



Training of Elite Police Unit Ends Gearing up for Elections Building Peace from Grassroots

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: MARGOT WALLSTRÖM





Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

I briefed the Security Council in March on the 20th progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia. The briefing gave me an opportunity to highlight the significant progress Liberia has accomplished so far, as well as the substantial challenges that still remain. Security Council members expressed satisfaction with the progress in the peace process in Liberia, while noting the considerable challenges that remain particularly in the Rule of Law and Justice sectors. The civil unrest that led to the loss of lives and wanton destruction of property in Lofa County at the end of February demonstrated the continued challenges to rule of law, as well as the unfinished work of national reconciliation.

Liberia's ability to achieve a steady state of security will have a direct bearing on the successful transition and eventual withdrawal of peacekeepers from the

country. However, with an annual budget of a little over US\$300 million, the Government of Liberia is seriously constrained to finance all the necessary training, equipment and infrastructure for the country's security institutions on which the people of Liberia depend for their security, in addition to meeting the various developmental needs that Liberians have identified as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Without adequate security, the consolidation of Liberia's hard-won peace cannot be sustained and that could stymie much needed development. Therefore, it is important for Liberia's development partners to continue to offer generous support to build the capacity of the law enforcement and judicial sectors. It is equally important nonetheless for the Government of Liberia, both the executive and the legislature, to provide all the necessary support to these institutions so that they can progressively assume responsibilities from UNMIL.

National security assumes special significance in view of the legislative and presidential elections in October 2011, a little over a year from now. These elections will be a litmus test for Liberia since conducting the elections peacefully and efficiently will indicate the sustainability of the peace achieved so far and the country's capacity to organize and conduct a politically sensitive national event.

Unlike the first post-war election, the

elections in 2011 will be led and managed by the Government of Liberia. One important step in that process is the adoption of a threshold bill. I therefore call on all concerned to work without any further delay towards the finalization of work on the bill. Liberia's international partners, including the United Nations, are ready and committed to actively support these elections. In this regard, the United Nations, representing development partners, and the NEC have finalized a 2010-2012 electoral support project worth US\$39.3 million. A number of partners already have pledged their support, and it is hoped that more will contribute to this effort supporting key electoral processes and enhancing NEC's professional and operational capacity to conduct the elections in a credible and competent manner.

With the encouragement from President Johnson Sirleaf, the United Nations in Liberia has embraced the "Delivering as One" programme that will further enhance synergy among the UN agencies, Funds and Programmes. Liberia represents the first post-conflict country to embrace this concept in the context of an integrated peacekeeping mission. This initiative should enable a seamless transition as the UN mission withdraws and hands over the remaining but important tasks of recovery and development to the people of Liberia and the rest of the UN family in the country.

Ellen Margrethe Løj

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



4. Training of Elite Police Unit Ends

With the graduation in May of the final class of the Emergency Response Unit of the Liberian National Police, the total number of the elite unit now stands at 344 with 4 female officers as the LNP now shifts its focus to the development of the Police Support Unit which will offer flexible armed support to normal police operations.



8. Gearing up for Elections

As the countdown to the 2011 national elections begins, Liberia's development partners have unveiled a road map for smooth conduct of the electoral proceedings through a project that would enhance the capacity of the National Elections Commission and support key exercises.



12. Building Peace from Grassroots

In a move that would take peacebuilding to the grassroots level as UNMIL gradually draws down, various Liberian organizations came together in May to sign agreements that would facilitate their participation in peacebuilding activities across the country.

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ERU graduates demonstrate their skills

Training of Elite Police

With the graduation of 47 officers of Class Five at the Liberia National Police Training Academy in the first week of May, the development of the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) has come to an end. With the last class, the total number of trained ERU personnel stands at 344 including 4 female officers. The governments of the United States, Ireland and Germany, the UN Mission in Liberia and the Ministry of Justice had lent support to the development of this elite unit within the Liberia National Police.

The ERU personnel are trained to deal with crimes which may require the use of firearms – specifically the arrest of armed criminals, violent crimes in progress, hostage situations and armed terrorists activities. They also deal with riot control, engage in anti-crime patrol in crime-prone areas and provide assistance in major dis-

aster situations.

The original targeted strength of the ERU was put at 500 officers. But an assessment shows that its present strength is sufficient to effectively respond to tactical interventions and critical incidents

number of the ERU as well as the LNP's current emphasis on the expansion of the Police Support Unit (PSU) in order to offer flexible armed support to normal police operations, while allowing the ERU to focus on its mandated role to address critical

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield disclosed that with the funding the US Government will provide trainers and advisors, equipment and some infrastructure to specifically address one of the Liberian government's highest priorities – strengthen and expand the PSU to be an effective force in time for the 2011 elections.

anywhere in Liberia. They proved professional and efficient when they were deployed outside Monrovia to respond to unrest in Bong Mines, the Liberia Agricultural Company and more recently, Sinoe rubber plantations. Budgetary constraints also have played a part in limiting the

incidents.

Addressing the final group of graduates, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu urged the ERU personnel to exhibit sound judgment, restraint, and above all, respect and compassion for



US Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield, DSRSG Mensa-Bonsu and Police Commissioner Sawang pose with graduates

ice Unit Ends

those they serve while discharging their duties. “Your service as ERU officers will be defined by how you show respect for human rights of the citizenry, how controlled you are in your use of force and your use of firearms, how much respect you maintain for the chain of command, and in sum how well you adhere to your Duty Manual, rules and regulations,” she told the graduates and urged them to take the newly acquired skills, knowledge and experience and their inner strength and transform these into the best and most professional service that they can give their communities.

Mensa-Bonsu reminded the ERU and LNP officers that they represent the hopes, dreams and means to ensure Liberians and residents alike live in safety, security and peaceful co-existence. She warned them that any breaches of regulations, or indiscipline among them will be met with serious and appropriate consequences. “Citizens

have extended their trust in you; and you must return this trust,” she stressed.

She praised members of the ERU and the LNP for proving their merit and commitment in providing security but noted that they cannot succeed in isolation, and cannot deliver if not adequately funded. “The LNP are facing a very real operational dilemma,” she noted. “While they are steadfastly improving in the quality of police service delivered, they are also increasingly challenged by the imbalance between operational demands and available budgetary allocations.” The UN deputy envoy encouraged the government to do its utmost to provide the LNP, and the security sector, with the means to be operationally effective.

United States Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said that her government was proud to have trained this elite special unit under the programme funded through a Congressional grant earmarked in 2007,

but noted that the US support to police and justice sector development in Liberia does not end there. She named Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s promised additional funding for police assistance this year; and more recently, Undersecretary of State William Burns fulfilled that promise by announcing that the US Government will provide US\$19.75 million for support to the LNP.

“The US\$19.75 million is intended to support capacity building within the LNP in terms of skills and resources. It is not a substitute for budgetary support that the Liberian government has responsibility for,” she stressed. “We cannot pay salaries, incentives or provide rice.”

Ambassador Thomas-Greenfield disclosed that with the funding the US Government will provide trainers and advisors, equipment and some infrastructure to specifically address one of the Liberian government’s highest priorities – strengthen and expand the PSU to be an effective force in time for the 2011 elections.

The US Ambassador said the assistance for the PSU and other aspects of the LNP will draw lessons learned from the ERU development programme. While providing assistance for management of the LNP, communications, and support for the academy in expanding training capabilities, ERU will also benefit from in-service training assistance and other support as required. “Our goal is to be part of the international effort to build an effective Liberia National Police,” she said and hoped that the US Government’s commitment will encourage others to invest in the LNP and in so doing show their support for ongoing stability for all Liberians.

Deputy Inspector-General of Police for Administration Samuel Dakana, on behalf of Justice Minister Cllr. Christiana Tah, appealed to the citizenry and residents within our borders to support the LNP and ERU in maintaining peace and security, protecting lives and property, and enforcing the laws of the country. He frowned on the use of mob violence as a way of justice and advised everyone to seek the due process of law. Training of ERU personnel began on 2 January 2008. Those selected are active LNP officers. Each candidate underwent a vetting process.

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Two Decades of Peace

The Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Margrethe Løj, has lauded the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) for its continued support and participation in the peace process in Liberia, which has been critical in sustaining peace.

Congratulating the Government of Liberia and ECOWAS for organizing a week-long international conference in Liberia's capital Monrovia to examine the sub-regional group's achievements, failures and lessons learned in relation to two decades of peace processes in West Africa, the UN envoy described the conference as a "welcome initiative which could not have come at a better time."

Participants from ECOWAS, African Union, UN systems, development part-

ners, civil society, research institutions, media and other relevant stakeholders as well as some of the region's most distinguished personalities, including former heads of state Dawda Jawara of The Gambia, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Jerry John Rawlings of Ghana attended the conference. Former executive secretaries and former commanders of the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group, ECOMOG, also participated in the late March conference.

"As you all may know, the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is already drawing down its military troops as a prelude to the eventual withdrawal of the Mission. As ECOWAS and other bilateral and multilateral partners have been very much a part of our work here in Liberia and elsewhere in the sub-region, I am convinced that any fu-

ture security arrangement in Liberia that will replace UNMIL will rely in part on the ECOWAS framework," said the UN envoy. She added that before as well as after the establishment of UNMIL in 2003, ECOWAS and its constituent member states have continued to play a major role in supporting the evolving peace process in Liberia. "Before through ECOMIL and ECOMOG, as well as in mediating the Accra Peace Agreement. And to this day, ECOWAS has participated actively in the International Contact Group on Liberia, the International Contact Group on the Mano River Basin, the Governance and Economic Management Programme (GEMAP), and other multilateral and bilateral efforts. This support has been critical in ensuring the sustainability of the peace process, which included DDRR, post-conflict recovery, reconstruction, de-



Distinguished personalities at the summit

ce Processes

velopment and national reconciliation,” Løj said.

Christmas Eve 2009 marked the twentieth anniversary of the invasion of Liberia by National Patriotic Front of Liberia rebels. ECOWAS for the first time since its creation in 1975, intervened in the conflict by sending troops in 1990 to restore order. The ship laden with peacekeepers from neighbouring countries raised a white flag to signify peace, friendship and neutrality. However, as they landed on Liberian soil, their friendly gesture was greeted by a firestorm of mortar shelling. Although they sustained casualties, the peacekeepers were determined to execute their mission of separating the warring factions and ensuring a ceasefire. The conflict in Liberia also spread to neighbouring countries with rebellion beginning in Sierra Leone in 1991, followed by further conflicts in

Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire.

Expressing the hope that never again will Liberia become the epicentre of instability in the sub-region, Special Representative Løj noted that West African leaders and people are fed up with conflict, war and violence, and are determined collectively to prevent the kind of horror witnessed in the region for about 15 years. “I hope the outcome of this conference will point us in the direction to ensure that.”

Delivering her keynote address, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf requested a moment of silence in memory of peacekeepers, partners, and the thousands of Liberians who perished during the country’s civil war. She commended those who laboured so tirelessly and those who made daring sacrifices for peace in Liberia. The Liberian leader said the root causes of civil conflicts in Africa are bad govern-

ance, lack of respect for human rights, socio-economic and political inequity and grinding poverty. “Liberia is no different,” she noted. Despite challenges, President Sirleaf said Liberia’s “nightmare” was over. “The country has been at peace since 2003. We are grateful for the support we have received from our West African, American, European, and Asian nations; from the United Nations and the entire international community.”

While the UN peacekeeping mission in Sierra Leone successfully completed its mandate a few years ago, UN peacekeepers are currently deployed in Liberia and Côte d’Ivoire. Although there are no active civil conflicts in West Africa, the security situation in the post-conflict societies continues to be characterized by fragility. Over the past 20 years, the region has also been contending with simmering low intensity conflicts such as the Touareg rebellions in Mali and Niger, the conflicts in Casamance and in the Niger Delta. “It is just not enough to be preparing military contingents to stop carnage, but we have to prevent this carnage in the first place through good political and economic governance,” remarked Dr. Abdel-Fatau Musah, ECOWAS’ Director of Political Affairs.

President of the ECOWAS Commission James Victor Gbeho, and Said Djinnit, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in West Africa, were among some 200 participants who contributed to deliberations. Working in tandem with ECOWAS and other regional bodies, the African Union has declared the Year 2010 the African Year of Peace to reiterate its commitment to peace in Africa.

The conference also witnessed the launch of the ECOWAS Youth Volunteer programme in which a group of women and men aged between 18 and 35 years from ECOWAS countries are expected to help to consolidate peace, recovery, national reconciliation and rehabilitation in crisis-affected communities. The pilot phase, supported by the African Development Bank, the United Nations Volunteer Programme, UNESCO and UNHCR, will cover Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Guinea.

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Gearing up for Elections

As the countdown to the 2011 presidential and legislative elections begins, the Government of Liberia, the National Elections Commission (NEC) and the country's development partners have together unveiled a roadmap for the smooth conduct of the electoral proceedings. Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance Moustapha Soumaré, Planning & Economic Affairs Minister Amara Konneh, and NEC Chairman James Fromayan recently signed a project document that spells out the roadmap to realize credible, free and fair elections.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, Soumaré revealed that the total estimated cost of support to the elections is US\$39.3 million out of which the Liberian government has committed US\$12.1 million. The government of Spain has contributed US\$750,000 while pledges so far by development partners amount to US\$15.6 million. "I have every confidence that the balance in the budget will be successfully mobilized this year," Soumaré said while commending Liberia's development partners for their goodwill and commitment to support the NEC.

Soumaré, who is also the UN Resident Coordinator, hoped that the Liberian government and other local stakeholders



stressing the need for ample time to plan for the conduct of the elections. He noted that the exercise is not an event but a series of processes that lead up to polling day. "The future of the country depends on the 2011 elections," he said, adding that although a democratic election will not bring about solutions to all of Liberia's problems it will give the country the space to move forward.

The project aims to support building the operational and professional capacity of the NEC and key exercises of the electoral process including boundary limitation, voter registration, civic/voter education, domestic observation and women's participation. It will also support NEC's relations with political parties and the legislature, training for security, and legal counsel.

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would play their part in a timely manner to create an environment conducive to a credible vote, referring to the necessary legislations to establish the legal framework for the elections. "Any further delay in the passage of the relevant bills will have deleterious effect on the ability of the NEC to conduct the electoral process," he warned, encouraging deliberate speed to take the necessary actions that will strengthen the legitimacy and credibility of the 2011 elections.

NEC Chairman James Fromayan thanked the Government for its unflinching support to the work of the NEC while





Planning & Economic Affairs Minister Konneh, DSRSG Soumaré and NEC Chairman Fromayan sign the project document

Fromayan warned that any delay in passing the necessary legislation could give a bad signal to the country's development partners that Liberians were not serious about the conduct of next year's elections. "We don't want to have a situation that our hands will be tied and squeezed with time," he said and called on the media, civil society and political parties to ensure that the various legislations are

International partners listen attentively



passed expeditiously.

Planning & Economic Affairs Minister Amara Konneh reaffirmed the government's commitment to meeting its obligations in the project document over the two-year period. "As a member of the budget committee I can say here on behalf of my colleagues that we will protect in the budget the resources allocated for the NEC which will be sent to the National

Legislature soon," he said. It demonstrates to the development partners the government's commitment to holding free, fair and credible elections next year, he added.

Minister Konneh called on other partners to join in and assist the NEC in the conduct of the next elections as it will determine the future of Liberia. "For us Liberians, we have a rendezvous with destiny to either demonstrate to our people and the world that we are now a responsible country capable of managing our own future or we can choose to reverse the gains we've made over the past seven years," he said. He noted that the 2005 elections were managed by the international community because then Liberians had not demonstrated to the world that they were a responsible country. "The dialogue today is different," he said.

Konneh promised to work with others in the government and the National Legislature to ensure the passage of the Threshold bill, which is the initial step to the holding of free, fair and credible elections. He then made a passionate plea to members of the National Legislature to fast track the process there because time is running out.

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NEC Chairman Fromayan makes remarks





New HQ for Election Commission

Although a number of legislations required for timely conduct of the 2011 national and presidential elections still remain unresolved, the institution charged with the responsibility to hold free, fair and credible elections got a major facelift recently with the dedication of its new headquarters. The National Elections Commission's (NEC) two-storey, modern headquarters located at the site which formerly hosted the offices of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in the late 1970s, but demolished in January 2009 due to structural problems, cost the US Government US\$3.2 million to construct. This is the first time since Liberia's independence that the NEC has its own headquarters which will save the Liberian

Government nearly US\$70,000 annually for rent.

The US Government through USAID's Liberia Community Infrastructure Program (LCIP) formally handed over the newly constructed NEC headquarters to the Liberian Government on 24 March 2010.

US Ambassador Linda Thomas Greenfield, speaking at the dedication, termed the NEC as one of Liberia's most important government institutions, but noted that it is just one brick in the structure of Liberia's democracy which alone cannot guarantee successful governance. "It is the starting point for the democratic process in Liberia because it ensures that the leaders who run Liberia's democracy are selected by the people in a politically-neutral and impartial manner." She advised

that meaningful democracy requires that all Liberians become involved and engage each other and their leaders with honesty, respect and candour.

Ambassador Thomas Greenfield reiterated that the completion of the new NEC headquarters is not the end of the US Government's commitment to helping make sure Liberians are able to choose their leaders in free and fair elections. The United States is committed to supporting the right of Liberians to decide who runs their government following next year's election. She disclosed that the US Government is providing US\$17 million to





The new Headquarters of the National Elections Commission

build the NEC's capacity to prepare for and carry out the 2011 elections, which "will be, and must be, free and fair, open and transparent."

On behalf of the Board of Commissioners, NEC Chairman James Fromayan again appealed to the Executive and Legislative branches to immediately pass the Threshold bill, a major piece of legislation that has been a victim of political wrangling for nearly two years. "As a result of all this unwarranted delay in the passage of the Threshold bill, I honestly do not see how the NEC can be expected to conduct a national referendum to address key constitutional issues under severe time constraint," Fromayan warned, noting that elections require massive planning and time is an essential factor.

He cautioned that the Board of Commissioners is mindful of the fact that any

level of mishap in the electoral process can squarely be blamed on the NEC. But when an election falls short of the expectation of the people and situation degenerates into a crisis, although the Commission will be the obvious targets, the entire country can become the victim.

Receiving the new headquarters, Fromayan noted that it is not only a symbol of the long standing friendship between Liberia and the United States; but more importantly underscores the US' global partnership with and encouragement to countries that are upholding basic democratic tenets. He urged Liberians to see the need to reciprocate the gesture by choosing ballots over bullets and accept the fact that the rule of law and the adherence thereto is the surest guarantee to democracy. "Anything to the contrary is simply an invitation to tyranny," he warned.

Vice President Joseph Boakai, who deputized for President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, reminded Liberians that the new building is not just a structure but all that it signifies. "This building is a 'one stop shop' in this epoch to nurture a sustained democratic culture based on the rule of law, which, I'm proud to state, has already taken off on a healthy trajectory," he said noting that the building is an attestation of the US Government's assurance to partner assembly and adherence to the rule of law.

The Liberian Vice President noted with optimism that the NEC will continue to conduct itself professionally and play a pivotal role without fear or favor, in this new democratic dispensation, so that it continues to earn the trust of the Liberian people. Dr. Boakai further urged Liberians to be appreciative that the Commission has a firm base from which to build on its recent achievements, citing the conduct of the two senatorial by-elections in 2009.

Dr. Boakai reminded the Commission that the conduct of free, fair and transparent elections exemplifies good governance which is embedded in the Government's four pillars of the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). "We will hold you, members of the NEC, individually and collectively responsible to maintain the sanctity of this building, especially the integrity, impartially and steadfastness required to conform to international best practices, the standard of any democratic country's National Elections Commission," he cautioned.

The building will accommodate modern offices, meeting rooms, computer and data processing centre, a resource and reference room, a media centre, space for election observers and for extra personnel during the election season.

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The hand-over ceremony



Building Peace from Grassroots

In a timely move that would take peacebuilding to the grassroots level as the United Nations Mission in Liberia gradually draws down, representatives of various organizations met at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) headquarters in Monrovia in May to sign agreements that give them the opportunity

to participate in peacebuilding activities.

“We have been crying to be part of this process,” says Salome G. Gofan, Executive Director of Integrated Centre for Community Empowerment, who was among representatives of 15 civil society organizations that signed tripartite agreements with the UNHCR and the Liberia Peacebuilding Office/Peace Building

Fund (PBF). As people with their ears on the ground, civil society activists argue that insecurity in any part of Liberia is a threat to security in all parts of the country, and if conflicts are not resolved at the community level, it can affect national development.

Until now, local and small non-governmental organizations, especially those



submitted proposals, 15 organizations were selected through a competitive process based on criteria of the Peacebuilding Fund and in line with Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The projects are intended to address localized conflicts such as religious and ethnic, and will employ conflict resolution and mediation skills. Some of the projects will cover psychosocial support to war-affected people especially children and women, and victims of sexual and gender-based violence, among others.

"The small grant initiative is a way of responding to the cries of small civil society institutions that felt left out of the implementation of the PBF. An appeal was made

ing for peace committees in six conflict prone communities in Gbarpolu, Bomi and Grand Cape Mount counties. For their part, the Women Empowerment for Self Employment intends to enhance social cohesiveness of the community by reducing poverty and promoting conflict resolution through provision of two essential life skills -- training in straw baskets and country cloth weaving -- while simultaneously providing psychosocial support through sports and cultural activities for 40 ethnically diverse women.

To enhance their technical capacity in programme and financial management and familiarize themselves with reporting and financial procedures, the UN refugee

The UNHCR Small Grants Initiative is a new partnership which supports grassroots initiatives for peacebuilding through provision of small grants of up to US\$ 26,000. Although 99 organizations submitted proposals, 15 organizations were selected through a competitive process based on criteria of the Peacebuilding Fund and in line with Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. The projects are intended to address localized conflicts such as religious and ethnic, and will employ conflict resolution and mediation skills.

to the UN Special Representative and it was subsequently looked into," says Wilfred N. Gray-Johnson, Executive Director of Liberia Peacebuilding Office/PBF. While extolling the UN refugee agency for being outstanding in implementing peacebuilding projects, Gray-Johnson cautioned the community based organizations to be careful in the ways they implement the projects in order not to exacerbate tensions instead of mitigating them.

As the implementation of the projects begin and will last from six months to one year, the 15 organizations will be focusing on issues which have the tendency to undermine peace efforts in their communities. Liberians United to Expose Hidden Weapons for instance says it will be promoting peace and reconciliation among community structures in Bomi County while the Peace Building Resource Centre aims to reduce land disputes through community as well as county level consultations on the nature of conflict and train-

agency conducted training for the implementing partners. Representative Coly expresses hope that Liberia will enjoy lasting peace long after the UN mission would have phased out. UNHCR is also involved in skills training and income generation, all of which contribute to the consolidation of peace.

Although the refugee agency has reduced its activities in Liberia, it has four field offices that will work with the various organizations. "Peacebuilding is a continuous process and UNHCR is committed to working with you," Coly assures the group but reminds all that their activities will be closely monitored. "Donors need to know what is happening. You may be working 24 hours, but if you don't report to donors, nothing is happening. This is going to be the test case in Liberia. If we do well, if the projects are successful, they will not only stand a chance of continuation, but may also be replicated in other countries."

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UNHCR Representative Ibrahim Coly addresses partners operating outside Monrovia, had limited consideration for the implementation of peacebuilding projects due to unmet criteria. "We have done a lot in terms of building the capacity of community members and leaders in peacebuilding, encouraging peaceful negotiation and dialogue in resolving land disputes, inter-tribal conflicts and other issues that threaten the peace in the country. Involving grass root organizations at this time add value to this effort because members of these organizations know who is living where and what they are faced with," says Ibrahim Coly, UNHCR Representative, stressing that people should talk about peace in the family and in their communities.

The UNHCR Small Grants Initiative is a new partnership which supports grassroots initiatives for peacebuilding through provision of small grants of up to US\$ 26,000. Although 99 organizations



Land Commission conducts one-day consultation in Bentol City, Montserrado County



An elder makes comments during the Land Commission consultation

Land Commission Takes

A serious challenge to the stability, peace and security that Liberia now enjoys under the watchful eyes of the UN peacekeepers comes from land. The prolonged civil war forced many people to flee their homes abandoning their land and properties only for others to occupy them. As many of the original owners have returned with the dawn of peace, concerns over land rights, administration, management, sale, possession, occupancy control and distribution abound in Liberia today.

All over the country, from Maryland and Grand Kru, Sinoe and Rivercess to Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba, Lofa and Montserrado counties, there have been grisly murders and violent conflicts over land. Most of these are still unresolved. Though ad-hoc committees have been set up to probe land disputes over time with findings and recommendations presented to government, most of these disputes have still not been resolved.

In order to find amicable solutions to what could pose a serious challenge to the country's peace and stability, the National Legislature passed an Act establishing a

Land Commission in August 2009. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf subsequently appointed a seven-member team with a five-year mandate to propose, advocate and coordinate reforms of land policy, laws and programmes in the country.

Its main objectives in policy and law reform shall be to promote equitable and productive access to the nation's land, both public and private; security of tenure in land and the rule of law with respect to landholding and dealings in land; effective land administration and management; and investment in the development of the nation's resources.

The mandate extends to all land and land-based natural resources, including both urban and rural land, private and public land, and land devoted to residential, agricultural, industrial, commercial, forestry conservation and any other purposes.

With support from UN-HABITAT, financed through the UN Peace-building Fund, the Land Commission has begun implementing its activities aimed at making a direct contribution to the peace building process as part of a long term land reform programme. Other agencies and organizations including the UN Children's Agency

UNICEF, the Norwegian Refugee Council and the World Bank also contribute to the work of the Commission while UNMIL provides technical and logistical support.

The Commission has hit the ground running. With support from UNMIL's Public Information Section creating public awareness and advocacy on the Commission's mandate, it recently launched its first consultation campaigns throughout Liberia's 15 political subdivisions. The hearings brought together county legisla-

Commissioners and staff of the Land Commission





Commission's consultation in Robertsport, Grand Cape Mount County

kes Off

tors, district commissioners, paramount and clan chiefs, women and youth organizations as well as land commissioners, resident surveyors and other stakeholders from each of the counties.

During each meeting, the Land Commissioner with oversight responsibility for the county provided participants with an overview of the Land Commission's work, mandate and objectives. The gathering deliberated on a number of issues relating to land use, land tenure, security and devel-

Land Commission brainstorm during one-day county consultations



opment.

The process of establishing a Land Commission started some three years ago under the Governance Commission (GC). It started as a small working group guided by a steering committee of all of those in the land sector, including the ministries of agriculture and lands, mines and energy, environmental protection agency (EPA), forestry development authority (FDA), UNMIL, among others.

The Commission's Chairman, Dr. Cecil T.O. Brandy, speaking at the forum in Montserrado County's capital, Bentol, acknowledged that land issues have a serious potential for conflict in post-war Liberia, and the Commission is beginning to look at the numerous issues of land reform.

Among the substantial number of rec-

ommendations that evolved from the various deliberations is an overwhelming view of the participants that "fast track courts" be established to prosecute those involved in land sale to more than one person. They also recommended that the signing of land title deeds be decentralized rather than signed exclusively by the President of Liberia.

All over the country, from Maryland and Grand Kru, Sinoe and Rivercess to Margibi, Grand Bassa, Bong, Nimba, Lofa and Montserrado counties, there have been grisly murders and violent conflicts over land. Most of these are still unresolved. Though ad-hoc committees have been set up to probe land disputes over time with findings and recommendations presented to government, most of these disputes have still not been resolved. In order to find amicable solutions to what could pose a serious challenge to the country's peace and stability, the National Legislature passed an Act establishing a Land Commission in August 2009. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf subsequently appointed a seven-member team with a five-year mandate to propose, advocate and coordinate reforms of land policy, laws and programmes in the country.

promote the four aspects of our mandate," he said adding that though the commission does not have implementation functions, it has powers within the Act to follow-up and ensure that proposed recommendations are seen through.

Dr. Brandy said that land disputes are on the front burner of the Commission, terming it as critical. The Commission has begun mapping an inventory of land disputes. Already, he said, they have completed three counties – Montserrado, Bomi and Margibi counties – and are rolling out to the rest of the country. A task force on land disputes resolution is being formed. Besides looking at border harmonization, the Commission is looking at improving land sector coordination. President Johnson Sirleaf instituted a three-month moratorium on the sale of public land.

Chairman Brandy noted that he heads a commission that is a policy reform and review commission. "Our activity will be looking at land reform, primarily looking at law reform, and how we can speed up the process of dispute resolution. We have a clear mandate to recommend procedures, guidelines and develop legislation that can

torium on the sale of public land.

The Commission has also begun developing new laws, procedures and guidelines to facilitate the sale of public land. "In the first 18 months we plan to develop a broad land policy framework and prioritize land policy development," says Dr. Brandy, noting that developing a clear legal and institutional framework for dispute resolution is a major priority. Developing a national land use map and management plan and also modernizing the Center for National Documentations and Records are also on the cards.

JWW

“Rape must be rooted

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, Margot Wallström, visited Liberia in late May. In an exclusive interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka, she discusses her role and UN’s efforts in dealing with rape and other forms of sexual violence meted out to women and girls in conflict situations.

UN Focus: Madam SRSG, could you please explain briefly the purpose of your visit to Liberia?

Margot Wallström: My new position as Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has its roots in Security Council Resolution 1325 in relation to Women, Peace and Security, giving women a role in peace processes but also looking at sexual violence against women as a security issue. As you know, reports are everywhere about sexual violence and rape against women in many areas of conflict, and it does not seem to get better. In June 2008, Resolution 1820 recognized conflict-related sexual violence as a core security challenge and in September last year Resolution 1888 was passed, which called for the creation of this post. I want to make sure that we understand this phenomenon of sexual violence including in a country like Liberia, a post-conflict society. I have already visited the Democratic Republic of Congo. Armed conflict is still going on in the eastern part of DRC, but here in Liberia the most frequently reported serious crime is rape. Why is that? We know that many years of armed conflict and war brutalized the society, but how can we understand why rape is so rampant in the Liberian society today?

So your tour is to investigate the root cause of sexual violence in Liberia during the war and also the continuing sexual violence in post-conflict Liberia?

We will not be able to investigate and state exactly what happened during the war, or before the war, which also is very interesting because a lot of people here say that there were many rapes before the

war but this was so exacerbated during the years of armed conflict. And now, it has brutalized the society to such an extent that it introduced new elements like gang rape and very violent forms of sexual violence that did not previously exist in Liberia. We want to see how we can prevent this. But you can’t prevent what you don’t fully understand. So we want to meet the survivors of sexual violence, also understand more about the perpetrators, and analyse how

society deals with it. How can we better address this serious problem?

You have been known to be involved in promoting issues relating to women in peace and security ever since your appointment to the European Commission. Where does this passion come from?

I believe that without women we cannot build sustainable peace. I think also,



out...”

purely from a democratic point of view, you cannot exclude more than half of the population. Even in the European Union, we make up more than half of the population but we are only represented at the decision making table at around 30 per cent and I don't think that this is democratic, I think that it is counter-productive for any society. In African countries in particular, women are the pillars of society, very often they are also the breadwinners; they take care of the children, fetch water, fetch firewood and bear children. In order to build and maintain peace, you have to give women a voice. I am a strong promoter of gender equality. I believe the whole of society benefits, I think men also benefit.

Yours is a new position in the UN system. Does it mean that the United Na-

tions is just waking up to the reality of the seriousness of sexual violence in conflict situations?

I think it means that the United Nations admits that the issue of sexual violence in conflict situations has not been properly addressed in the ten years since Resolution 1325. I think the UN has realized that this has become a security policy issue, that women are on the frontline of many of the modern wars and armed conflicts. We saw it of course in the DRC. In areas in the eastern part of the DRC, armed groups are hiding in the jungle. Women have to go out into the field to bring water or firewood back to the house and they are often attacked, raped and killed. The Security Council has accepted that this has to be placed on top of their political agenda.

Do you think a lot more remains to be done to support the victims of sexual violence in Liberia?

We have identified gaps in how society

Liberia, even after seven years since the civil war came to an end. Does that confound you?

Yes, that is why we came to ask the question: why does rape persist long after the guns have fallen silent?? Drugs, alcohol, unemployment, trauma -- there are many problems that make it complex.

There is this other side of sexual violence: UN peacekeepers themselves being accused of perpetrating such abuses. What is your take on this? Does that fall under your mandate too?

Not directly. But it will indirectly, because it takes only one case and the whole credibility of what the UN peacekeepers are doing will be put into question. We really have to demonstrate our commitment to eradicate this. We can actually do more training and vetting before the peacekeepers are deployed. We should also ensure that any such cases are immediately dealt with.

I think we have to start by addressing the fact that so many children are raped. You don't want to do this to your country because it will create lasting psychological scars and trauma. There has to be a clear signal that this is not the fault of women – the victims are not the criminals.

can deliver and help survivors and so on but at the same time one has to recognize and acknowledge what has already been done. It is extremely important that there is political accountability and political responsibility. It means if the signal is strong from the very top, and in this case from the President who herself has really spoken up on this issue, then that helps a lot. There are practical problems of lack of capacity in a very poor country that is still struggling to rebuild everything. So I think it is matter of capacity and implementation and sometimes a lack of enforcement. I think a lot has been done in investing in training and education and we have to look at what more can be done in terms of communication to signal very clearly that rape is not cultural or sexual – it is criminal.

As you noted, rape is still one of the most frequently committed serious crimes in

Do you have a message to the people of Liberia?

Yes, of course, that rape must be rooted out. I think we have to start by addressing the fact that so many children are raped. You don't want to do this to your country because it will create lasting psychological scars and trauma. There has to be a clear signal that this is not the fault of women – the victims are not the criminals. A lot of people have mentioned “improper dressing” as a cause of rape. We need to reinforce that there is no excuse for sexual abuse. Women and girls have a right to their bodies and a right to decide how they dress. I hope Liberian men and women, together, will participate in the campaign to stop rape, and stop rape now.

Thank you so much for your time.



Battling Polio and Measles



It's daybreak in the Liberian capital Monrovia and the streets are bustling as residents go about their chores. However, for hundreds of health workers and parents, it's a special day for child protection and survival. At the Redemption Hospital, loudspeakers belt out jingles as crowds gather. "Don't hide your children," appeals a very enthusiastic Communication Officer Angelina Tarr of the Ministry of Health, her voice reverberating all around as Liberia's National Integrated Polio Measles vaccination campaign from 23 to 29 April kicks off, targeting 750,000 under-five children.

At the national launch of the campaign at the hospital, mothers listen to health talks and get a chance to seek advice from professionals. "What if my child already has Measles, can he still take the vaccine?" asks one mother. "If my child recently took the vaccines, can she take them again?" enquires another. Dr. Zakari Wambai of the World Health Organization clarifies that children who recently took the vaccine can still take as a booster dose while a child with Measles can be vaccinated at a health facility under medical supervision.

The medical officer reminds the gathering that the vaccination exercise is the second round of campaign against Polio. "Liberia is not the only country in the sub-region that is conducting this campaign. There are 12 other countries targeting the same age group," he says, adding, "Last year alone, Liberia recorded 11 cases of Polio after over 10 years of being Polio-free. This year one case of Polio has been confirmed in early March in Bong County. So we are not out of the woods yet. No country is truly Polio-free until all coun-

tries are Polio-free. By the same token, no child can be Polio-free until all children of the world are Polio-free, and the only way they can be Polio-free is by being vaccinated.” As for Measles, Liberia is currently experiencing an outbreak of the childhood killer disease. From December last year to early May this year, more than 700 children, mostly in Montserrado County, have been diagnosed with the disease, and some adults who were never vaccinated or never contracted the disease before, have also been infected.

With Dr. Wambai and Ministry of Health officials clearing all doubts and stressing the importance of vaccination and that Polio is not as a result of witchcraft, the mothers are happy to have their children vaccinated. “I am very happy today. I know the vaccine is going to protect my child against Polio, against paralysis,” says 31-year-old Lucy Johnson, beaming with smiles as her tender three-day-old baby girl receives the oral Polio vaccine. “I am feeling fine, very fine that my first baby has received the vaccines which are free,” says elated 22-year-old Umu Jalloh as health workers go from house to house to vaccinate children against Polio, give them Vitamin A and provide them de-worming tablets. The campaign also goes on simultaneously in health clinics and hospitals, and temporary sites. The Polio vaccine targets every new born to 59 months; Measles vaccine, which is administered at health centres, targets every child aged 6 months to 59 months; the Vitamin A is for every child aged 6 months to 59 months while de-worming medicine is for every child aged 12 months to 59 months.

While worms can cause anaemia and ill health, Polio is a dangerous disease that can cripple or kill and can spread very fast, especially among children, according to health experts. Measles can cause malnutrition, poor mental development, hearing and visual impairments as well as death, and Vitamin A deficiency can cause blindness but Vitamin A medicine helps children to resist illness, protect their eyesight and reduce the risk of death.

UNICEF Representative Isabel Crowley commends the 4,000 vaccinators, supervisors and community volunteers as they go out to villages and towns for seven

days, and describes their efforts and hard work as “vital to vaccinating every child below 5 years to eradicate measles and polio out of Liberia.” To support the campaign, UNICEF provides technical and financial support for communications, and supply more than 900,000 doses of Polio vaccine and 640,000 doses of the Measles vaccine in addition Vitamin A tablets and Mebendazole. The World Health Organization provides technical support as well as funds for logistics, monitoring, transportation and allowances for vaccination teams. UN Mission in Liberia supports the campaign through sensitization programmes and jingles on the mission’s ra-

dio that has a nationwide coverage and often uses its helicopters to airlift campaign materials and personnel to far-flung areas.

“We encourage parents to take Measles vaccine in health facilities as it requires professional attention, but Polio can be given during the house to house campaign,” says Liberia’s Chief Medical Officer Dr. Bernice Dahn. Routine vaccination will continue in health facilities after the synchronized Polio eradication campaign from 28 May – 1 June and the final round scheduled for 25 - 29 June 2010.

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A young child is administered the polio vaccine



Better future for girls, farmers

Although Liberia heavily relies on the importation of rice, its staple food, locally produced rice is being distributed for the first time as take-home food to girls under the school feeding programme of the Ministry of Education.

In many Liberian homes, poverty prevents girls from going to school but the distribution of food in public and community primary schools where the gender gap is 15 per cent or more, serves as an incentive for families to keep girls in school. Each girl in grades 4 to 6 who attends at least 80 per cent of total school days in a month is given 25 kg of rice plus other condiments every month.

While the distribution of rice to girls

of Agriculture is providing extension services and policy guidance. FAO and WFP are also helping to rehabilitate swamps for cultivation.

“For the first time, we are getting reward for our efforts and we are very happy about it. Even President Sirleaf has visited and commended us,” says a very proud Moses N. Phillips, Chairman of the Dokodan Farmers Cooperative in Nimba County. P4P initiative is a pilot programme that is being implemented by WFP worldwide in 21 countries, mostly in Africa but a few countries in Asia and Latin America as well. The initiative was launched in Liberia in March 2009 and is being implemented in Lofa, Nimba and Bong counties.

“We are increasing the capacity of farmers to produce more,” notes P4P Pro-

one year, P4P has trained 200 smallholder farmers, including 160 women and 40 men in post-harvest processing of rice; constructed a warehouse for the Dokodan Cooperative and installed a rubbhall for Intofawor cooperative in Lofa, and donated one rice milling machine each to the two cooperatives in addition to threshers, winnowers and parboiling machines. P4P has also donated generators and warehouse equipment such as measuring scales, pallets, empty bags and stitching machines and conducted training for cooperative leaders in management and computer-based accounting systems. Furthermore, it has provided one desktop computer each to Intofawor and Dokodan cooperatives. Recently, the initiative procured four semi-rice milling plants for donation

While the distribution of rice to girls is encouraging them to stay in school and giving them hope of a brighter future, Liberian farmers who usually struggle to sell their surplus rice are equally elated that Purchase for Progress (P4P) is benefiting them as they are offered an attractive price.

is encouraging them to stay in school and giving them hope of a brighter future, Liberian farmers who usually struggle to sell their surplus rice are equally elated that Purchase for Progress (P4P) is benefiting them as they are offered an attractive price. The rice is purchased from local smallholder farmers under the P4P initiative, a local procurement scheme through which the World Food Programme (WFP) partners with the Ministry of Agriculture, UN agencies and others. FAO is providing seeds and fertilizers to the farmers, UNDP is constructing warehouses and roads linking farmers to markets, and the Ministry

of Agriculture is providing extension services and policy guidance. FAO and WFP are also helping to rehabilitate swamps for cultivation. programme Manager Lansana Wonneh. He explains that P4P intends to go over the market bottleneck and place demand right at the door of farmers so that they can access markets. Payment for rice is done in partnership with a local bank, Ministry of Agriculture and the UN Mission in Liberia. Apart from the payment for each bag of paddy rice, WFP also pays the contracted cooperatives for support services, including collection, handling, parboiling and bagging.

Added to building markets, the initiative is also involved in capacity building through series of training. Over the past





A warehouse for rice

to selected cooperatives in Lofa, Bong and Nimba. “Before now our cooperative was not together but thanks to P4P we are very organized now and we are benefiting a lot,” says Chairman Phillips, who now knows how to use a computer as a result of P4P support.

In May this year, the women of the Dokodan Cooperative were busy parboil-

ing and drying rice. “We were trained by P4P to parboil rice. Before, we used to do it but not properly,” admits Veronica Diggs. The mother of five says by belonging to the cooperative, she can now help her husband take care of the home and pay their children’s school fees. “We should all go back to soil and stop hunger. The soil is a bank,” she says. For now, P4P, which

will be gradually expanded to other countries, buys only rice but the programme is also encouraging farmers to grow other crops such as beans.

The Liberia pilot for P4P was made possible through funding from the Howard G. Buffett Foundation. The Governments of Germany, Japan, and Switzerland funded the first phase of the procurement targeting 400 metric tons in 2009 but farmers were able to produce more than 50 per cent of the target. In the ongoing second year of procurement from March 2010 to March 2011, USAID has provided the initial funding targeting at least 1,000 metric tons of cleaned rice. From two cooperatives in the first year, seven cooperatives have been contracted in the second year, including four women-only groups.

As P4P continues to support girls to stay in school and farmers to grow more and address poverty, Wonneh says they are sure to exceed their target this year. “All of what we get will be distributed to schools,” says the programme manager, optimistic that in years to come, Liberia will not only produce enough food to feed the population but will actually export as well.

Some beneficiaries of the P4P initiative



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Moustapha Soumaré addresses the summit on Aid Effectiveness

Maximizing Aid for Development

Liberia is one of the most aid-dependent countries in Africa with about half of its funds coming from external donors. But how can the Government of Liberia and its development partners maximize aid for growth and development? This was the focus of a High-Level Summit on Aid Effectiveness in the Liberian capital Monrovia in April with the theme: “Maximizing High Quality Aid for Growth and Development”.

Although Liberia continues to enjoy a lot of international goodwill, some Liberian Government officials express concern that large chunks of donor resources to the post-war nation are spent on imported

goods and services leaving paltry amounts for intended goals of programmes and projects. Organized by the Government of Liberia and partners, the two-day summit brought together donors, non-governmental organizations and civil society to broaden the policy dialogue on aid effectiveness and NGO coordination.

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf says the summit represents a time to harness and take stock of opportunities and potentials that will ensure greater efficiency. “The hope is that we will engage in constructive dialogue in order to foster genuine partnership with all actors in the aid architecture in order to achieve our development goals by establishing clear

policies and guidelines which will facilitate a genuine way forward.” Six years ago, the Liberian leader says most aid to Liberia was in the form of emergency humanitarian assistance, which was a response to Liberia’s immediate need for the most basic of necessities. “Today, we are on an ambitious path to long-term sustainable development,” she says, pointing out that the shift in Liberia’s needs must be accompanied by a change in the way the Government and its development partners conceptualize aid and its management. President Sirleaf acknowledges that despite progress made by the Government in the aid dialogue with sector line ministries, civil society and development

partners on aid management, “efforts have been undermined by capacity gaps as well as unclear articulation of policies, procedures, roles and responsibilities.”

Added to the contribution of United Nations peacekeepers to the restoration of peace, various UN agencies, funds and programmes continue to support Liberia’s recovery and development efforts. The UN Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Governance, Moustapha Soumaré commended the Government for seeking ownership over the coordination of aid delivery and described the Summit as “further evidence of the Government’s drive to lift Liberia onto a path of sustainable, long-term development.” The deputy UN envoy said despite improvements

tion, and the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, lifting poor people out of poverty in a sustainable way. “As the United Nations in Liberia works towards “One UN” this is certainly the opportune time to discuss how to maximize aid delivery for growth and development.”

As Liberia is likely to remain dependent on aid in the medium-term, ensuring that aid is used effectively is critical. The Government has also invoked the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness as its guiding principle which includes: Ownership, Alignment, Harmonization, Managing for Development Results, and Mutual Accountability. “Liberia is going through a transition process,” says Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs Am-

pipe so we can know where there are leakages.”

Liberians say donors sometimes project their own agenda at the expense of government ownership. But while stressing that aid “is about the country’s interest and development”, Ohene Owusu Nyanin of the World Bank maintains that “ownership without capacity is a hoax.” For her part, Pamela White of USAID attributes “ego” by donor organizations as one of the main problems of aid effectiveness. The question of whether the donor community itself is coordinated was also discussed.

But should Liberia continue to receive aid? Notwithstanding shortcomings, there was a general consensus among participants that aid has played a crucial role in



A wide range of participants took part in the summit

in domestic revenue in Liberia, “public spending faces challenges by regional and international standards, and Liberia remains highly aid dependent.” He points out that three benchmarks should define the effective use of aid in the Liberian context: supporting implementation of Liberia’s Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008-11; strengthening Liberian institutions, so that they may continue to lead and own Liberia’s development agenda; and delivering the national programmes that will support the consolidation of peace and reconstruc-

ara Konneh. Between 2003–2008, Konneh observes that Liberia experienced an aid boom. “We received a lot of aid during this period but we don’t want to wait when there is significant decline before we start talking to each other. We have been talking but we have not focused our attention on the five principles of the Paris Declaration,” he says, admitting that the aid pipe is not perfect and it is important to identify where problems are to clear them before getting clogged. “The two-day dialogue is to begin the process of putting water in the

Liberia’s progress over the years, and will continue to do so in years to come. However, to maximize aid for growth and development, donors and the Liberian Government signed a communiqué reaffirming principles and commitment as the way forward for aid effectiveness with the ultimate aim of ensuring that Liberians live prosperous lives, free of the burden of poverty.

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UNHCR Transfers A

Dozens of vehicles, motor bikes, generators, computers and other information technology equipment, which were once the property of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Liberia, are now the assets of their implementing and collaborating partners.

Instead of selling them, the UN refugee agency has handed over 23 light vehicles, three trucks, 33 motorcycles, seven generators, 19 air conditioners, 81 IT equipment and other items much to the delight of partners in Montserrado, Nimba and Maryland counties. At the symbolic

transfer of ownership ceremony in May in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, UNHCR Representative Ibrahima Coly urged the partners to take good care of the assets. From the signing of the documents, assets which the various partners had been using effectively became their own while only maintaining “Donated by UNHCR” identification.

Since 2003, the UN refugee agency has been working with dozens of partners but the relationship with some of them ceased with the end of projects. Coly says during the emergency phase UNHCR had a big capacity in terms of human resources and logistics, but noted that operations

have scaled down. The hand-over ceremony was an occasion to express gratitude to their partners for the good collaboration over the years and to give them the assets they had been using which were still in good condition to strengthen their ability to continue their humanitarian non-profit work consistent with the objectives and mandate of the refugee agency. “Humanitarian work is not just an emergency. Effective today, the things you have in your possession are now yours to enable you assist people in need. We have enjoyed our collaboration with you and I would like to thank you very much,” said Coly. The agreement with the partners relinquishes



The transfer of ownership ceremony in Monrovia

Assets

the refugee agency's right to the assets and will not be therefore responsible for insurance, licenses, levies and taxes, as well as fitness.

The Ministry of Gender and Development, the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC), World Food Programme, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, EQUIP Liberia, MERCI, and Star Radio, are some of the beneficiaries of the assets. The LRRRC received five light vehicles and seven motorcycles, 17 IT equipment and three generators. "We are very grateful for this assistance which will go a long way in addressing the needs of the Commission

as we continue the protection of refugees and other people of concern," said Executive Director Counsellor Wheatonia Y. Dixon Barnes. "These assets can assist us to efficiently carryout our mandate."

UNHCR works very closely with the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization. "We are the first point of entrance and the last point of departure. We very much appreciate the assistance of motorcycles from UNHCR," said the Bureau's Director of Administration, Col. Danny B. Sartee.

James K. Morlu, Manager of Star Radio, said the station's correspondents all over Liberia are constrained to cover their areas of responsibility as a result of the

use of the donated light vehicle and the three trucks previously received, for transporting refugees. He said the donation will be used exclusively to support Liberia's school feeding programme. "Thank you for increasing the capacity of the Ministry of Education. We are receiving this donation so that we can support the Ministry."

Although not an implementing partner, the School of the Blind received a light vehicle from the UN agency. A visually impaired principal said the vehicle has been vital in meeting their transportation needs. "We are more than grateful. Before now we had a lot of hindrances," said Anthony Dangan.

Although not an implementing partner, the National Resource Institute for the Blind located along the Robertsfield highway received a light vehicle as it is in the agency's local integration area. A visually impaired principal said the vehicle has been vital in meeting their transportation needs.

lack of transportation. He expressed profound gratitude for the UNHCR's assistance and assured that they will be prudent users of the donation. "The three motorbikes we have received today will be given to three of our county correspondents. But we still need more support," he appealed.

Perhaps, a unique recipient of the largesse was a collaborating sister UN agency, the World Food Programme. Deputy Country Director Taban Lokonga lauded the agency for the support they have received and expressed the hope that there will be no more situations warranting the

At the moment, the UNHCR works with 13 partners for various projects and have assets which remain the property of the refugee agency. Some of the agency's current activities include local integration, implementing rule of law projects, increasing public awareness for and assisting the voluntary return of some 64,000 Liberian refugees in asylum countries, in addition to handling refugees of other nationals such as Ivorians, Somalis, Sudanese and an Iraqi.

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Liberia Prepares for 13

Come October, the world will be marking the tenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Liberia began preparations for the landmark celebration by hosting in April an international conference in the Liberian capital Monrovia on the Resolution with the theme: Gender Perspectives.

Organised in partnership between the Liberian Ministry of Gender and Development and the Conflict Resolution Unit of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland, the four-day conference attracted participants from Ireland and Timor-Leste, as well as representatives of the United Nations family and partners in Liberia.

“Liberia was in the throes of a vicious civil war when the Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 on October 31, 2000,” said President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in a message to the conference that was read by Minister of Justice Christiana Tah. The conference is the third in the series of Cross-Learning Initiatives on the Resolution after previous 2009 con-

ferences in Belfast, Northern Ireland and Dili, Timor-Leste. “Our purpose here today is to continue the process of bringing together women from post-conflict situations to develop a unified message on 1325, to be presented to the United Nations as it observes the tenth anniversary, in October, of the adoption of that historic resolution,” said President Sirleaf.

Expressing concern that civilians, particularly women and children accounted for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, the main thrust of the Resolution is to ensure that the needs and concerns of women and girls are taken into full consideration and that they benefit fully from peacekeeping and peacebuilding processes in post-conflict situations. Key among the expectations of the Resolution is the increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

Previous conferences in the Cross-Learning series focused on aspects of the

“Three Ps” of Resolution 1325, increasing women’s participation, and encouraging the protection of women in conflict and post-conflict situation. “Our focus is to examine the third “P” – “Gender Perspectives” – and how best to incorporate a gender perspective in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding,” noted the Liberian leader, pointing out that during the civil war, women bore the brunt of inhumanity and terror as they were conscripted into war, gang-raped at will and forced into domestic slavery. “Yet, it was the women who laboured and advocated for peace throughout our region,” she pointed out.

Liberia launched its National Action Plan for implementing Resolution 1325, becoming the first African country to do so, at last year’s International Colloquium on Women’s Empowerment, Leadership Development, International Peace and Security, which President Sirleaf co-convened with President Tarja Halonen of Finland in Monrovia. Since 2006, the Liberian Government has made it a priority to increase the number of women serving



Participants at the conference in Monrovia

25 Anniversary

in security forces. UNMIL has been giving technical support to the Liberia National Police (LNP) to intensify recruitment of women and the number of women serving in the police force has risen from 4 to 15 per cent. The LNP has established 46 women's and children's support units at police stations across the country in an effort to stopping the culture of impunity for violence against women.

Echoing the significance of the tenth anniversary of Resolution 1325, Deputy Special Representative for Recovery and Governance Moustapha Soumaré said the occasion will be “the most auspicious moment for reflecting upon how far we have come with the Resolution’s implementation, the challenges we have faced, and how to ensure the full achievement of the objectives.”

Although Liberia has come far in addressing Women, Peace and Security issues since 2003, there are many factors that undermine the country’s ability to ensure that the objectives of 1325 are effectively and comprehensively realised. “High incidences of Gender Based Violence; capacity challenges of legal and judicial systems; insufficient infrastructure and lack of reliable data warn us that there is still a long way to go before meeting our goals,” said Soumaré.

Baroness Nuala O’Loan, Ireland’s Special Envoy for UNSCR 1325, reiterated her country’s commitment to work with Liberia and Timor Leste, and described the achievement of women in both post-conflict countries as “legendary”.

Liberian women have made tremendous progress since the end of the civil war with some of them today playing key leadership roles as ministers, legislators and senior government officials. Liberia has also made history by electing Africa’s first female president. For its part, the United Nations Mission has a clearly defined mandate to implement Resolution 1325, and its Office of the Gender Advisor ensures that the mandate is actively pursued.

As Liberia gets set to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the landmark UN resolution, Gender and Development Minister Varbah Gayflor says that Liberian women should not brood over the past. “We should begin to celebrate our successes -- more than ever before, Liberia is ready to move forward.”

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Pakbatt-12 commander, Maj. Yamin receives inventory document from outgoing Banbatt-16 commander, Lt.-Col. Iqbal

Bangladeshi peacekeepers leave their mark

Bangladeshi peacekeepers of the BANBATT-16 contingent, which oversaw the security of Bong County (Sector-B), officially handed over to a company-size Pakistani contingent recently. In line with

the UN Mission in Liberia's current third phased drawdown process, BANBATT-16 will not be replaced. Likewise, a number of other Bangladeshi contingents will be significantly reduced including the Signal and Logistics contingents (BANSIG-7, BANLOG-7) and BANBATT-18.

Bong County's Superintendent Ranney Jackson commended the departing infantry battalion of the Bangladeshi peacekeepers for the exemplary work during their one year stay in the county. "During their tour of duty here," Jackson said, "BANBATT-16 went beyond the call of



Keepers rk

duty. Besides providing the central Liberian county with maximum security as per their mandate, they provided assistance to the communities in the areas of agriculture, health and skills training, which is much appreciated by the residents of Bong County.”

During their one year tour of duty and with 808 peacekeepers of all ranks, BANBATT-16 manned five military camps spread around the county including Camp Milton, CARI Complex (Sector Reserve), Camp Weisue, Camp Phebe, as well as two camps based at its Administrative Headquarters near the county’s capital, Gbarnga.

Before turning over the signed documents containing inventory on the logistics and fixed assets to the incoming PAKBATT-12 Commanding Officer, the outgoing Commanding Officer, Lt.-Col. Tanveer Iqbal, on behalf of his troops, expressed immense pleasure to have been a part of UNMIL trying to consolidate peace in Liberia. “Over the last year, my contingent has performed its assigned task with commitment and diligence. Besides, we have been involved in a number of civilian-military (CIMIC) activities which I think the citizens appreciate highly. I must thank the Mission for the opportunity to serve,” he said.

Maj. Mohammad Yamin, PAKBATT-12’s Company Commander thanked Lt.-Col. Iqbal for his able leadership and praised the work of the departing Bangladeshi peacekeepers. He noted that it would be an immense challenge for his company-sized contingent to oversee security in the county previously manned by a battalion. “However, with guidance from Sector-B Commander, my Commanding Officer and the cooperation of all, I’ll try to meet the expectation of the UN and what is required to maintain the peace and security in the county,” Maj. Yamin said.

The Bangladeshi peacekeepers have left an indelible imprint on the minds of the residents of Bong County. Apart from their assigned operational activities, the contingent was involved in the capacity and confidence building of the locals under civilian-military cooperation. The Bangla-Bong Agro Farm along the Gbarnga-Zorzor highway, the Ideal Village project near Camp Milton in Maimu and the Youth for Development and Progressive Action (YDPA) agricultural project in Gbarnga are three projects they were heavily involved with.

Speaking about the essence of the projects, the outgoing BANBATT-16 Commander reiterated that the 25-acre

Bangla-Bong Agro Farm project was intended to inspire the county’s youth, especially ex-combatants, not to engage themselves in crimes but rather involve themselves in productive ventures. The Ideal Village project, a project which covers 150 acres and comprises a school and community-based farms, a fish pond and 5,000 fingerlings, and a poultry farm with chickens, ducks and goats, is a demonstration on how local villages can produce all its own food and be self-sufficient in addition to encouraging backyard gardening. The YDPA agricultural project, inspired by the success of the Bangla-Bong Agro Farm, mobilized more than 100 residents including widows, war affected youths and physically challenged persons, among others, to organize themselves to invest in the soil.

Prince Simpson, the head of the YDPA group, recently reported a bumper rice harvest from the 50-acre farm. He said they had harvested 1,200 kilograms of rice and is determined to expand the farm and produce beans and vegetables as well.

Mark Dowee, the head of the Bangla-Bong Agro Farm, could not hide his feelings about the departure of BANBATT-16 who he termed his “very good friends”. “With the departure of BANBATT-16, we don’t think we’ll ever get any contingent that can replace them. They rendered us immeasurable assistance and imparted to us skills that have redirected our orientation in life. They did extremely well for us,” Dowee noted. Along with his colleagues, Dowee has begun establishing similar model farms in other districts across the county.

Lt.-Col. Iqbal leaves the Mission with fond memories. “The fond memories we go back with are not only that we maintained and enhanced peace but we also did something to enhance the capacity of the locals in our attempt to make them self-sufficient and self-supporting.” On a sad note, the Commander said he came to the UN Mission with 808 peacekeepers of all ranks under his command but unfortunately one (Emdadul Haque) succumbed to death while four others were repatriated home on medical grounds.

JWW

Liberian

Rumours spread fast in Liberia: What



Davies Freeman (Security Guard) "It would be preferable that people say things that they are sure of. There is also a need for people in the various communities to advise others not to spread information that they are not sure of. With this, I think we can reduce the spread of rumors and change the mindset."



Prince Dargo (Trader) "People should change their habits about the spread of rumours especially if they are not verified because rumours can lead to the destruction of lives and property."



William Koffa (Trader) "It is very important that rumours are verified to ascertain the truth before spreading them. If rumours are not verified and the facts obtained, one could just exacerbate an already bad situation."



Erasmus Kantan (Driver) "Frankly, rumour is not good for any country because if those rumours are false, it could bring about problems within communities. Therefore it's important that people check out the facts regarding any information they hear before deciding to spread the information to the third or fourth party because it could help or hinder any situation."



Adolphus Konah (High School graduate) "Rumour brings about conflict either in a nation or in a home if it is not verified and certified as a fact. As such those spreading rumours should be counselled so as to prevent them from such acts which can cause severe consequences."

s Speak

Should We Do To Change the Mindset?



Emmanuel Tarka (Car Washer) "Rumours spread hatred and bring conflict. As such, I would suggest that people be patient, take their time to do thorough investigation to ascertain the facts about the rumour before taking an action. This is very important for the stability of the country."



Joseph A. Taye (Driver) "It's important that we are honest to one another and stop backbiting. Rumour is always dangerous in any community as it can create panic and fear among the citizenry. It's important that we are absolutely sure of information before we tell others."



Monica Merrian (Security Guard) "You spread minimum rumours if you mind your business and keep yourself busy. There is a saying that an idle mind is the devil's workshop. So if you engage in meaningful ventures, there will be no time to engage in rumour mongering. So my advice is to keep yourself busy, either with your work, school or whatever you choose to engage in."



Agatha Doe (Security Guard) "Liberians really exaggerate on things, especially rumours even if they do not know the facts and circumstances concerning the information they receive from other second or third-hand sources. It is important that we stop exaggerating the information that we receive but try as much as possible to verify it making sure that we gather the facts and when we're disseminating the information, we should not add or subtract."



Saylee Johnson (Fuel Attendant) "Though most "chechepolay" (gossip or rumour) as we call it in Liberia, could have some element of truth, it is important that we Liberians cross-check every information before taking action because it could affect a person or even the larger society. You could damage someone's life by the wild rumours or destroy property. To change the mindset, we have to be very careful with what we say. Rumour is bad but if one must engage in "chechepolay", please spread the good one."

