

UNMIL FOCUS



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A large photograph of a group of African children, mostly girls, smiling and posing for the camera. They are dressed in casual clothing like t-shirts and dresses. The children are of various ages, from young children to teenagers.

**Road Rehabilitation
Creates More Jobs**

Listening to the Youth

Telling the Truth



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

recent visits to Liberia by United States President George W Bush, Executive Director of UNICEF Ann Veneman and the World Bank President Robert Zoellick underscored the importance the international community attaches to Liberia's transition to peace and development, and the confidence that external stakeholders have in the government's reconstruction and development agenda.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) will continue to support the Government in its efforts to consolidate peace and take the country forward on the path to reconciliation and development. A lot more remains to be done before Liberia can fully emerge from the shadow of conflict and UNMIL will work to ensure a secure environment across the nation to facilitate successful and sustainable development.

UNMIL's planned drawdown is being executed in a calibrated and prudent manner without compromising the Mission's ability to deal with threats to the security of the nation. The adjustments in troop strength are linked to the accomplishment of a number of core benchmarks, most importantly Liberia's own capacity to take over responsibilities for national security. To this end, UNMIL will continue to train and mentor the new Liberia National Police and also support the rebuilding of the new Armed Forces of Liberia, AFL. Security sector reform however entails more than police and military, it also requires efforts to reform and strengthen the rule of law. UNMIL will support government's efforts in this

regard.

Liberia is no longer a "failed state", but education, health, employment creation, poverty alleviation and infrastructure development are all in need of urgent support from bilateral and multilateral partners to back up the Government's own efforts. Investments in infrastructure and energy supply, in particular, are critical to sustained growth. Since Liberia cannot meet these investment needs from domestic sources alone, external assistance is critically needed to fill the gap.

The UN family in Liberia will continue to actively assist the nation to deal with the massive challenges that it still faces. The County Support Teams (CSTs), backed by UNMIL and UN funds, programmes and agencies, are actively engaged in all 15 administrative counties to support local authorities in designing and implementing community development projects. This initiative lays emphasis on locally-driven development to spur economic growth and aligns UN assistance with the country's own development agenda.

As before, let us continue to work with utmost dedication and commitment to help Liberia achieve lasting peace, stability, development, and to heal the wounds inflicted by the abuses and violence of the past. I am optimistic that together we can achieve what the people of Liberia have been yearning for a long time – a peaceful, prosperous, stable and democratic nation that upholds rule of law and offers all its citizens an opportunity to realize their dreams.

It is a privilege for me to have assumed my duties in Liberia as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General at a time when the country, under the dynamic leadership of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, is moving forward from devastation to recovery and getting firmly set on a course of peace consolidation and national renewal.

While the international community's attention is increasingly shifting to emerging hotspots elsewhere in the world, Liberia is quietly undergoing a revolution every day. Although it may take some years to heal the wounds caused by the prolonged civil war, the days of fighting are over and Liberians are now full of optimism for a better future.

As we have seen in many parts of the world, rebuilding a shattered nation is a long-term endeavour. For some years to come, Liberia will continue to need bilateral and multilateral assistance. The

Ellen Margrethe Løj

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



With road works in progress, Liberia's tattered infrastructure is getting a face-lift, much to the delight of the people. The road rehabilitation, a combined effort by the Liberian government, UNMIL, the World Bank, UN agencies and a host of other partners, has also helped create employment opportunities for many Liberians, contributing to the welfare of local communities.



In a drastic departure from the past, the government of Liberia is involving all the segments of the society in identifying priorities that should be reflected in its Poverty Reduction Strategy. Among those who were involved in country-wide consultations held by the government were Liberia's children and youth. A report on the views and concerns raised by this group.



Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has begun taking testimonies from the victims and perpetrators of the civil war through public hearings. The TRC has been established to address Liberia's past, characterized by appalling human rights violations, including sexual violence, to promote national reconciliation and healing of the wounds of war.



The civil war left most parts of the country devoid of government presence, leaving the population at the mercy of warlords and violent gangs. Four years since the war came to an end, the presence of the Liberian government is today felt across the nation but lack of infrastructure poses a key challenge.

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Road Rehabilitation Creates More Jobs

By Sulaiman Momodu

With bulldozers, graders, pavers and other heavy equipment littering Monrovia's Tubman Boulevard, major road works on the city's main thoroughfare have resulted in heavy traffic jams across the entire metropolitan area. Yet, nobody is complaining. "I am happy to see that our roads are being fixed. Look at the work that is going on – it is just beautiful," says Yatta Kamara, a resident of the capital.

As a result of years of neglect and a devastating civil war, most of Liberia's primary and secondary roadways lay in ruins. Pothole-infested roads in the capital cause traffic congestion and wreck the vehicles that ply them. "If I take my taxi on a bad road especially during the rains and it gets damaged, where will I get money to feed my family?" asks a cab driver. Although UN peacekeepers have been repairing roads and bridges beyond the call of their duty throughout the country since April 2004, their efforts have been just a drop in the ocean.

For Liberia's new government and the population as a whole, road rehabilitation is a major priority, as echoed from deliberations of the ongoing County Development Agenda process. This year, in the national budget, the government has allocated over US\$ 5.3 million for highway maintenance and rural roads, which is integrated with international assistance for public road infrastructure through the Roads and Bridges Working Group of the "Infrastructure and Basic Services" Pillar (Pillar IV of the Poverty Reduction Framework).

Through the provision of technical support from the Ministry of Public Works



(MoPW), non-governmental organisations, bilateral and multilateral agencies, including the United Nations system, USAID and the EC as well as the civil society and the private sector, are all involved in road works with major contribution provided by the World Bank (WB).

In 2007, the WB committed over US\$30 million for roads. "The World Bank has provided US\$24.5 million in funding for the rehabilitation of the major road corridor between Monrovia to Cotton Tree alone. These works involve re-surfacing and rehabilitation activities along Monrovia's main thoroughfares, including Tubman Boulevard, UN Drive and Somalia Drive," explains Bronwyn Grieve, the Bank's Infrastructure and Basic Services Consultant. Plans have also been developed for the rehabilitation of streets in Monrovia this dry season and next dry season, as well as major road corridors such as Pleebo-Barclayville and Monrovia-Ganta-Guinea Border.

The Bank has funded the rehabilitation of five rural roads including Voinjama to Zorzor; Zorzor to Gbarnga; Ganta - Tappita; Tappita - Zwedru; and Zwedru - Fishtown, totalling about 556 kilometres. In a bid to prevent rehabilitated roads from fast deteriorating, WB has committed US\$ 2 million to maintain the five roads for two years. Through a tripartite arrangement, the World Bank provides funding, UNDP does the procurement while MoPW and UNMIL Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Ethiopian and Chinese engineering contingents are engaged in engineering works. Road experts say they are also looking into the possibility of using chemical substance PermEnzymes 11X, which will preserve laterite roads and reduce the cost of rehabilitation, as is done in some countries.

For its part, further to undertaking major rehabilitation works using labour-intensive methods under the WB funding, UNMIL is also making available US\$ 750,000 in addition to US\$ 400,000 disbursed last dry season, to make Primary and Secondary roadways accessible through the year and to preserve the security of the country, in line with its mandate, says Bisrat Habtemichael, UNMIL Rehabilitation and Recovery Officer. Some other partners involved in road rehabilitation include USAID, UNHCR, WFP,

ILO, and German Agro Action.

In her annual address to the National Legislature in late January this year, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf said of the total road network of 6,162 miles, only 456 miles is paved and that 1,500 miles of feeder roads were largely back to bush. The Liberian President has encouraged Liberians to exercise some patience over the inconveniences that the rehabilitation work creates.

Because infrastructure, mainly roads, rehabilitation presents a great opportunity for employment creation especially for unskilled community labourers, the government of Liberia, in mid June 2006, with the assistance of partners, launched the Liberia Emergency Employment Programme (LEEP), a framework under which UNMIL and its partners have created more than 21,000 short term jobs for skilled and unskilled labourers, representing more than 500,000 working days. This critical contribution of employment to peace building efforts in Liberia cannot be overemphasized, as it serves economic, social, political and cultural functions. Preliminary findings from an impact assessment conducted by the Liberia Institute for Public Administration to determine how income earned from labour-intensive projects affected standards of living in the communities revealed that most of the labourers used wages earned to rebuild their homes and start new livelihood and income generating activities, especially in Lofa County. "We are very happy to be doing this work - helping to rebuild our roads and also getting some money," says one of the workers engaged in side-brushing.

Liberians agree that good roads will impact positively on the country's hard earned peace and stability, and will improve trade and commerce and enhance free movement throughout the country. However, some motorists use vehicles exceeding the designated tonnage on certain roads and bridges, contributing to their rapid deterioration and damage. Engineers say the MoPW should enforce strict regulations on maximum vehicle tonnage on roads. Information Minister Dr. Laurence Bropleh says traffic lights and speed limitation sign posts will be installed at key intersections in due course. A driver's education programme is also to be re-introduced. ♦



Road work in progress

Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL



Liberian children and youth are now getting a chance to have a say in national decision making processes

Listening to

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

It's a drastic departure from the past. As the government embarks on a five-year national agenda -- the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) 2008-2012 -- the youth of Liberia, historically ignored, are getting a chance to articulate their needs and vision for the future of their war-ravaged nation.

The PRS aims to move the country beyond interim policy strategies towards sustainable development. How to increase economic opportunities? How to create an environment where everyone has access to basic services? A participatory method was developed to find answers to such questions and to ensure that the views of all segments of the Liberian population are incorporated in the PRS. The government, led by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, recognizes the need to involve people in decision making processes in order to effectively move Liberia forward and to inculcate a sense of national ownership.

Liberians nationwide gathered in the final months of 2007 to identify needs as well as unexplored possibilities in their

communities. One demographic group participating in the process leading up to the drafting of the PRS was the youth. In Liberia, children and youth constitute the majority with 55 per cent of the population below the age of 20.

Historically, children and youth in Liberia, like in many other areas of the world, have been left out of decision making processes. However, governments worldwide are beginning to recognise that this demographic group constitute the members of society most affected by change while simultaneously being the most likely agents of change.

In Liberia, the majority of those affected by the 14-year long civil war are the youth. Many of whom witnessed or participated in gruesome atrocities while nearly all were denied a safe and enabling upbringing. Feelings of alienation, frustration and vulnerability will eclipse in an environment of safe encouragement and participation. Sustainable peace and development in Liberia will depend, to a large extent, on placing children and youth at the centre of national policies.

Children and youth county consulta-

tions were facilitated by the ministries of Gender and Development and Youth and Sports in collaboration with UNICEF. Youngsters between the ages 14-24 discussed their dreams and aspirations for the future in line with the upcoming PRS revolving around four strategic pillars: security and peace, economic revitalisation, governance and the rule of law, and infrastructure and basic social services.

Some 40 children and youth assembled in Buchanan representing Grand Bassa county. In one exercise the participants were divided into smaller groups and challenged to draw their personal dreams and their dreams for the community and the the country. The group of girls aged 13-17 drew books, schools, nurses and sporting gear as symbols for their personal dreams. Football fields, hand pumps, roads and houses represented dreams for their communities while palaver huts (depicting a forum for open discussions and decision making), streetlamps, skyscrapers and airplanes symbolised their vision for the country.

More challenges followed. The various groups were asked to identify their



Rebecca Bannor-Addae/UNMIL

to the Youth

nightmares -- possible scenarios that could prevent the dreams coming through. The younger girls highlighted poverty and sickness. "You can have a hundred schools but if you're sick with no access to health-care, what does a school matter?" asked Miatta, aged 15.

Another consultation exercise demonstrated that the youth participate little or not at all in decision making processes at home, in school or in church. However, Jestine, 20, has a different take. "I do think things are slowly changing. At least things are better now than just a couple of years ago," she said. "We've written petitions advocating for a university and we've held peaceful demonstrations. Now they at least invite us when they call for town hall meetings."

During the PRS consultations in Buchanan the youth spent two days discussing ways to improve the future of Liberia in line with the upcoming national development agenda. "We share our dreams and our fears and our visions for Liberia, our country. We listen to each other's views and that's very helpful and inspiring," said Neejay, 17. "But one thing

we're concerned about is, will all this information move outside this room? Will adults actually not just listen to us but also implement our suggestions?"

"The children are right," says Alfred Mutiti, UNICEF Child Protection Specialist. "Historically they come from a background where they're not regularly consulted or given feedback. It is good that they're raising this very important point."

The information collected from the nationwide consultations will be consolidated in a final report underlining major cross-cutting issues as well as concerns that might be unique to certain parts of the country. A children and youth working group on the PRS, co-chaired by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Gender with UNICEF as the focal partner, has been set up to ensure that the issues raised during the consultations are reflected in the final PRS.

"The working group meets on a regular basis and it's a good team that has been put together," says Sam Hare, Deputy Minister for Youth Development at the Ministry for Youth and Sports. "The youth

are really coming out to talk and we'll do our best to ensure that their views are heard."

One important concern that has been raised during the consultations is that of security. "It's very clear from the consultations that the girls in particular don't feel secure in their communities whether it is in school, church or at home," says Hare. "We have a serious problem with sexual harassment and exploitation. Imagine not feeling safe when going for choir practice in church."

Liberia already has significant policies in place, such as the sexual offences act, the national youth policy framework and the national policy on education for girls, meant to protect and ensure the rights of children and youth in Liberia. However, implementation of the policies remains a huge challenge.

Young peoples' capabilities are vital to Liberia's development process. If children and young people are not given the chance to develop and participate in a positive way, history has shown us that they could easily take the negative path of destruction. ♦

Telling the Truth

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

After swearing by the bible to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, an elderly witness starts narrating his experience at Mahare River bridge, Bomi county, in 2002.

"When the government forces came to our area they captured us accusing us of supporting the LURD rebels. They drove us in a pickup, 10 people at the time, to the river. There they executed us. I think we were more than 350 people. I was shot but

the bullet passed through my flesh. The soldiers thought I was dead like everyone else and they threw me in the river with all the other corpses. I can swim and dive, that's what saved me."

On the eighth day of public hearings at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in Monrovia, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Liberia is taking testimonies from victims as well as perpetrators of Liberia's brutal civil war that lasted 14 years. All warring factions committed appalling human rights abuses including sexual violence, torture and recruitment of child soldiers. With the aim

to promote national reconciliation, the Commission is mandated to conduct investigations into the gross violations that occurred in Liberia between 1979 and 2003.

As the witness continues his testimony the hall is quiet and the commissioners are busy scribbling down questions they may want to ask the witness to corroborate his account of the infamous "Mahare River massacre."

The realisation that Liberia, like other post-conflict countries, needs to address the past in order to move forward led to the establishment of the TRC. More than



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

250,000 people were killed and over a million people fled their homes during 14-years of conflict in Liberia.

“The TRC gives both victim and perpetrator a chance to come to terms with what happened in this country,” says Nathaniel Kwabo, Executive Director of the TRC. “The TRC fosters an opportunity to move beyond where we are as a country and as a people haunted by the past. We can have all sorts of structures in place that deal with economic development and so on, but as long as our wounds are not healed, as long as people are not reconciled, it will be difficult to move on.”

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2003 mandated the creation of a national truth and reconciliation commission. Nine commissioners were inaugurated in early 2006 and in June the same year the TRC was formally launched.

The Commission has the mandate to investigate human rights violations and economic crimes committed between the “rice riots” of 1979 and 2003 when UNMIL was deployed. The Commission is charged with the responsibility to address the root causes of the conflict and critically review the past in order to reveal misconceptions hampering the understanding of why there was a war. The final report by the TRC will recommend measures for reconciliation and rehabilitation.

The Commission can recommend, but not grant, amnesty. Although there is no inherent prosecution mechanism, the TRC can recommend prosecution of individuals who committed gross violations during the conflict. As such the TRC of Liberia is not an end in itself. It constitutes a forum for

truth telling, remorse and forgiveness, and depends on the government to institute its final recommendations.

Outside the Centennial Memorial Pavilion people wait around to enter the hall. “The TRC is good for Liberia. I believe that when you confess with all of your heart, you have changed. You’re no longer that wicked person,” says Evelyn Toe, who has come to hear testimonies. “I don’t believe in punishment,” she adds. Not all Liberians are of such opinion. In the initial stages of the TRC, a segment of the population argued for a war crimes tribunal with the power to prosecute. “Public perceptions and expectations are of course a challenge to the TRC,” says Kwabo. “There are some people who believe there should be a war crimes court while others see the TRC as the way to go. We believe that we by now have assured the population that the TRC is part of the way forward.”

The Commission is now in the last stages of its two-year mandate. There have been a number of challenges along the way including lack of funding. The commission relies largely on donor funding from individual governments and organisation and lack of funds halted activities on several occasions until the International Contact Group on Liberia (ICGL) intervened. ICGL is comprised of a number of governments including the Liberian government and organisations such as ECOWAS, EU and UNDP.

“There were indications of having come to a dead end. We didn’t know where the process was going but when ICGL intervened and proposed the idea of a

working group things started to happen,” says Raphael Abiem, UNMIL Human Rights Officer. The TRC/ICGL working group, co-chaired by the TRC and UNMIL, was established in early 2007 and has since provided the Commission with extensive technical support in such fields as policy guidance and administration.

To date the Commission has collected close to 24,000 statements in Liberia and amongst Liberians in the Diaspora. When the nationwide public hearings close in July 2008, the Commission will have three months to complete an independent and accurate record summarizing the findings. The Commission will also recommend measures for national reconciliation. “The report will be presented to the government and we hope the government will look closely at the recommendations put forward in order not to repeat the bitter past,” says Kwabo. “It’s difficult to say now what such recommendations could be but the TRC may for instance recommend reparations to communities where individuals have deep physical or psychological scars as a result of the conflict. It can recommend institutional reform as national institutions played a key role in violations during the war.”

The final report will address essential questions as to what went wrong, what needs to change and how the people of Liberia can effect change. The report could serve as a roadmap for building a just society free from fear and intimidation. However, the success of the TRC depends on the support of the people and the government’s will to implement and institutionalise the recommendations. ♦

SIDA Grant For TRC

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) recently provided a grant of US\$1.1 million to further enhance the TRC process. “We’re encouraged about the progress that has taken place in the TRC during these past couple of months,” said Anders Ostman, Representative of the Swedish government, during an official signing ceremony. Ostman noted that the TRC

should provide Liberians with a chance to talk of what took place during the years of turmoil.

Toga McIntosh, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, remarked that continued support from partners is vital for the current momentum of the reconciliation process through the TRC. He thanked the Swedish government and donors and added that the ultimate challenge lies

with Liberians to make the TRC process work.

The Swedish grant will help strengthen essential TRC services such as national awareness activities, psychosocial counselling and security mechanisms for witnesses as well as research support towards completion of the final report.

Other donors to the TRC include the Danish government, EU, OSIWA, UNDP and USAID.

Armed Forces Take

By J. Wesley Washington

With the activation in December 2007 of its first three infantry companies, Alpha, Bravo and Charlie, the new Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) is all set to have its first battalion later this year.

Some 370 trained soldiers, dressed in crisp military uniforms and shining black boots to match, stood at "attention" on the grounds of the Barclay Training Center (BTC) to witness the presentation of the 'Guide-on' to their unit commanders by AFL's Command Officer-in-Charge, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Abdurrahman.

"The 'Guide-on' presented to your companies will serve as your rallying point in building a regimental unit line. They are to instill unit pride and comradeship in members of your respective companies. They are sacred and need to be treated as such," Maj.-Gen. Abdurrahman reminded the soldiers. Stressing the army core values of

loyalty, duty, respect, selfless sacrifice, integrity, honour and personal courage, he expressed confidence in the newly activated units to perform their duties well and to make Liberia proud.

"Loyalty entails that you bear true faith and allegiance to the Liberian Constitution, the army, the unit and other soldiers. Duty means fulfilling your obligation as a soldier. Respect, on the other hand, means treating people as they should be treated while selfless service means that you put the welfare of the nation, army, and your subordinates before your own. Honour ensures that you live up to the army values whereas integrity requires you to do what is right legally and morally. Personal courage demands you face fear, danger or adversity physically and morally," Maj.-Gen. Abdurrahman told the attentive audience.

The three Company

Commanders serving with the new AFL are drawn from the ECOWAS countries of Benin, Ghana and Nigeria. They have been seconded to serve as Captains and military mentors within the new AFL.

Over the next two years, a US private company, DynCorp, will assist with recruiting, vetting, training and equipping the new army of 2,000 soldiers, including 94 civil servants for the Defense Ministry. Although the strength was set initially at 4,000, the size of the new army was scaled down due to budgetary constraints. The recruitment and training of the AFL is behind schedule because of earlier funding difficulties, which have since been sorted out and the exercise has resumed at full speed.

More than four years after deployment in October 2003, the troop levels of the United Nations Mission in Liberia will begin to scale down marginally in 2008. This is linked to the achievement of a number of core benchmarks,



Shape

most of them relating to the security situation in the country as well as the region. The activation of at least a battalion within the restructured AFL and establishment of an Emergency Response Unit (ERU) within the Liberia National Police are crucial to this proposed drawdown.

The United States Ambassador to Liberia, Donald Booth, whose Government is underwriting the cost of the restructuring and training of the new armed forces, urged the activated companies to develop the reputation of their individual units and the new AFL. "Above all, your duty is to protect the people of Liberia; not just the borders or the Government, but the people and to respect the rights of the people," he said. "If you do that you will earn their respect and you will

have a proud tradition going forward." He pledged his Government's continued support to the development of the new army.

The Deputy Commander of Military Operations of the United States/Africa Command (US-AFRICOM), Navy Vice Admiral Robert G. Moeller, Special Guest at the activation ceremony, noted that the establishment of the first three companies of the new AFL is an important step for Liberia's security and stability as UNMIL begins its gradual drawdown. "The activation of these units is an example of the outstanding partnership that our nations enjoy together; a partnership that demonstrates the commitment of both nations to security cooperation and assistance in Africa," Vice Admiral Moeller said.

Minister of Defence Brownie J. Samukai reiterated the government's desire to ensure that the new AFL is professionally developed through training both locally and abroad. "The way forward is to ensure that what is being built by the United States through the Security Sector Reform programme will be supported and sustained by the Liberian Government in due course. We want to make sure that they have the necessary logistical support so that they will perform their duties unhindered," he stressed.

AFL's first set of Initial Entry Training Class of 106 soldiers graduated in November 2006. This was followed by Advanced Individual Training for the group. Thereafter, 48 officers proceeded on to Basic Officers Course after which 11 were selected to attend the Officers Candidates School where they graduated in March 2007. Nine of them were later commissioned in May 2007.

Since then eight Non-Commissioned Officers have undergone further training in Germany while another eight officers have proceeded to the United States for the Infantry, Military Police and Supply Specialist Basic Officers Course. Twelve others have qualified as Military Police. In addition, 19 soldiers have qualified as medics and have teamed up with doctors at the John F. Kennedy Medical Centre to enhance their practical knowledge.

On 11 January 2008, 485 soldiers, 17 of them women, graduated from the Third Initial Entry Training Class after eight weeks of intensive military training. As of February, the strength of the new army is 1,131 personnel -- 11 officers, 34 non-commissioned officers (NCOs), 1,046 soldiers and 40 members of the AFL band -- a little over half of the projected figure to become the first core elements of the targeted 2,000-strong new AFL. Some of these officers and NCOs are currently undergoing military training in China, Germany, Nigeria and the United States. ♦



AFL's Command Officer-in-Charge Maj.-Gen. Abdurrahman presents "Guide-on" to a Company Commander

Security Sector Reform (SSR-Dyncorps)



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

All-female Class Graduates

By Sulaiman Momodu

Liberia's first all-female class of police officers has graduated from the Liberia Police Academy in the Paynesville suburb of Monrovia. The training of the 105 females, with support from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), is a significant step to achieve better gender representation in the Liberia National Police (LNP).

The new female police officers were elated to receive their certificates from President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf last December after completing basic police training from the special educational support programme for female candidates. The educational programme was launched in January 2007 to give the opportunity to Liberian women between 18-35 years who were interested in joining the LNP but did not meet the requisite qualification.

"Our new development agenda has as its core peace and security and the rule of law...whatever we do will depend on whether we can keep the peace. So the first pillar of our development agenda rests on your shoulders," said President Johnson Sirleaf. She called on the new officers to exhibit what she described as "the three Cs; good character, credibility and confidence" and urged the officers to ensure the '3Cs' values are embodied in everything

they do.

Thanking all the stakeholders who had made the recruitment and training possible, the Liberian President admitted that more needs to be done to make the police more professional. She expressed satisfaction at the increasing involvement of Liberian women in nation building and commended the new officers for their patriotism in enlisting into the police in order to ensure the safety of lives and property. "We look forward to these new entrants into the police force to be a shining example of what the new Liberia is all about."

UNMIL Force Commander Lt.-Gen. Chikadibia Isaac Obiakor congratulated the female officers and reminded them that the Liberian citizens hold them in high esteem: "You have enlisted to offer your service to the people of Liberia in line with the special training given you. I urge you to further the cause of good governance in Liberia by conducting yourselves in line with the tenets of professionalism and the principles of democratic policing." He pointed out that female police officers have proven to be effective in handling cases of sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated mainly against women and children, a problem rampant in Liberia. "UNMIL will not remain silent on this matter; we have therefore formed a strong partnership with the Liberian Government

and other stakeholders to address this menace."

Liberia's Solicitor General, Counsellor-at-Law Tiawan Gongloe administered the oath to the new officers and noted that there can be no security without respect for the rule of law. "The foundation for peace and security in this country is respect for the rule of law. And the only institution under our system of government that is responsible for ensuring that there is respect for the rule of law is the Police force," he reminded the new graduates.

The completion of 'Class 32' brings to 356 the number of females that have been recruited into the Liberian Police, representing nearly 10 per cent. The programme is in support of the Convention on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and Security Council Resolution 1325.

On behalf of her colleagues, a member of the class said their graduation was a clear demonstration that nothing is impossible with determination. "Let us not relent but forge ahead for there are many challenges that are ahead of us... and let us prove to the world that we are capable of keeping peace in our nation and other nations." The new officers will be deployed in various police units throughout the country. ♦

“It could be your mother, your daughter...”

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

As rape continues to be the most frequently committed serious crime in Liberia, even four years after the civil war ended, the Liberian government and UNMIL have teamed up to launch a nationwide campaign against all forms of sexual violence. The campaign ‘Stop rape - It could be your mother, your daughter, your sister, your niece’ is aimed at tackling one of the most serious challenges facing post-conflict Liberia.

During the 14-years of conflict, thousands of women and girls had fallen victim to rape and sexual violence, used as a weapon of fear and humiliation by all warring parties. Today, despite numerous attempts by the government, the UN family in Liberia and NGOs to tackle the issue of rape and sexual violence, incidents continue to make headlines. The nationwide anti-rape campaign was launched in December 2007 following a call by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to step up

the efforts.

The campaign will travel nationwide for six months. Roadside billboards, radio jingles, concerts and flyers are part of it, highlighting that rape by law is a punishable crime, a crime traumatising the victim for life and a crime which concerns the whole of society.

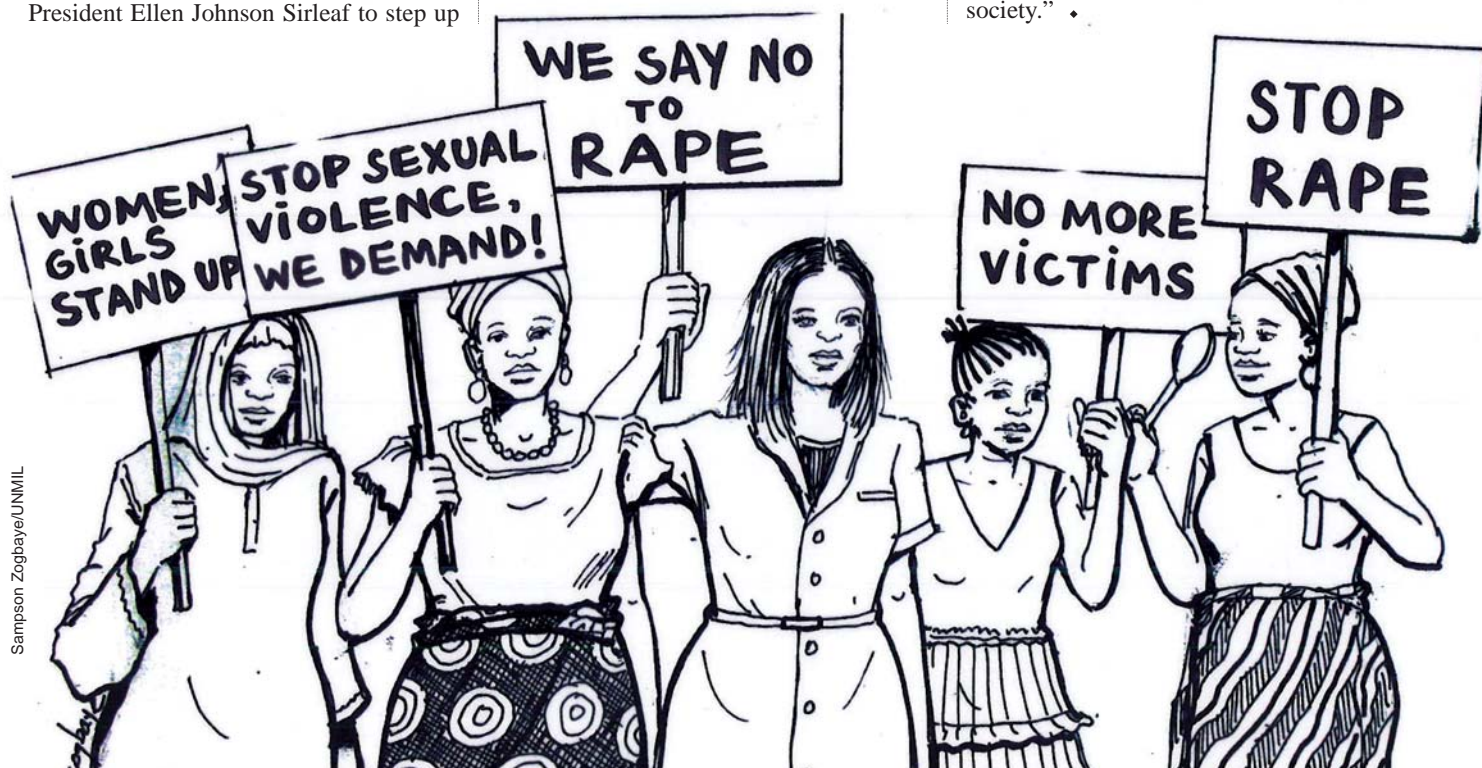
“A lot of people seem to have the idea that it is not their daughter or their relative who is affected. But we need to consider that we’re all Liberians and what affects one affects all. If we don’t understand this fact then it will be difficult to change, to move forward,” says Laurence Bropleh, Liberia’s Minister of Information, Culture and Tourism.

It is widely believed that many rape cases never get reported but stay within the families of the victims although the number of reported rape cases climbed to 425 in 2007 from 351 in 2006. During the war perpetrators of sexual violence enjoyed impunity but Liberia’s new government is strongly committed to reversing the pattern of injustice. However, the

country’s judicial system is severely hampered due to lack of capacity to follow through rape cases and as a result many cases of rape and sexual violence are settled within the families involved.

Another impediment to fighting sexual violence is the stigma, forcing many victims to conceal their plight. “People need to understand that when somebody is raped it is not a crime they’ve committed, it’s a crime committed by the perpetrator. We need to welcome the victim amongst us,” says Bropleh.

The soaring rates of rape can only be tackled when every man, woman and child in Liberia is aware of the damage sexual violence does to society. A wholesome functional society cannot be realised if women and girls live in constant fear of sexual assault. The anti-rape campaign is a step towards breaking with the culture of silence and lack of awareness surrounding the issue of rape. “We need to change our mindset, our attitudes when it comes to rape,” says Bropleh. “What is pivotal now is major awareness in every sphere of our society.” ♦





SRSO opens UN

State Authority Extended

By Sulaiman Momodu

After years of civil conflict during which state officials and local government authorities abandoned their offices, leaving most parts of the country devoid of government presence, state authority has now been extended throughout Liberia, even though its consolidation remains a key challenge.

Since the deployment of UN peacekeepers four years ago, UNMIL's Civil Affairs (CA) - the largest civilian substantive component of the mission - has been working to ensure that government extends its control to the counties. Civil Affairs Officers say ex-combatants were in control of key government installations, including police stations, court houses, immigration and customs offices, banks

and post office facilities etc. In order to assist to restore state authority, the section and the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) agreed on the criteria, modality and methodology for taking the government back to the people, taking into account security considerations, availability of basic services and the increased rate of returnees to their areas of origin. They point out that before, government could not exercise its authority or control over some areas. "Civil Affairs officers were deployed under very difficult conditions to all the 15 counties in Liberia, in some areas even before disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants had taken place," notes Civil Affairs Officer Gilbert Ngesu.

"Transformation is always a rough time...we will do great injustice to our conscience should we fail to highly com-

mend the UN and the international community who came to our aid for peace and stability to return to our country when we were actually in dire need," says Levi J. Banny, Assistant Minister/Legal Affairs at the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Over the past few years, Civil Affairs Officers have been assigned to government ministries, autonomous agencies and corporations to advise on policies and good governance practices on a day-to-day basis. In close coordination with UN agencies, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and others, they have been working on issues of local government elections, boundary delimitation exercises, decentralization, in addition to assisting to build the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) and local government authorities. Generally, priorities vary from county to county. In Nimba County for instance, the focus is



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

UNMIL QIP funded Bureau of Immigration office in Lofa

ed, But...

more on land and property as well as inter-religious and ethnic disputes. In Grand Bassa, Sinoe, and Bomi the focus is on plantations, and in other counties where ex-combatants are many, their local integration is the priority.

Civil Affairs officers also assist local communities to identify development projects. Throughout Liberia, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has assisted communities with small-scale projects. For its part, UNMIL has addressed some of Liberia's pressing needs through its Quick Impact Projects. With the UN Peacebuilding Fund committing US\$ 15 million to Liberia, it is expected that more projects will now be designed to consolidate gains and sustain the country's peace.

A key area in strengthening state authority is ensuring that relevant policies

and structures are legislated. Civil Affairs played a key role in helping the government to develop policies in the ministries of agriculture, education, youth and sports, lands, mines and energy and in state corporations such as the Public Procurement and Concessions, Forestry Development Authority, among others. Additionally, CA played a key role in supporting Liberia's admission into the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme through developing relevant documentation and policy papers. Related to this is the collaboration between Civil Affairs and UNDP to support CSOs and the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs to draft an NGO Policy Guidelines for Liberia.

Civil Affairs Officer Ngesu says they have also engaged civil society actors, both at central and local levels, with CA field officers engaging CSOs on a regular basis, and have reported on gaps that need to be addressed. Civil Affairs officers engage community and traditional leaders, who form the bedrock of community organizations that define everyday cohesion and operations at village level. A key dividend of this approach has been the consolidation of local authority in addition to building a conflict sensitive early warning mechanism at community level, which is important in the context of current thinking that CSOs are a major thread in the tapestry that forms the peacemaking architecture.

Notwithstanding the gains made, challenges remain. County Superintendent of Grand Cape Mount County Catherine N. Watson Khasu says lack of accommodation for government workers, no communication facilities, inadequate vehicles, lack of employment opportunities for youths and vocational training facilities are some of the numerous challenges facing her county. "The line ministries have not come to stay in Robertsport (the county's capital) because of lack of accommodation. In this age of technology, how do you work when you have no computers and internet facilities? We are very grateful to the UN and other partners but we still need support."

Civil Affairs expert Abimbola Aina concurs. "We play a facilitating role to see that local authorities are better supported," she says, adding that there are still con-

straints that need to be addressed for local authorities to effectively function. Under the country support team frame work though, the "One UN" strategy is to support local development initiatives.

Liberians say one of the contributing factors to the country's 14-year long conflict was the over-centralization of Monrovia and the marginalization of the counties. To mitigate this, the Liberian government, in collaboration with partners, is currently engaged in nationwide consultations with various segments of the society to develop county-specific development agendas.

As Liberians enjoy relative peace, one of the major areas of intervention is inter-ethnic land and property disputes "If peace has to be sustained, one of the areas to focus on is the potential conflict resulting from land disputes. There has to be a permanent mechanism to resolve such disputes," says Civil Affairs Officer, Adriano Cassandra. He adds that part of the problem is linked to lack of clear delineation of administrative units in the counties with poorly defined boundaries, newly created multiple administrative units, lack of archives and a weak judicial system. The good news is that government is at the verge of establishing a Land Commission, which will strictly deal with land and property rights issues.

Assistant Minister Banny is very concerned about issues of rule of law. "We still have 'trial by ordeal' (torture to make a suspect confess a wrong doing) in the counties. In 1916, it was abolished and declared unconstitutional and illegal but people continue to practice it to this day. We have to sensitize our people to respect rule of law." In February this year, violence ensued following a murder incident in Tapita, Nimba County, leaving the UNMIL-QIP funded police station burnt down. The incident also claimed the life of a woman who died in the inferno.

Superintendent Watson-Khasu stresses on the way forward: "One of our greatest problems is the mindset of our people. We will really appreciate if the UN and partners will help us in this regard - encouraging Liberians to take responsibility for their own development and destiny." ♦



World Health

Revamping the Health

By J. Wesley Washington

As Liberia moves from the emergency phase to recovery and development, the Ministry of Health & Social Welfare is developing a comprehensive National Health Policy and Strategic Plan. In collaboration with health sector partners, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the Ministry launched the Basic Package of Health Services (BPHS) during Liberia's first ever National Health Fair recently. The three-day programme held under the theme "Invest in Health, Build a Safer Future" was designed to create awareness of all aspects of the role the Ministry plays

in coordinating activities to improve the health of the Liberian people.

Although responsible for coordinating health care activities in the country, the health ministry has been hamstrung by the lack of financial and human resources. However, as the new government strives to raise the living standards of the population, the Ministry and its partners have begun coordinating health sector activities aimed at making Liberia's health services more efficient and accessible.

The launch of the BPHS serves as the cornerstone of the National Health Plan. It defines an integrated minimum package of standardized prevention and treatment services that will be adapted for each level of the health system -- community, health

clinic, health centre, county hospital, and tertiary hospital. It will be introduced incrementally to become functional in 70 per cent of existing health facilities by the end of 2008, up from the current 40 per cent.

Liberia's Deputy Health Minister and Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Bernice Dahn, says BPHS standardizes the package of services, promotes redistribution to ensure greater access to essential health services throughout the country and defines the minimum set of staff with appropriate skills for each facility level. "By carefully prioritizing our services, we plan to guarantee their availability to each and every Liberian who seeks health services at the Health Ministry's facilities," she said. The



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

h Organization's booth during the National Health fair

Sector

Ministry also expects that NGOs and other faith-based health institutions will adopt the Basic Package as their guide to provide health care to the populations they serve.

Based on the principles of primary health care, the BPHS aims to make services available at the peripheral levels of the health system. The management of health services will be progressively decentralized so that responsibility for implementing them rests at the county levels. BPHS provides the basis for operational plans, defines the technical and management competencies required at each facility level and guides the formation of an essential drug list which can be costed to estimate the financial resources required for implementation.

WHO Officer-in-Charge, Dr. Fussum Daniel, said during the launch of the BPHS that it was intended to serve as the foundation for the provision of basic and quality health services to the population of this country. "Indeed the hosting of the National Health Fair and the launch of the Basic Package of Health Services are considered very vital to the WHO as both are expected to contribute to the attainment of the health related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Liberia," he noted.

"The BPHS, which are standardized minimum services that include both preventive and curative services, designed to improve maternal, newborn and child health as well as communicable diseases, will be delivered free of charge in the initial stages, until we can restore our nation's health," Liberia's Vice President,

world. HIV prevalence rate is estimated at 5.2 percent while 7 per cent of children under five are severely underweight. There is just one doctor for every 28,000 Liberians.

In her annual message to the National Legislature recently, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf highlighted the plight of the country's health sector. "Today we have 122 doctors serving throughout the country of which 51 are Liberians against a need of 842. There are 668 nurses serving the population against a need exceeding 4,000 persons," she noted.

The National Health Plan outlines the objectives, strategies and resources to reform the health sector to effectively deliver quality health and social welfare services to the people of Liberia and operates within the framework of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy. The opera-



J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL

Health & Social Welfare Minister Dr. Walter Gwenigale takes HIV test

Dr. Joseph N. Boakai, said.

Liberia's 14-year civil war all but destroyed the country's health services. While the revitalization of the health sector has begun, it is far from reaching its pre-war status and remains fragmented, uneven and heavily dependent on programmes implemented by local and international non-governmental organizations.

Liberia's infant mortality rate today is 157/1,000 (compared to sub-Saharan average of 102), under-five/child mortality rate is 235/1,000 (sub-Saharan average of 171) and maternal mortality ratio is 580/100,000, among the highest in the

tional and integrated framework for implementing the plan is based on four key components -- Basic Package of Health Services; Human Resources for Health; Infrastructure Development; and Support Systems.

A proposed four-year budget for the National Plan is put at US\$283 million as part of the government's multi-year planning. The current budget of the Health Ministry is approximately US\$10 (including funding for the John F Kennedy hospital) and represents 8 per cent of the total national budget of US\$129 million. It is expected to increase to US\$33 million by 2010. ♦

Mountains of Waste

By Sulaiman Momodu

Clearing mountains of rubbish that overwhelm the capital, Monrovia, has been a daunting challenge faced by the authorities ever since the restoration of peace in 2003. "Cleaning the city of rubbish is a big struggle—

gle...the crisis in Monrovia devastated everything," says Monrovia City Mayor, Ophelia Hoff Saytumah.

The piles of rubbish, sometimes mixed with human excrement thrown away in plastic bags known as 'flying toilets', pose a serious health hazard. As the city authorities lack the capacity to deal with the menace, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has been assisting the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) to clear the sprawling rubbish from markets and

other public places. "We could not have cleared the backlog of rubbish that had accumulated during the crisis if UNMIL had not come to our assistance through its Quick Impact Projects which lasted for about three months," commends the City Mayor.

UNICEF has also rendered assistance for about a year. Notwithstanding such assistance though, the scenes of rubbish ferociously re-appeared in public places with scavengers including children frequently seen salvaging whatever they could from the foul-smelling waste. Over the past few years, poor waste management had led to the contamination of food and water sources leading to outbreaks of diseases such as cholera.

Why is waste management becoming a perennial



problem in Monrovia? Before the war, Monrovia had a population of about 400,000 people. The war uprooted thousands of people from the countryside and many of them ended up in the capital. Today an estimated 1.5 million people inhabit the capital, leading to large quantities of refuse generated on a daily basis.

Last April, the World Bank came to the aid of the City Corporation with a project to develop a basic solid waste collection system. "The solid waste collection program forms part of the World Bank's Emergency Infrastructure Project. The rudimentary system is designed to alleviate at least some of the problems associated with the accumulation of waste in the city. It aims to improve sanitation and living conditions in Monrovia," says Bronwyn Grieve, the Bank's Infrastructure and Basic Services Consultant.

Waste management is a very expensive undertaking. The WB has spent US\$ 3 million to date with an expected US\$ 4 million planned for 2008 – 2009. Under the World Bank-funded project, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has handed over equipment valued at over US\$ 900,000 including 120 skip containers located around the city, eight Ford trucks, and spare parts to the

Corporation. The project also includes paying contractors engaged in the collection and disposal of waste.

The rudimentary waste collection system involves contractors going out and clearing stockpiles of rubbish, followed by a daily collection and disposal of up to 30 per cent of the waste generated in a day. As of early January, a staggering 95,000 cubic metres of waste have been cleared from the capital. "Considering where we are coming from...we are coming from almost nothing...we are very grateful to all those who have assisted us over the years. With our capacity we cannot clear the waste," says the City Mayor.

Today, both old and young Liberians

The piles of rubbish, sometimes mixed with human excrement thrown away in plastic bags known as 'flying toilets', pose a serious health hazard. As the city authorities lack the capacity to deal with the menace, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has been assisting the Monrovia City Corporation (MCC) to clear the sprawling rubbish from markets and other public places.

could be seen shoveling rubbish into yellow-painted skip containers. The rubbish is then loaded in trucks and carted away through the busy traffic to the Fiama dumpsite. Hitherto, the dumpsite was poorly managed but the WB project has helped to improve it. "I am glad to be cleaning my city and also getting some money that enables me to take care of my family," explains one of the workers. "Clearing the rubbish and helping my country to be clean is far better than engaging in crime," says the 40-year-old father of four.

Further to rubbish, categorized as solid waste, another herculean task the city corporation confronts is that of liquid waste

management. It involves ensuring that city residents have hygienic toilet facilities both at home and in public places, and other wastes from places like funeral homes, hospitals and industries are not located or disposed off in ways that will contaminate drinking water sources. By all indications, dealing with Monrovia's liquid and solid wastes requires huge funding which the city corporation lacks.

In addition to lack of funds and technical staff, the proper use of skip containers is posing yet another challenge. Already 10 skip containers have been reportedly damaged by users lighting up fire in the bins despite clearly written warning: "No lighting of fire!" The authorities say the public is being sensitized on the need to change their attitudes - not to indiscriminately dispose of waste and not to put fire in the bins.

The WB solid waste programme has been extended to June 2009. So, how will the system be sustained? "We are looking for alternative means of financing; we are doing costing so that our government knows exactly how much we need," says the Mayor. "The programme that we are doing now is only addressing about 30 per cent of solid waste. So for the next fiscal year we need about US\$1.8 million to sustain the programme given that we now have trucks and bins. If we have to go up to 100 per cent, we need about US\$ 6 million which means we have to buy more equipment." The current waste disposal site at Fiama is located in the capital but arrangements are being made to move it to Whein town on the outskirts of the city. The WB is funding the development and initial operation of the Whein site as an interim solution until a more permanent landfill site is found and funding for its development identified.

As efforts continue to keep Monrovia clean with UN peacekeepers assisting from time to time, the International Labour Organization is also involved in the effort by working with communities. A study is to be undertaken to explore the possibility of levying taxes on households and commercial enterprises that generate waste as is the standard practice in other parts of the world. Waste producers sharing the burden may go a long way in solving Monrovia's perennial waste problem. ♦



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

“Liberia can become a

A former head of the Danish development agency, DANIDA, and until recently Denmark's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, **Ellen Margrethe Løj** has assumed duty as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Co-ordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia. In an interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, she discusses the priorities of UNMIL, reiterates women's ability to tackle tough jobs, and urges Liberians to take charge of the nation's destiny.

Let's start with your new role. Although you have worked at the UN representing your country, this is the first time you are serving the UN as an insider. How do you look at your new role?

The transition from outsider to insider translates into two challenges. One, and it is the most important one, is to work together with everybody in UNMIL towards transforming all the words and ideas that I have been espousing over the years into reality on the ground. That is a challenge, because it is easier to draft a speech telling people what they are supposed to do than to actually do it. So that's a huge challenge.

The second challenge when coming from the outside is to get accustomed to a very different bureaucratic system. Even though I have been in a bureaucracy for many years, it is a small one compared to the United Nations. The rules and regulations are different and present challenges, especially in the beginning.

Liberia is in a phase of transition from war to reconstruction and development. How do you think your previous career in development and as the head of the Danish development agency, DANIDA, would help in your role as the head of UNMIL?

My background in development work is an advantage, especially so in Liberia's current phase. However, besides development, I have also been involved in security and political issues, for instance when I represented Denmark on the Security Council and when I was posted to Israel during the first Gulf War.

This combination, I hope, will be an

advantage to the Mission and to the UN team as a whole. The challenge for Liberia today is not in establishing the peace, but consolidating the peace. It means that the United Nations, not only UNMIL, but the whole UN family must contribute to that effort. We also have to prepare the ground for eventually leaving the long term development activities to the government and the development agencies. In this peace-building phase it is critical that all the actors work together in synergy. The sum is so much greater than the parts.

So in your view, what are UNMIL's priorities at this moment?

Our task in UNMIL is to implement the mandate given to us by the Security Council. It is very clear from that mandate and also from the last discussions at the Council - when the Mission's mandate was extended in September last year - that we must continue to assist in both keeping the peace and consolidating the peace. That is in parallel with us performing our role in relation to security in the broader sense of the word. We must assist the government in building the capacity to gradually take over the responsibility for national security by training and developing the Liberia National Police, as well as creating the new Armed Forces of Liberia.

We must also support the much needed reforms in the whole rule of law sector, with specific emphasis on the justice sector. There will not be security unless trained policemen are on the streets and are able to arrest suspected criminals. But that is not the end of the story. Those arrested must have access to due process, and they must be tried in courts. And,

there must be correctional facilities to keep those convicted in humane conditions. These are all intricately connected.

It is also important for the Mission, together with the whole UN family, to look at recovery measures and governance issues because they also relate heavily to the ability of the country to sustain the peace. Peace, security and development are three interlinked and intertwined challenges for Liberia.

With the civil war over and peace holding, Liberia is no longer in the news, and the world's attention is focused on various other global hotspots. Does Liberia risk being ignored by the international community at this critical stage of transition from war to reconstruction?

That is what we sometimes call the “CNN effect.” There is a tendency for the media to focus on crises and then move on once they are no longer a hot topic, and to



prosperous country...”

ignore the difficulties faced in reconstruction and nation-building. But, Liberia is lucky to have Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President. She is a good, hard working and committed leader, who has a vision for Liberia. She does not miss an opportunity to remind the international community of Liberia's continued struggles to recover from the effects of the war that devastated the nation. Her interaction with the international community helps spread the message that work still needs to be done in Liberia.

All of us in the UN family, be it UNMIL, Agencies, Programmes or affiliates like the World Bank, have the responsibility to highlight the challenges facing Liberia - whether they catch the headlines or not. We must attract the attention of as many players as possible to help take

Liberia forward. And we have been lucky with the good number of world leaders and heads of international institutions that have visited Liberia in the past two years and in the process brought positive attention to Liberia.

You were the co-Chair of the General Assembly Working Committee on the Peacebuilding Commission, and now Liberia is benefiting from the Peacebuilding Fund. How best can the funds

made available to Liberia be utilized?

Together with my colleague from Tanzania, I was a facilitator appointed by the President of the General Assembly to negotiate the resolution on the establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission.

The Peacebuilding Fund is to be used to finance activities in countries that are on the Peacebuilding Commission's agenda. But the fund is under the Secretary-General's purview and there is a second window under which the Secretary-General can authorize funds for use in countries that are not on the Peacebuilding Commission's agenda. That is the case with Liberia.

There have been close consultations between the United Nations and the Liberian government, in this case led by the Minister of Internal Affairs, and a framework has been drafted in which priority areas will be identified for the utilization of the US\$15 million that has been earmarked for Liberia. Mostly, the funds will be used for relatively short-term but critical interventions focusing on reconciliation – so very very important in enabling a war-scarred nation to move forward.

A steering group is to be set up in February and the proposal is that it will be co-chaired by the Minister of Internal Affairs and UNMIL, and will comprise other government representatives as well as representatives of international partners, bilateral and multilateral, NGOs, civil society and business so that we could have a wide variety of views on the priority areas.

There are not many women heading peacekeeping operations, which are often a tough job to do. As a woman, do you feel disadvantaged in any way? Or, could it be the opposite?

Unfortunately, not many women are in leadership positions in peacekeeping operations and I think I'm the only Special Representative of the Secretary-General at the moment. Luckily, there are more and more deputies and I'm very lucky that

we have a female deputy in UNMIL. But if your premise is that women cannot do tough jobs, I totally disagree with you. It has been proven over and over again that women can accomplish tough tasks just as well as men. I think the United Nations should get more women in leadership positions. There are many capable women out there.

I was asked by a journalist, at my first press conference here in Monrovia, whether it is difficult for me to work with so many men in the Mission. And I responded by saying that I have been working in environments that have been rather male dominated throughout my career; so I suggested to the journalist that he asks some of my male colleagues if it was difficult for them to have a female boss - it may be more difficult for my male colleagues than it is for me (laughs).

If you were to tell Liberians something on the way forward, if you had a message to the people of Liberia, what would it be?

I would urge each and every Liberian to do their utmost to contribute to further consolidation of the peace in Liberia and to actively engage in Liberia's development. I'm convinced that Liberia is on the right track and I am impressed by what has happened in Liberia since I visited the first time round, and that was only less than two years ago.

The international community can assist and support the country but it is for the Liberians themselves to take charge and move the country forward. I am convinced that Liberia can succeed. It will take hard work but Liberia can become a prosperous country. It has land, it has water, it has abundant and diverse natural resources. So if all Liberians unite with the government and the politicians to bring Liberia forward, they will succeed and they have the support of the international community.

Thank you.

Youth in Volunteer Initiative

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Mayoe Kellen is attending to a small girl in the children's ward at Phebe hospital in Bong county. "The girl was brought in with severe malaria. She's better now, at least she can open her eyes," says the young nurse while injecting medicine into the girl's arm.

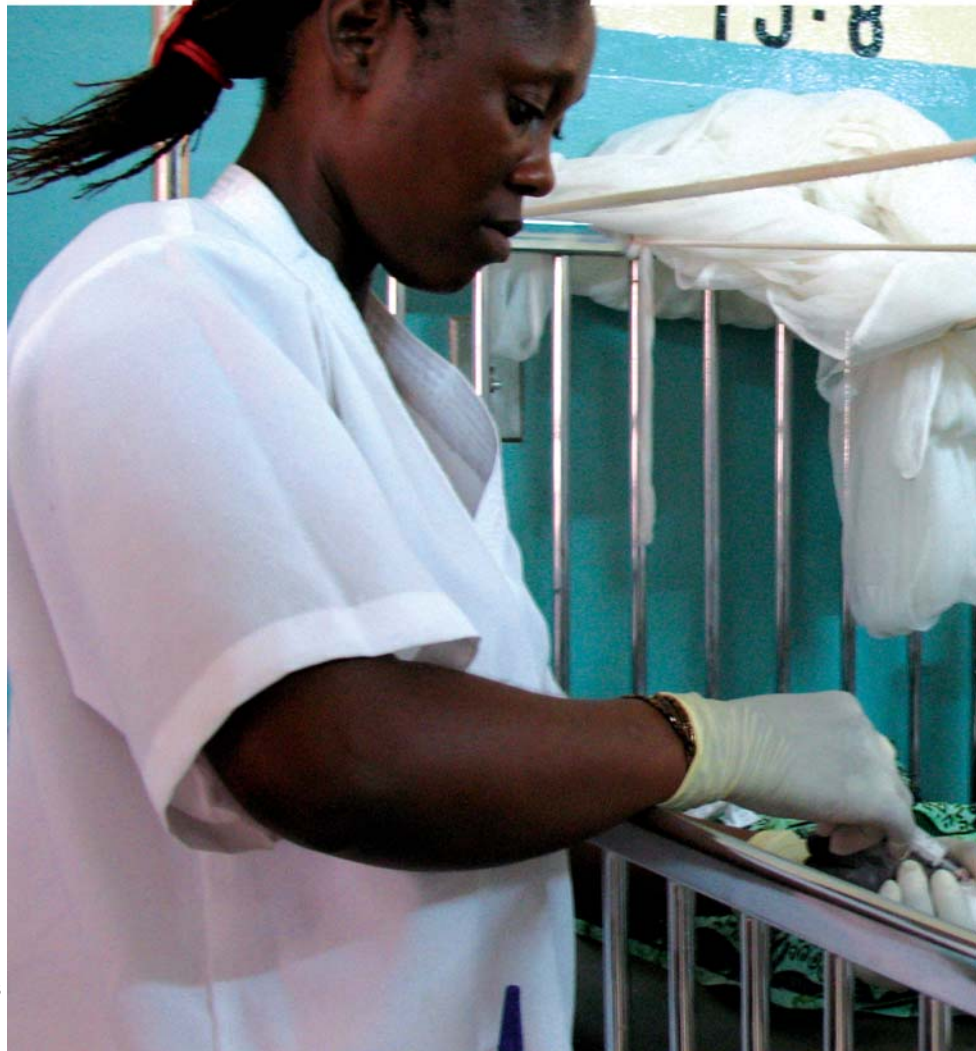
Although Kellen seems at ease pushing her medicines trolley through the green corridors, it is just her second week as a volunteer nurse at Phebe hospital. "I've had the dream of becoming a nurse since high school. I want to save lives and I want to serve my country, that is why I chose to volunteer," says Kellen, who graduated from nursing school in the summer of 2007. Together with other recent graduates, Kellen is part of the new National Youth Volunteer Service (NYVS) spearheaded by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and supported by UNDP and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV).

NYVS is a two-year pilot programme aimed at enabling the youth to contribute to the development process in Liberia. As volunteers, university graduates support both education and health sectors which face an acute need for teachers and practitioners. Through this, the volunteers will also gain practical skills enhancing their opportunity to access the labour market. By way of their work in the field, the youth will promote the importance of volunteerism in the development of post-conflict Liberia. "In fact the objectives are manifold," says Etmonia Tarpeh, Minister of Youth and Sports. "The programme is also a way of building linkages between the various cultures of Liberia since the

volunteers will be deployed outside their home county. During the war people got accustomed to defining themselves by ethnic grouping. We hope that this initiative will also help stem this divide and instead make people see themselves fully as Liberians."

Initially the idea of a national volunteer corps was launched by the youth themselves. In 2005 more than 150 youth dele-

gates from throughout Liberia met at a week-long conference together with government and development partners to produce a national youth policy intended to address the many pressing problems facing the youth. The conference discussed the looming hardships facing the growing population of youth in Liberia where 15-24-year olds comprise a significant portion of the population, with those under the age of 15 averaging over 40 per cent. "The reasons for failure of suc-



cessive regimes in this country to adequately address issues of young people within a national policy framework, is equal to their failure to address the historical-political socio-cultural and socio-economic contradictions that have long since hurt our nation,” said the President of the Federation of Liberian Youth, George G. Wisner at the 2005 conference. A substantial outcome of the conference was the National Youth Policy Framework which today operates as a guideline for government policies and includes a formulation of the need for a national volunteer corps.

At this stage 67 volunteers serve in four of Liberia’s 15 counties. Students who graduated between 2005-2007 have been encouraged to apply for NYVS and suitable applicants attended a three-week induction training course in Monrovia in January and February 2008. The training helped participants to become familiar with major documents approved by government such as the National Youth Policy Framework, the Millennium Development Goals and the National Human

Development Report. They were briefed by local and international educators on civic education, leadership and project management and they discussed their upcoming volunteer fields of education and health. Furthermore, the volunteers-to-be had a taste of what to expect during a few days of volunteer activities in communities around Monrovia.

At the end of the training participants were assigned their locations. Like Kellen, Anthony Gweisah has been deployed in Bong county. “I’m learning everyday coming across different cultures and different languages,” says Gweisah, who is from Nimba county and majored in sociology in 2007. Gweisah also volunteers in the field of health but on an outreach basis. Together with the county health team and NGOs, he visits rural communities to raise awareness on pressing issues such as HIV/AIDS, malaria and the importance of safe drinking water. “I find that people respond well when we explain what we do and why we do it,” says Gweisah. “The training course was very helpful in that

way. I learned how to approach communities, how to work together and never impose. This vision really helps me in remembering that volunteering means serving people for our common development.”

A supervisor in the field serves as the focal point of support for the volunteers. The supervisor acts as a link between the programme and the communities ensuring awareness and deployment opportunities. The volunteers receive a monthly allowance of US\$100 to cover food, transport and the token fee they pay to live with host families in the various communities. The youth are deployed for a period of six months during which they are expected to develop micro-project proposals based on their experience. The projects should be rooted in the communities and evolve around youth, governance and volunteerism and the best proposals will receive implementation grants.

UNDP and UNV are funding the two-year pilot programme which is seen as the initial stages of what is to become a permanent structure. Tarpeh explains that NYVS is a process with a beginning and not an end. “This will eventually become a national programme and not only catering to university students but to all youth. It is not enough to include the youth in decision making, they must also be out there helping to actively create the climate they want to advocate for,” says the Minister of Youth and Sports.

A NYVS steering committee meets quarterly acting as the guiding body to the programme. The steering committee additionally receives volunteer performance evaluations from the supervisors in the field and they approve grants for micro-projects proposals. The committee is chaired by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and members include ministries of Health, Education, Planning as well as UNDP, UNV and academic institutions.

The next batch of volunteers will be deployed in September 2008 to additional counties throughout Liberia. An estimated 200 youth are expected on board for the second round. Meanwhile Kellen, Gweisah and the others will pave the way for what could become a groundbreaking spirit amongst the youth to work together for a better Liberia. ♦



Rebecca Bamor-Adae/UNMIL



Women Surge Ahead

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

Leadership positions -- in politics, commerce or other areas -- have remained beyond the grasp of the majority of women throughout the world. Women's participation in managerial and administrative positions is around 33 per cent in the developed world, 15 per cent in Africa, and 13 per cent in Asia and the Pacific. Only 1 per cent of the world's assets are in the name of women. Nonetheless, the good news is that 12 female heads of state have been appointed or elected since 2000. Is the tide turning?

In Liberia, the inauguration of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as President in 2006 was path-breaking, bestowing the war-ravaged nation the honour of producing the first democratically elected female President on the African continent. Her election marked a decisive turn in the history of Liberia and prompted a surge of women in political leadership positions.

Liberian women played key roles in achieving peace during the 14-year conflict. Well-coordinated grassroots movements amongst women staged demonstrations and brought warring parties to the negotiating table. During the elections in 2005 Liberian women voted in great num-

bers and now comprise a significant constituency.

So what better place than Liberia to host the International Colloquium on Women's Empowerment and Leadership scheduled to take place in 2009?

More than 100 women from around the world gathered in the Liberian capital, Monrovia, for the preparatory meeting of the Colloquium in January. The Colloquium, co-hosted by the President of Liberia and Madam Tarja Halonen, President of Finland, is intended to empower women at various levels to become effective leaders and thereby positively impact development in their coun-



The election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf electrified Liberian women

tries and abroad.

“The Colloquium is not intended for women only to develop and use their capacity. The Colloquium is also intended for men to realise that 50 percent of the world’s population is out there waiting to be engaged,” said President Johnson Sirleaf as she welcomed participants to the four-day long preparatory meeting. “African women, like women elsewhere, are now claiming their space, and a liberated society is one which uses all talents of both men and women and a society that promotes justice and equal opportunity.”

The first two days of the preparatory meeting were dedicated to a number of training workshops. Participants, who included dignitaries, representatives from the UN family in Liberia and grassroots and community leaders, engaged in skills enhancing activities such as looking at methodologies for leadership, understand-

ing one’s rights and becoming familiar with examples of countries like Rwanda and Finland where women constitute nearly 50 percent of political leadership.

One workshop entitled ‘Women who will not wait’ attracted an impressive crowd. Participants were asked to identify women in their own communities whom they see as leaders. Everyone quickly singled out individuals attributing virtues such as ‘innovative’, ‘good listener’, ‘determined’, ‘caring’ and ‘willing to accept her mistakes’. The exercise was meant to recognize the numerous women at the community level who daily strive to make their communities a better place to be but receive little recognition.

“These many women are drivers of our communities. The women who will not wait don’t sit around to wait for donors from abroad because it takes Liberians to make Liberia. They don’t wait for govern-

ment either. They demand accountability and transparency from government but what these women really do, what we all need to do, is to create a sense of urgency amongst ourselves. Become stronger and louder together,” said the facilitator of the workshop, Julia Duncan Cassell, who is also the Superintendent of Grand Bassa County.

The Colloquium will be a Liberia-focused event rooted in the experience of women’s significant leadership roles during and after the conflict. However, it is an international undertaking, engaging women worldwide on the need for inclusiveness in decision making processes in order to achieve sound social and economic development for all.

The broad organisational structure of the Colloquium evolves around an international steering committee comprised of representatives from the seven continents. National steering committees work locally, tasked with public outreach, logistics and sustaining the momentum of what is intended to become an influential event with hundreds of participants attending from all over the world.

Two days of workshops, presentations and discussions culminated in planning for the 2009 Colloquium. It was agreed that the guiding principles of the Colloquium are leadership development, women’s empowerment, and peace and security. The UN Security Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, adopted in 2000, will serve as the overarching framework for the Colloquium. The expected outcomes include developing a new concept of leadership emerging out of experiences of women in governance and establishment of sustainable mechanisms to document and follow-up on internationally agreed standards on gender equality and gender participation.

The International Colloquium on Women’s Empowerment and Leadership will take place in Monrovia 7-8 March 2009.

In Liberia the national steering committee of the Colloquium is comprised of the Ministries of Gender and Development and Foreign Affairs, UNMIL’s Office of the Gender Advisor, UN agencies, Programmes and Funds, academic institutions and women and youth groups. ♦

Eric Kandelstein/UNMIL

Libony: Liberia is endowed with vast swathes of rich agricultural land and abundant rainfall, yet over 50 per cent of rice, its staple food, is imported from other countries to feed the nation's three million plus population.

Currently, it is estimated that about 40 per cent of the country's population is food insecure. Malnutrition has contributed to over 20 per cent of children under five in rural areas being under weight or stunted.

Nearly three decades ago, riots broke out over the prospect of a hike in the price of rice, contributing subsequently to a coup plot and eventual assassination of President William R. Tolbert in 1980. Against the increase in the price of rice globally, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf earlier this year announced the reduction of US\$ 2 from a bag of imported rice. A bag of rice costs between US\$ 30 to US\$ 40 depending on the brand.

Individual perspectives vary for Liberia's unenviable food situation. "I think some Liberian men don't like to work but they like to eat and merry; some are lazy and only cultivate very small farms," says a young Liberian lady, adding, "In the area where I come from, women are the breadwinners while the men just idle around."

Following the restoration of peace, most farmers returned home from refugee and internally displaced camps to begin life anew but they face numerous challenges. Most of the country's livestock were killed and eaten during the war by fighting forces and most farmers returned with virtually nothing to begin agricultural activities, relying instead on the Liberian government, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations for assistance.

Liberia's Minister of Agriculture Dr. Christopher Toe admits that food sufficiency is a huge challenge but says the issue is being addressed. He points out that the past two years constituted an emergency period during which the government had to provide seed rice, planting materials, tools and other items to farmers. Last year, more than 2,000 metric tons of seed rice worth over US\$ 2 million was



brought in from Sierra Leone and distributed to farmers throughout the country. "Today, government buys what is produced from the farmers to distribute to other farmers as well as to sell the balance so that the purchasing programme, which provides farmers with income, is sustainable."

According to Minister Toe, for the first time in the history of Liberia, a Food and Agricultural Policy and Strategy is being discussed among stakeholders. A Food Security and Nutrition strategy has already been prepared and will soon be presented to the cabinet for approval.

Last year, the Ministry of Agriculture organised a trade fair in Tubmanburg, Bong County, in an effort to recognise the work of farmers. During the fair, over US\$ 30,000 was given out in prizes ranging from rice mills, generators and cash prizes of up to US\$ 2,500 per farmer. "Experts have shown that every successful growth effort in agriculture is four times more effective in reducing poverty than any similar effort elsewhere," observes Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who interacted with farmers at the fair. This year the fair is expected to be held in Lofa County.

at You Eat



Agriculture sector faces numerous challenges

Describing the support of partners as “tremendous”, Dr. Toe says some of the Ministry’s multi-lateral partners include FAO, UNDP, WFP and UNHCR while the bilateral partners include China, the United States of America through USAID, the UK government through DFID and more. All the partners collaborate with the Ministry to support farmers by providing quality planting materials, tools, training, and by strengthening institutions such as the Central Agriculture Research Institute (CARI) at Suakoko, Bong County.

Since their deployment in 2003, various contingents of UNMIL have been ren-

dering assistance to Liberians in diverse ways, including agricultural production. “These people were not asked... they are keeping the peace by helping us to be food sufficient with their own contribution...I have gone to all the places where they are rendering assistance. I doff my hat to them,” the minister applauds the peacekeepers.

However, in Gbedin, Nimba County, one of the places where Bangladeshi peacekeepers last year assisted farmers to cultivate over 100 acres of seven varieties of Bangladeshi hybrid rice, the hope of the farmers has been subdued by a pronounce-

ment by environmentalists that the piece of land is a reserved area and as such, agricultural activities are forbidden.

“I was born here and grew up here. Since the 1960s we have been working here. The Chinese too used to work here so we were very shocked when the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) told us that this place is a reserve area. This is a complete embarrassment,” says Samuel Brown, one of the project officials.

“We are trying to get to the bottom of this issue,” say Minister Toe. “Truthfully, that is not a natural watershed; that place was developed in the 1950s and since that time it has been used to produce rice. It is a major surprise to me but we are collaborating with the EPA to ensure that both environmental concerns and agricultural production do not become competitive, that we can all work together.”

As Liberia struggles to meet food sufficiency, many farmers are today working for rubber plantations and companies instead of engaging in food production. “Are we eating rubber in Liberia?” a school teacher asks. The minister has a different view: “If we increase our rubber production and we can add value, it creates employment opportunities so people who are not producing will be able to buy food. It also generates revenue for the government and part of that revenue can be ploughed into agriculture.”

Some of the challenges facing Liberia’s agriculture sector include lack of quality planting materials and fertilizers, lack of human resources, weak institutions and the unwillingness of some displaced farmers to leave Monrovia for their villages because of the lack of basic services and facilities such as health and education, and more. Most Liberian farmers rely on the old-fashioned method of cutlass and hoe. The use of modern methods such as power tillers and food processing facilities are still a dream.

The UN Special Representative to Liberia, Ms. Ellen Løj, has urged Liberians to be more actively involved in agricultural activities for their own benefit and for the enhancement of Liberia’s economy. “There are several things that we need to do. We still need assistance, but we cannot wait for assistance,” says Minister Toe. His advice to Liberians? “Grow what you eat - eat what you grow!” ♦



Stand up to be Counted

By J. Wesley Washington

It is time for all Liberians to stand up and be counted. For the first time in 24 years, the country will have a census, and the government of Liberia, in collaboration with its development partners, has set aside March 21-27, 2008 as Census Week. The Liberia Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services (LISGIS) will conduct the 2008 National Population and Housing Census.

Billboards, posters, bumper stickers and banners have sprung up in every nook and corner of the country explaining the benefits of being counted during the census. "Don't Guess Liberia's Population. Be Scientific, Be a Part of The National Census!" reads one poster on the back of a taxi cab in the capital, Monrovia. A billboard erected in far-away Yekepa, Nimba County, shouts: "Support Census '08 for National Development; Census Is Not For Taxation, Recruitment Nor Political

Maneuvering. Be Counted During the Census Week."

The last census in Liberia was conducted in February 1984. By law, Liberia should conduct a census at least every decade to update its demographic database. Except during the past five years of peace, much of the quarter century since the last census was consumed by civil war, significantly affecting the population size, structure and distribution. The civil war also destroyed databases and statistical information that once existed.

Liberia conducted its first census in 1962. Twelve years later in 1974, another census was conducted and the last one a decade later in 1984, which returned a population of a little over two million. Today, rough estimates put the country's population at over three million.

Demographic dynamics such as population size and growth, fertility and mortality rates, age structure, population distribution, and urbanization and migration

significantly impact the socio-economic development of a country. Such detailed information is essential to generate key indicators for the formulation of national and sectoral development plans, such as Liberia's Poverty Reduction Strategy. It also helps in the monitoring and evaluation of progress made towards the attainment of various national and international development goals such as the Millennium Development Goals.

With the assistance from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), the United States Aid For International Development (USAID), the African Development Bank (ADB) and LISGIS, an autonomous body created in July 2005, Liberia is all set for the forthcoming census. LISGIS has developed a five-year plan, outlining the various activities that will be carried out during the main phases of the census.

UNFPA has been the biggest contribu-



tor to the overall process, says the Director-General of LISGIS, Dr. T. Edward Liberty. With the population agency's support, five persons have been trained in Census Cartography Mapping and Management in Kenya and Zambia while another five were trained in Intermediate GIS Geographic Information System in Ghana. The UNFPA has also recruited long term technical advisors and consultants to aid the Census Secretariat in the preparation of various census instruments, including the production of enumeration maps for the census. Liberia has been mapped and has been divided into enumeration areas to afford an enumerator take data of about 120 households before the end of the census week.

Recruitment and training of six census regional coordinators, 17 census county inspectors and 135 census district inspectors are in its advanced stages as UNMIL FOCUS goes to press. About 8,000 to 10,000 persons have been recruited as

enumerators and field staff during the census week, with emphasis on local recruitment.

The Census Sub-Technical Committee, in collaboration with the Census Secretariat, has already completed the census questionnaire and the various manuals which will be used by the field staff carrying out the census exercise. Close to one million household questionnaires and over 10 field manuals have been printed.

To successfully implement the enumeration process, LISGIS will need US\$5.5 million. The Liberian government is providing US\$1.6 million for 2008 while UNFPA is providing US\$760,000 towards the census process this year. A five-year plan of action puts the overall cost of the census project at over US\$7.6 million, less than half of which will be spent during the phase of census counting or enumeration. Since preparations for the census commenced in 2006, UNFPA has

so far contributed US\$2.2 million to the exercise, the USAID over US\$300,000 and the ADB has committed US\$300,204.

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, last June, launched the National Population & Housing Census at the Monrovia City Hall. At the launch of the Publicity and Advocacy Phase of the upcoming Census Week last December, the Liberian President again reiterated government's clear and unequivocal support to the census noting that no government can bear the risk of planning in the absence of accurate data. "Today, we wake up to the understanding that the national census is a formidable tool for development and will be used by our government and development partners alike to formulate policies which would be used to ameliorate the conditions of welfare of our people," she said. The Liberian President has called on every individual within the boundaries of Liberia to come out during the census week and give accurate information about oneself.

It is time for each and every Liberian to stand up and be counted. ♦

By Sulaiman Momodu

Caught red handed trying to break into someone's house at night to steal, 11-year-old Joe Blamo (not his real name) recently found himself in police custody. In Blamo's firm grip were candles, a match-box, scissors and iron bars. Clad in tattered trousers and looking unkempt, the youngster told the police that most of his accomplices were friends who lived on the streets.

Stopping cars and pedestrians to beg, shining shoes by roadsides or selling cold water or sundry items, sad and hungry-looking children crowd the streets of the Liberian capital, Monrovia. They don't attend school and sleep in markets and street corners or along corridors or any place they could pass the night despite the dangers lurking in the dark.

"I stay with my step ma who beats me up everyday so I ran away from home," explains a 10-year-old boy in rags. "I am staying with my auntie who sends me to sell oranges. I don't go to school and if I don't sell, she won't give me food," laments another.

The exact number of street children in Liberia is not known. A survey carried out in July 2007 in Monrovia, Buchanan, and Tubmanburg revealed that about 75 per cent of 568 street children interviewed were from rural areas. Of this, about 75 per cent are from Bong and Nimba counties.

"The issue of street children is very challenging," says UNMIL Child Protection Advisor, David Ntambara. He points out that many street children have families but because of the economic conditions in their homes, they are on the streets selling, while others are delinquents or are children running away from their homes because of maltreatment and other abuses. "Some children don't have anybody to take care of them while others have taken adult responsibilities of getting means of livelihood. The family structure is very weak so it is very difficult for children."

Child protection experts say the issue of street children has been worsened by internal child trafficking by people in urban areas who go to rural areas and tell

Spotlight Street Child



on ldren



parents to give them their children to educate. But once the children are entrusted to them, the promise of education is abandoned and the child is sent to sell and subjected to other abuses. Some female street children are exposed to rape and in some cases boys are sodomised.

Over the years, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been working in close collaboration with partners such as Project New Outlook, Christian Children's Fund, Action for Greater Harvest, Sustainable Development Promoters, Helping Hand, Touching Humanity In Need of Kindness (THINK), and the Don Bosco Homes (DBH) to address the issue of street children.

The civil war ripped apart the lives of many Liberian children. Many got conscripted into warring factions, but some, made orphans, ended up on the streets. "After octopus in 1993 (during which rebels forces waged a full scale attack to capture Monrovia), there were lots of street children in Liberia, but with the assistance of UNICEF, DBH established five centres for over 1,000 children most of whom were reunified with their families in subsequent years and the centres closed," says David S. Konneh, the Executive Director of DBH.

With support from UNICEF, DBH is providing shelter for children that come in conflict with the law with the cooperation of the Liberia National Police (LNP). As of early February this year, there were 36 children at the centre for various offences; they are either receiving psycho social support so they can go back to their parents or face trial in the juvenile court.

"UNICEF helps to protect children who come in conflict with the law. We are trying to work with the judiciary to establish child friendly courts so that children can get a fair hearing," says UNICEF Child Protection Specialist Alfred Mutiti.

"Seeing young children engaged in criminal activities almost every time pose a very big challenge to us as a nation. We need a home that will counsel and take care of children than always arresting and releasing them again," notes K. Leo Pouseah, the Deputy Chief of Section at the Women and Child Protection Unit of the LNP where UNMIL police officers

provide daily technical advice.

Some children end up on the streets because their parents either abuse or reject them, especially those that are physically challenged. "There was a time one of the parents cut the fingers of the child while another parent put red hot coal in the mouth of the child because the child stole food in the house, which was a clear aggravated assault so we sent the parent directly to court," says Pouseah.

With emphasis on prevention, UNICEF has assisted in the establishment of child welfare committees through partners. So far, over 274 child welfare committees have been set up throughout Liberia's 15 counties to help identify children at risk in the community and to prevent them from ending up on the streets. Children's clubs have also been formed where children talk to peers against going to the streets and disseminate messages on key issues.

For its part, UNMIL plays an advisory role on child protection issues, provides technical assistance in terms of expertise and training, attends child protection network and task force meetings, and advises stakeholders and relevant ministries on child protection. UNMIL recently carried out an assessment of 117 orphanages where some of the street children end up and made recommendations based on findings. Furthermore, UNMIL Child Protection intervenes on behalf of children who come in conflict with the law by assisting to establish contacts with their parents, and in situations where family members could not be contacted, the DBH is contacted.

Recently the Liberian government announced that street children would be forcefully removed from the streets and sent to school. Although the pronouncement is yet to be implemented and probably will never be, child protection agencies say it is not the best approach. Experience shows that in countries where children have been forcefully removed from the streets they always end up resurfacing after some days.

Although the children's plight is attracting some attention, it may be a while before they could find a better home than the streets. ♦

Millennium Villages

By J. Wesley Washington

Liberia is the latest African country selected to have two Millennium Villages. The first Millennium Village is to be located in Kokoyah Statutory District in Bong County, River Gee County, in south-eastern Liberia, is the site for the second village project.

As Liberia gets set for the launch of the Millennium Villages, the Special Advisor of the United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Professor Jeffrey Sachs, paid a three-day visit to the country in January. The highlight of the visit was a round-table conference that focused on how Liberia could achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

There are eight MDGs – which range from halving extreme poverty and the spread of HIV/AIDS to providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015. This forms a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and leading development institutions. More than one billion people – one sixth of the world's population – live in extreme poverty, lacking safe water, proper nutrition, basic health care and social services.

Sachs, who served as Special Advisor to former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the MDGs, headed the independent advisory body responsible for the blueprint *Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals*. Part of the Plan is constructing Millennium Villages around the world in different agro-ecological zones that reflect the range of farming, water, and disease challenges facing vari-

ous continents.

Kokoyah Statutory District, hosting an estimated 15,000 residents, is situated in south-eastern Bong County, on the border with Grand Bassa and Nimba counties. It is a cluster of three sub-districts with a cultural mix of Kpelle, Bassa, Gio and Manos and lacks the basic services necessary to sustain economic growth. UNDP-Liberia, the MDGs focal point, inspired by the Millennium Villages concept, and in consultation with the Government of Liberia chose this district for the first project expected to support poverty alleviation by providing general development assistance and capacity building.

Providing a synopsis of the Millennium Village project concept and what their focus is as partners, Sachs, also Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University told the round-table that the priority areas for investment in the project will be in the areas of agriculture, health, education and infrastructure. "On education, our commitment has to be that there are schools for the children to go to, teachers there to teach them and books and supplies to learn from," he said.

Sachs said agriculture would take centre stage in the Kokoyah Millennium Villages Project as investment in food production and income earnings of the communities are crucial to the upliftment of the district. "I believe that the key to economic development is that people have the tools that they need to be productive," Sachs, a leading international economic advisor, remarked.

He also assured his audience that once there is some electricity in the district, there will also be computers for these

schools as there is an arrangement with SONY, a major computer manufacturing company, to provide computers for all the Millennium Villages in Africa. Likewise Ericsson, a mobile phone company, has volunteered to bring telephone and internet connections for all the Millennium Villages, including those in Liberia.

Also crucial to the project is improving infrastructure which will entail rehabilitating roads, bridges, providing safe drinking water and sanitation as well as providing electricity to the district. "We are extremely delighted that through your partnership we are about to improve the lives of the people of Kokoyah Statutory District as we look forward to the kick-off of the first Millennium Village project in Liberia," says David Waymah, the District Superintendent.

The Deputy Special Representative of

J. Wesley Washington/UNMIL





Jordan Ryan, Ambulai Johnson and Jeffrey Sachs at a round-table meeting

the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance, Jordan Ryan, hoped that all parties to the initiative are driven by a great sense of self-responsibility. "Development is not going to happen just because someone wants it. It's going to happen because the people want to do things differently," Ryan, also UN Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia, said. He noted that as the partners have a responsibility to live up to their word, they look up to those at the district level to really make the project work.

The five-year project is estimated to cost over US\$5.6 million. Already, the Norwegian Government has pledged US\$1million. The project hopes to gain the partnership of Millennium Promise, Japanese Facility Grants, Earth Institute at Columbia University in New York, the UN

Country Team, European Union, amongst others. Though the project is not yet launched, the project document has been completed and is expected to be signed between the UNDP and the Liberian Government shortly.

Already, the UNDP has begun making some interventions. In Ulah, the Ulah Public School and Annex have already been renovated and expanded. Solar panels have been installed there as well as at the village clinic. Other interventions to be undertaken by UNDP shortly include rehabilitating and renovating the Quoikapor, Tugbalee, and Kokoyah Public Schools, repairing emergency bridges and undertaking some water and sanitation projects in Quoikapor and Tugbalee.

"We are hoping that the experiences from this exercise could be transferred to other areas in Liberia as well so that they

may enjoy the benefits that the people in Kokoyah will enjoy," Internal Affairs Minister Ambulai Johnson noted.

In September 2000, at the United Nations Millennium Summit, world leaders placed development at the heart of the global agenda by adopting the UN Millennium Declaration. The Declaration was then followed by MDGs - a set of measurable goals and targets to be reached by 2015. Though Liberia is making some strides, it's unlikely to achieve the MDGs by 2015.

The Millennium Villages project so far has reached nearly 400,000 people in 79 villages clustered into 12 groups across 10 other African countries including Ghana, Uganda, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Malawi with one village each; whereas Mali, Nigeria, Kenya and Liberia will have two villages each. ♦

Zoellick Pledges World Bank Support

The new World Bank Group President, Robert B. Zoellick, has assured that the Bank would continue to support the Liberian government in its recovery and reconstruction efforts as the country emerges from the ravages of the prolonged civil war.

The assurance came during his two-day visit to Liberia in January to gain first-hand understanding of the development challenges facing the country and efforts being made by the government to promote growth and overcome poverty.

“This visit has given me an opportuni-

and prospects of the Bank’s programmes in the country and the need to expedite their implementation for the desired impact. They called for the mobilization of more donor support for the country’s Infrastructure Fund, intended for the construction and rehabilitation of roads, bridges, electricity and the ports.

Along with President Johnson Sirleaf and Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj, the World Bank President also participated in one of the three regional consultations that took place in Kakata, Margibi County.

“The purpose of this meeting is an

one, so say all!”

The Liberian President reminded the audience of the meaning of democracy, à la Abraham Lincoln. “Government is of the people – this means we represent you; ‘for the people’ means it is our responsibility to make sure that what we do reflect the things that you want us to do; but there is also ‘government by the people’ – this means you must do something for yourself, it means you must not sit there and wait for us to come. You should plant the rice yourselves, you should plant the plantain, banana...”

Addressing the gathering, Special Representative Løj said: “In our efforts to help Liberians to succeed, there can be no better approach, for ensuring the success and sustainability of our assistance, than to let the people tell and decide what their most urgent needs are... And the people have spoken clearly through all the consultations and forums.”

She said Liberia is a rich nation blessed with abundant natural resources such as land, forests, minerals and rainfall. “But it’s going to take the hard work of the Liberian people to turn all of this potential into lasting prosperity,” Løj cautioned.

At the consultations, Zoellick reiterated the Bank’s desire to help Liberia develop and provide opportunities for the future. Already, the Bank has provided an emergency grant of US\$ 68 million to support interventions to address some of the critical infrastructure needs of the country.

Referring to Liberia’s transition from emergency to deeper stages of reforms at a press roundtable at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the WB President said he was deeply impressed with the level of work being done in the country, but cautioned that there are still many challenges. Zoellick’s visit to Liberia was part of his four-nation tour of Africa that also included Mauritania, Ethiopia and Mozambique. ♦



Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

Ellen Løj with Robert Zoellick

ty to listen and learn about the challenges facing Liberia,” said the WB President, adding: “The hard work of the people and Government of Liberia that I witnessed offers great encouragement and inspiration for development partners like the World Bank Group in helping ensure the peace and democracy enjoyed by Liberia translates into tangible socio-economic benefits for all Liberians.”

Zoellick’s discussions with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf focused on progress

opportunity to listen to you...what you think are the priorities that we ought to be pursuing...recognising that the government can’t do everything...,” said the Liberian President, pointing out that the consultations were aimed at drawing up local development agendas to be incorporated in the country’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). The consultations are clearly a break with the past when Liberians had to follow the diktats of one person under the infamous saying: “So say

UNICEF Boss Veneman Visits Liberia

By Rebecca Bannor-Addae

UNICEF Executive Director Ann M. Veneman announced more than US\$17 million in additional assistance towards education of Liberia's children. The announcement came during her three-day visit to Liberia in February 2008.

"Liberia was torn apart by conflict but strong leadership is putting the country on the road to recovery. Children are returning to school and communities are rebuilding, yet there is so much more to be done," said Veneman, who, apart from meeting government officials, also visited UNICEF supported programmes in Liberia.

Due to the war many children either never enrolled in school or had their education constantly interrupted. At Voinjama Public School in Lofa county, Patrick and his fellow students are in their classrooms waiting to welcome Veneman. Patrick is 14 and attending 4th grade. "When there was a war we were running. It shouldn't be like that because when you're child you should enjoy life and you should be in school," says Patrick with a smile. "UNICEF supports people, that's what I know. They've helped us with books and other things."

UNICEF supports the Liberian education system with learning materials, furniture, teacher compensation and the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP), a catch-up programme designed to assist overage children to complete primary level education.

Still, as Veneman pointed out, there is a long way to go with only about 33 per cent of primary school age children attending school despite free primary education.

UNICEF additionally supports educa-

tion through the Business Development Skills (BDS) programme where demobilised children who have graduated from skills training now learn efficiency and profitability in order to expand and develop their trade. Mawata, aged 16, recently completed her BDS training and now work as part of a three-member pastry cooperative. "I wasn't able to go to school because my mother couldn't afford the fees. With the money I save from selling cakes, I'll soon be able to pay my own way," says Mawata, busy mixing milk, sugar and flour for a coconut tart.

During her visit to Lofa county,

Although Liberia is slowly recovering from war women and children still face significant risk of sexual exploitation. During the conflict sexual violence was endemic and despite numerous efforts to tackle the issue of rape, incidents continue to grab headlines. In the capital, UNICEF supports a juvenile transit rehabilitation centre for girls who have been either abandoned or sexually abused. "I'm very concerned about the high rates of sexual violence in this country," said Veneman after visiting the centre. "But from talking with the girls, I felt so much hope in them. They were in a safe place and they were devel-



Ann Veneman with children at UNICEF-supported juvenile transit rehabilitation centre in Monrovia

Veneman was also the guest of Malamai village to which many people have recently returned after having lived in camps for the displaced. Today the villagers enjoy mosquito nets in every household and children and mothers have received lifesaving vaccines for killer diseases such as tuberculosis, tetanus, measles, polio and yellow fever. UNICEF, in collaboration with the government and NGOs, have brought immunization coverage up from 31 per cent in 2004 to 87 per cent in 2005.

oping aspirations."

"Overall I see a strong commitment by the international community to Liberia but most importantly I see a strong commitment by the population," concluded Veneman before departing Liberia.

Another US\$2 million has been made available for advocacy, research and strengthening data collection systems. This brings the total UNICEF contribution to Liberia for 2008 to around US\$35 million. ♦

Pakistanis Contribute To Peace in Liberia

By J. Wesley Washington

Pakistan was among the first troop contributing countries that set up the military component of UNMIL outside Monrovia. UNMIL received the first Pakistani road and airfield engineering unit in November 2003, and within one month, the Pakistani military began its deployment beyond Monrovia, first at Klay Junction and onward to its headquarters in Tubmanburg, Bomi County. Over the next four months the Pakistani contingent fanned out to the western and north-western

regions of Liberia. Since then, with more than 3,400 soldiers, Pakistan has become the largest contingent among the 49-troop contributing countries to Liberia.

Beyond providing security, their core mandate, the Pakistani peacekeepers have adopted schools and established vocational and skills training centres, in addition to catering to the sick through free medical camps even in the remotest parts, as well as reconstructing basic infrastructure, including roads and bridges.

Charged with the responsibility of maintaining security in Sector-II (Bomi, Gbarpolu, Grand Cape Mount, and Lofa counties), the Pakistani military strengthens the

Headquarters at Tubmanburg with a battalion (PAKBATT-7), as well as a Sector Reserve Unit; and infantry companies at Guthrie Rubber Plantations, Klay, Government Farm in Bomi County; Bopolu, Gbarpolu County as well as at Bo Waterside, Sinji, and Robertsport in Grand Cape Mount County. In Voinjama, another battalion (PAKBATT-8) is deployed with infantry companies at Zorzor, Yeala, and Foya in Lofa County.

Also, within Sector-II the Pakistani contingent has two engineering units based at Tubmanburg and Voinjama; medical teams at the Level-II hospital in Tubmanburg and 10 Level-I hospitals spread over the Sector. Additional Pakistani units constitute part of Sector-I.

They include two engineering units based at the Roberts International Airport



(RIA) and the former Voice of America compound at Caryesburg. Under the command of the Force Headquarters is the Pakistani Quick Reaction Force (QRF) located at Camp Clara. The peacekeepers patrol Liberia's porous borders with neighbouring Guinea and Sierra Leone by vehicles and helicopters, or on foot, to maintain security in their areas of operation.

Among the major challenges the peacekeepers (Contingents I to III) faced since their deployment included the disarmament of tens of thousands of ex-combatants and providing security and logistical support during the voter registration and the presidential and legislative elections. Contingent IV, which arrived in January 2007 and has begun their rotation, continued to consolidate the peace by focusing more on various humanitarian and developmental work within their area of responsibility.

However, some challenges still remain, says Brig.-Gen. Ahmed Nawaz, Contingent and Sector-II Commander. He cites boundary disputes, especially between the old and the newly established counties; inter-tribal property disputes; and unemployed and idle youth as some of the challenges. "Apart from these minor problems, Sector-II borders Sierra Leone and Guinea, so we have to continue to monitor activities on those two fronts

because any adverse happenings would have a direct impact on Liberia. We do not want to be caught by surprise," Brig.-Gen. Nawaz said.

The engineering companies rehabilitate and maintain roads and bridges within their sphere of operations including the Robertsport-Madina, Bo-Waterside-Monrovia, Bopolu-Tubmanburg, the Foya-Voinjama, Voinjama-Zorzor and the Zorzor-Gbalatua highways, amongst others. "Thank you, thank you, Pakistanis!!" were the overwhelming chants of hundreds of local residents at the completion of the Kaikpu Town Bridge linking Monrovia to Tubmanburg and neighbouring Sierra Leone which was washed away in August 2007.

During the tenure of Contingent-IV, the peacekeepers have adopted 12 schools, which were renovated and provided with various supplies, including sporting materials. The peacekeepers also maintain regular link with the schools. In addition to their humanitarian assistance, the Pakistanis also undertake small-scale community projects to engage directly with the local population. One of these is the Pak Liberia Friendship Centre which includes a library, computer room and a sewing centre and a science laboratory.

"Now the Liberian youth can sharpen their skills in computers and tailoring. We appreciate the love, cooperation and support extended by

Pakistani peacekeepers to the people of Liberia," said Felecia Do Summah, Assistant Minister for Secondary Education at the inauguration of the Centre last year.

The Pakistani medics at the Level-2 hospital and 10 Level-1 hospitals in the rest of the Sector continue to provide free medical services to the local population in addition to the military and civilian staff of the mission. Despite the limited resources at their disposal, they provide free medical outreach in remote areas, reaching out to the needy and neglected patients with an average of 15,000 patients benefiting each month.

"The strongest affiliations and relationships are those built during hard times; such are the feelings which bond us with our Liberian brethren," says Brig.-Gen. Nawaz. "Liberians should give peace a chance as the standard of life gradually improves. Continue to lend support to UNMIL and other organizations here to help you mend the broken pieces. Ultimately, it is you that will be responsible to rebuild this beautiful land."

Pakistan joined the United Nations on 30th September 1947. Since 1960, Pakistan has been actively involved in many UN Peacekeeping missions and today is a top troop contributing nation with 10,623 peacekeepers serving in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sudan, Kosovo and Burundi, among others.



Pakistani troops demonstrate during last year's Medal Parade

Emmanuel Tobey/UNMIL

Liberians

CAN THE TRC PUBLIC HEARING

For me, though as Liberians we are professing peace and reconciliation, when perpetrators face the TRC narrating the acts they committed during the war, in my opinion, they open up old wounds. In my view, in addition to the TRC, we should also have a Special Court for Liberia to prosecute those responsible for their crimes against humanity.

Dennis Forkpah (Student)



I don't think the TRC can heal the wounds because most people who experienced problems from the hands of fighters during the war have already put things behind them. They've decided to live with the losses of their relatives. So for someone to come up and stand publicly and confess, it reawakens the bad feelings. So I don't think it's necessary right now. Preferably, set a particular day aside as Memorial Day to commemorate the loss of all those who lost their lives during the war.

Morris Kollie, Jr. (Returnee)



Yes, it can heal the wounds of the nation. Whenever you do wrong you have to admit you're wrong. Though people think that (say) John Brown killed my father or relative would mean resurrecting the wounds but you must resurrect these wounds in order to heal them. That's the only way out. Until we can tell each other the truth - what we did during this war era - people will continue to harbour even greater malice against someone and when this malice reaches a certain stage, it's devastating for the country and its people. So I think the TRC is a way out; intended to see what happened during the war. From there we can move forward.

McGill Borbor (Journalist)



The TRC is good. For us, we were quite young at the time, but this enlightens our minds as to what transpired during those difficult times. We must also remember that most of these atrocities were actually committed by young innocent youth like me. We, as youth, need to hear these stories to ensure that at no time do we repeat this path. Reconciliation is good for our country and we should promote the TRC.

Kuku Zantou (Trader)



I think the TRC public hearing is creating more problems for us Liberians because what has already happened has happened. We're trying to forget, though it's not easy to forget. The TRC public hearings are not necessary in my view. I would rather let bygones be bygones,

Thelma Nurse (Student)



For me, I feel that the TRC is not helping us at all. People had gone through the trauma of war which is gradually fading away, and for anybody to come and reawaken your memory can be very painful. But what can we say about it? I can't say anything since it was the parties to the Accra agreement who came up with the idea in order for us to have peace.

Satta Norman (Civil Servant)



Speak

SHAL THE WOUNDS OF WAR?



There is a growing misconception about the TRC. I hold the view and I'm confident that the TRC is the best mechanism for us to address the issue of justice because justice and peace are two close sisters. If you alienate one, you're going to cause a problem for the other and I think we need to pursue justice in a way that doesn't necessarily seek to prosecute people per se; but seek to bring out past happenings and that we can look at and say this is what happened in the past; where can we start to move forward? We can't move forward if we don't know what happened in the past - if our past is not well documented. I think this is one key area in the TRC process that a lot of people miss; documenting our past experiences. So I stand for the TRC process.

Lawrence Randall (Journalist)



Actually, the TRC cannot heal the wounds of the war because it seeks to remind people of the bitter past. Someone who might have committed atrocities against a family member cannot be easily forgotten; and going before the TRC will be a reminder of pain. I don't think the TRC can heal any wound.

Emman J. Harris (Trader)

Let the will of God be done. Like in my country, Nigeria, there was the Biafra war and serious atrocities were committed. Over time, things have healed. Though I don't know much about the TRC and what it is doing, as a pastor, I can only say let the will of God be done.

Christian Ebere Azubuike (Pastor)



I think the establishment of the TRC is a good exercise. Years have lapsed now since we had the civil war and time has now healed those wounds. Since loved ones killed during the war cannot be brought back, it's time to reconcile and move on with nation building as one people.

Old man Edward King (Ex-AFL Captain)



My view about the TRC process is that it is just here to open old wounds. For me, I would prefer that a Special Court for Liberia be established and the two can go hand in hand. Those who committed serious crimes against humanity in the Liberian war should face that court so as to prevent impunity in future.

Saah Bangatormah (Musical Studio Engineer)



The TRC will try to heal the wounds. If we say that this country is a Christian nation; we should learn to forgive and live in peace. If God decided not to forgive us for all the sins we commit, what will happen to us? I support the TRC public hearings as a way of healing the wounds of the war.

Lawrence Dahn (Student)





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