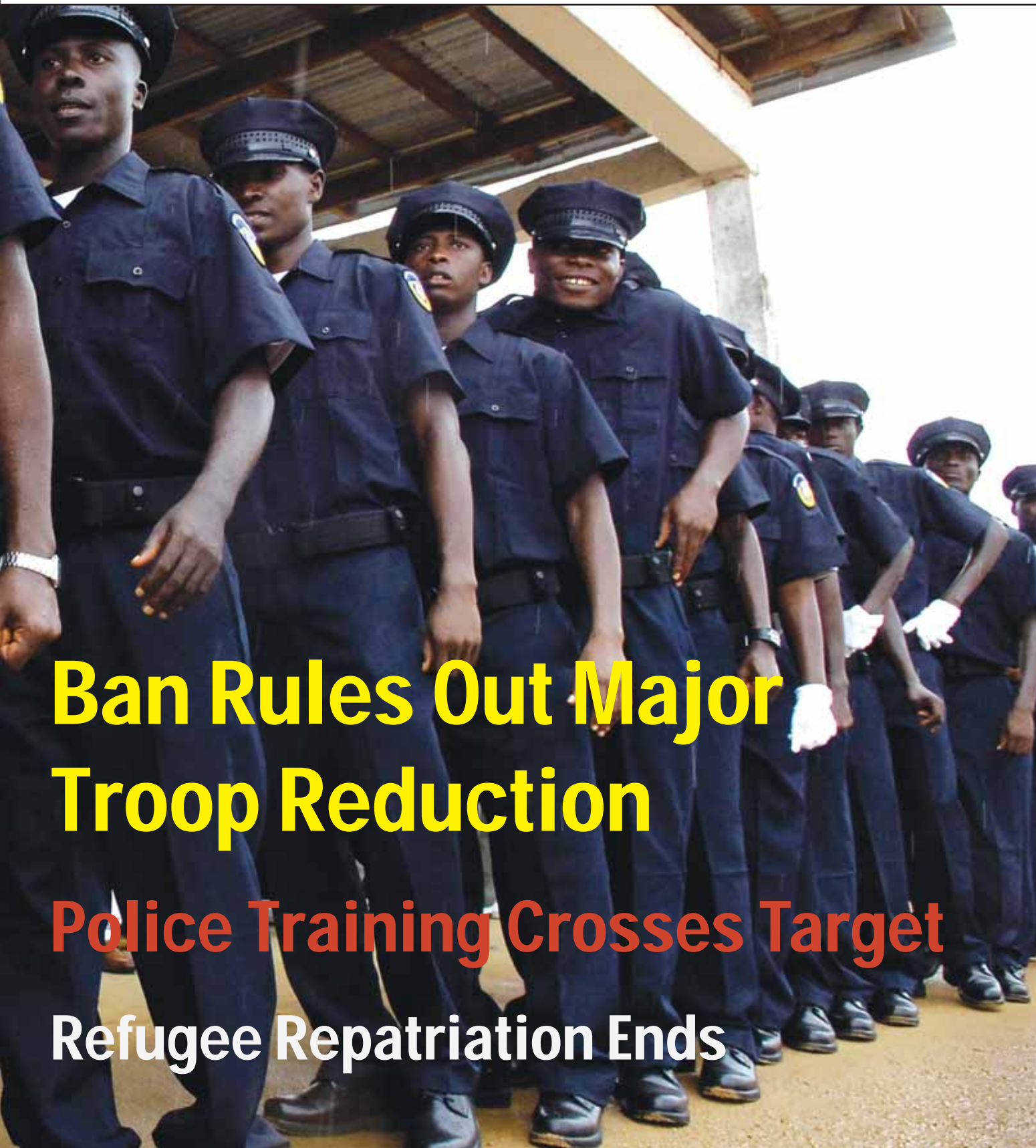


UNMIL FOCUS

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June - August 2007



Ban Rules Out Major Troop Reduction

Police Training Crosses Target

Refugee Repatriation Ends

Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



As Africa's oldest republic celebrated its 160th independence anniversary this year, four years after the end of the prolonged civil war, the nation is seeking to fulfil its promise as the "Land of Liberty."

The recent graduation of the final group of trainees from the National Police Academy is a significant step towards strengthening Liberia's national security, which is vital for the country's recovery and future progress. In July the Liberia National Police met the planned target of 3,500 personnel.

A well-trained police service that protects and promotes the constitutional rights of all Liberians will go a long way in ensuring sustainable peace in the country. Although the LNP has achieved its targeted strength, we must continue to focus on improving the quality of law enforcement personnel, while providing them with adequate logistical support.

It is equally important to expand presence of the LNP in the rural areas to ensure that the rule of law prevails throughout the country.

As Liberia consolidates peace and the security situation remains stable, we will begin to implement some adjustments in the deployment of UNMIL security forces. The Secretary-General's fifteenth progress report on Liberia, issued in August, recommends that the adjustments should be done in stages and in a measured and prudent manner so as to maintain UNMIL's capacity to deal with any security threats in the country. These adjustments in the troop strength of UNMIL will be linked to the accomplishment of a number of core benchmarks that will monitor Liberia's own capacity to take over security responsibilities, as well as the security situation in the region.

This approach underlines the fact that the international community does not want to put at risk the major investment that it has made in helping Liberia restore peace and freedom. Liberia is emerging, slowly but steadily, as an inspirational story of how a shattered nation can put its divisive and painful past behind it and rise again to embrace the dream of a promising future.

The UN family will continue to actively assist the country deal with the massive challenges that it still faces. A lot more remains to be done before Liberia can fully emerge from the shadow of the devastating conflict that ravaged the country for 14 dreadful years. Education, health, employment creation, poverty alleviation and infrastructure development are all in need of urgent support from donors and multilateral agencies to back up the Government's own efforts.

The peaceful celebration of the 160th anniversary was a moment of encouragement and hope for Liberia. After so many years of misery people can now look forward to the prospect of a better future. Our job in the UN is to help Liberians make that future a reality.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Alan Doss". The signature is stylized with a large, looping "A" and a long horizontal line extending from the end.

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



Liberia has reached the planned target of a 3,500-strong new police force, three years after the training of the first group of recruits began. The new law enforcement agency replaces Liberia's earlier discredited police force, which had turned from protectors to predators during the civil war.

UNHCR's two-and-a-half year repatriation programme for Liberian refugees has come to an end, drawing to a close large-scale refugee repatriation in the West African region. More than 100,000 refugees have returned to Liberia as part of the programme while over 50,000 refugees returned spontaneously.

A large number of Liberian children were forced out of school as a result of the civil war. The Accelerated Learning Programme, condensing six years of primary schooling into three years, is drawing thousands of children back into the classrooms and helping them make up for the lost time.

The Sapo National Park, regarded as an area of significant biodiversity, suffered environmental damage due to illegal occupation and mining activities during the civil war. Efforts are currently underway to conserve its heritage by offering alternative livelihood to the communities surrounding the Park.

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

Deputy Special Representative of the
Secretary-General for Recovery and
Governance
Jordan Ryan

Officer-in-Charge of Public
Information
Ben Dotsei Malor

Editor and Head of Publications
Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Staff Writers
Sulaiman Momodu
Rebecca Bannor-Addae
J. Wesley Washington

Design and Graphics
Paddy Defoxy Ilos, II

Photos
Eric Kanalstein

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Liberia

unmilfocus@unmil.org

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Ban Rules Out Major Troop Reduction

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

A proposed plan to gradually scale down the troop levels of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) forms part of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's fifteenth progress report on Liberia issued in August. If approved by the Security Council, the plan calls for over 9,000 troops to remain in Liberia at the end of 2010 as the country still faces possible threat of political instability.

Almost four years after its deployment in October 2003, UNMIL still remains one of the largest peacekeeping operations in the world with over 14,000 soldiers and more than 1,000 police personnel. The plan to scale down UNMIL's force levels is linked to the achievement of a number of core benchmarks, most of them relating to the security situation in the country as well as in the region.

"The proposed plan allows UNMIL to adapt to evolving priorities and to conduct a gradual, phased and deliberate transfer of responsibility for the security of Liberia to the government in a manner that gives the government the opportunity to build its capacity, while the Mission continues to help sustain the prevailing stability," Ban said in his report. The plan for a gradual withdrawal is based on the many challenges that still face Liberia, he said, "in particular its complex and fragile security environment."

Ban's proposal for withdrawal of

peacekeepers takes into account both the "great strides" made by Liberia's government in consolidating peace and promoting economic recovery, and the enormous challenges still facing the country.

Completing the measures required to lift the timber and diamond sanctions, implementing the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy, increasing public revenues by 48 per cent, and restoring electricity to some parts of the capital are among the government's achievements, the report pointed out. Ban also highlighted the increase in school enrolment by 40 per cent, the improving human rights situation, and the government's focus on fighting corruption, reforming the security sector and cultivating mutually beneficial relations with the country's neighbours.

Despite these remarkable achievements, the country still faces formidable challenges and remains vulnerable to the risk of a relapse into lawlessness, Ban cautioned. "The process of consolidating peace and rebuilding State institutions is still in its formative stage. Until the army and police can stand on their own and the justice system is rehabilitated and accessible to all Liberians, the country will remain vulnerable to the risk of a return to lawlessness."

The most immediate threats to sustained peace and stability in Liberia at this stage include increasing violent criminal activities, especially armed robberies and rape, the limited capacity of the security sector to curb violent crimes, and a weak justice system, the report pointed out.



Other challenges include economic insecurity, proliferation of disaffected groups such as unemployed ex-combatants, deactivated army and police personnel, as well as elements from the dismantled irregular militias.

Liberia still faces the risk of possible resurgence of armed groups, which may be easily organized to cause political instability, Ban warned. "These factors, as well as the risk of a possible spill-over from the unstable situation in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, underscore the country's continued vulnerability."

The enactment of the Rape Amendment Act in 2006 has had "little impact" in stemming the high incidence of sexual violence, including rape of women and girls, the report pointed out. The judicial system is constrained by limited infrastructure, shortage of qualified personnel,



UN Peacekeepers have restored peace and stability in Liberia

lack of capacity to process cases and poor management. “As a result of these shortcomings, many Liberians have little confidence in the justice system,” Ban observed. Deficiencies in the justice system continue to pose serious challenges to the promotion and protection of human rights in the country.

Describing the status of the implementation of UNMIL’s mandate, the report said following the installation of the new government in 2006, the Mission has redefined its strategic goals to focus on peace consolidation and helping the country achieve a steady state of security with a police and armed forces that can “stand on their own.” UNMIL’s priorities currently include assisting the government to rebuild the country’s security and rule of law sectors, re-establish functioning administrative structures, complete the

reintegration of ex-combatants and resettle returnees and internally displaced persons. The Mission also supports the government’s efforts aimed at restoring proper administration of the country’s natural resources, promoting and protecting human rights, and forging national reconciliation.

Although the humanitarian situation in Liberia continues to improve, a lot more remains to be done in the areas of health, education, food, and water and sanitation, the report said. Six months after the launch of the 2007 Common Humanitarian Action Plan for Liberia, only 21.1 per cent of the US\$117 million needed to address high priority humanitarian needs has been received, the Secretary-General pointed out.

The proposed scaling down of the peacekeeping troops will be continually

assessed in the context of specific benchmarks identified in the report, Ban stressed. He called on the Liberian government and the international community to make timely and effective investment for the accomplishment of these benchmarks.

The Secretary-General’s proposal for the gradual reduction of peacekeepers from Liberia is largely drawn from the recommendations made by an inter-departmental technical assessment mission led by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations that visited Liberia in June. The assessment mission had held extensive consultations with the Liberian government, UNMIL, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and other actors involved in efforts to restore sustainable peace and economic development in the war-torn nation. ♦



More than 3,500 police personnel have graduated, crossing the

Police Training Crosses Target

By J. Wesley Washington

Dressed in their crisp blue uniforms with the police insignia in bright yellow, 366 police trainees stood at attention as the guests of honour inspected 'Class 30' to begin the graduation ceremonies at the National Police Training Academy (NPTA). After an impressive march past, they quietly took their seats for the long-awaited commencement -- the culmination of 29 weeks

of intensive training.

But this was not just a regular graduation ceremony. The celebration on 7 July marked a milestone in the history of post-conflict Liberia as the country crossed its target of a 3,500-strong new police force.

Three years ago on 12 July 2004, the National Transitional Government and the United Nations Mission in Liberia launched the training programme for a new police service at the newly reopened Police Academy with 150 recruits. It heralded a significant step towards replacing

Liberia's discredited police force with one that, unlike in the past, protects and promotes the constitutional rights of the citizens.

"It's the beginning of a new day for policing in Liberia," said Jacques Paul Klein, then Special Representative of the Secretary-General, at the launch of the training, recalling the long years of civil war during which the police function was "abused, exploited and politicized."

During the 14 years of civil war that killed over 250,000 people and displaced



he planned target for the new police force

three times as many, the country's security forces had turned from protectors to predators. Ordinary Liberians could not distinguish the gun-totting rebel combatants who killed, raped and maimed indiscriminately from the country's police personnel. As the civil war came to an end in 2003, the UN peacekeeping mission deployed in the country was mandated to replace the discredited police force and train a new one as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed by the warring factions.

A target of 3,500 police personnel was set, to be trained by the UN Police (UNPOL), in collaboration with the Transitional Government. The trainees were vetted and recruited in accordance with pre-set standards. Only high school graduates or above, between the ages of 18 and 35 and without a criminal record, were eligible to apply. They were also tested on medical and physical fitness.

By March 2005, just over two years ago, the first 123 officers graduated from the NPTA. The graduation of 'Class 30' on 7 July 2007 not only achieved the planned full strength but exceeded the goal as the number of trained officers has now reached 3,522, including 203 women. A further group of 168 officers, among them 146 women, will graduate before the end of this year, taking the total number of trained police personnel close to 3,700.

At the ceremony marking the key achievement in enhancing the country's law-enforcement capacity through the new Liberia National Police (LNP), Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jordan Ryan praised the graduating class. "Each of you have displayed individual commitment and courage,

UNMIL has been facilitating and coordinating donor support towards enhancing the manpower and logistical capacity of the LNP. Already, through donor funding, UNMIL has renovated a multi-purpose cafeteria and an existing dormitory for use by female recruits at the Police Academy.

while collectively you are offering your nation the chance for peace, security and stability," he said.

Viewing the milestone achieved as a "new beginning with new challenges", Ryan urged the NPTA not to become complacent but to set goals and objectives that reinforce the LNP as a model of professional and democratic police service in the sub-region.

Addressing the new graduates, Justice Minister Frances Johnson Morris said Liberia's government was committed to a policy of good governance, human rights and the rule of law. She stressed the need for the graduates to abide by these values, recognized by the UN in its Declaration of Human Rights.

She praised UNMIL for the pivotal role it has played and continues to play in

the realization of this crucial national objective. "While there are still daunting challenges in achieving the security sector reform, the role of UNMIL has been encouraging and remarkable, a classic example of accountable support," Minister Johnson noted. She challenged graduates to take a stand against violence and other vices that have the potential to retard or reverse progress toward sustainable peace and development.

Following the graduation ceremony, Ryan handed over 30 brand new motor-bikes, donated by the government of Netherlands, for use by the LNP, especially those assigned in the rural areas.

UNMIL has been facilitating and coordinating donor support towards enhancing the manpower and logistical capacity of the LNP. Already, through donor funding, UNMIL has renovated a multi-purpose cafeteria and an existing dormitory for use by female recruits at the Police Academy.

In its continuing efforts to enhance the law-enforcement capacity of Liberia, UNMIL has renovated or reconstructed 24 police facilities throughout the country while another 21 construction projects, including new training facilities at the Police Academy, are currently ongoing. These include a modern building housing 12 classrooms and a new male dormitory with a capacity to host 200 recruits. In other counties, restructuring projects include the construction of barracks for LNP officers. Six prison cells at the LNP headquarters were renovated recently with funding from the Dutch government.

Partners who have contributed to the restructuring of the LNP include the United States, United Kingdom, Nigeria, China, European Commission, Norway, Netherlands, Belgium, Ghana, Egypt, and INTERPOL, and within the UN family, UNPOL, UNDP, UNICEF, WFP and UNHCR.

Despite crossing the targeted number of police personnel, there is still considerable need for advanced training to enhance the quality of the LNP personnel as well as to adequately equip them. Equally important is to ensure the presence of law-enforcement officers in the rural areas, which lack even basic facilities such as offices and housing. ♦

Female Recruitment Makes Headway

By J. Wesley Washington

Although Liberia has exceeded the benchmark and graduated 3,522 police officers, only 203 are female officers, representing 5.8 per cent of the police force. In line with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and in support of the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDWA), female recruitment into the Liberia National Police (LNP) has been a key consideration as the country restructures its discredited police force.

The lack of the requisite qualification has, however, been a big challenge for

al level of interested females up to the high school graduation level, which would subsequently qualify them to be recruited into the restructured police force.

The project was launched on 20 January 2007. Three weeks later, of the 380 candidates that completed registration forms, 228 sat the aptitude test. However, only 151 passed, with 124 females finally commencing the tutorial classes.

For some of the candidates who are housewives, mothers and breadwinners, enrolling for police training was both a challenge and the realization of a dream. With her husband ill and bed-ridden, Elous Jackson, a mother of five, says her acceptance to start the training came at a very difficult time. But her husband encouraged

to cover the entire syllabus.

"I think from our end we did our best or else we would have had a mass failure; but the WAEC results showed 90.3 per cent success of the 124 persons that enrolled in the programme. This is quite positive for us," says Keke Nah, the Campus Coordinator of the project at Stella Maris.

"Overall, performance has been good. They are not behind the other graduates that have been here and they have been working quite hard. However, there are challenges for ladies that are not used to a paramilitary environment. It is a little difficult for them to adopt this into their daily lives; but they are coping," said the UNPOL Training and Development



A special education programme has helped increase female intake in the police force

many women who could not complete their secondary school education largely as a result of the country's 14 years civil war when education was frequently disrupted. Women and girls became the primary victims of the war.

In an effort to increase female representation in the Liberia National Police (LNP) to 20 per cent or an appreciable level, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), in collaboration with the government, initiated in January an educational support programme for female candidates between 18 and 35 years.

This pilot project designed by UN Police and the LNP, in collaboration with the ministries of Gender, Education and Justice, the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), and the Stella Maris Polytechnic, aimed to bring the education-

her to pursue the training, which motivated her.

Following three months of intensive schooling covering a total of nine subjects at Stella Maris Polytechnic, examinations were administered by WAEC and 112 students triumphed. The 12 who could not make it are currently undergoing an additional two-month remedial tutorial class and, if successful, will enroll at the academy during the next cycle.

For Ciatta Bambara, who stopped school at 12th grade some years back, completing secondary education this year was quite fulfilling. "It was a worthwhile experience going back through those lessons I vividly remembered way back," she said, a view shared by others who underwent the three-month intensive programme, some eight hours six days a week

Coordinator at the Academy, Dag Dahlen.

In January 2008, the academy will embark on a new training curriculum with plans to expand it for a year, which will include six months academic and six months field training. "We sincerely hope that about 30 to 35 per cent will be ladies. We are going to take 150 recruits into the next training cycle and an additional 150 after six months. This is to increase the quality and sustainability of the training," Dahlen said.

It is hoped that the Educational Support Programme will increase female participation in LNP and address the dire need for additional female police officers in the area of criminal investigation, particularly in the Women and Child Protection Unit, as well as Community Policing Programmes and other strategic areas. ♦

Army Training Continues

By J. Wesley Washington

After a six-month lull, training of the second group of the new Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) recruits has commenced, this time at the refurbished and renamed Sandi Ware Military Barracks, 35 kilometers outside capital Monrovia. On 21 July, at what was formerly the Voice of America (VOA) Compound in Caryesburg, 525 new recruits, all vetted and tested, were administered the 'Oath of Affirmation' by Liberia's Vice President, Dr. Joseph N. Boakai.

Pledging allegiance to protect and defend the Republic of Liberia, as well as to respect the rights of all within the country's borders, the new recruits dubbed 'Class 07-09' began their initial entry training expected to last for eight weeks.

Vice President Boakai acknowledged the determination of the new recruits to provide protection and defend the country. "I believe you are among the best selected from among thousands of other applicants available. You are the ones God has ordained to serve and set good examples and make the army a true representative of decent young men and women willing to serve their country," he said.

The Liberian Vice President hoped that at the end of their training they would perform their duties and responsibilities in the prime interest of the country and execute their mission with utmost dedication, patriotism and nationalism. "We shall rely on your training to become prudent citizens using your good judgment to prevent human rights abuses and to deal intelligently with transgressions when they occur."

Turning his attention to those friendly countries that are contributing to the SSR program, Vice President Boakai praised

the United States of America and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) for their support in restructuring the army as part of the security sector reforms in the country. He pledged the government's commitment to providing support and mentoring for personnel of the restructured AFL.

The US Ambassador to Liberia, Donald Booth, called on the new recruits to put Liberia first in whatever they do thereby seeing themselves as agents of change. "Military service requires great sacrifice. This is not a Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. job; rather a 24 /7 commit-

Armed Forces of Liberia which had become a factional army since the civil war began in December 1989. The UN Security Council Resolution 1509 mandated UNMIL to assist the creation of a professional army for Liberia as part of a broad security sector reform.

The US government has taken the lead in the restructuring process. In early 2005, it contracted the project to a privately owned security company, DynCorp International, a US-based government contractor. Over the next two years, DynCorp International will assist with recruiting, vetting, training and equipping the new army of 2,000 soldiers, including 94 civil servants for the Ministry of Defense.

The first group of 106 army recruits graduated on 4 November 2006. Nine of those commissioned as Second Lieutenants have been granted military scholarships by the United States government under the International Military Educational Training (IMET)

programme and are currently receiving specialized skills training.

Although the US government is the major facilitator in training the new army, other governments too have come forward to support the Liberian government. Nigeria has provided the new AFL with the Command Officer-in-Charge. The British government has also assigned a senior officer who is working closely with the Ministry of Defense and DynCorp International while the Ghanaian government has expressed interest in assisting the new AFL with training opportunities.

The Chinese and French governments have made scholarships available for the benefit of the Ministry of Defense and the AFL. The Chinese government has also provided funds for the rehabilitation and expansion of the Camp Tubman Military Barracks near Gbarnga, Bong County, intended to host a battalion of 800 members of the new AFL. ♦



Members of the new Armed Forces of Liberia

ment," he reiterated. Ambassador Booth thanked the new recruits for volunteering to serve the new Liberia. "You need to respect yourselves as soldiers so that the citizens would respect the new AFL." The training of the second group of AFL recruits began with funds made available by the United States.

Defense Minister Brownie Samukai urged the newly recruited personnel to remain vigilant during their initial training which would qualify them for greater tasks ahead. "Your selection is strictly based on merit and your own character and we hold you to that. You stand to that merit in your continuous training programme and the rendering of your service upon graduation," he cautioned. "We demand that you accept the challenges that are presented to you to prepare for the duties that are ahead of you."

The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement among the parties to the conflict called for the restructuring of the

Refugee Repatriation



By Sarah Fyneah Brownell

For the first time in 16 years, Musu Kamara touched the Liberian soil, a land that held sad memories for her, on 30 June. Accompanied by her five children, she returned to her home country from neighbouring Sierra Leone, where she had spent much of her time since fleeing Liberia.

Kamara was seven months pregnant when armed men murdered her husband in Bong County in 1990. Alone and fearing for her life, she trekked through the forest surviving on wild fruits to reach Guinea, from where she moved to Sierra Leone later. "Time heals all wounds," she said. Her narrow escape from death had erased the hope of ever returning to her home country. "To be frank, during the early

days in exile, I did not want to hear the name Liberia mentioned." But positive

As the next step, UNHCR and those countries still hosting thousands of Liberian refugees are preparing to start long-term projects aimed at achieving their local integration, bringing the displacement chapter in the West African region to a successful closure.

developments in the country, such as the presence of the UN peacekeepers, the peaceful elections of 2006 and the

progress in the country helped her to make the decision to return home. "For me to come back at this time means that I am really convinced that the war is over in Liberia," says Kamara, quite oblivious of the pouring rain, as she clammers down the UNHCR repatriation truck.

For most Liberians who fled the carnage of the civil war, retuning home means accepting a painful past and rebuilding shattered dreams under difficult circumstances. Despite the uncertainties and challenges of starting all over, more than 500,000 Liberians have returned home from camps and communities within and outside the country, either spontaneously or with assistance from the UN refugee agency, to conditions far from satisfactory. The lack of basic amenities such as shelter, schools, clinics, and livelihood opportunities did not deter them from returning home.

Ends



Sarah F. Brownell/UNHCR

The last group of refugees return

Sinoe Ballah was also part of Kamara's convoy that brought home 798 Liberian returnees from Sierra Leone on that rainy day, which marked the end of the refugee agency's voluntary repatriation exercise in Liberia. Protecting her infant twin-girls from the rains, Ballah could not contain her joy of being back home after living for five years in a refugee camp in Sierra Leone. She gave birth last month to twins and decided to join her husband who had returned ahead of her to prepare the way for his family. "Thank God for my safe delivery and UNHCR that helped me to get proper medication," Ballah sighs.

UNHCR's decision to end its two-and-a-half year repatriation programme for Liberians on 30 June sent many refugees racing home. The UN agency had used commercial flights from Ghana and Nigeria and chartered sea vessels to com-

plement its fleet of trucks to facilitate the repatriation of the refugees. At the height of the civil war, an estimated 800,000 Liberians were displaced within and outside the country.

The 2003 Accra Peace Agreement and the deployment of the UN peacekeepers led to the gradual restoration of peace and security in Liberia. Encouraged by the positive developments, Liberian refugees and internally displaced persons began flocking home. Some returned to camp-like situation as counties were not yet safe to go back to, while some were marooned at sea or stranded at the borders. UNHCR had to organize rescue missions to aid some of these spontaneous returnees. In addition, the refugee agency also had to establish transit centres to host the many spontaneous returnees, the majority of whom came from Sierra Leone.

The deployment of peacekeepers in

The repatriation programme for Liberian refugees has been demanding, calling for huge logistics involving returns by air, sea and road, in addition to significant human and material resources.

Liberia's counties paved the way for the delivery of unhindered humanitarian assistance and the subsequent declaration of safe counties for return. UNHCR commenced the organized voluntary repatriation exercise of Liberian refugees from the region on 1 October 2004. A month later, under the interagency collaborative approach, UNHCR extended similar assistance to internally displaced people in the country. After resettling over 300,000 internally displaced people, the IDP camps were closed in April 2006.

The refugee agency's involvement in the repatriation eliminated the risky means employed by refugees to return home, increasing their confidence and leading to a surge in the number of returnees. To set the legal framework for the smooth facilitation of the repatriation process, agreements were signed by UNHCR and the

Governments of Liberia with host countries Ghana, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria. UNHCR also set up six field offices, Transit and Way stations and distribution facilities in Nimba, Lofa, Bomi, Bong, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties to serve as hubs to provide material and physical protection to the returnees. The returnees also received a 4-month food ration, domestic items, secondary cash allowance and vocational training opportunities.

At the end of the repatriation programme, UNHCR had assisted over 108,000 refugees to return home from neighbouring countries, mainly from Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, while some 50,000 refugees spontaneously returned. Over 50 percent of the refugees and a large number of the half a million internally displaced have returned home to Lofa County, followed by Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, Montserrado, Bong, Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties.

The repatriation programme for Liberian refugees has been demanding, calling for huge logistics involving returns by air, sea and road, in addition to significant human and material resources. Bad roads, broken bridges and heavy rains were some of the constraints faced during the repatriation exercise. The refugee agency had to engage in mass awareness campaigns to dispel misinformation on conditions in Liberia and to help refugees make informed decisions. Refugees were themselves involved in the process with their representatives brought to visit return areas to see the conditions first-hand and report back to their compatriots.

The end of the Liberian repatriation programme draws to a close large-scale repatriation of refugees in the West African region. UNHCR concluded the repatriation of Sierra Leonean refugees in 2004.

As the next step, UNHCR and those countries still hosting thousands of Liberian refugees are preparing to start long-term projects aimed at achieving their local integration, bringing the displacement chapter in the West African region to a successful closure. ♦

The writer is Public Information Assistant/Mass Information Focal Point, UNHCR, Liberia

Making Up for Lost Time

By Sulaiman Momodu

Clutching a few books in one hand and a pen in the other, Lee Gongar is on the way to school. But he is late. Not by a few minutes but by a few years. “I never thought I will make it to school again,” says 18-year-old Gongar. At his age one is usually expected to be finishing high school, but Gongar is just starting his primary school education.

As a result of Liberia’s 14-year civil conflict which constantly disrupted education, thousands of children either never enrolled in school, or fled for safety to areas where they could not access education. The Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), led by the Ministry of Education (MoE) and supported by a number of different organizations including the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), has come to the rescue of the children who missed out on education. “I am very happy for this opportunity without which, I wonder what the future will be like,” says Gongar, who has set his eyes on becoming a medical doctor.

The ALP National Coordinator, Alphonso M. Sheriff, says the programme started in 1999 with a pilot project in five counties during a brief spell of respite from civil war following an assessment visit to Uganda where a similar programme had been implemented. However, the programme was briefly interrupted in 2003 as the civil war worsened.

The programme condenses six years of

primary schooling into three years of intensive education, enabling youngsters to make up for lost years. Liberia’s MoE authorities say about 73 per cent of Liberian school children in conventional primary schools today are above the official primary school age of six -11.

Harriet Matthews, the ALP Project Officer at UNICEF, says the programme is being implemented in approximately 582 schools of which 210 are being supported by the children’s agency through the MoE. UNICEF is supporting ALP in seven counties: Montserado, Bong, Bomi, Nimba, Lofa, Grand Gedeh and Maryland.

Currently, a number of organizations are using the ALP approach and other standardized ALP tools. They include Creative International Associates Incorporated, International Rescue Committee, Save the Children –UK and IBIS who support the Ministry of Education, and the Norwegian Refugee Council, which works in communities. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has renovated a number of ALP implementing schools while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has provided furniture. At the moment, over 41,000 Liberian children, aged above 10, are participating in the programme.

After spending three years instead of six, 17-year-old Ophelia Cole was among pupils who sat for the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) sixth grade exam of 2007, an entry requirement to gain admission to secondary school. “I hope I will pass the exams so I will contin-



Many children have resumed school after disruption during the war



ue my education and one day be like President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf,” she says, brimming with optimism.

Presently, the ALP is being implemented in 11 out of the 15 counties in the country. In the remaining four counties of Grand Bassa, River Cess, Sinoe and Margibi, the programme is being implemented in community schools with limited support. The programme takes note of the fact that until recently about 260,000 Liberians were living as refugees in neighbouring countries while about 300,000 were internally displaced persons. For some organizations, one criterion for the implementation of the programme is heavy return areas with large numbers of children, adolescents and young people.

Although they do not attend conventional school, the ALP pupils are also required to wear uniforms to school. “Once they are in their uniforms, one hardly notices that they are grown ups,” says ALP teacher, William Philips. He points out that most of the children are very committed to learning.

The MoE in collaboration with UNICEF has devised a teaching curriculum and manual that accelerates the normal six year primary school cycle. To accomplish this, teachers have been specially trained and continue to be trained in accelerated learning pedagogy. Initially, the teachers undergo a 10-day training course to be followed by a five-day refresher training.

ALP’s Level I combines grades 1 and 2 of the normal primary school, while Levels II and III combine grades 3 & 4, and 5 & 6, respectively. Pupils then sit for the WAEC grade six exams and if successful, they continue their education normally in the formal secondary schools. Students are supplied with books and other learning materials and do not pay any school fees (which were abolished for public primary schools in 2006), making the learning process attractive.

UNICEF provides support to ALP schools in a number of areas including through the provision of essential learning materials, Facilitating minor classroom renovations, provision of furniture and other supplies. The UN agency also assists the MoE to co-ordinate all ALP activities in the country. Chaired by the

Ministry of Education, the meetings of the ALP partners are now held biweekly to share experiences and standardize the various documents that are used in the programme.

Many of the teachers who work in the formal schools also teach in the ALP. Classes are held in the afternoon when the formal school learners have returned home as part of a shift system. For their extra effort, the teachers are paid incentives.

Although the programme started some years ago, records are not readily available to show how many pupils have benefited from the programme or how many have moved on to secondary school. There are also no statistics to show how many have completed the ALP or the number of children that remain to be enrolled. To rectify this, the MoE is currently undertaking an assessment of the programme, with UNICEF’s support. Based on the information from this assessment and a data collection exercise which is currently taking place in ALP implementing schools, it is envisaged that a thorough review of the current programme will take place with the aim of improving it by building on the experiences of the past few years.

In all the counties where ALP is implemented, district educational officers serve as focal points. In UNICEF supported areas, all monitors have been provided with motorbikes to facilitate their movement to monitor implementation, but bad road conditions challenge the monitoring of the programme, especially during the rains when road networks become virtually impassable.

But how long will the ALP last? Both UNICEF and MoE say efforts have begun to review the programme in order to strengthen it and by identifying and structuring in more realistic exit points for the graduates rather than assume that all will proceed to the secondary school cycle. Since the ALP is intended to clear the backlog of older than primary school aged children, the aim is to have no such programme once this objective has been achieved. Continued ALP programme, no doubt, will help Liberia fulfill one of the eight Millennium Development Goals of achieving universal primary education by 2015 besides giving children the opportunity to make up for lost time. ♦

The Plight of Orphans

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Every child has the inherent right to life, survival and development, declares Article 6 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Convention acknowledges that children have human rights too -- civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Liberia is among the 193 states that have ratified the Convention, adopted in 1989.

Yet, for the vast majority of Liberia's children, whose lives were consumed by the brutal civil war that lasted 14 long years, these lofty ideals belonged to a different planet. Recruitment of children into the fighting forces, brutal killings, and displacement of a third of Liberia's population had a devastating effect on the social fabric of the country. Four years after the end of the war, formidable challenges prevail in sustaining the most basic social unit -- the family. Today, thousands of Liberian children languish in orphanages, many of them squalid and filthy.

Liberia has no considerable history of orphanages. Prior to 1989 there were only 10 orphanages in the country. But by 1991, the number of orphanages established to cater for children abandoned or neglected by their families had shot up to 121.

During the past four years, UNICEF and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (MoH/SW), together with partners, have conducted a number of assessments of orphanages throughout the country. The vast majority of the institutions revealed astoundingly poor standards of nutrition, hygiene, care and schooling. "The orphanages are usually very crowded and badly maintained and often the children sleep on the floor. We frequently see a scarcity of food although non govern-

mental organizations contribute in that regard. Sufficient schooling, medical care, those are things we find difficult to establish," says Ketevan Gagnidze, Child Protection Advisor to UNMIL Human Rights and Protection Section. This view is echoed in UNMIL's report on "Human Rights in Liberia's Orphanages," published in March 2007.

A startling revelation from the assessments is that the vast majority of the children in these institutions are not really orphans but have one or, in several cases, two living parents. This, according to Vivian Cherue, Deputy Minister of MoH/SW, is due to the underlying factor of poverty. "Many parents simply see the orphanage as a sort of boarding school,"

says Cherue.

More than 90 per cent of the orphanages in the country are funded by faith-based organisations, mainly located in the United States. "For a parent who does not have any means, the orphanage is seen as an opportunity whereby the child will get some kind of schooling no matter how substandard it is. Also the child will get at least a meal or two a day," says Deputy Minister Cherue. However, she points out that many orphanage owners don't really have the case of the children at heart. "Some are not caring for the children even in the most basic sense of the word. I won't go as far as saying that running an orphanage is business, but it is a fact that some proprietors do exploit the fact that there is funding out there. Some evidently exploit the situation to their own end."

Currently 126 orphanages house an estimated 6,000 Liberian children but 84 per cent of these children are not orphans in the real sense of the word. Most of them ended up in these institutions due to poverty. More than 80 per cent of these institutions are located in Montserrado County, which hosts Liberia's capital, Monrovia. However, more than 8 out of 10 children



were born in other counties which experienced large displacements, such as Bong, Lofa and Grand Bassa.

These numbers point to the challenges of disintegration that many families are facing in post-war Liberia. "These are rural areas where families are just as poor as in the urban setting but where the African family structure works, where the extended family is involved in bringing up the child. Maybe poverty, mixed with displacement and rapid urbanisation, makes for lack of parenting," suggests Alfred Mutiti, UNICEF Reintegration Officer.

The early stages of the assessments of Liberia's orphanages led to the establishment of the Child Protection Network Task Force, chaired by MoH/SW and comprising UNICEF, Ministries of Justice, Education, Planning and Gender and Development, Union of Orphanages and various local and international NGOs. Aiming to provide care and protection for all separated children living in orphanages, the Task Force issued a guideline for minimum standards for operating welfare institutions in Liberia in 2006. As a result, more than 60 orphanages have been placed on a closure list and MoH/SW is currently

taking practical steps to deal with the issue.

In the first half of 2007, MoH/SW and its partners completed documentation of all children in orphanages countrywide. The documentation verifies name, sex, age, place of origin, when the child was admitted and the reason why -- information necessary in meeting the government's aim to reunify non-orphans with their biological families. "Now that the academic year is coming to an end we will reunify the children who have parents and for those who are orphans, we will move them to better facilities (i.e. accredited orphanages complying with the minimum standards)," says Cherue. Rev. Alexander Stemn, President of the Union of Orphanages, concurs with the approach: "The Union has agreed to cooperate in the aim for reunification. We should rightfully leave orphanages to real orphans. Hopefully we will be able to find foster families in cases where it is not possible to send a child back to the biological family."

Stemn is also the proprietor of the Calvary Orphanage Mission Home on the outskirts of Monrovia, one of the 50 accredited orphanages in Liberia. Maize

and rice fields outline the Calvary Orphanage, pigs snuffle in pens and children play in the large open yard. "We care for 102 children, among them 46 are genuine orphans. The war forced many people to flee, families disintegrated and everything we had built up was destroyed. The harsh economic situation caused some parents or relatives to place their children in orphanages in the hope for survival, protection, an education and food to eat."

A Norwegian flag is painted above the door of the orphanage's cafeteria building. "We have friends from UNMIL police, a small group of Norwegians. They have helped us tremendously by donating the cafeteria as well as a generator, a water tank system and fencing of the yard, which is one of the minimum standard requirements set by the government," says Stemn. Being an accredited orphanage, the Calvary receives government subsidy, and monthly food rations are delivered by the Christian Aid Ministries, which together with the World Food Programme, provide food assistance to orphanages in Liberia.

Since 2005 UNICEF has been providing assistance to the MoH/SW in the form of training of social workers to carry out assessments of orphanages and to educate communities on prevention of separation of the child from the family. Mechanisms have been developed for regular monitoring and supervision of accredited institutions to see that they operate in line with the minimum standards. Moreover, UNICEF together with MoH/SW, completed Phase 1 of training for orphanage caregivers. "The workshop was very helpful in educating us on the sensitive aspects of how to ensure that a child feels that someone cares for them and encourages them," says Stemn. Phase 2 of workshops for caregivers will take place before the end of 2007.

Are we on the right track?

"We [MoH/SW] recently met with the Justice Minister to discuss issuing court orders for closing unaccredited orphanages. This is a step in the right direction. You see, this proliferation came about because of the war. My belief is that with the law on our side, if we keep working, if we keep talking and creating awareness, gradually these things will iron themselves out," says Deputy Minister Cherue. ♦

Many children still live in squalid orphanages





Micro credit loans have helped some, especially women, to start small businesses

Beating Poverty

By Sulaiman Momodu

Once upon a time, Korpo Kollie sold various items on a mat spread on the ground for a living. The meagre commission she received from middle men could not adequately support her family and she lived in a rented house. Today the middle-aged Liberian woman who never had an opportunity to acquire formal education has become an inspiration to many. Kollie has built two houses, sends her children to school and has even travelled abroad.

What is the secret behind Kollie's rags to riches story? Micro credit. The scheme that gives out small loans to mostly those who haven't even seen the inside of a bank.

"I used to sell on mats on the ground. But with micro finance, from the ground, I went to the table, and from the table, I can now travel all over the world - I have gone to countries that I never thought I would," Kollie, who won the UNDP 2005 global micro finance award for which she travelled to New York to receive her prize, narrated her story to a packed audience in the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia.

Donning T-shirts inscribed "Crushing poverty through micro finance," beneficiaries gathered at the pavilion in June to 'Honour Liberia's Unsung Heroes of Microentrepreneurship' supported by the "Launch of an Inclusive Financial Sector (LIFS) Project" during which 10 unsung heroes of micro finance entrepreneurship in Liberia were honoured with certificates and gifts, which were presented by

Liberia's Vice President, Joseph Boakai.

Kollie's account of how micro credit has transformed her life from rags to riches won her several rounds of applause from the audience, including excited co-marketers, government officials, and non-governmental organizations and UN staff. Based in Monrovia, Kollie has also created employment opportunities for several hundred Liberians who are currently doing business under her supervision. She also runs a small loan programme for women, providing them credit to engage in small businesses.

With their partners either dead (some killed in the war) or out of job making them breadwinners, for many Liberians, especially women, the advent of the UN-funded Launch of Inclusive Financial Sector Project is a welcome relief.

The stories of the unsung heroes of micro finance, who started with small loans of between US\$60 to 100, are heart-warming. Sianah Haddad was in tears when she narrated her story. She dropped out of primary school and began selling a local sweet made up of groundnut and sugar called "Ground-pea Candy". During the war, she and her family lost all their possessions and had to move to a displaced persons camp where she started life and business all over again. With the restoration of peace, Haddad returned to Gbarnga in Bong County and became a part of the micro credit programme. Through the micro credit loan, she now owns a shop and sells both retail and wholesale goods. Before, Haddad lived in a rented apartment, but now she has built her own house and her children are going to school.

In Liberia, where the unemployment rate is about 80 per cent, micro credit is helping low income households set up small businesses or engage in other productive activities. The overall goal of the project, operating out of the Central Bank of Monrovia is to reduce poverty in the country by providing sustainable access to financial services to the poor. The project is also in line with the Liberian government's vision as articulated in its economic growth and revitalization programme. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has expressed delight that the Central Bank of Liberia and the UNDP have begun "the process of policy design to help improve financial inclusion and the operation of the micro-finance sub-sector".

"When you have a little, it is the beginning to get more. The difficulty is to get that little," says Dr. Mills Jones, Executive Governor of the Central Bank of Liberia. The vision of micro finance is to see that Liberians all over the country benefit with

the support of UNDP, the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF, the technical arm of the UN for micro finance) and Cordaid as donors, at least over the next five years.

Some of the micro credit beneficiaries are returnees (former refugees and internally displaced persons). Kebbeh Sumbo who fled to Guinea during the war said that upon her return from refuge, she started her business with one gallon of palm oil.

By joining the micro credit scheme and through the repayment of her loan and applying for and receiving more, she was



Launch of the Inclusive Financial Sector Project

able to move from selling in gallons of palm oil to selling in drums and subsequently opened a warehouse. Sumbo has built her own house, has some people in employment and is supporting her children and some relatives, some of whom are now in university. "From pints," she explained, "I went to gallons, and from gallons, I went to drums." She advised her fellow marketers to be trustworthy by repaying their loans so that others can benefit.

"When you take a loan, you pay back with interest, with that we can reach out to more women, to more men in the micro finance sector," UNDP Country Director Steven Ursino said. "Nation-building is not the business only of the President, it is the business of everybody," he points out.

At the moment some people are getting loans between US\$800 - 1,000.

The UNCDF Country Technical Adviser who is at the helm of the programme, Kenyah Laura Barlay, says the programme is being mainly implemented by the Local Enterprise Assistance Programme (LEAP) and the American Refugee Committee/Liberty Finance. The three donors of micro finance have jointly approved US\$870, 970 for lending to clients and for operational costs. So far, over US\$560,000 has been disbursed to these institutions.

More than 8,000 Liberians have benefited from the micro

credit scheme with 80 per cent of them being women in the Montserrado, Margibi, Bomi and Bong counties, according to Barlay. "We have just touched the tip of the iceberg. We are expanding slowly. Our vision is to reach out to many low income earners and give them greater access to financial services in the coming years," she said but acknowledged that the programme needs more funds for

it to benefit the thousands of Liberians who urgently need assistance.

The main criteria set by micro finance institutions for one to benefit from a loan is that one has to be among the working poor, and not an idle poor. For this year, the programme is targeting some 15,000 beneficiaries and will progressively expand. Plans are also underway for the convening of a donor round table conference for micro finance by next year.

The beneficiaries of the micro credit have applauded the efforts of the UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia and others for the restoration of peace, which makes it possible for them to do business without fear of armed men taking everything from them at gun point. The battle against crushing poverty continues. ♦

Reversing Brain Drain

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Bright minds have long left Africa for opportunities unavailable at home. The world's poorest continent has lost some 20,000 professionals annually since 1990, according to an estimate by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

In Liberia, no historical records exist of the number of professionals who have migrated in the quest for greener pastures. Nevertheless, it is well known that the 14-year civil war killed thousands of skilled workers and technicians and led to an exodus of countless educated and professional Liberians.

Liberia's deeply debilitating brain drain stands in stark contrast to the soaring expectations among its people today. The restoration of peace and the choice of a technocrat -- Ellen Johnson Sirleaf -- as President have brought about renewed hope and aspirations among the people. They are eager to see quick improvements in their lives and speedy development and economic progress.

However, one of the major challenges facing the new government has been the lack of competent professionals to restore the seriously weakened state institutions and to jump start the economy -- a direct result of the exodus of skilled professionals. "Liberia is facing serious development challenges and it would be difficult for the new government to deliver without competent people in leadership positions," says Wilmot A. Reeves, UNDP National Economist and Programme Manager.

In April 2006, the government launched the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support Project (LECBS), technically and financially supported by the UNDP and the Open Society Institute for West Africa (OSIWA). By assisting with salary supplements for expert positions, the objective of the project is to help the government phase out corruption and to undertake major reform initiatives in the civil service, land and security sectors, and



Lack of competent professionals is a major problem facing Liberia

to institute decentralization.

Facing serious economic woes, the government is unable to offer adequate salaries to competent professionals, making it difficult to compete with other employers for skilled personnel. The Project is expected to run for three years with a 100 per cent salary supplement during year one. In year two, starting March 2007, donor funding is cut back to 67 per cent of the salaries with the government covering the remaining 33 per cent. In the final year, from March 2008, the government is expected to cover the salaries in full. The LECBS contracts range from one year to 18 months.

In total, 25 top-notch professionals

have been appointed by the President and placed in leadership positions in various government institutions such as the University of Liberia, the National Police, the Centre for Agricultural Research Institute and the Ministries of Justice, Finance, Information, and Planning and Economic Affairs. These professionals are expected to contribute to the much needed capacity building within the government structures while enhancing transparency and accountability. The project's steering committee is chaired by the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and co-chaired by UNDP and OSIWA. The Civil Service Agency and Liberia Reconstruction and Development

Committee (LRDC) take up the rest of the seats. Monitoring and evaluation of output is conducted by UNDP.

Toga McIntosh, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, is one of the



experts identified by the President under LECBS. "The President brought on a team of high-level international civil servants. Not only did they come with their skills but also with their reputation, their contacts. Some of these people have spent 25-30 years out there interfacing with the international community," says McIntosh, who left a lucrative job in the private sector to join the rebuilding of his country. "In addition to bringing to the table in terms of decision making processes, they have also been able to strengthen our relationship outwards to quickly bring Liberia back on her feet."

Although LECBS is benefiting the

government in many ways, there is a long way to go before Liberia's institutions can claim a semblance of professional competence. A government assessment conducted in 2005 covering 33 agencies and institutions indicates that of the more than 19,000 civil servants interviewed, 8.3 per cent are illiterate, 47.3 per cent have high school education, 12.5 per cent have first degrees, 1.9 per cent hold graduate degrees and a whopping 70 per cent were hired through personal contacts, outside established procedures.

To help strengthen immediate technical capacity in key institutions and agencies of government, a new initiative, the Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) was launched in May 2006 with a projected duration of 18 months. TOKTEN personnel act as consultants to government institutions performing specific tasks with clear terms of reference. They are recruited for anything between a few months to the full length of the project. TOKTEN is not a project unique to Liberia but has been applied elsewhere in the world. In fact UNDP supported a similar project in Liberia in the early years of the conflict. Interestingly, 75 per cent of those recruited decided to stay beyond their initial contracts.

Bako Freeman is a TOKTEN professional serving as the Economic Advisor to the Minister of Commerce and Industry after leaving a position with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. "Historically Ministry of Commerce and Ministry of Finance were where you found the most entrenched and endemic corruption. We had to start with basics like putting frameworks in place, create organisational structures, workflow, none of which existed before. And then of course we had to get the actual work done such as negotiating trade agreements. A lot of progress has been made over the past year," says Freeman, who has spent 17 years away from Liberia.

TOKTEN and LECBS recruit from among Liberians both at home and in the Diaspora. Salaries are drawn from a funding pool so far contributed to by UNDP and USAID. Currently, a total of 23 professionals are engaged by the TOKTEN project. The Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (MPEA) is responsible

for reviewing TOKTEN applications as well as chairing the steering committee, which is co-chaired by UNDP and additionally composed of the Governance Reform Commission (GRC), Civil Service Agency and LRDC. The professionals submit a monthly progress report as well as quarterly and end of assignment reports to the MPEA.

While LECBS has boosted the higher levels of government and TOKTEN helps through specialised short term contractors, the middle level of government institutions are still in need of an injection. In February 2007 at the Partners Forum held in Washington, D.C., President Johnson Sirleaf advocated strongly for donor support for a new capacity building programme, the Senior Executive Service (SES), to help advance the government's reform agenda.

Endorsed by the international community, the SES has already begun receiving funds from governments and organisations, including UNDP and the World Bank. The first wave of recruitment will take place from July 2007 and will bring in 100 technical professionals over a three-year period to fill existing positions within the civil service.

The civil service reform constitutes right-sizing the government which includes letting go of employees occupying positions for which they are not trained. "The SES is meant to address the missing middle when it comes to the gaps we have in terms of human capacity. Ultimately, as the government's civil service reform measures take hold, we hope that we will be able to keep the SES beneficiaries by transferring to a government payroll. The aim is to have SES beneficiaries merge into the civil service," says William Allen, Director General of Liberia Civil Service Agency, which chairs the implementation committee of SES.

"We have received a lot of support from the international community and for the nearest future we will continue to need more. The sound fiscal management system established in the Ministry of Finance, preparation of the Investment Guide under the National Investment Committee, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper -- these are just some of the real tangible benefits of the efforts during the past year," affirms Reeves of UNDP. ♦

UNMIL's contribution is phenomenal...

On a two-day visit to Liberia recently to promote her charity work, Sarah, Duchess of York, took time off to witness the dedication of a school that was built by the United Nations Mission in Liberia under its Quick Impact Project on the outskirts of capital Monrovia. In an exclusive interview with Editor Mathew Elavanalthoduka, the Duchess discusses the importance of supporting children's education in Liberia and acknowledges the key role played by the UN peacekeepers and UN agencies in the country. Excerpts:

What is the purpose of your visit to Liberia?

I am visiting Liberia to support the work of Children in Crisis, the charity I founded 14 years ago that seeks to help forgotten children, particularly their education. In Liberia we work with the Forum for African Women's Educationalists (FAWE), which is involved in many African countries. We want to support these dedicated women who are doing a great service for the disadvantaged people across Africa. In Liberia we want to support their work and also help build schools in this country.

Three quarters of the schools in Liberia were destroyed during the war and perhaps Liberia is the only country where the younger generation is less educated than the older generation. So the challenges are huge. What kind of impact do you think you'll be able to make through your organization?

I believe that we can support the efforts of the Liberian government to enhance education in the country through building schools. Children in Crisis has already completed one school. We intend to open four or five more schools in the next 18 months. We can also help children on the curriculum. We can inculcate spirituality in the children, like, for example, teaching them that rape is an abhorrent crime, that sexual abuse should not happen. It's just the question of broadening their minds through education. If half of the population is under 18 and majority of

them have never been to school, then we have a lot of work to do.

The civil war has had a tremendous impact on the children and many of them are traumatized by their experience. There is little psychological help for them by way of counselling, etc. Would this be an area Children in Crisis will look at?

Yes, one of the key things about Children in Crisis is that we focus on the forgotten children. Conflicts, wars and even natural disasters have left in their wake hundreds of thousands of children in very difficult conditions. Once the world's attention moves away from these situations, the child victims too are often forgotten.

Some 250,000 people died in Liberia



because of the civil war and there are many families without fathers and mothers to look after children. Their bereavement and the experiences they have gone through have certainly impacted their minds. We want to give these children hope by supporting them, by counselling them, by introducing them to spirituality. We want them to feel nurtured, loved and embraced.

How do you view the United Nations current role in Liberia? For example, UNICEF is doing a lot of good things for the children. The UN peacekeeping mission has brought peace back to the country, and it's maintaining the security...

The United Nations has come under unwanted, misplaced criticism from some quarters. The tremendous work the UN is doing around the world is not given the recognition it deserves. For example, UNICEF is doing an amazing job in Liberia. I really can't support enough of the mothers' clubs! UNMIL is such a good example for people all over the world to see how UN works so well in a

country. Without UNMIL here there would be so much unrest. I cannot speak more highly of the excellent work the peacekeepers and the UN agencies are doing in this country. UNMIL's contribution is phenomenal. I don't honestly know how Liberia would have picked up the pieces and managed to move on without UN's active involvement.

Do you feel the international community is adequately focused on the dire needs of this country or do you think the focus on Liberia is receding because of other crises elsewhere in the world?

I think people have begun to forget Liberia. Liberia is no longer on people's minds. My job is to get Liberia back on the map and to be the loud speaker to the sound of whispers - as they call it - and to speak very openly about Liberia and wake up people. So yes, I do think that the news is on to another disaster, and it's on to Iraq a lot now. But what my job would be is to get Liberia more on the lips of people. We have to. Some 60 per cent of Liberian children have never been to school. We have to help them get education. We have to help the government to make sure that the children get at least one meal a day at school. The school feeding programme run by WFP is facing a cash crunch, which means many children risk being left out of this programme. That shouldn't happen. I want to lobby for more funds for the school feeding programme with the UN and with the American government. America has a special relationship with Liberia, and I want to lobby the American administration to support Liberia more.

I understand that you are planning to do a fund raising event for Liberia?

Yes, on 11 July in New York I'm going to get a group of influential people into a room and start talking about Liberia, show slides and footage of my trip to Liberia, and raise awareness and raise funds which will go to support the people of Liberia, particularly children.

What motivated a celebrity like you to champion the cause of disadvantaged children?

I was very lucky to marry a prince and it took a while to get used to being in pub-

lic life. I feel so proud to be able to do this work, it's just a sense of duty. I think that people in public life should use their image to champion needy causes. I love charity work and that's what I really want to do. I don't want to go back to my normal life in America or London where everything seems so complacent and we live in such abundance.

As a celebrity, you have easy access to the world media. Will you be advocating the cause of Liberia using the Western media?

Tomorrow, I'm doing an interview for an Australian magazine and I will be talking about Liberia. I will be in America next week and will be talking on NBC about Liberia. I might even see if I can do a Larry King show focusing on Liberia and what needs to be done. Every time I appear on television, I will be using the opportunity to spread the word about Liberia.

Liberia has the first ever elected female president in the whole of Africa and that is a great inspiration for women all over the world. How do you think Liberia is moving forward under her leadership?

It's absolutely amazing and inspiring that there is a woman president. It provides a great deal of hope for people that if they work hard they too can get there. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is really getting to grips with the work that needs to be done to develop this country, to making a difference in the country. We just need to support her.

What is your message to the Liberian people?

I admire the people of Liberia. The country is back on track after so many years of bloodshed. The prevailing peace should be nurtured and cherished, there should never be a war again. I also admire the UN peacekeepers, the NGOs, the charity workers. I can't say more about the actions of these people. They are making a huge difference in the lives of Liberia's people and I cannot say how much that inspires me and makes me feel so humble to be in their presence.

Thank you.





Improving maternal health

The Agony of Childbirth

By Sulaiman Momodu

At the Redemption hospital in Monrovia, Joana Denmia, 25, has delivered twins. “My parents brought me to this hospital because I was very sick,” she says, busy breastfeeding her babies. “This is my fifth born. Two of my children died before the age of five.” Though anaemic and complained of bodily pains, Denmia was lucky to have given birth safely. Next to her bed in the maternity ward, Ruth Jallah, 28, says she was admitted to the hospital because she was bleeding profusely, which caused her five-month-old pregnancy to abort. “This is my second miscarriage,” she lamented.

For many Liberian women, especially

those living in the rural areas, realizing the dream of motherhood can be risky. One out of every 16 women dies while giving birth in Liberia. In the developed world, only one out of 3,800 women faces such a tragedy. Beyond the risk of women losing their lives while giving birth, one in every four children in Liberia also dies before the age of five.

Among the causes of maternal deaths in Liberia are hemorrhage, hypertensive disorders of pregnancy, unsafe abortion, prolonged or obstructed labour, Infection/sepsis; other direct causes include malaria, AIDS, and anaemia. The highest cause of child mortality is malaria, accounting for about 42 per cent of cases, followed by diarrhoea with 22 per cent, and acute respiratory infections accounting for about 12 per cent, according to

Ministry of Health (MoH).

As Liberia emerges from the devastating civil war that destroyed much of the country’s infrastructure, including hospitals and clinics, improving maternal health and reducing child mortality -- two of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -- are among the priorities of the government. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Fund for Population Affairs (UNFPA) are among the organizations supporting the government’s efforts. The task ahead, however, is enormous.

In addition to destroying the health facilities across the country, the civil war also took the lives of several medical professionals. Many others fled the country during the war and are reluctant to return



Maternal health is a major priority in Liberia

home due to poor working conditions and facilities. Today, Liberia is faced with acute shortage of qualified medical staff to meet the health needs of the population.

Dr. Eileen Reilly of Scottish International Relief, who works at the government hospital in Tubmanburg, is the only gynaecologist for the population surrounding the area. There is just one government doctor in the hospital. "We have only one ambulance serving three counties...most times pregnant women come to the hospital bleeding and almost at the point of death. The maternal health situation here is absolutely appalling," she laments. Without the voluntary medical assistance rendered by the Pakistani doctors stationed in Tubmanburg who also provide free drugs, the operation of the government hospital will be a nightmare.

In some towns and villages, pregnant women and other sick people have to either walk or be transported in hammocks. In Grand Kru for example, which is referred to as the "Walking County,"

medical personnel say a woman in labour has to walk for days to reach a health facility. Compounding the scenario is the high prevalence of teenage pregnancy in the country.

To help improve the delivery of medical care across the country, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has funded 15 newly-built or rehabilitated health facilities in eight counties through its Quick Impact Project. "Health is wealth. We must help you generate this wealth. Without healthy children, there will be no healthy Liberia," says Alan Doss, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Peacekeepers also carry out medical outreach activities in towns and far flung areas, sometimes trekking for miles to render free medical assistance to the ailing.

"There are a lot of gaps in service delivery in addressing emergencies that kill our mothers...having skilled personnel in service delivery is key to reducing maternal and child mortality," says Dr. Musu Julie Conneh-Duworko, the Family Health and Population Adviser at the WHO. The organization is supporting the government in its drive to improve health delivery across the country. It has provided both financial and technical support for the development of the "Maternal – new born health road map," which defines the vision of the government to address the situation of maternal and child health issues.

The MoH is putting in place a strategy to accelerate child survival in the coming years through interventions that are high impact and low cost. Dr. Isabel Simbeye, the Project Officer, Health and Nutrition at UNICEF, says the UN agency helps with technical support, equipment, drugs and training. In areas that are inaccessible by vehicles and motorbikes, health personnel use bicycles or trek several miles in order to render medical services and to sensitize people on healthy living.

In Foya district, Lofa County, the WHO, in collaboration with UNFPA and the MoH, has introduced "appropriate technology ambulances." They are motorbikes with a cushioned carrier fixed to it to transport pregnant women to the nearest functional health facility. The pilot project is called "Wolorkendia," a Kissi word for

safe birth.

Currently there are 364 functional health facilities in Liberia, including hospitals, health centres and clinics. By and large, deliveries in health facilities are very low and are sometimes done by traditional midwives or trained traditional midwives (TTM), who are not competent to handle complex cases. Health authorities have begun training middle-level health workers to ensure they are well equipped to carry out their functions. The MoH and partners work with TTMs in the communities to improve their skills and encourage them to refer cases. MoH, in collaboration with partners, is also undertaking immunization to prevent child mortality.

Now that Liberia is moving from an acute humanitarian situation to one of recovery, some non-governmental organizations which came to the country's assistance during the height of the civil crisis to rehabilitate health facilities and carry out free medical services are folding up their operations, a development that is of great concern to the government. Efforts are being made to fill the gap when many of the organizations would have finally pulled out by 2008. Working conditions are also being revisited to make them more attractive so that doctors and other medical practitioners can move from the city to the counties.

One of the major challenges of the Liberian health sector is the lack of statistics. MoH officials say they are putting their records in order. Meanwhile, a just released 2007 Liberia Demographic and Health Survey (LDHS) points to encouraging trends in maternal and child health.

The survey shows that the current fertility rate in Liberia is 5.2 children per woman, down from 6.2 children in 1999/2000. The under five mortality has been cut in half to 111 from 219 deaths per 1,000 '10 to 14 years before the survey.' During pregnancy, 79 per cent receives anti-natal care from a health professional and 78 per cent of births are protected against tetanus. However, only 39 per cent of children are considered fully immunized against childhood killer diseases.

Despite the marginal progress being made, much remains to be done to improve maternal health and reduce child mortality in Liberia. ♦

Conserving Sapo's Heritage

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Liberia is home to more forest than any of the other seven countries sharing the Upper Guinean ecosystem. More than 45 per cent of the country's landmass is covered in forest, representing half of what remains in West Africa.

In 1983, Liberia designated the Sapo National Park as the first nature conservation area in the country. Regarded as an area of globally significant biodiversity, the park covers more than 180,000 hectares and expands through the south-eastern counties of Grand Gedeh, Sinoe and River-Gee.

"Sapo National Park is very unique in its flora and fauna that remain relatively intact. It has hardly been walked over, so to speak. The park also has mineral deposits, and combined with the abundance of fauna, it has become the livelihood of some people, not only for communities surrounding the park but also for people of foreign nationalities," says John Woods, Managing Director of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA).

Liberia's 14-year conflict was heavily fuelled by the income generated through exploitation of natural resources. In 2003, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Liberia's timber export, adding to existing sanctions on diamonds.* By early 2005, an estimated 4,000 people lived in settlements inside the park in search of gold and other minerals, causing destruc-

tive environmental damage by diverting rivers, uprooting trees and creating inadequate waste disposal. The occupants undermined the sanctions and took advantage of weak governance structures. Although sanctions effectively curtailed trans-national trade, they did not ensure reform.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is the first ever peacekeeping operation to incorporate environmental and natural resources advisors to assist establishing control of natural resources in a post-conflict country. By mid 2005, Sapo occupants were successfully evacuated following an integrated approach by government ministries [at the time the National Transitional Government of Liberia], including the FDA, UNMIL, other UN agencies and NGOs. "The 2005 evacuees included a large number of people living in the park to eke out a livelihood. So we focused very much on alternative livelihood projects, which have since been established in a number of communities surrounding the park," explains Hiroko Mosko, an Environment and Natural Resources Advisor with UNMIL.

Liberia Association for Community Empowerment (LACE), a government branch operating as a non-for profit institution, responded to the Sapo evacuation by embarking on a Community Driven Development (CDD) approach with funding from the World Bank. Since the end of 2006, CDD projects have been established in 8 communities surrounding the park.





Sapo's crown canopy is dense and impressive

Rebecca Banner-Addae/UNMIL

The projects cover water and sanitation and building of schools and market places. "When you take people away from their livelihood, you need an alternative. People need jobs. The building of infrastructure due to CDDs create jobs, schools create jobs," says Ramses Kumbuyah, Executive Director of LACE.

The CDD projects are community owned. Community residents identify the needs and control the funding by choosing contractors and overseeing the work. "Once people are part of the process from start to finish, you will usually see that they take an interest in operating and maintaining what they have created. The idea is to provide people with the social services they need. In doing so, it is expected that eventually the dependency on the park for their entire livelihood will

From the sky, Sapo's crown canopy looks impressive in its density and the many shades of green. Below the trees one can only imagine the diversity of flora and fauna representing some of the most intact ecosystems in the entire West African region.

be reduced. In that way you increase the sustainability of the park," says Kumbuyah. The other component of CDD is education. Together with the NGO, Flora and Fauna International, LACE provides training on the importance of conserving the forest and preserving the wildlife.

UNMIL Quick Impact Projects (QIP) and a number of other NGOs have included a variety of alternative livelihood projects for surrounding communities in their efforts to conserve Sapo. However, some people, a number of them non-Liberians, have gone back into the park to continue mining and poaching with the help of local community leaders. "In 2005 we called it evacuation and not eviction because when we evacuated people they had room to consider the humanitarian option of

engaging in alternative livelihood projects. Now, the people who inhabit the park today, an estimated 200-300, are more organised in their activity. They work closely with community leaders, they threaten FDA rangers and a number of them are nationals from neighbouring countries," explains Mosko.

Creating alternative livelihoods for the surrounding communities is not the sole solution, says FDA's Woods. "Some local authorities act as gateways to the park, they benefit from a group of hunters and poachers who do not belong to the communities. Although it is small scale mining creating limited destruction to the environment, the occupants are engaging in illegal activity. Also, and probably more important in the light of conservation efforts, poaching is a severe threat to endangered species. We need to enforce the law," concludes Woods.

From the sky, Sapo's crown canopy looks impressive in its density and the many shades of green. Below the trees one can only imagine the diversity of flora and fauna representing some of the most intact ecosystems in the entire West African region. "Sapo could become a significant area of eco-tourism, of research activities and of other pursuits highly beneficial not only to the government but also to the surrounding communities," says Alex Peal, Country Director of Conservation International, another NGO that collaborates in conservation efforts.

A project based approach brings in money but is it sustainable in the long run? The international community will dip in and out with assistance and according to Webby Bwanali, Senior Environment and Natural Resources Advisor with UNMIL, the real move will have to come from the government. "The major lesson learned from the 2005 evacuation is that we need to have ample involvement by the government, especially Ministry of Internal Affairs, need to take a leading role to sensitise community leaders on the need to protect the park. This is no longer just a conservation matter but a matter of national security as well."

**UN sanctions on Liberia's timber trade were lifted in September 2006 and on diamonds in April 2007. ♦*

World Bank Grant for Health Sector

By J. Wesley Washington

The World Bank (WB) has approved grants totalling US\$13.5 million to support the reconstruction of Liberia's health care delivery system and other social services. Through an International Development Association (IDA) grant, the WB has made available US\$8.5 million to an Emergency Health Project while US\$5 million is dedicated to a Community Empowerment Project II (CEP II).

Prior to Liberia's Partnership Forum held in Washington, D.C., last February, the WB and other development partners played a critical role in supporting the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare (MH&SW) to publish a special paper on the health sector and draw international attention to the issue. At the Forum, a number of partners, including the WB, United States Aid for International Development (USAID), the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO), Irish Aid, and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) made commitments to support health services in Liberia.

As the focus on humanitarian assistance begins to fade, with some NGOs in the health sector leaving, the WB grant would provide critical support to prevent a collapse of the health services in Liberia. The grant would strengthen the policy making and management functions of the Ministry and help restore some of the crucial building blocks needed for a functioning health sector. The project will support the MH&SW build its operational capacity through a health information management system, policy development, and information technology.

A significant portion of the grant will go into development of health infrastructure and also for new equipment, accord-

ing to Liberia's Deputy Minister of Health for Administration, Dr. Mohammed Sheriff. "About US\$2,365,000 will be used for management support system, US\$2,830,000 on human resources, while US\$3,305,000 will be used on infrastructure and equipment." While strengthening the management capacity of the Ministry, the grant would also help policy development, health management and information system, and monitoring and evaluation.

The project also aims to address the lack of trained medical staff, a major problem facing Liberia's health sector, by training and providing teaching staff for the A. M. Dogliotti College of Medicine

"We have a serious problem as it relates to the human resources gap. With a population of an estimated 3.6 million, we have only about 51 Liberian medical doctors."

and the School of Pharmacy at the University of Liberia as well as the Tubman National Institute of Medical Arts at the John F. Kennedy Medical Centre. It will also seek to hire trained Liberian or expatriate doctors, nurses and other essential medical personnel for hospitals, clinics and health centres across the country.

"We have a serious problem as it relates to the human resources gap. With a population of an estimated 3.6 million, we have only about 51 Liberian medical doctors," says Dr. Sheriff. "To include foreign doctors with private institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), we have nearly 220 doctors. Trained nurses and other essential medical personnel are scarce."

The WB grant would support the rehabilitation of essential medical facilities and

medical teaching institutions, including the A.M. Dogliotti College of Medicine and the maternal and children's wards at the John F. Kennedy Medical Centre. It would also help in building several new health centres and equipping them.

The WB reiterated that government's national health policy and plan reaffirm its commitment to work toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals with particular focus on activities that will contribute to improvements in maternal and child survival. The project is expected to be implemented over the next three years beginning October 1, 2007.

The IDA grant for Second Community Empowerment Project (CEP II) is to help improve access of poor rural communities to basic services and economic opportunities through a community driven development approach, by investing in capacity building at the community and local government levels. It will be implemented by the Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment (LACE), a government agency supported by the WB which is implementing small-scale community rehabilitation projects throughout the country.

A total of 260 sub-projects are earmarked for poor communities in rural and remote areas of the country with emphasis on vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Approximately 250,000 persons are expected to be employed during the duration of the project, while some 860 will be trained in various skills.

"The CEP II envisages a strong involvement of local authorities in key sub-project phases by enhancing their capacity and involving them in the selection and supervision of these sub-projects," said the WB Team Leader of the project, Giuseppe Zampaglione. The European Commission is contributing 8.5 million Euro to the funding of CEP II, which falls under the World Bank's new rapid response procedures for emergency projects. ♦



Farewell to arms, welcome to skills

Skills Training for Former Child Soldiers

By Adolphus Scott

Along a busy dirt road in Kolahun city in northern Liberia, more than a dozen youngsters in their twenties are busy tinkering with various parts of a broken down automobile by the side of a dilapidated building. It is a skills training centre run by UNICEF for Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF).

"During the war, I was taken away by force at the age of 14 by forces of Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD)," says Tarnue, clad in a grease-soaked overall. "At first, they made me carry ammunition on my head through the forest to the front lines. Later I started to hold gun and began fighting with LURD against government troops. Our Small Boys Unit fought all the way until we reached Monrovia. I saw plenty of my friends die along the way."

During the years of war, Tarnue never had hope for a better future. "Since I joined this skills training programme, my life has changed. Soon I will be working on vehicles and hope to make a living," says the former child soldier.

Since the end of the civil war in 2003, UNICEF has been working with child protection partners to provide rehabilitation and reintegration services to ex-CAFFs and other war-affected children. The programme provides basic formal primary education and vocational skills training. With UNICEF support, more than 1,100 teachers have also been trained to provide psycho-social services to the youngsters through creative and recreational activities.

The reintegration of ex-CAFFs is part of UNICEF's much broader child protection programme, which aims to strengthen coordination mechanisms in the child protection sector and provide leadership in the design and implementation of pro-

grammes and policies for war-affected youth. During the war, CAFFs were forced to carry arms and serve as spies, porters, cooks and sex slaves.

A total of 2,485 ex-CAFFs are currently undergoing skills training and apprenticeship programmes in 14 of Liberia's 15 counties. More than 2,400 trainees have already graduated from the skills training programme so far. The highest number of graduates has been in the areas of cosmetology, masonry, carpentry and pastry-making.

"The objective of the skills training programme is to create opportunities for self-development through skills training and apprenticeships for former child soldiers," says Rozanne Chorlton, UNICEF Liberia Representative. The programme includes options such as agriculture, animal husbandry, mechanics, carpentry, cosmetology, masonry, tailoring and baking. The training lasts between six and nine months, and also includes basic literacy and numeric training, psycho-social counseling, recreation, and business development. Children are also provided with tool kits for their trade to learn with and to use upon their graduation.

UNICEF's reintegration programme is currently working with a total of 714 community structures which includes 293 child welfare committees, 228 children's clubs, and 193 youth groups. These structures have been very vital in mobilizing children into the reintegration programmes and providing them psycho-social care and support. In 2005, UNICEF provided access to basic formal primary education in government and community schools to 5,000 school-aged ex-CAFF and skills training to an additional 5,000 at various educational centres across the country.

In an extraordinary logistical effort by the United Nations Mission in Liberia, over 100,000 combatants were disarmed and demobilized as the war came to an end in 2003. Among them were 11,780 Liberian children. All but 25 of these children have been reunited with their families or caregivers. ♦

The writer is Programme Assistant with UNICEF Liberia

Winning Hearts and Minds

By Sulaiman Momodu

Rescued from the jaws of death after he was involved in a gruesome road accident, 25-year-old Johnson Cole lay at the government hospital in Tubmanburg, his body partly wrapped in bandages. "If not for the UN peacekeepers who are treating me free of charge, I would have been a dead man by now," Cole says. "Peacekeepers are good people. They have not only brought us peace, they are also helping us a lot."

After 14 years of civil war, Liberia's infrastructure lay in ruins -- many roads are virtually impassable, health facilities and educational institutions have been destroyed, and safe drinking water and electricity scarcely available. This stark reality is not lost on UNMIL military personnel who have been, under the aegis of Civil-Military Coordination (CIMIC), focusing on recovery activities with contingents working with local authorities, Government of Liberia ministries and agencies to assist in numerous humanitarian and development programmes.

One striking attribute of the CIMIC initiatives is that funds for activities are mostly from the personal financial contributions of the peacekeepers, from resources available for their own use, or from donations from the governments and people of their respective countries. Since 2003, peacekeepers have provided services in the health, sanitation, agriculture, sports and public works sectors, among others.

"We provide community assistance, we give some sort of help to develop the infrastructure; we go to the very remote areas where people don't see the doctors and don't have the facilities; even if there are no road connections, sometimes special flights are going," says Mohammad Ashraffudin, Staff Officer of CIMIC Section.

Like most health facilities in the country, the Tubmanburg hospital was looted clean during the war. Today, it reels from lack of medical personnel, drugs and facilities. However, with the Pakistani medical practitioners lending a helping hand to the hospital, residents of Bomi County and its surroundings now breathe a sigh of relief. "We say 'thank you' to the UN," says 17-year-old Jatu Dormah, happy that her six-month-old baby who was constantly convulsing had been treated.

Although the 70 Pakistani medics including 15 doctors based at the Level 11 Tubmanburg hospital are mandated to provide medical services to peacekeepers, on a daily basis, they provide specialised medical services to locals who throng the hospital. "The Pakistanis are very much cooperative, whenever we are in need we just run over to them. They are doing everything for us. Even if you call them by 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. during emergencies, they will come, at any time we call them, they will come," says a local medical staff. In addition to the Pakistanis, peacekeeping medical practitioners in the various contingents comprising Bangladeshis, Ethiopians, Senegalese, Nigerians, Ghanaians, Chinese, Namibians and Jordanians all render regular medical serv-



ices to locals beyond their call of duty throughout the mission's four sectors. From January to June this year, nearly 100,000 Liberians have benefited from free medical assistance.

In April this year, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf inaugurated a free clinic organized by Banglashehi Level II Hospital in CARI complex, Bong County. During her visit, the Bangladeshi peacekeepers also formally handed over Shanti Angan ("premise of peace" in Bengali) peace monument to the Liberian government. President Sirleaf unveiled the monument, dedicated to the people of Liberia, and laid wreath to honour the memory of peacekeepers who had lost their lives in the cause of peace.

The provision of medical assistance is not however, limited to curative medicine. In the fight against childhood killer diseases, peacekeeping troops supported immunization campaigns. During the National Integrated Measles follow-up campaign organised earlier in January, a total of 946 vaccination posts were established around the country. UNMIL forces provided assistance in the area of air and road transport, electricity supply and security. All sectors are also involved in awareness campaigns on crucial issues such as gender-based violence, including rape, and



A Pakistani medic treats patients at a free medical camp

health and hygiene. Sanitation activities are carried out with cleaning exercises of public places undertaken while hand-pump wells have been installed in some communities where residents had no access to safe drinking water before.

Donations of various items including medicines, food, sporting and building materials have also been made to the local population. During the first half of this year, the Ethiopian troops donated medicines to the government hospitals in Zwedru and Greenville.

Despite the ghastly consequences of the 14-year war, the nation's passion for football was unscathed. Over time, peacekeepers have used sports to promote peace, unity and reconciliation in communities, a strategy that has proved very effective in bringing former foes together.

Some other activities that have been undertaken include repair and maintenance of roads and bridges, constructing children's parks, cleaning graveyards, organising art and essay competitions and cultural events in which both natives and peacekeepers exhibit their cultural heritage. Peacekeepers also provide logistic support and security for various events such as the "Fight Hunger - Walk the World" campaign. They also undertake rescue operations of vehicles involved in

accidents. On average, some 40 rescue operations are undertaken in a month.

Skills training programmes like carpentry, masonry, plumbing, wiring, vehicle and generator repair, tailoring, and basic computer skills have formed part of CIMIC activities. Over the past six months, more than 5,000 Liberians have benefited from various trainings, and some of them are now engaged in productive ventures.

In a few cases, UNMIL's Quick Impact

Projects have been undertaken by peacekeepers, who also make their own personal contributions. The Vincent Compound Hall in Tubmanburg, for example, was constructed with Pakistani peacekeeping engineers undertaking the construction far more than was budgeted for. The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Jordan Ryan, in his remarks at the inauguration of the hall commended the contingent and engineers for what he described as "doing more than what was expected on the project". QIPs have also been undertaken by contingents like the Bangladeshis who have constructed a youth centre, an agriculture and medical project in Nimba County, and the Chinese contingent engineers in the area of road rehabilitation.

"I believe that real recovery has to begin at the local level. We are working at the community level to assist the Liberian people. My immediate objective is to make sure that the non governmental organisations, the military force and other UN agencies are working together towards a common objective," says Colonel Christopher Thomas Mayer, Chief of CIMIC.

Although UNMIL military has neither the material nor the funding resources available to undertake the many humanitarian assistance projects requested by the communities, there is no doubt that peacekeepers have won the hearts and minds of most Liberians through their sacrifices. ♦

Peacekeepers help rehabilitate a road



By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Former combatants from rival militias who lost their limbs in battles have found common ground on football fields in Liberia, adding momentum to the much needed reconciliation in the war-torn nation. Joining them are also civilians who got caught up in the fighting during the 14-year civil war. Liberia Amputee Sports Association (LASA) is the country's first amputee football team founded with the goal to bring hope to those who lost limbs during the conflict.

"People used to point fingers at me. They used to call me names," says Dennis Parker, LASA's star striker, resting on a pair of crouches. His right leg was wounded in a battle when he was 19, fighting for Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The leg was amputated just below the knee and for several years Parker was forced to beg on the streets of capital Monrovia for a living. "Today I am a different man. Football has done amazing things for me," says Parker with a resolute look on his face.

More than 100,000 former combatants went through UNMIL's Disarmament, Demobilisation and Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme. Each participant received a cash payment and the majority of them have benefited from formal or vocational education as part of the programme. However, many remain jobless in the bleak economy of post-war Liberia and the disabled are amongst the worst off with no welfare system to turn to.

In late 2005 close to 300 former fighters, all disenchanted amputees, stormed Taylor's party headquarters. Their amputated limbs stood out as the symbol of a past most Liberians are eager to forget. The society disregarded them making it difficult to find jobs let alone a place to live. The amputees occupied the party headquarters for 10 months before Parker and his peers negotiated a settlement with the NPFL party paying each man US\$30 to leave the premises.

A key figure in the negotiations was Reverend Robert Karloh, Deputy Executive Director of the National



Lost limbs, yes

Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (NCDDRR). Rev. Karloh was aware of amputated ex-combatants playing football in Sierra Leone. "Many of the guys playing fought for different factions but today they can see eye to eye on the football field. Through amputee football they develop a sense of oneness. They are able to leave the past behind, their self-esteem is being restored and many of them leave the streets. Not only that, the community begin to respond, they see an athlete and not a crippled criminal," says Rev. Karloh who helped found LASA just a few months prior to the All-Africa Amputee Tournament hosted by Sierra Leone in

February 2007.

LASA made bustling headway and came second at the Tournament. In June the team represented Liberia in the World Cup of Champions in Russia. Despite the notable achievements it is difficult to muster funds to sustain the team. A few donations have come in from private individuals and local NGOs but the players still have to find ways to make a livelihood. Parker ekes out a living selling palm oil to support himself, his girlfriend and eight children.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Liberia supported LASA for the two competitions. "We contributed towards transportation, board and



Soccer has restored the self-esteem of the amputees

s, but not hope

accommodation as well as new gear when the team went to Sierra Leone. For the trip to Russia we funded a portion of the airline tickets,” says Baboucarr Sarr, Deputy Resident Representative of UNDP. “We contributed in the hope that this initiative would prove an effective integration effort for victims of war. UNDP will not be fully involved in this undertaking but will assist with advice on a sustainable way forward -- how to raise funds, approach businesses for sponsorship, affiliate with other sporting bodies and so forth. The amputee football players of Liberia need to operate under an organised structure,” says Sarr.

More teams have been founded since LASA’s success in Sierra Leone. There are

currently 6 amputee football teams in Monrovia and an unknown number in the counties. Anthony Doe plays for the Mighty Conquerors. “This game gives me strength, I become someone. Although most team mates fought during the war, we rarely talk about it. We are here on the field together, former fighters and civilians, and we are working towards a better tomorrow,” says Doe who was hit by a stray bullet when he as a civilian was looking for food during the height of fighting in 1990. His right leg was amputated shortly after.

The rules for amputee football differ slightly from two-legged football. The game is played on metal crouches and

incidental contact between the ball and a crutch is allowed. There are six players on the field and one goalkeeper. The goalie is a hand-amputee and is not allowed to leave his net. Games consist of two periods of 20 minutes each since it is extremely demanding on the players.

LASA came back from Russia in June and although they did not score high, the experience was elevating. “I had never travelled. Today my face is known not only in Liberia, my picture has travelled all over the world. I want to take this far,” says Parker. “The transformation of some of these guys is truly unbelievable. Not long ago many had given up and you would hear them say things that could make you cry. They believed they had already been buried. It takes a lot of work to mould the mind but I do my best to make them believe that they too can become the next pastor, the next president. They too can become role models in life,” says Paul Tolbert, coach of LASA.

The Amputee Football Federation of Liberia was established in May 2007 as an umbrella for the league of teams. The 2007/08 budget of the Ministry of Youth and Sports has allocated some funding for amputee football. “During a budget hearing someone stood up to ask why money should be set aside for the crippled. Afterwards I went up to the person to let him know that it was no one but the amputees who brought us to the World Cup,” says Marbue Richards, Deputy Minister of Sports. The majority of our population is youth and our mandate is to keep them focused, keep them away from idleness. You participate in sports and there are rules and regulations. The same is true for society. You get penalised if you break the rules.”

In conjunction with the tournament in Sierra Leone the Amputee Football Federation of Africa (AFFA) was established and Rev. Karloh was elected as President. Although LASA has represented Liberia on the international arena so far, soon a national team will be welded together with players from the various teams. In November this year the national team will represent Liberia in the Amputee football World Cup hosted by Turkey. Perhaps Parker and his peers will go far. And with them, the much needed reconciliation in the Liberian society. ♦

By J. Wesley Washington

When major football leagues and tournaments around the world are on, Liberia's football fans are often glued to their television sets either at home or in the proliferating video clubs in urban centres to follow their favorite teams and soccer heroes. The English Barclay's Premier League, Spanish Primera Liga and Italian Serie A are just a few of the soccer tournaments in Europe that draw huge crowds in Liberia.

So it was not surprising that when the most capped soccer player in the history of the French national team, Barcelona's Ruddy Lilian Thuram-Ulien came calling, thousands of young Liberian football enthusiasts crowded various venues on his itinerary on Sunday, June 24, to catch a glimpse of and interact with the soccer star.

Thuram was on a one-day visit to Liberia, organized by the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA) and facilitated by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), to boost Liberia's 'Sports for Peace' programme, established earlier this year to reach out to young people, whose lives were badly affected by the devastating 14-year conflict.

An icon and a role model, the FC Barcelona defender who received a rapturous welcome on his arrival, urged Liberian youth to shun violence, drugs and war which he said was dangerous to peace and a better life.

Speaking at the Monrovia City Hall upon arrival, Thuram, who also played alongside Liberia's soccer icon George Weah for Monaco, encouraged Liberia's youth to work harder to change the image of the country. "Violence is dangerous. To have a better life, it's more important to have peace," he said. HIV/AIDS protection, he added, was critical to population and growth of any economy. While it was important for Liberians to prevent HIV and AIDS, it was also important to do away with stigmatization, the soccer star reminded the thousands of young Liberians who had thronged to meet him.

A role model for many Liberian youth, Thuram, who was part of the French 1998



World Cup and Euro 2000 winning squads, participated in two soccer matches involving young children, ex-combatants and amputees during his one-day visit. He participated in a community football match where he played for each side for a few minutes at the New Kru Town Community Sports Ground at the D. Tweh Memorial High School to the delight of thousands of cheering spectators. He also made a stop over at the Fish Market football practice ground where he interacted with amputees of the Liberia Single Legged Amputees Sports Association.

Earlier, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Jordan Ryan welcomed the soccer star to an interactive forum at the Monrovia City Hall attended by more than 300 national youth representatives. "Liberia needs peace in every county, district, village and every home. One of the best ways to bring peace is through sports and we are delighted to have you join us in one of the continuing efforts to make sure that Liberia has peace through sports," he said, and thanked the soccer icon for supporting the 'Sports for Peace' programme. "Your message today will have considerable impact on the young people of Liberia."

Deputy Youth and Sports Minister Jeremiah Witherspoon noted that as the country was just coming out of a prolonged civil war, youth development

issues were very important to Liberia and pledged the government's commitment to work with the UN and other development partners to ensure that issues affecting youth were kept on the national agenda.

The 'Sports for Peace' Task Force presented Thuram with a plaque in appreciation of his visit, in addition to a 'Stop Exploitation and Abuse' (SEA) bracelet. He was also gowned and given a Mende name, Thuram Ngububla (literally one who splits fire), by the traditional people of Liberia.

Among those who joined the soccer star during his visit were UN and Government officials, members of a number of national youth groups and sporting federations, as well as students, musical and traditional artists and war-affected youth.

The 'Sports for Peace' initiative is the result of efforts by UNMIL and the Government of Liberia, with support from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and several national sporting associations and non-governmental organizations. In early March 2007, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Sports for Development and Peace, Adolf Ogi, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Liberia, Alan Doss, launched the 'Sports for Peace' programme in Liberia. ♦



A CST workshop in progress

CSTs Gain Momentum

In July members of the County Support Team (CST) gathered in Bantol City, the administrative capital of Montserrado County. Representatives of the UN family in Liberia, County Superintendents and government officials assembled for a one-day workshop under the theme, “Country Support Team – Lessons Learned and the Way Forward.” The CSTs have now existed in the 15 counties for over a year and are aimed at strengthening the presence of government authority on the ground in all parts of Liberia.

The day unfolded with a hand-over ceremony of the Montserrado Administrative building. A component of the CST includes rehabilitation of county administrative buildings, which were badly damaged and looted during the 14 year war. More than 100 participants assembled in front of the freshly painted two-storey building for speeches and ribbon cutting. “We are all working to get Liberia back county by county. You have an important role in making sure that you focus on reconciliation, focus on an honest accountable government that is responsive to every Liberian. We in the UN are proud

to play a supportive role to the national leadership. Our role is to help facilitate, to attract donor resources and to pull the UN together to work more coherently in each of the 15 counties,” said Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

Soon followed the “Market Place,” an interactive feedback exercise taking the participants through the CST Project, which covers rehabilitation of administrative buildings, capacity building amongst local leadership and establishment of Information Management Offices (IMO). One exercise was arranged as a role play explaining the establishment of IMOs in two pilot counties enabling any development actor to obtain vital information, such as how many doctors, wells or schools exists in a particular county. “It is a forum allowing for questions and discussion and also criticism between all CST partners. It gives us an opportunity to see where we are in the process, how certain aspects are going well and where we have to improve,” says Julia Duncan-Cassell, Chair of Superintendent Council, before attending a demonstration of the HF radio system soon to be operational in all coun-

ties. HF radio waves will allow for email accounts enabling local government officials to send and receive data.

The afternoon was assigned to informing participants about longer-term development efforts such as the preparation of County Development Agendas (CDAs) and work to further refine the information processes in Liberia. Mohammed Massale, Superintendent of Bomi County, reflected on the theme of the workshop: “Overall the CST is working well. Of course there are areas where improvement is needed but it is a good exercise for all of us and if we continue this way we will succeed. The CST adds credibility to the government’s efforts to decentralise. We are clearly seeing a move beyond Monrovia to include the rest of the country.”

The CST mechanism is a process fashioned as a coherent UN approach to strengthen the government’s recovery process under the four pillars: expanding peace and security, revitalizing economic activity, rebuilding infrastructure and providing basic services, and strengthening governance and the rule of law. ♦



Benin President, UN Envoy Discuss Liberia's Security

The security situation in Liberia and job creation for the unemployed topped the discussions between the UN envoy to Liberia, Alan Doss, and the President of the West African state of the Republic of Benin, Yayi Boni, who was on a two-day state visit to the country in early August. Boni applauded the UN mission for helping to restore peace and security to Liberia, and urged the United Nations to continue supporting the Liberian government to bring lasting peace to the war-torn nation.

The Beninese President pledged that his country, which has its military observers in Liberia as part of the peace-keeping mission, would contribute more to stabilize Liberia and the entire region. "We want to support Liberia and UNMIL. We are prepared to send military engineers to Liberia and eager to set up partnerships with the private sector in this country," he said.

Boni, who was accompanied by his Minister of Defence, said he would consider deployment of Beninese military engineering assets to contribute to the

reconstruction of infrastructure in Liberia, which would generate employment opportunities, especially for the youth, most of whom were seriously affected by the country's 14 years civil war.

Briefing Boni, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss highlighted UNMIL's efforts to restore peace and security in Liberia and the mission's progress since deployment in 2003. He noted that Liberia was calm and stable and that the country's security forces were being restructured to enable the war-torn nation take care of its security needs. Doss also pointed out that UNMIL collaborates with the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire and provides security for the UN-backed Special Court for Sierra Leone. In addition to restoring peace and security, both the police and military components of the Mission are also rendering humanitarian assistance to the local population after long years of civil war, he said.

Although Liberia is enjoying relative peace and stability, the general feeling among the population is that the UN mission should stay in the country until the security forces, including the army and the police, have been properly restructured. Doss reiterated that there would only be a gradual reduction of UN peacekeepers from Liberia over the next few years, which will not affect the peace and security which the UN Mission is now working on consolidating. "UNMIL will not leave before the national security services are ready to take over the job," he stressed.

During Boni's visit, Liberia and Benin signed a joint communiqué pledging to strengthen bilateral ties between them. Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Boni welcomed the finalization and signing of four bilateral agreements calling for enhanced economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation.

The two leaders also discussed other regional and sub-regional issues including Guinea, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, and expressed concern over the situation in the Darfur region of Sudan, Chad and the Central African Republic. They welcomed the recent UN Security Council Resolution, mandating a 26,000 strong hybrid United Nations/African Union peacekeeping force to be deployed in the Darfur region. ♦



Alan Doss calls for an end to sexual violence

Call for More Protection for Women

By Sulaiman Momodu

As incidents of gender-based violence (GBV) continue unabated in Liberia, taking a huge toll on women and young girls, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss recently joined officials from the Council of Churches and the Liberian government in denouncing such acts of violence and called for more protection for the country's female population.

Speaking during their silver jubilee celebrations with the theme "the Church and Gender-based Violence," the UN envoy congratulated the Council of Churches for their contribution to the restoration of peace in Liberia and noted that in addressing GBV, there was the need to speak directly to "men and boys committing violence." Citing a weekly report that recorded 10 rape cases, compared to seven the previous week, Doss said the majority of the victims of sexual violence were girls under 18 with one as young as five.

"In one case, two sisters aged 13 and 14 were victims of rape committed by a 45-year-old male. Another incident came to light on 30 July when the mother of a victim reported that her daughter was raped by two male adults. She later passed away at the hospital. The girl was just 14 years old... this is unacceptable, we cannot tolerate that. We have to deal with and confront this problem."

Since women and girls were usually the first victims of war, Doss said peace was the best investment in their protection. "Sadly, peace is not enough. Our statistics reveal that there have been 100 reported cases of rape over the last three months. That is just the tip of the iceberg. We do not get reports of all the cases of rape committed in this country and the more you get out of Monrovia, the more difficult it is to get accurate information." He also pointed out that 40 per cent of those serving sentences in Liberia's prisons are for sex-related offences, which is a pointer to the magnitude of the problem.

Liberia is a country of faith. Churches dot the landscape with the majority of the population being Christians. The role of the Church is therefore crucial as a channel for changing people's attitudes and behaviour, especially among men and boys.

"It is a shame for this country to be on record for the degree of GBV that is committed... women who have played such a key role in bringing peace to this country are being abused on a daily basis," Liberia's Vice-President Joseph Boakai said. He urged the Church to preach against the evil so that "the criminal act of GBV would be put under control, and that older men who have siblings do not go out to destroy other people's children."

In her keynote address, Gender Minister Varbah Gayflor described the increase of GBV cases, especially incidents of rape, as "very alarming" and

highlighted measures that have been taken to deal with the problem. "It is a good thing to have the laws in the books, but it is another thing to see how we go about implementing them," she emphasized and called on all institutions to come together, mobilize resources and fight the menace.

Although nobody knows how many women are abused on a daily basis throughout the country, Gayflor recalled that during her childhood, while girls used to expose their breasts, happily played in the moonlight and were protected by older men and neighbours, the same cannot be said today.

The UN envoy's six-point proposal to halt GBV included more support to have Women and Children Protection Sections in all of Liberia's police stations with properly trained staff, increasing the number of women in the Liberia National Police and promoting zero tolerance of rape. He also called for improved medical procedures at health facilities to help rape victims, accelerated prosecution of rape cases and the establishment of special courts to deal with GBV cases. He denounced female genital mutilation and called for an end to the practice.

Talking about his own organization, Doss assured his audience that every accusation of GBV levied against UN personnel would be thoroughly investigated and appropriate action taken. "If you see any of our personnel misbehaving, call us, call me... we must be part of the solution and not part of the problem. GBV is illegal and above all, it is wrong." ♦

The people of Perry Town received an unusual visitor in early July. Sarah, Duchess of York, attended the inauguration of the Sean Devereux Community School in the small town in rural Montserrado. There was clapping and dancing as the Duchess greeted children neatly lined up to welcome their special guest. The doorframe of the newly built school was decorated with colourful flowers and the school bakery had pastries on display.

The Sean Devereux Community School was built through an initiative by UNMIL Quick Impact Projects (QIP) constructing or rehabilitating bridges, hospitals, prisons, and schools in Liberia. The Community School will accommodate more than 300 children and provide skills training for men and women for whom

The Duchess went beyond the freshly painted classrooms to visit the nearby community. She spoke with little children, young mothers and grandmothers before leaving Perry Town.

school was interrupted due to 14 years of civil war. “I want to learn the skill of tailoring to be able to sustain myself and my family,” confirms Francesca Dean, 24, as she takes a seat to view the inauguration ceremony.

“You inspire me. You are determined to get your country back on its feet. This country can prosper and I will do my best to act as a loudspeaker in far away countries such as Australia and the United States. Liberia should not be forgotten,” says the Duchess in her address to the people of Perry Town. The Minister of Education, Joseph Korto, took to the podium, “We have been looking for space in order to have our war-affected children return to school. UNMIL QIPs have been a blessing towards this end. We are standing in front of a beautiful building today but remember it is what goes on inside that makes for a good school – that is our challenge,” says Korto before declaring that



Duchess vows to be “loudspeaker”

the Ministry of Education will equip the Community School with more computers.

Also present was the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Jordan Ryan. He emphasised the need for educating Liberian women: “Every woman who voted with her thumb in the last election must use her signature in the next.” Then it was time for cutting of the ribbon and viewing of the new school, built in the memory of Sean Devereux, a British missionary and UNICEF staff who lost his life in Somalia in 1993. He had

previously worked with Perry Town community in establishing a series of training programmes.

The Duchess went beyond the freshly painted classrooms to visit the nearby community. She spoke with little children, young mothers and grandmothers before leaving Perry Town. The Duchess was on a two-day trip to Liberia exploring ways in which her humanitarian organisation, Children in Crisis, can support educational projects. ♦

Senegal Contributes to Peace in Liberia

By J. Wesley Washington

The tiny West African nation of Senegal is the seventh largest troop contributor to the 48-nation peacekeeping force of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

For many years, Senegal has played a meaningful role in the sub-regional efforts to bring peace to war-ravaged Liberia. Back in 1992, Senegal provided 1,500 troops to ECOMOG, the peacekeeping force under ECOWAS. Six of these soldiers were captured and executed in Vahun, Lofa County, by the National Patriotic Front of Liberia in May 1992.

Senegal was also among the seven West African countries that deployed the first elements of the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL) that separated the warring parties following the ceasefire signed in Accra, Ghana in August 2003. The country deployed a total of 263 troops and three staff officers as their contribution to the ECOMIL vanguard force in September 2003. These soldiers were among the approximately 3,600 ECOMIL troops re-hatted and reassigned to UNMIL as UN peacekeepers a month later. The newly designated UNMIL troops remained in the deployment areas established by ECOMIL in Monrovia, as well as on the main roads leading into the city and along the Kakata -Totota and Monrovia-Buchanan highways.

As UN peacekeepers began to fan out to other parts of the country, in June 2004, a 600-strong Senegalese contingent was deployed to Maryland County, the south-eastern tip of Liberia. The deployment of the French-speaking troops improved the capacity of UNMIL to monitor the border with neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire, also engulfed in a civil war, and the coastal

counties of River Gee and Grand Kru. It proved a boon as they were able to bridge the communication gap and foster better understanding between Liberians in Maryland and their French-speaking counterparts just across the border.

Currently, a 540-strong Senegalese battalion, the sixth since the inception of UNMIL, is deployed in Liberia. Along with the Contingent's Headquarters and Support Company in Harper, there is one Infantry Company in Pleebo, Maryland

of medical facilities. SENMED also handles civilian cases in the area constituting about 40 per cent of the total daily attendance at the hospital.

The health situation in the south-east is such that even J.J. Dossen Memorial Hospital, the government's only referral hospital, lacks trained medical personnel. To help remedy the situation, medical doctors of the SENMED contingent provides voluntary medical and surgical services there. "Besides our hectic schedule here,

our medical staff provide medical and other surgical services at J.J. Dossen, most times under very difficult conditions due to the acute shortage of medical doctors and equipment to work with there," says Maj. Cheikh Tidiane Ndour, Commanding Officer of SENMED Level II Hospital.

"By supporting the United Nations peacekeeping operations, Senegal has demonstrated its commitment to international peace

and security," says Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss, who has praised the Senegalese peacekeepers for their dedication and commitment.

Senegal's contribution to UN peacekeeping began with the Second United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF II) in the Suez Canal sector and later in the Sinai Peninsula in 1973. The country also contributed a 600-member battalion to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon in 1978, Rwanda (UNAMIR) in 1994 and the Central African Republic (MINURCA) in 1997.

Currently, nearly 2,000 Senegalese military personnel are deployed in missions in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), Côte d'Ivoire (UNOMCI), Sudan (AMIS) and Liberia (UNMIL). Senegal also has gendarmes serving in Haiti and Bosnia-Herzegovina. ♦



Senegalese peacekeepers during a medal parade

County, and another in Weebo, River Gee County. Also, a Quick Reaction Company is headquartered in Harper to respond to any emergency that may occur.

The Deputy Contingent Commander, Maj. Papa Sene, says the local population appreciates the Senegalese peacekeepers efforts as they work with the local authorities in securing peace and stability in the county. "Before, our work was a little difficult as we were getting acquainted with the area; but the longer we stayed, we built confidence with the population which has made our work enjoyable."

The Senegalese medical contingent (SENMED) runs two hospitals (Level I and Level II) in Harper. These two hospitals provide medical support to the military units, UNMIL and non-governmental organization (NGO) staff deployed in the south-eastern areas of the country devoid

Liberians

HOW LONG SHOULD PEACEKEEPERS

As long as UNMIL is here and everything is under control, I'll want them to remain here until between 2010 and 2012. For now, the country is still under threat from anti-peace elements in our society. Besides providing security, we would like UNMIL to continue its humanitarian activities throughout the country.

Matthew Saiewane (Money Changer)



I'll like UNMIL to remain for some time, at least five years, to continue the good work they began in the country in 2003. The country is still not safe. We're grateful to God that because of their presence, there is peace and calm in the country. God comes first and UNMIL comes second for saving Liberia.

Fatumata Trawally
(Hair Dresser)



I want UNMIL to remain in Liberia for as long as it's necessary. What I mean is Liberians are hard to deal with. We usually don't see the reality until we're in the hole. This is when we reflect. As a human, it's always better to know what is good for oneself than to regret later on. This is why I'm saying that UNMIL should remain and educate us on how to nurture the peace so that all Liberians can enjoy the peace and tranquility they've sacrificed their lives for.

Peter Massaquoi
(Businessman)



I want UNMIL to remain as long as this government's tenure lasts because Liberians do not love one another; we are so cruel to one another; and we don't have that feeling of peace and love towards one another. Since our country is not yet entirely safe, I would appreciate if UNMIL remain until they can put together the relevant security structures necessary to take over from them.

Esther Davies
(Gov't Employee/Judiciary)



I would like UNMIL to remain engaged in Liberia for the next ten or more years. The reason is that we want our peace consolidated. If they leave prematurely, chaos could resurface in the society which we do not want since we have enjoyed relative peace for the last four years.

Ruth Thomas
(Student)

Speak

KEEPERS STAY IN LIBERIA?



I want to say that the security situation in Liberia remains fragile. If UNMIL decides to pull out before time, it would be wrong to Liberia. We must first of all take into consideration our security. We do not have an army yet and we're still going about restructuring a police force.

For me, it's good enough for UNMIL to remain until our security forces are well strengthened so that it will be able to protect its citizens and our borders. I will prefer that UNMIL remain for some time, maybe eight or nine years to say the least.

Josiah Monger
(Student/University of Liberia)

For me, I would want UNMIL to remain in Liberia for as long as they can. Since they came to Liberia, they've provided us peace and security and I would prefer that as long as we're restructuring our security, they should stay with us.

Terry S. Dymago
(Businessman)



As for me, I want UNMIL to remain for some time. I think they should remain here for the next six years. They were the ones that brought us peace; they have to consolidate that peace. For now, in my view, the peace is still delicate; as such, they'll have to put the necessary mechanisms into place so that Liberians can sustain the peace when UNMIL leaves.

Rita Chea (Student)



As for me, I'll want UNMIL to remain here until the end of the tenure of this current government because the country is still not safe. Once UNMIL remains, it will be a sign of protection for us, the vulnerable residents. If UNMIL leaves before the next five years, in my view, the country will not be stable.

Prince Dunbar
(Journalist)



I wish UNMIL could remain until our army and police are properly restructured. If you recall, after former President Charles Taylor was elected in 1997, the sub-regional force, ECOMOG, prematurely departed the country before the army was restructured. Not long after, another civil war erupted which lasted until 2003. As such I wish they can remain for at least three or four more years.

Juah Tweh (Student)

I'll like UNMIL to remain here indefinitely. Since they've brought peace for us, they'll have to consolidate that peace which is very important for the country and its people in order to make progress.

Archie Kiazolu
(Student)





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