UN FOCUS is published quarterly  
Printed by Buck Press Ltd., Accra, Ghana



## Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

**W**ith Liberia marking the tenth anniversary of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 18 August, there is much to celebrate in reaching this remarkable milestone.

As we celebrate ten years of peace, I would like to congratulate the Liberian people, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the Government for their unwavering commitment to the consolidation of peace and to advancing Liberia's development.

Liberia's journey in these ten years has been one of steady progress. Guns in the hands of young people have been replaced by pens and school books. Refugees have returned home with hope for the future, and schools are opening their doors across the nation to educate future generations of leaders.

The anniversary of Liberia's Comprehensive Peace Agreement is a chance for us to come together and commit anew to keep working to strengthen the foundations of the country's peace and stability.

In the coming months, the people

of Liberia will have an important opportunity to participate in community meetings on revising Liberia's Constitution to strengthen the foundations of a more democratic and just political system. Citizens will also have an opportunity to become involved in processes under Liberia's reconciliation roadmap, launched in June. In addition, the Government is increasing access to security and justice services for citizens across Liberia, and I encourage young people to seek careers in these fields.

There is much hard work ahead. The participation of committed people in public life, from all parts of the country, is important to preventing a return to the dark days of the past.

Next month the world will mark the International Day of Peace on the 21 September. This offers us one more opportunity to mark Liberia's achievements and to commit afresh to lasting peace in Liberia, and to honour the memory of family and community members who lost their lives during the civil war by pledging to maintain Liberia's hard-won peace.

**Karin Landgren**

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



By Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

Ten Years of Peace:

# UNMIL's Contribution to Liberia's Peace, Security and Onward March to Prosperity

**"LIBERIANS AND FOREIGNERS ALIKE MUST PAUSE TO REFLECT AND GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGE THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF THE UN TO THE MAINTENANCE OF PEACE, SECURITY AND STABILITY THAT WE ENJOY TODAY."**

**T**he experts often predict that countries emerging from civil crisis are likely to revert into conflict within seven years. Our country is proving them wrong.

Liberia stepped out of the shadow of civil war in 2003, and is beginning its tenth year of uninterrupted peace and solid progress. A new generation of Liberians is growing up without the knowledge of war, without being internally displaced or being refugees. For the peace we enjoy, and the progress being achieved, we thank the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for the tremendous contribution.

On August 18, 2003 Liberian stakeholders, including the warring factions, political parties and civil society groups, signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana, which formalized the ending of war and ushered in an interim government

with a two-year mandate to ensure disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, promote reconciliation, and hold free and fair elections with the assistance of the international community. Around the same time, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1509 (2003) to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and the peace process generally. On October 1, 2003, West African troops who had been serving with an ECOWAS vanguard force, ECOMIL, were "re-hatted" as UN peacekeepers under the UN Mission in Liberia, and have been here since.

Liberians and foreigners alike must pause to reflect and gratefully acknowledge the crucial role of the UN to the maintenance of peace, security and stability that we enjoy today. By their presence and selfless sacrifice, the UN through its agencies especially peacekeepers have taught us that



people everywhere have the right to live their lives in peace and justice, free from fear, free from threats of war, free from all forms of domination.

Over the last decade, Liberia's phenomenal rise, from a failed and pariah state to one that is recognized and is regaining respect among the comity of nations, has been supported, in large measure, by the international community. Under UNMIL's security umbrella, over 100,000 men, women and children turned in their weapons to start their lives anew. Many went through the rehabilitation and reintegration programs and benefitted from the opportunity to resume formal education or undergo vocational training.

Within the decade, more than 1 million registered voters turned out to cast their ballots and choose their leaders to run the country in two successive elections. Nearly 500,000 internally displaced persons living in camps and tens of thousands of refugees overseas have returned home with support from humanitarian agencies. Since the advent of this government, UNMIL and the UN Country Team have been assisting in security sector reform, especially in retraining the Liberia National Police and helping with the reconstruction of the country in different ways.

UNMIL's strong presence deserves special recognition for these many achievements. It led the operations to collect and destroy weapons, counsel ex-combatants during the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. It also played a key role to support the electoral processes undertaken in the country.

Beyond safeguarding the country, the blue berets of the multi-national force are performing humanitarian and community-development work. They are providing health services to thousands of locals, free of charge, at UNMIL clinics and medical camps;

repairing thousands of kilometers of roads; rehabilitating schools and clinics; cleaning up the communities; facilitating the movement of personnel; teaching ex-combatants and others various vocational skills.

These efforts have not come without sacrifice. Over the last 10 years, 176 fatalities have been documented, most of them succumbing to various illnesses. We wish to honor them and express deep condolences to the bereaved families.

Liberians understand that promoting democracy and building a nation for sustainable growth and development take much more than simply holding elections. Accordingly, with the help of the international community,

Although the country, like many others, continues to grapple with high unemployment, especially among the youth, some of whom are ex-combatants who were bypassed by an education, government's policies of prudence and restraint of the last six years – seen as a period of stabilization and economic recovery – have put the country firmly on the path to sustainable growth.

Our government sees its second term as a period of national transformation for Liberia. After extensive nationwide consultations with the broadest possible participation of the citizens, we adopted a strategic national plan that we call "Liberia Rising – Vision 2030", our long term strategy to make Liberia a middle income country.

Towards that end, we developed a five-year development program, "Agenda for Transformation," together with a "Roadmap for Reconciliation". We are determined that Liberia should not need official development assistance in ten years' time. As necessary first steps towards achieving our objectives, we have identified



UN peacekeepers have touched every facet of the lives of Liberians  
Photo: Christopher Herwig/UNMIL

we are taking steps to ensure functioning and effective integrity institutions such as the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission (LACC), the General Auditing Commission (GAC), the Liberia Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (LEITI), among others as there is the urgent need for good governance with functioning and transparent institutions, rule of law, protection of human rights, independent judiciary, free press and free speech, an engaging civil society and vibrant private sector.

The Liberian economy grew at an average of 9% annually from 2006-2008. It has averaged 7% following the global financial crisis of 2008-2009.

power, roads and ports as priority projects.

As Liberia continues to progress, benefitting from the goodwill and cooperation of the international community, we felt it is time for us to once again give back to the world in whatever small way that we can. And so, a few weeks ago we deployed an Infantry Platoon to Mali as part of the now UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission (MINUSMA).

Once again, let me end by thanking UNMIL, both civilian and military, and the entire UN family for the tremendous work you have done over the past decade to help Liberia recover from the ravages of war.

*The writer is the President of Liberia*



By Leymah Gbowee

# Ten Years Later, is Peace Finally Here?

**E**arly morning on 18 August 2003, deep in sleep, the ring of my cell phone woke me up. On the other end of the line was Charles Gyude Bryant (one of the strong supporters of our peace campaign). “Leymah, you all have done it! The Comprehensive Peace Agreement has been signed.” By that time I was alert. “What did you say, sir?” He repeated that the agreement had been signed. I woke one of the protesting women up as we used to share a room (depending on our funding sometimes four or seven to a room). I told her the CPA had been signed, “peace is here and we can go home.” She in turn woke everyone else up and we got on our knees and started praying and thanking God.

It had been three long months of tears, frustration and heart-ache. Three months of the so called liberators refusing to end the war because they were interested in personal aggrandizement; three months of anger and pain... but it was also three long

months that taught my sisters and I courage in the midst of adversity and that evil can and will never prevail in the face of innocent cries.

Peace was finally here? Or was it? We came back to Liberia to celebrate our victory. Celebrate we did, on the airfield where we sat under the scorching sun and heavy down pour of rain sometimes with no money, water or food but armed with our conviction that we must continue if our children must live a life free of suffering, free of rape, free of abduction in to “small boys unit.”

But the question was: Is peace finally here? We all answered, No! For us peace was the process of disarming the young men and women, peace was having a democratically elected President who would ensure that basic social services were up and running and that people could live in dignity again. Peace for us was also the process of discussing why we fought and finding a solution to the problems that existed between families, communities







and the nation as a whole. Until then peace was not finally here...

My sisters and I joined UNMIL in the process of disarming. We launched the "Back to School Campaign" (encouraging ex-fighters to put their guns down and go back to school), we were in the communities identifying and taking the fighters and their guns to be disarmed. When the symbolic disarmament process failed we worked with the generals to identify the problems and where we could be of assistance.

We joined the National Election Commission (NEC) to support civic and voters' education. NEC recognized us, Women in Peace Network (WIPNET), for the level of work at the end of the elections.

We ended our campaign in December of 2005, after 2 ½ years because we had exhausted the list and for us peace was finally here.

Ten years on, can we really say peace is finally here? Speaking for my self, I would say no!

The guns have been silent for 10 years, we have had two successive elections, reconstruction of major infrastructure is ongoing in some cases, schools are functioning, hospitals are

open but the one big question is: Have we addressed the conditions that led to the war?

For me peace is not just the absence of war, peace is when every Liberian can have at least two meals, peace is when justice in the courts is not measured by the size of your pockets, peace is when being pregnant is not a death sentence, peace is when children are able to see a future beyond the next 24 hours, peace is when leadership and being a civil servant is not the place where men and women come to become millionaires overnight.

Ten years on can we really say peace is here? Let us all fellow Liberians use this 10th anniversary of the silencing of the guns in our land to soberly reflect on what we have gained, what future there is for our children and us.

It is time for us Liberians to join hands and make peace a reality, use our voices, our faith and every moral compass we possess to help change the tide. Let us recommit ourselves to transforming Liberia and embark on a journey that will lead us to becoming the true bright star in the dark continent of Africa.

Women have been in the forefront of the agitation for peace in Liberia

**LET US RECOMMIT OURSELVES TO TRANSFORMING LIBERIA AND EMBARK ON A JOURNEY THAT WILL LEAD US TO BECOMING THE TRUE BRIGHT STAR IN THE DARK CONTINENT OF AFRICA.**

The guns are silent, and we as a people with God's help can ensure that Peace is finally here!

*The writer is Co-winner of the 2011 Nobel Prize for Peace with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen*



By Peter Quaqua

# Reconciliation Remains Elusive

RECONCILIATION IS WIDELY UNDERSTOOD TO BE "A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT." THIS PHRASE SEEMS TO BE THE DEFENSE OF THOSE WHO EASILY SQUANDER THE OPPORTUNITY TO RECONCILE WITH SOMEBODY OR WITH A PEOPLE. WE PROBABLY NEED TO RE-EXAMINE OUR UNDERSTANDING OF RECONCILIATION.

**R**econciliation begins in the hearts and minds of both the victims and the perpetrators of conflict.

Today, reconciliation seems to be on the lips of every Liberian. We have spoken for so long about this subject but it continues to elude us. Over the last decade our country has been preoccupied with reconstruction and not consolidating the peace through reconciliation.

It is all the more important to prioritize reconstruction after a violent conflict like the one we had in Liberia, but unless we intentionally make reconciliation an integral part of the reconstruction package, we risk a relapse into conflict that will eventually destroy the reconstruction gains. Reconstruction must go hand-in-hand with reconciliation if we must consolidate the peace.

Reconciliation is widely understood to be "a process, not an event." This phrase seems to be the defense of those who easily squander the opportunity to reconcile with somebody or with a people. We probably need

to re-examine our understanding of reconciliation.

There is no denying that reconciliation entails "a process" but every time we short-circuit a process, we must start all over again.

The biggest political decision aimed at reconciliation in Liberia was the setting up of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

We witnessed the hearings unfold for more than two years. Some of those who appeared were accused of not telling the "whole" truth, while others made mockery of the exercise. Unfortunately the result of the TRC hearings effectively became the source of another conflict that needs to be reconciled. We missed that opportunity.

For some obvious reasons, we live with the attitude and illusion that this "process of reconciliation" should start and end without apportioning responsibility. Some of us also believe that those in power or authority should not get affected by the outcome of the reconciliation process. I disagree.

Governments are the prime beneficiary of a reconciled people. A country is stable for the government to lead when there is reconciliation, the opposite is destabilization.

So national reconciliation should be initiated and driven by our government. Reconciling the nation can never be possible if the government dedicates this responsibility to individual citizens. With all the state structures and resources at its disposal, this government has what it takes to mobilize its citizens to reconcile and should not run away from this critical national emergency.

The Government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was right when it identified marginalization as one of the causes of the Liberian conflict. If the government still believes in that diagnosis, then it has to act intentionally to address the inequalities, however minimal those actions maybe.

I suggest that we make reconciliation the theme of our entire national budget and policy decisions. A lot of our citizens feel abused, cheated, oppressed, used, hungry and deprived. It is the responsibility of the government to reduce their anxieties and fear for their survival.

Ten years after a nasty conflict driven by wealth and power, our government must act to address the extravagance of public officials in the face of poverty; we must act quickly to deal with the structural inequalities and corruption in our constitution and our laws; we must deal with the problem of resource and power distribution; our government must deal with the defects of our judicial and justice systems; our government must re-examine its land policy to respond to the growing tension over land ownership.

These are some of the issues that form the basis of the recurring conflicts we have had in our country. We must therefore stop making the mistake of leaving these vexing issues to chance. They could explode again.

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***The writer is the President of the Press Union of Liberia***





Members of a peace group arrive at a tenth anniversary event

# Liberia Celebrates Ten Years of Peace

By Stefanie Carmichael

In 2003, social worker Leymah Gbowee decided she needed to step up and take action to try and end the 14-year civil war that had been plaguing her country. What started off as a few hundred women from Gbowee's church staging peaceful protests at a fish market in Monrovia gradually grew into a peace movement of thousands of women praying and singing for peace daily. Come rain or shine, these women, all dressed in white, mobilized themselves at the market with the sole aim of agitating for the end of the civil war.

On 18 August, 2013, several of these same women returned to the very spot they had protested ten years earlier. This time, however, instead of protesting, they were celebrating an achievement: a decade of peace. It was on 18 August, 2003, that Liberia's bloody civil war ended with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Accra, Ghana.

"Our journey has not been easy, and it is not over. Peace that lasts is hard to come by," said President Johnson Sirleaf as she addressed a packed

audience at Monrovia's Centennial Memorial Pavilion marking a decade of uninterrupted peace and the 10th anniversary of the signing of the CPA. "However, with each passing year since 2003, the chances of Liberia relapsing into further armed conflict have diminished, challenging the theory that almost half the countries that make the transition from war to peace slide back into conflict," she added.

"The commitment, actions and prayers of Liberians have kept the weapons silenced, and kept peace alive," Special Representative of the Secretary-General Karin Landgren noted. She congratulated Liberia on its success, and also highlighted the ongoing progress in building responsive political systems, public services, and the reform of the justice and security sectors.

"This continued peace is a magnificent achievement, and we should neither take it for granted nor regard it as a finished product," said Landgren. "As Liberia continues to rebuild itself and recover its soul, it is also still coming to grips with painful historical legacies,

and working out how to avoid mistakes of the past."

Grace Yeaphyve, 26, is a member of the organization Youth and Students Sustaining Peace who attended the anniversary event.

"For ten years now, we haven't gone through any civil war," said Yeaphyve. "We are in peace. We can move freely in our country. We can go to school. So we are happy and it's very important to celebrate this day."

Another excited attendee was Alfred T. Wilson, a Liberian National Police Officer who, while taking care of security at the Pavilion, could not help but join in with the crowds singing outside.

"This is so important because everybody is together," said Wilson. "People are dancing, people are singing, people are happy. We are here working but we are also standing with the people to celebrate peace today."

Still, a small group of protesters outside the Pavilion chanted anti-government messages and held posters denoting the continued poverty and alleged corruption that plague Liberia.

"Peace is not just the absence of the guns. Peace is measured by the economic advancement and living standard of the people," said Julius T. Jason, one of the protesters. "The vast majority of people in our country are still living in abject and extreme poverty... We have all the resources we need, but our people are living in destitution."

Despite the protesters, the exuberant mood of the day could not be quenched. There were songs praising peace, and there were goodwill messages from international partners, including the African Union, European Union, and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Celebratory events throughout the weekend also included prayer services in churches and mosques across the country, soccer matches, panel discussions, a cultural jamboree and a peace parade through the streets of Monrovia.

# Central Liberia Brims with Optimism

By Daniel Mensah Brande

Today, ten years after the cessation of hostilities, Bong County residents believe they are getting their fair share of the peace dividend. They see the many socio-economic interventions in the county as a sign of Bong fast regaining its glory as the model province of Liberia.

**"WE HAVE SEEN A LOT OF BENEFITS FROM THE PEACE FOR THE PAST TEN YEARS. SCHOOLS ARE RE-OPENED; WE MOVE AROUND FREELY; OUR JUSTICE SYSTEM IS WORKING, THOUGH SLOWLY. NOW THAT WE HAVE COME TO THIS POINT, I THINK LIBERIANS SHOULD UNITE AND PUSH THEIR COUNTRY FORWARD,"**

**DR. JOSHUA GIDDINGS**  
VICE-PRESIDENT OF CUTTINGTON  
UNIVERSITY

**H** haunted by the bitter memories of the 14-year civil war, having hosted many rebel groups, and with their administrative headquarters, Gbarnga, serving as the capital of former President Charles Taylor's self-proclaimed "Republic of Greater Liberia", residents of Bong County seem determined to use Liberia's ten years of unbroken peace as a springboard to chart a bright future for their county and country.

"We have seen a lot of benefits from the peace for the past ten years. Schools are re-opened; we move around freely; our justice system is working, though slowly. Now that we have come to this point, I think Liberians should unite and push their country forward," advises Dr. Joshua Giddings, Vice-President of Cuttington University in charge of Public Relations, who kept a diary of happenings in the county during the war years.

Wilmot Fassah, an anaesthetist at Phebe Hospital, recounted the havoc inflicted on the county, the massacres and lootings that took place, and how the entire county was reduced to a wandering race in search of safety. Gruesome battles were fought at the hospital, practically turning patients and health workers into prisoners of war. "Now that we have enjoyed these ten years of peace with the help of our United Nations friends," he heaved a big sigh of relief, "we will not allow it to slip out of our hands again."

Its strategic location at the heart of Central Liberia, sharing frontiers with Guinea, and as many as seven other counties - Montserrado, Bomi, Gbarpolu, Lofa, Nimba, Margibi and Grand Bassa - in

addition to having the main supply routes to neighboring Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea, turned Bong County into a major theatre of the civil war. Not only did it provide the base for training rebels, and for fighting running battles, the county also provided the men and women who fought the war itself. Of the more than 100,000 former fighters disarmed in the country following the end of the conflict, over 22,000 – more than one-fifth of the total, were disarmed in Bong County alone.

Today, ten years after the cessation of hostilities, Bong County residents believe they are getting their fair share of the peace dividend. They see the many socio-economic interventions in the county as a sign of Bong fast regaining its glory as the model province of Liberia. The County hosts the more than US\$4 million Gbarnga Regional Justice and Security Hub constructed through the UN Peace-building Fund to bring justice to the doorstep of the people; the Kokoyah Millennium Villages Project, the first of its kind in Liberia; and the multi-million Tubman Military Barracks in Gbarnga, housing the engineering unit of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

They are also proud of the multi-million technical college being built in Gbarnga, as well as the several courthouses and police depots con-

## **"WE HAVE A GREAT RESPONSIBILITY TO CONTINUE TO EDUCATE OUR YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN TO STAY AWAY FROM VIOLENCE AND SEEK PEACEFUL MEANS OF REDRESS."**

structed by UNMIL in various parts of the county, and the US\$2.8 million Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) feeder road project linking more than 100 towns and villages in the county with a network of roads. Additionally, they point at the road-construction machines procured by the county leadership for the rehabilitation of roads in the county, and the ongoing reconstruction works on the Monrovia-Gbarnga-Ganta highway as a big plus for the county's development aspirations.

Furthermore, residents of Bong are priding themselves that their county has become the destination for every visitor who wants to sample rural Liberia. They hail the restoration of state authority in the county, reduction in crime, rehabilitation of schools and health facilities, in addition to the soon-to-be-constructed one-million US dollar multi-purpose modern market in Gbarnga. Bong is also leading the way in gender equality in decision-making

with its County Superintendent, the Senior Senator, and the Mayor of Gbarnga, all being women.

Additionally, Bong residents are celebrating the vibrant media industry they have; nine community radio stations, one TV station, and two newspapers; making it possible for them to cross-pollinate ideas, and demand transparency and accountability from their leaders. "The media is being used to foster unity among various ethnic and social groupings in the county, seek accountability from politicians, and promote development in the county," says William Quire, President of the Association of Liberia Community Radios, who also heads Radio Gbarnga.

However Annie Nushann, a renowned peace activist, is worried about the sporadic outburst of youth violence in some parts of the county and thinks the prevailing optimism should be guarded with caution. "Things have improved, yes; but we need to work extra hard to sustain the peace; and this is what we, women have been doing all along," says Nushann, whose women's group in Totota played a leading role in the disarmament of ex-combatants in 2004, and now works for women's empowerment, and preaches non-violence. "We have a great responsibility to continue to educate our young men and women to stay away from violence and seek peaceful means of redress," she adds.

Dr. Giddings of Cuttington University agrees with Nushann. "We have to ask our young people to do away with violence," he stresses. "Violence is not good; violence only begets more violence."



Inauguration of the Justice and Security Hub in Gbarnga

# Slow but Sure Progress in Rural Liberia

By Napoleon Viban

**"BEFORE, WE COULD BARELY SNEEZE AT PUBLIC GATHERINGS, BUT TODAY WOMEN CAN BE HEARD SPEAKING UP IN THE COURTS. THANKS TO PEACE SECURED BY THE UN, ALONG WITH EMPOWERMENT BY OUR GOVERNMENT, WE'RE NO LONGER CONFINED TO THE BACK SEAT."**

**T**en years is a long time, but the trauma still lingers on for many who endured the ordeals of Liberia's 14-year civil war.

"War isn't something you'd want to think about.

Not when you've lived the havoc, the destruction and the misery that come with it," Henry Gbeli, Paramount Chief of Tchien in the border County of Grand Gedeh, reminisces of the bloody conflict.

Chief Gbeli and many from his Khran community made a dash for the border at the crack of the first gunfire, crossing within hours to take refuge in the western Ivorian town of Gbloeleken. "We survived because we escaped to Côte d'Ivoire," the Chief recalls of his long sojourn in Gbloeleken.

Gbeli's is a common story shared by many others in Zwedru, chief town of Grand Gedeh County. Like him, Julia Gaye Waritay took refuge in Côte d'Ivoire as the war flared in 1990. It was in the aftermath of Charles Taylor's ascendancy to the helm in the elections of 1997 that she returned the following year.

Still, life at home in those early years remained a test of endurance, until the Accra deal in 2003 rallied the international community behind efforts to give Liberia a new lease. "There was a lot of harassment and exploitation going on,

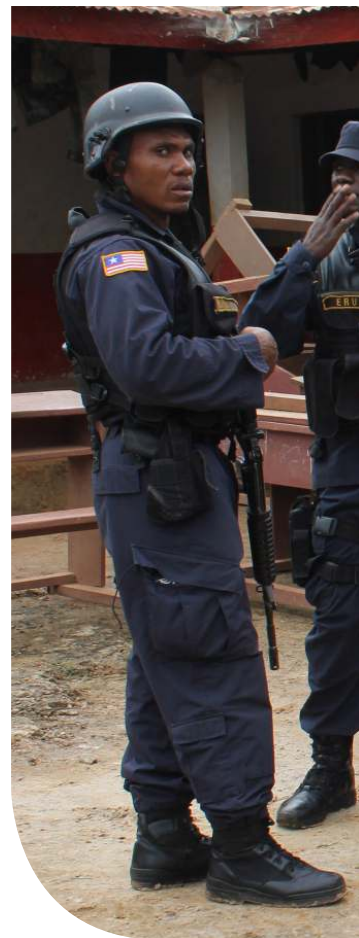
and it's truly amazing how far we've come," Waritay reminisces.

The petty trader, who is also Chairlady of A-comman, a local community-based organization and affiliate of the Association of Women in Cross-Border Trade, credits the UN with the sustenance, these last ten years, of Liberia's hard-won peace. She also hails significant gains in the empowerment of women, as an offshoot to a decade of uninterrupted peace.

"Before, we could barely sneeze at public gatherings, but today women can be heard speaking up in the courts. Thanks to peace secured by the UN, along with empowerment by our Government, we're no longer confined to the back seat," Waritay observes.

A-Comman is Khran for "We're Blessed," and she sounds pretty upbeat about prospects for a change in the fortunes of post-war Liberia. "We now carry on cross-border trade with little hassle. What's more, with basic literacy and numeracy training by EduCare [a local NGO], most of us are now good at keeping business records and managing our accounts," she says.

Things, though, do not appear that rosy for the average Grand Gedeon, and the likes of Waritay are to be admired







more for their positive attitude in the face of daunting challenges. In Zwedru and elsewhere in the County, the wasted years of conflict have left hundreds of young people who fought in the wars idling around with no education, no skills and no jobs.

Gbeli is thankful for the peace and tranquility at his homestead in the ELRZ Community. But the old man won't stop sulking over the education that the war denied the eldest of his six children. By the time the guns went silent, Susana was way past school age.

"She's getting along, somehow, in petty trade," the Paramount Chief remarks with a guarded sense of relief. "But it hurts to see that for no fault of hers, my firstborn never had a chance to attend school."

By comparison, however, the Tchien chieftain's unlettered daughter fares way better than some of her contempo-

raries in Grand Gedeh. Day in, day out, they just hang around, pacing up and down Deh Suah Street – the commercial hub of Zwedru – in their hundreds. Some, eager for a quick break, head for the County's alluvial gold mines.

It's a grim struggle, but the Assistant Superintendent for Grand Gedeh believes this bodes well for the County's stability and development. With the years of war long gone, Abraham Tar-lue Gbeway believes the dynamics for Liberia's rebirth are now playing out in the countryside.

"Before, our people were very much laid back. Now, many are throwing in everything they can for a better livelihood," he avers. "A transformation in the lives of people out here is visibly underway."

Gbeway cites the expansion of Zwedru and boasts about the number of houses that have in recent years

Liberian police keep vigil at the border

progressed from roofs of thatch to corrugated iron sheets.

The Deputy Superintendent also finds in road communication, evidence of strides the Grand Gedeh has made since the Accra Peace Accords.

"Before, there were almost no practicable roads linking peripheral towns and villages to Zwedru, and people would trek long distances to reach the County capital," he recalls. "True, the state of our roads today still leaves much to be desired, but the situation was even more precarious before and during the war."

As Liberia celebrates ten years of peace, there is optimism and hope among the people for a better future.

# Thousands Return Home from Exile

By Sulaiman Momodu

Many returnees were accompanied by grown-up children born during years in exile; some of the returnee children from French-speaking countries were more fluent in French than English. All returnees expressed hope of never becoming refugees again.

**"A REFUGEE LIFE IS VERY DIFFICULT BUT IT ALSO GAVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO SEE HOW OTHER COUNTRIES ARE DOING. WE PRAY FOR LASTING PEACE IN OUR COUNTRY,"**

**YATTA**  
A SINGLE MOTHER OF TWO, WHO  
RETURNED FROM REFUGEE IN  
GHANA

**T**housands of Liberians who were uprooted from their homes during Liberia's devastating civil war and became either internally displaced persons (IDPs) or refugees have returned home during the past ten years as Liberia has enjoyed unbroken peace since October 2003.

The conflict that broke out in Liberia in December 1989 generated the biggest displacement of people in West Africa. More than 150,000 Liberians are estimated to have been killed in the civil war that even spilled over to neighbouring countries such as Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.

Some 750,000 Liberians became either IDPs or refugees. The conflict led to the establishment of 34 IDP camps and spontaneous settlements such as schools and churches mostly around Monrovia and along the highway to Bong County. Each IDP camp accommodated between 500 and 28,000 people.

A year after peace was restored following the deployment of UN peacekeepers in 2003, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in collaboration with part-

ners started the voluntary repatriation programme for refugees and IDPs.

To sustain return, UNHCR implemented dozens of reintegration projects such as the construction and rehabilitation of roads, schools, clinics, hospitals, water and sanitation facilities, income-generating programmes and vocational training.

UNHCR officially ended the repatriation of IDPs in April 2006 at a ceremony presided over by Vice President Joseph Boakai. By then more than 300,000 IDPs had returned to their home areas. However, the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees from mostly neighboring countries continued.

To enable refugees to make informed decisions during the repatriation process, the UNHCR organized mass information campaigns to countries of asylum during which refugees were updated on the restoration of peace and the country's recovery and development efforts. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf also encouraged



Liberian refugees return home  
Photo: Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR



her compatriots to return home and contribute to the development of the country through audio and video messages.

In June 2012, Liberians who had fled the fighting for other countries ceased to be considered refugees. In December 2012, UNHCR brought down the curtains on the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees, officially ending the programme. By then over 155,000 Liberians were brought home by road convoys and flights. Some refugees spent more than two decades in countries such as Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, and Togo.

Many returnees were accompanied by grown-up children born during years in exile; some of the returnee children from French-speaking countries were more fluent in French than English. All returnees expressed hope of never becoming refugees again.

"A refugee life is very difficult but it also gave us the opportunity to see how other countries are doing. We

pray for lasting peace in our country," said Yatta, a single mother of two, who returned from refuge in Ghana.

All repatriated refugees received cash grants. In 2012 for instance, the UN agency paid each refugee above 18 years old US\$375 to defray reintegration and transportation expenses to their final destination. Each refugee below 18 years received US\$275.

"Liberia is now a very peaceful country, so it was only prudent that we assisted people to return home from IDP and refugee camps. Last year alone we facilitated the return of nearly 30,000 Liberian refugees, exceeding initial planning figure of 15,000," said Acting UNHCR Representative, Robert Tibagwa, pointing out that ending the voluntary repatriation process was evidence of the restoration of peace to Liberia and a remarkable achievement for the West Africa sub-region. "We are thankful to everybody for this remarkable accomplishment, including donors for their support, and to refugees for embracing the repatriation process,"

he said.

Some of the challenges faced during the repatriation process included unusable roads, especially during seasonal rains. Bringing people back by air was costly and it also prevented people to carry with them all their belongings.

The Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) is assisting returnees by referring them to job opportunities, providing scholarships, and collaborating with government ministries to absorb those with specific skills. In mid-August this year, about 60 returnees graduated from a skills training programme in Monrovia.

Liberian refugees who decided to locally integrate in countries of asylum are being provided legal and social assistance, such as income-generating activities for self-reliance and the issuance of Liberian passports in collaboration with Liberia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## 150,000

People estimated to have been killed in the civil war

## 750,000

Liberians became either IDPs or refugees

## 500 - 28,000

People accommodated in each IDP camp

## 300,000

IDPs had returned to their home area by April 2006





President Sirleaf bids farewell to an AFL soldier about to depart for Mali

# Liberia Sends Peacekeepers to Mali

By Stefanie Carmichael

**"THIS IS A PROUD DAY FOR ALL OF US AS LIBERIANS, AND TRULY, YOU ARE THE PRIDE OF OUR NATION."**

**ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF**  
PRESIDENT OF LIBERIA

**F**or the first time in 52 years, Liberia is participating in a United Nations peacekeeping mission. It is a historic leap for Liberia, itself a beneficiary of international peacekeeping support for several years to recover from a prolonged and devastating civil war. Returning that favour in a small way, Liberia sent a platoon-sized contingent of the Armed Forces of Liberia to Mali in June to support the new United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA).

The last time Liberia provided troops to peacekeeping operations was in 1960, when it supported the UN response to the Congo crisis. This time, the soldiers underwent rigorous training at Camp Sande Ware prior to being deployed, with logistic and other support provided by the United States Government. The unit will be embedded within the Nigerian battalion in Mali.

In a farewell ceremony held at Roberts International Airport, the President of Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, addressed the troops.

"For so long – decades, in fact – we have been the beneficiary of support from our ECOWAS neighbors, and friends from far and wide, who came to our shores to help us restore the peace

and rebuild a shattered nation. It is time for Liberia to give back, in whatever small way that we can," she said. "This is a proud day for all of us as Liberians, and truly, you are the pride of our nation."

In April 2013, the UN Security Council authorized an 11,200-strong peacekeeping force to replace the African-led mission already in place effective 1 July, 2013. Its mandate includes supporting the Malian authorities restore state authority, implementing the transitional roadmap, protecting civilians and promoting human rights.

Captain Mason, AFL Provost Marshal, described the importance of the event for his country.

"After so many years of war, we are now ready to bring peace to other nations. It is now time that we do our part. I'm very proud," he said.

Private First Class Felima is one of the soldiers selected for the six-month mission to Mali. Prior to leaving, he expressed his pride at being part of this deployment.

"We're quite enthusiastic. It's a moment of joy, a moment of celebration, and a history-making event," said Felima. "There is no fear in the life of a soldier. This is what we have trained to be, what we want to do, and this is what we enjoy doing. So we feel privileged to be part of the peacekeeping mission in Mali, to tell the world that Liberia is up to the task, and we are going to make our country proud."

Hatty David, whose brother is among the deployed troops, echoed these sentiments. "I'm proud that [my brother] is leaving to go and serve his country, but the feeling remains that he is my brother and I will miss him and I will continue to pray for him."

As the world now awaits to see the progress of the new mission in Mali, Liberia's contribution of troops is a significant accomplishment for a country that has risen from the ashes of a bloody civil war and has enjoyed unbroken peace since 2003 with the help of international peacekeepers.



# Farmers Adapting to Climate Change

By Augusta Pshorr

**E**ight farming communities in two pilot counties have substantiated findings and recommendations of a survey on climate change affecting food production in Liberia, and measures to adapt to climate change.

At a four day-long consultative forum held in March this year, farmers in Bong and Grand Gedeh Counties agreed to make land available to set up demonstration sites to be used for farmer field school activities in Foequelleh and Zleh Town.

The aim of the workshop was to validate the findings and recommendations of a survey on Climate Change Adaptation in Bong and Grand Gedeh Counties as part of activities of the Climate Change Adaptation for the Agriculture Project (CCAAP), an initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture. The workshop discussed the aims and objectives of Climate Change Adaptation for the Agriculture Project.

During the forum, Assistant Minister of Agriculture (Technical Services) Chea Garley appealed to farmers to take the project seriously. "Climate change is a new phenomenon so farmers must exercise patience in their activities," Garley noted.

The Ministry of Agriculture and its partners including UNDP and FAO will provide farming implements and help build the capacity of farmers to increase food production. The coordinator of the project said that practical and realistic efforts must be made to reduce losses even though there

are difficulties in controlling the climatic conditions being experienced. "Construction of appropriate dams and irrigation system could help to manage and control the erratic rainfall and increasing temperature from damaging production fields," Roland Lepol noted.

In December 2012, the Government of Liberia (GoL) and FAO undertook a baseline and needs assessment survey of

The study took into account the current climate change issues facing agriculture in Panta and Gbarzon and their impacts, the degree to which agriculture production systems are vulnerable as well as the current coping mechanisms smallholder farmers are using to adapt to climate change.

vulnerabilities and livelihood in Panta District, Bong County, and Gbarzon District, Grand Gedeh County, to kick start Component Two of the CCAAP which is funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) and UNDP.

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The Liberian government and FAO with support from GEF and UNDP launched the Climate Change Adaptation for Agriculture Project (2011-2015) last year to enhance farmers' resilience to climate change.

Coastal areas too are affected by climate change  
Photo: Moses Zangar Jr.



# "Farmers Can Be Well-off"

By John T. Monibah



Annie Dolo with some farm produce  
Photo: John T. Monibah/FAO

As a result of the post-election violence in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 and 2011, hundreds of thousands of Ivorians sought refuge in Liberia, impacting food stocks of host families and communities where they settled.

"I can tell you for sure that farmers can make money and be well-off, because agriculture is not a small thing," says Jackson Dolo, as he walks visitors through his 3.5 acres of lush green vegetable farm planted with pepper, egg plant, corn, okra, cucumber, and bitter balls. Dolo had received support for his farming from FAO and partners through funding from European Union's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection Department, ECHO.

"Look at this, this is money," he says, pointing to the blossoming bitter

balls and egg plants. "Last year, I built a three-room house and bought one motorbike called Honda Hero. This year I have sold crops from this farm that gave me money, I mean L\$64,880". His wife, Annie, said the farm was their livelihood. "It's through this farm that we eat, send children to school, and do other things."

Dolo and his wife take their produce to nearby bigger markets in Gbarzon District and gold mining communities of Grand Gedeh County where committed customers are ready to buy upon arrival. "I hope to build a second house this year, five rooms, and when that is

done, I will call you to come and see it," Jackson adds with a grin.

As a result of the post-election violence in neighboring Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 and 2011, hundreds of thousands of Ivorians sought refuge in Liberia, impacting food stocks of host families and communities where they settled. FAO and the Government of Liberia responded appropriately, first with a UN Central Emergency Fund (CERF) Project in 2011. In early 2012, FAO and the Government of Liberia through the Ministry of Agriculture increased support to Ivorian refugees and Liberian host families to produce nutritious rice and vegetables. The Project, known as "Emergency Food Security Assistance for Ivorian Refugees and Affected Host Communities in Liberia" started November 2011. Implemented in Nimba, Grand Gedeh, and Maryland Counties, the project benefited some 7,500 households.

Just across the river from Jackson Dolo's farm are two other thriving vegetable farms, cultivated by host families of Daniel Sumo and Abenedgo K. Borbor. So far in year 2013, Sumo, 30, and his household have earned L\$44,500 or US\$600. "FAO, local implementing partner SAP (Sustainable Agriculture Program), and the Ministry of Agriculture started helping me this year. They gave me seeds, tools, and fertilizer," said Sumo. He has already bought two bundles of zinc for his building project while Borbor, 28, is saving farm proceeds to enable him return to school and graduate before building a house.

Martha, Sumo's wife, sums up: "I feel fine for this farm. We had nothing at all. Then one day, you people came, trained us, gave us seeds and tools, and today we have our own farm. We eat some and sell the balance because we want to build a house for a better future."

# Liberia Makes Progress in Addressing HIV&AIDS

By Solomon Watkins



Liberia enjoys one of the lowest HIV prevalence rates and mother-to-child transmission in Africa, thanks to determined efforts to stop the spread of HIV. Since the first reported case of HIV in Liberia in 1986, the Government in collaboration with the United Nations System, and bilateral and multilateral donors have demonstrated high commitment in the fight against HIV in Liberia, resulting in a prevalence rate of 1.5 per cent, according to a survey conducted in 2007.

The UN Joint Programme on AIDS has helped facilitate the establishment of the National AIDS Commission (NAC), drafting of the National Strategic Framework II, and the Operational Plan for Accelerated Country Action for Women, Girls, Gender Equality and HIV. Legislation prohibiting stigma and discrimination against people living with HIV and their families has

been passed and the number of health facilities offering treatment and care has been increased, thereby making HIV treatment available to more than 2,000 additional people who needed anti-retroviral treatment (ART) between 2010-2012.

A study conducted by the National AIDS and STI Control Programme in 2012 indicated that the number of sites offering Prevention of Mother-To-Child Transmission (PMTCT) services increased from 29 in 2008 to 335 in 2012. The number of sites offering HIV care and treatment services also increased from 19 to 40 in the same period, leading to an increase in the number of adults and children on ART from 4,238 to 6,759, and 332 to 570 respectively. The study also found that 38 per cent of pregnant mothers and 26 per cent of exposed infants received antiretroviral prophylaxis. Over 85 per cent of exposed infants who received

Participants at a retreat to review response to AIDS in Liberia

Photo: Solomon Watkins/UNAIDS

ART treatment were tested negative to HIV.

In spite of these achievements, HIV remains a critical challenge to national development. Out of the country's population of 3.5 million people, it is estimated that 37,000 representing about 1.5 per cent of the adult population were living with HIV by the end of 2009. Teenage pregnancy, and sexual and gender based violence which contribute to HIV spread are reportedly on the increase in Liberia. The national response is heavily dependent on external funding and there is limited targeting of key populations.

To better understand the current HIV epidemic and AIDS response in Liberia, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV&AIDS is supporting the NAC to conduct a number of studies. These studies include; the Stigma Index, the National AIDS Spending Account (NASA), the Integrated Biograph and Behavioural Sensational (IBBS), the ART Cohort, and the Modes of Transmission (MOT). These studies will facilitate the development of an investment case and the establishment of the National AIDS Trust Fund towards achieving the UN 2011 Political Declaration on HIV and AIDS, which calls for closure of the global AIDS resource gap by 2015. Additionally, this will help governments to provide support, treatment, and care for people living with HIV.

The UN in Liberia remains committed to supporting Liberia's national AIDS response.



FLASHBACK  
2012

# Vision 2030: A Pledge to Transform Liberia

By Daniel Mensah Brande

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

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ELLEN JOHNSON SIRLEAF  
PRESIDENT OF LIBERIA

**A**fter 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 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 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 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

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 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



applauded Liberians for developing a vision to transform their country, and reminded them that such a framework could only be achieved in partnership 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.

Soccer star George Weah joins President Sirleaf at the launch of Vision 2030

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.”



High turnout during first round of elections

# Elections Muddle Fragile Democracy

BY Mathew Elavalthoduka

**D**espite the heavy morning drizzle, Martha Sonpon, 35, waited patiently in the queue outside a polling station in the suburbs of Monrovia with her two-year old daughter strapped to her back. As soon as a polling officer spotted her, he ushered her to the head of the long line as pregnant women, mothers and the physically challenged were given priority to cast their ballots.

It was Liberia's second democratic elections since the end of the civil war but Sonpon was voting for the first time. Like hundreds of thousands of Liberians who fled the country to escape the 14-year civil war, she spent more than a decade as a refugee in Ghana and returned home only three years ago.

"I am glad to have the opportunity to choose my government through elections, not by fighting," said Sonpon, recalling the days she was forced to hide in the bushes to escape the marauding bands of fighters.

The elections on 11 October saw Liberians opting decisively for the ballot to usher in a new government. As the young and old, men and women, queued outside polling stations from very early in the morning to cast their votes, their determination to embrace the ballot, and not bullets, was very much in the air. With over 71 per cent of the 1.8 million registered voters casting their ballots, it was an emphatic statement from the people of Liberia – "We want peace and development, no more war."

The elections were the culmination of spirited, weeks-long campaign devoid of any major security incidents. This was also



an election that was fully organized by Liberian national institutions headed by the National Elections Commission (NEC) unlike the first post-war elections of 2005 in which the United Nations was heavily involved.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon welcomed the smooth holding of the elections and commended the people of Liberia for exercising their right to vote in a calm and peaceful manner. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) election observation mission, as well as the African Union and the Carter Centre observer missions also lauded Liberians for their peaceful and orderly conduct during the elections. Both the international and national observers declared the first round of elections free, fair and transparent.

By the time the results were announced, it became clear that no single presidential candidate had won an absolute majority, necessitating a run-off ballot between the two top vote-getters. The run-off was set for 8 November between incumbent President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Unity Party (UP) who won 43.9 per cent of the votes and Winston Tubman of the Congress for Democratic Party (CDC) who mustered 32.7 per cent.

However, with some opposition parties led by CDC alleging irregulari-

ties during the first round of elections and demanding the reorganization of the NEC, the prospects of a peaceful run-off election soon evaporated. The allegations were unsubstantiated and calls by ECOWAS, African Union and others to seek redress through legal channels went unheeded. The CDC announced a boycott of the run-off and an opposition gathering on the eve of the election turned deadly with at least two people killed. Yet, since there is no legal provision in Liberia for withdrawing in between the first and second round of the election, the run-off went ahead as planned.



'Here is the proof,' declares a voter

With fear and confusion gripping the electorate, the voter turn-out for the run-off reached only 37.4 per cent, and incumbent President Sirleaf emerged the winner with over 90 per cent of the votes cast. International and local observers billed the run-off vote as transparent, fair and credible with no major irregularities.

However, Liberia's second democratic elections since the civil war, widely touted as a litmus test for the country's nascent democracy, exposed deep divisions in the society and the lack of maturity among the political players. The President of the ECOWAS Commission, James Victor Gbeho, highlighted the need to raise the level of political education and advocacy in the region to ensure that political leaders recognized that "there is life after losing an election and that in every election there must be a winner and a loser."

Addressing the nation soon after the run-off vote, President Sirleaf announced her decision to set up a national peace and reconciliation initiative to be led by Leymah Gbowee, this year's co-winner of the Nobel Prize for Peace. "I invite everyone to be part of a national dialogue that would bring us together. I want to especially call on my fellow political leaders to join me in a conversation on the future of our country," she said.

Secretary-General Ban commended the national authorities for conducting free, fair and transparent elections and called upon the Liberian stakeholders to accept the outcome of the elections and to work together to resolve any outstanding issues. He emphasized the importance of a continued dialogue on national reconciliation.

Restoring a failed state and achieving reconciliation among a society that was torn apart are arduous tasks, and Liberia, placed among the lowest ten countries in this year's Human Development Report, faces daunting socio-economic challenges.



# Building Life Anew

By Yuko Maeda

In the reintegration process, more than 65,000 out of 101,000 demobilised ex-combatants have benefited from various opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge aimed at rebuilding their lives. The beneficiaries include former porters, caretakers and sex slaves.

**B**ehind a long narrow strip of petty traders in one of the busiest local markets in the capital city of Monrovia stands a bamboo-thatched hut. Five sewing machines on the dry mud floor fill the tiny room of about 10 square meters, with posters of fashion models pinned on the walls and a stock of colourful fabrics piled up on a bench.

"I don't want to go back to Zorzor," says Beatrice Johnson (not the real name), a 34-year-old seamstress. "Because I suffered too much there, no, I can't go back to my hometown." Zorzor, 300 km north of Monrovia, is the second largest city in Liberia's northernmost county of Lofa, once the country's breadbasket.

Johnson was just 19 when a group of rebels supporting Charles Taylor attacked her village in the middle of the night one day in 1991. Many fled to the nearby bush, narrowly escaping death, while others were tortured and mercilessly killed. The rebels abducted Johnson at gunpoint, raped her and forced her to serve for them as a sex slave. "I was a caretaker," she says, referring to a person who looked after the needs of fighters from preparing meals to doing laundry to serving as a sex object. "I was with them for seven years..."

Her ordeal ended when Taylor was elected President in 1997. She managed to leave the forces and started a petty trade in Monrovia, the only thing she knew in her previous life to make a living. She had stopped schooling at the third grade.

Now she has skills and a job to sustain her family. Johnson and three of her female classmates from a vocational training course joined the AB Tailor Shop last September. She says all of them have their own clients who like dresses they make. With a dream to run their own shop one day, they come to work from morning to evening, six days a week. "My dream? I want to be a 'boss' woman!" Johnson chuckles, with her hands and feet busy operating the sewing machine she received a year ago when she graduated from the Community Empowerment Programme, a local NGO that offers skills training.

CEP is one of 550 implementing partners for the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration scheme, a major component of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra that led to the end of Liberia's brutal civil war. In the disarmament process that completed in late 2004, the UN Mission in Liberia and its partners demobilised more than 101,000 former fighters, including more than 22,000 women and nearly 11,000 children, and collected 28,000 weapons and 33,000 munitions. Those demobilised are not only fighters but also porters, cooks, caretakers and sex slaves who belonged to the warring factions.

Jeanette Kamara (not the real name), 25, is among them. "I never held a gun," says Kamara, another seamstress at the AB Tailor. Because her boyfriend was a soldier, she accompanied him to cook meals and wash clothes, she says. "Life was tough. We moved from bush to bush, fighting, for years."

Based on lessons from previous peacekeeping missions, UN Security Council mandated UNMIL to rehabilitate the demobilised soldiers and help them reintegrate into mainstream society. UNMIL formed a DDR team with the UN agencies, international donors and national counterparts. While UNMIL peacekeepers took the lead to disarm and demobilise excombatants, the UN Development Programme has guided the rehabilitation and reintegration process, managing and adminis-



tering the UNDP DDRR Trust Fund.

In the RR component of DDRR, the demobilised combatants receive an opportunity to resume formal education, learn agriculture or other vocational skills, enter apprenticeship or take short-term public work. All those projects are funded by the DDRR Trust Fund and RR partners such as UNICEF, USAID and the European Commission. The Trust Fund has projected a revised budget of US\$71.3 million to complete the job, targeting 99,000 ex-combatants, excluding those who can self-reintegrate, at an average cost of US\$800 per person for RR. Donors have pledged all the projected budget and so far disbursed US\$53.3 million.

Since June 2004 when a DDRR execution agency, dubbed the Joint Implementation Unit, kicked off the first reintegration project, more than 65,000 demobilised ex-combatants have benefited from various opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge aimed at rebuilding their lives. The most popular RR programme is formal education with more than 32,000 ex-combatants enrolled in schools, followed by agriculture and vocational skills training, attracting 24,000 beneficiaries.

"Through the efforts of DDRR, I've changed. The process has made me useful for the society," says Takpor Gweh, 53-year-old former "commander" who graduated from CEP's eight-month tailoring course last year. He gave up his gun after the peace deal was signed. For him, the fighting was an only means of survival. "It was fighting against fighting," he says. "Doing this business is much better than fighting the war. Never, ever, I'll fight a war again!"

Gweh's determination sounds firm. When he threw his gun away, he made up his mind that he would bring a better life for his children, he says. "I paid

attention to all the instructions at the school." He graduated as an honour student and now runs his own tailoring shop and traditional Nimba food catering services with help from his two wives. On a good day his business brings LD\$800 altogether, about US\$15, enough to sustain his family and send his nine kids to school. "I'm happy now," he smiles.

Lucy Page, executive Director of CEP which was established in 2000, has witnessed positive changes in many graduates who went through skills training in various trades. It initially offered training in soapmaking, pastry and tailoring to returning female refugees and internally displaced people and now targets ex-combatants, mainly women and girls. "Many



Many ex-combatants benefited from vocational training  
Photo: Eric Kanalstein/UNMIL

graduates have reintegrated in the community very well," she says. "The community appreciates what we do, for instance, commenting about a graduate that 'she was a troublemaker in the past but now she's a role model.' It's an inspiration for us, too."

That's what the RR scheme is all about, says Charles Achodo, UNDP's DDR Policy Advisor. The RR projects give ex-combatants skills and knowledge to start their lives anew, which become "assets" for them to gain a membership to the community, he explains. "The community would accept ex-combatants because of changes in their attitudes, behaviours and mind-

sets. Through the RR projects, we are providing something they can demonstrate how changed they are."

The RR programme is scheduled to end in June 2007. With funding secured, other remaining 34,000 ex-combatants are expected to have access to various reintegration projects by then.

"We will bring all ex-combatants under this programme to give them skills and knowledge to start over. But that's not the end of the reintegration process," says Andrea Tamagnini, Director of UNMIL Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery, the mission's RR wing. He says the RR designers and policy makers are now shifting its focus from vocational training to employment to let demobilized ex-combatants lead to

a normal life mingling with other civilians. "Reintegration is a process, in which people abandon arms, receive training, get employed and reconcile with people in the community... Although the (RR) programme will be over next year, we will continue our support to the government's efforts to enhance employment and reconciliation."

A few months training or a few years schooling alone might not be enough for all demobilised people to get back on their feet when the country has no running water or electricity, lacks basic social services and offers only a little employment opportunities. However, the reintegration process certainly gives an opportunity for those demoralised people to build confidence in themselves.

Look at Joe Lewis, 36-year-old CEP graduate who, not long ago, was a specialist in handling AK-47 and other machine guns. He now owns his tailoring shop to support his family and aspires to attend a night school to finish his secondary education. "People call me 'Mr. Tailor' and ask me to make something for them. I feel fine," he beams.

FLASHBACK  
2005

# A Vote of Confidence in Peace

By Mathew Elavanalothoduka

**"THE LIBERIAN PEOPLE HAVE SENT OUT A STRONG SIGNAL TO THE LEADERS OF THE COUNTRY. IT WILL BE UP TO THESE NEW LEADERS NOT TO DISAPPOINT THE POPULATION BY ENSURING THAT THE DAILY LIFE OF ALL LIBERIANS IS CHANGED FOR THE BETTER."**

MARIE ARIETTE CARLOTTI  
HEAD OF THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT'S OBSERVER MISSION

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), with a 15,000-strong peacekeeping force on the ground, provided extensive assistance and advice to the National Elections Commission, responsible for conducting the elections. By ushering in participatory democracy through free and fair elections, Liberia has reached the end of the tunnel and turned a new page in its history.

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

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

The national elections, assisted by the United Nations and the international community, was the first since a peace agreement in August 2003 ended the prolonged civil strife that

turned this once prosperous country into one of the world's poorest, leaving nearly 200,000 people dead and the nation's infrastructure in tatters.

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

On 11 October voters had begun queuing up as early as 2 a.m. to cast their ballots at polling stations set up in churches, schools, dilapidated public buildings and even tents and rural huts. Some of them carried benches to sit on and umbrellas to shield themselves from rain and sun. Queues spilled out of the voting precincts winding through

streets. A whopping 74.9 per cent of the 1.35 million registered voters cast their ballots in the first round of elections, a remarkable voter turn-out by any standards and a rousing testimony to the people's desire for peace.

"We have all waited for this day to come," said Emma Korpeah, 48, a housewife who waited in the queue for five hours before she could vote at a polling station in downtown Monrovia, world's only capital city without electricity and running water. That was a sentiment shared by many Liberians who saw the election as a historic chance for a new era, far removed from the country's bloody past.

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

"At all polling places I visited, I was struck by the patience, the determination, and the friendliness displayed by all Liberians as they set about exercising this most precious right and responsibility," said Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary-General after visiting polling stations across the country. "Who would have thought two years ago that we would be here?"

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

Over 3,500 national and 421 international observers who monitored Liberia's first post-war elections endorsed the exercise as free and fair. "Following a remarkably peaceful and highly competitive electoral campaign, voting across the country was virtually violence free, orderly and well administered in most of the areas," said a statement from the 40-member multi-

national observer delegation co-led by former US President Jimmy Carter.

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

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), with a 15,000-strong peacekeeping force on the ground, provided extensive assistance and advice to the National Elections Commission, responsible for conducting the elections. The peacekeeping mission also paid salaries for over 18,000 Liberian nationals who staffed the polling places, in addition to moving the ballots by truck, helicopter and even ship to coastal areas that could not be reached by land. For two months preceding the elections, UNMIL had conducted a nation-wide voter education campaign, exhorting voters to peacefully participate in the elections.

The challenges facing the newly elected government are immense. With no electricity or running water for over a decade, rebuilding the country's shattered infrastructure will be top on the list. More than 100,000 ex-combatants, many of them children, need to be reintegrated into the war-scarred society. Unemployment currently stands at 85 per cent while hundreds

## "A CHAPTER OF RECONCILIATION AND RECONSTRUCTION, UNDERPINNED BY GOOD GOVERNANCE, THE RULE OF LAW AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS."

KOFI ANNAN

of thousands of Liberian refugees still live in relief camps.

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

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

A voter casts her ballot  
Photo: Eric Kanalstein/UNMIL





# From Disarmament to Reintegration

By J. Wesley Washington

Over a year ago, on 18 August 2003, Liberian parties signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana, bringing to an end the civil war that ravaged the country for 14 years. By this Agreement, the warring parties requested the United Nations to deploy a peacekeeping force to support the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and assist in the implementation of the peace accord.

A key component of Security Council resolution 1509 (2003) establishing the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is "Support for Implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement." As such, peaceful resolution of the conflict in Liberia depends to a large extent on the successful implementation of a comprehensive disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) programme launched on 7 December 2003, only two months after the commencement of the mission.

Since its launch, the programme has gone through three phases targeting the three warring factions, Liberians United

for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), ex-Government of Liberia (GoL), and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). So far, Phase I of the disarmament and demobilization (DD) process is complete, while Phases II and III are still on.

Phase I, which began at Camp Schieffelin outside Monrovia, was followed by Phase II on a sequential basis in Gbarnga, Buchanan, Tubmanburg and at the VOA in the

second half of April this year. Operations at two cantonment sites, Buchanan and Gbarnga, have been suspended due to the completion of combatant caseloads in those areas.

In early July, UNMIL began the disarmament and demobilization (DD) process for combatants in southeastern Liberia with the opening of DD sites in Zwedru and Tapita. This third phase is targeting the

MODEL fighters in Grand Gedeh Nimba counties. With the deployment of UNMIL peacekeepers to Harper, Maryland County and Greenville, Sinoe County, plans are being finalized to open DD sites in those areas.

The latest round of the DD programme was launched in



the north-eastern city of Ganta, Nimba County, in August targeting ex-Gol combatants. Another round of disarmament is expected to begin soon in Voinjama, for LURD combatants in Lofa County.

As at the end of September 2004, during the three phases of the DD process, more than 84,000 combatants have been disarmed including, over 16,000 women, 6,250 boys and 1,700 girls. Of this, nearly 75,000 combatants have been demobilized. Foreign combatants benefiting from the DDR programme include 300 Guineans, 230 Sierra Leoneans, 111 Ivorians, 10 Ghanaians, and five Burkinabes. A total of over 24,000 weapons, 25,000 munitions of various categories, and 5.8 million rounds of small-arms ammunition have been surrendered to UNMIL.

The Liberian DDR programme is an inclusive one. UNMIL collaborates closely with the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR), UN agencies and international non-governmental organizations (implementing partners) and their associated local NGOs (service providers) throughout the planning and operational periods. While UNMIL's military component takes lead in the disarmament (DI) process, implementing partners and service providers bring expertise into the demobilization (D2) process from the building of cantonment sites to the final discharge of ex-combatants after demobilization.

The rehabilitation and reintegration (RR) component of the DDR programme is another critical aspect of the peace process especially when the number of demobilized fighters has far exceeded initial estimates. Demobilized combatants have identified their preferences for reintegration training, with 39 per cent opting for formal education, 18 per cent each for auto mechanics and generic skills training, and eight per cent for driving. The rest have opted for tailoring, masonry, business, carpentry and agriculture.

Although key challenges in the implementation of RR projects still exist mainly due to inadequate funding from

the international community, UNMIL is working closely with other UN agencies, EU, USAID, NGOs and other key partners to devise short-term "bridging programmes" to absorb demobilized combatants pending the availability of funds for the full reintegration programme.

Within the Joint Implementation Unit (JIU), eight rehabilitation and reintegration projects dealing with vocational skills training targeting a total of 6,806 demobilized combatants have been approved. Three projects have been officially launched. They include the Booker Washington Institute's project to reintegrate former combatants into civil society in Margibi County, the Monrovia Vocational Training Center's Revitalization, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Recovery (4R) project in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to provide vocational skills for community inhabitants and ex-combatants in Monrovia, and UN-Habitat's vocational skills training project in housing construction and building trades in Cheesemanburg.

More reintegration projects are ex-

Disarmament in progress  
Photo: Eric Kanstein/UNMIL

pected to be launched shortly. Of significance is a project to be undertaken by Sustainable Development Promoters in collaboration with UNICEF (SDP/UNICEF), in particular for child ex-combatants which will mainly focus on education, skills development, apprenticeship and community-based support in three locations in Bong County.

The international donor community has pledged US\$25 million for the UNDP-DDRR Trust Fund. Thus far US\$13.5 million has been received and the Fund is in need of the pledged donor contributions. Funds programmable for rehabilitation and reintegration projects currently amount to US\$ 6.6 million.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided funding for parallel programmes to benefit 17,000 former combatants. The European Union has agreed to fund projects for 2,000 former combatants, while Japan has earmarked US\$3.64 million for reintegration of former child combatants.



# Ten Years of Peace-Comments



**KING BALLAH,  
PLUMKOR, SINKOR, MONROVIA**

Peace is good. Peace can make people to sleep well. I can play with my friends because of peace in Liberia. If no peace my parents will not send me to school. I don't know about the war in Liberia. Sometimes my mother tells me that they suffered during the war in Liberia. Then I can ask her what made them to suffer, and she said no food, no car to carry them. They used to walk long distances to look for food. She said more children died and some big people forced the children to go and fight.



**FELICIA BARNAR,  
TUBMANBURG BOMI COUNTY**

I am very happy that there is no war because my pa and ma (papa and mama) can go to work to get money to pay my school fees and provide my school lunch. I can also go to school and play happily with my friends. God bless UNMIL and peace in Liberia.



**PAPA MYERS,  
SAYETOWN, SINKOR**

I like peace because peace makes me to play and go to school. My father told me about the war in Liberia. He said more people died in the war. The people used to run all over to hide from the fighters. So I thank God for peace. I don't want war to happen again in Liberia so we the children can play and go to school. I thank UNMIL for peace in Liberia.



**SALLIMATU JALLOH,  
RIA HIGHWAY, PAYNESVILLE**

I feel bad when I hear of what my country experienced. Some of my older friends are orphans, amputated, homeless, destitute and street beggars as a result of the civil war. I pity their condition. I have never experienced any interruption in my education as the result of war. For this reason I hope to get my BSc by age 19. I want become a medical doctor at JFK Hospital.



# by children ten years and under



**DOUGLAS MOORE,**

**5TH STREET, SINKOR, MONROVIA**

My mother can tell me that UNMIL brought peace to Liberia. She said people used to kill one another with big guns so UN people came to Liberia to stop the war. That's all I know about the war. Sometimes I can hear the big people talk about "war war III" (last major armed hostilities in Monrovia before signing of peace agreement in Accra). I want peace to remain in Liberia. Nobody should bring gun to Liberia again. I want the UN people stop anybody who wants to bring war to Liberia.



**MASSA SACKOR,  
MONROVIA**

No, I don't know about the war. No war in Liberia. Yes, I want peace. UNMIL people brought peace in Liberia. Yes, all the children and myself can play together. Sometimes we can play on the field sometime can play in the yard. Nobody can shoot gun when we are playing. We can only hear the sound of guns in the video clubs (movie centers) when we run by it.



**ARMAH KOLLIE,**

**4TH STREET, SINKOR, MONROVIA**

Peace is in Liberia because nobody fighting war. We want peace because war is not good. War can kill people. My father said the war killed many people in Liberia. He said the people used to send the rockets in the city which used to drop on the houses and killed people inside the houses and on the roads. I don't want for them to send rockets here so we can't die. UNMIL stopped the people from sending the rockets.



**CHARITY F. JALLAH,  
MONROVIA**

UNMIL brought peace. I want peace. I can play with my friends in our yard. Yes, I can see the UNMIL people in the cars. UNMIL people are good people, they can help small children.

# Pledges for Peace

"Best wishes for the people of Liberia. May peace prevail in the country for the years to come." - Ahamed Amin Abdullah, Bangladesh

"I am surely excited about 10 years of uninterrupted peace. My hope is that we work together in avoiding the causes of conflict, ensuring justice and equality for all." - Abdullai Kamara, Liberia

"Congratulations Liberia! Let's keep it going for the next millenia!" - Muchiri Murenga, Kenya

"Liberia, the best is yet to come!" - Elena Pellizzaris, USA

Congrats to the good people of Liberia and God bless everyone that has made this possible. May we never see war again in any part of West Africa." - Pedro Uzoma-Iwuoha, Nigeria

"Is there anything more important than peace? I don't think so. We should fight the utmost to keep the peace that Liberians are breathing!" - Ebrahim Segid, Ethiopia

"As a young Liberian Peace Advocate, I wish Liberia and all countries that have suffered from instability, war, and any civil unrest adopt a culture of peace to protect this world." - Peterking Quaye, Liberia

As Mama Liberia enjoys continued peace for ten good years, may God continue to shower his blessings on Liberia." - Kebba M Bojang, Gambia

"I'll make peace my primary goal and to be sure that people around me and the whole world are at peace. I will not give up in hope and prayers for the world of peace." - Hawa Pelima-Richardson, Liberia

It's not too late to make your Pledge for Peace! Visit [www.unmil.unmissions.org](http://www.unmil.unmissions.org) today.