

UN FOCUS

Vol. 7, No. 03



March - May 2011



Getting Set for the Elections

António Guterres visits Ivorian refugees

WACPS Makes Strides in Combating SGBV

Exclusive Interview: Michelle Bachelet



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

The recent steps Côte d'Ivoire has taken towards normalization of the situation there are a welcome relief. As a result of the recent conflict, more than 180,000 refugees have entered Liberia, creating a humanitarian crisis Liberia could ill afford, and although the situation is getting better in Côte d'Ivoire, only a few have so far returned home. As long as refugees remain in Liberia, the humanitarian community will work to respond to humanitarian needs, although the upcoming rainy season and the poor state of Liberia's infrastructure will create even greater challenges for the humanitarian response in the coming weeks and months. Funding for the humanitarian response is also a major challenge, as only US\$63 million of the US\$146.5 million being sought through the Emergency Humanitarian Action Plan to address the crisis has so far been pledged.

In addition to humanitarian concerns, UNMIL is working closely with national security institutions to ensure that security is maintained in border areas. UNMIL has reviewed its troop and police deployments to ensure that resources

are made available where they are needed most, and the Mission is working closely with the Liberia National Police, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire to step up presence and activity along the border.

Preparations for the upcoming elections are progressing. A 16-week campaign on the referendum that seeks to reform key elections related provisions of the Constitution is currently ongoing. The August referendum and general elections in either October or November, depending on the outcome of the referendum, will be a litmus test for Liberia's progress towards peace and democracy. It is important to ensure a level playing field for all candidates, but it is equally important that the voters are well informed of their choices, and of their civic rights and responsibilities, creating an opportunity for all Liberians to voice their views, and a significant step in consolidating the democratic process in Liberia. With a peaceful, transparent and fair elections followed by a smooth transition, Liberia will have reached a major milestone towards peace and democracy.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen Margrethe Löj".

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



4. Getting Set for the Elections

With preparations in progress for the 23 August referendum aimed at resolving key constitutional issues, and a nationwide civic education campaign making headway, Liberia is getting set for the second post-war national elections later in the year with national institutions taking the lead role in organizing the polls for the first time.



6. António Guterres visits Ivorian refugees

Despite the end of the political impasse in Côte d'Ivoire, the majority of the Ivorian refugees continue to remain in Liberia due to fear of insecurity in their homeland. During the height of the refugee influx, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres and UN Humanitarian Affairs chief Valerie Amos visited Liberia to take stock of the unfolding humanitarian crisis.



10. WACPS Makes Strides in Combating SGBV

The Liberia National Police is proving increasingly capable of combating sexual and gender based violence thanks to the strengthening of the LNP's Women and Children Protection Service with technical support from the UN Police.

4. Getting Set for the Elections
6. António Guterres Visits Ivorian Refugees
8. Humanitarian Chief Visits Liberia
14. Bachelet : Liberia a model of women's empowerment
16. Interview: Michelle Bachelet
18. Winning Hearts Through Community Policing
20. WACPS Makes Strides in Combating SGBV
22. New Headquarters for WACPS
23. Grant Boost for Critical Land Reform
24. First Battalion-level Exercise for New Army
26. New Clinics Bolster Healthcare
29. National School Census Continues
30. Liberians Speak



Chief of Public Information
George Somerwill

Editor and Head of Publications
Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Staff Writers
Ruby Ofori
Ataul Osmani
James S. King

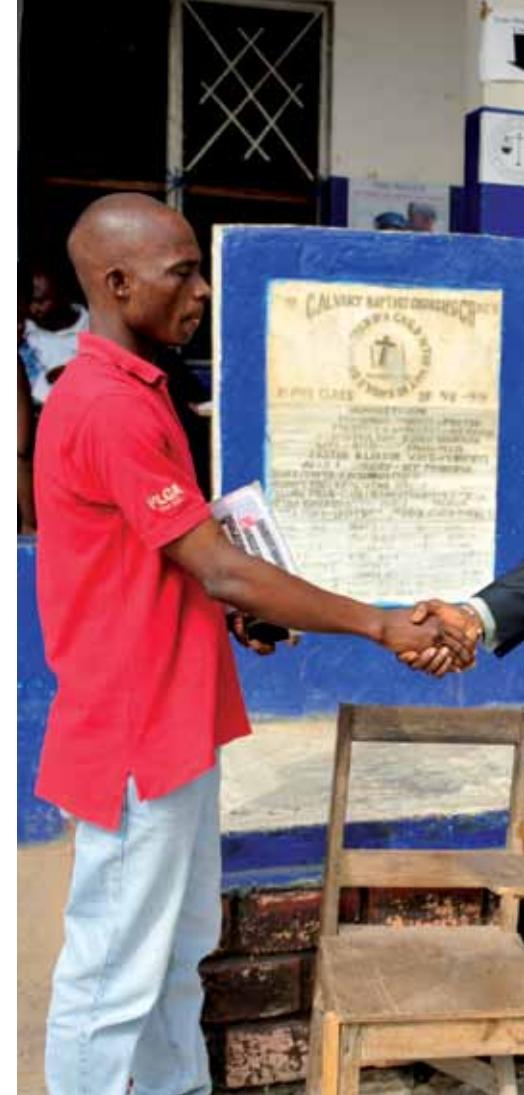
Design and Graphics
Paddy Defoxy Ilos, II
Thomas S. Blidi

Photos
Staton Winter
Emmanuel Tobey

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

unfocus@unmil.org
www.unmil.org

Printed by Buck Press Ltd., Accra, Ghana



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GETTING SET FOR THE ELI

By Ruby Ofori

A successful outcome to the forthcoming referendum that addresses key constitutional issues scheduled for August 23 will require the support and assistance of every Liberian, says the Co-Chair of the National Elections Commission, (NEC) Elizabeth Nelson. In an interview with UN Focus, Counsellor Nelson said the lengthy referendum campaign period from May 1 to August 21 is meant to give the NEC enough time to reach every voter to ensure everyone understands the issues that will

be put before them.

In order to maximize the understanding of a largely illiterate voting population, the choices posed on the referendum ballot paper will be presented as symbols. Up until now Liberian voters have made choices based on facial recognition, with candidates faces printed on ballot papers. Counsellor Nelson says this difference in the design of the ballot paper will represent a major challenge for the NEC in terms of explaining to voters what the symbols represent.

“Our people are used to seeing faces and by that it’s easy for them to make informed choices.” To meet this new chal-

lenge, Counsellor Nelson said, the NEC’s strategy is to reach and teach opinion leaders in every walk of Liberian life so that these leaders can in turn teach and inform the people in their communities. “NEC will try to reach the public through every available means to ensure that voters understand the basic choices that are put before them when they cast their ballots on referendum day on August 23,” said Counsellor Nelson.

The NEC is responsible for the entire process leading to credible, peaceful and transparent presidential and legislative elections later in the year. The referendum is just one event in the election cycle. So



UN Envoy Moustapha Soumaré visits a voter registration centre

LECTIONS

far the NEC has accredited over 180 civil society organizations and some two dozen political parties. These organizations are now authorized to campaign for and against the proposed amendments to the constitution.

The referendum will ask voters to accept or reject four amendments to the 1986 constitution. These include the requirement that presidential and vice presidential candidates reside in the Republic of Liberia for five consecutive years immediately prior to an election.

The second issue relates to judges. The referendum will ask voters whether they want to extend the working life of judges

to age 75. This would enable judges, who are of retirement age to continue working for an additional five years.

The third item on the referendum relates to the date on which presidential, legislative and local government elections take place. It offers voters the choice of changing the date on which these elections take place to the second Tuesday in November of each election year, with elections for city Mayors and their respective councils, as well as for traditional chiefs scheduled for three years following each general and presidential election.

The fourth item on the referendum ballot seeks to change the election requirements to all public offices to the simple majority system. The only exception would be elections for President and Vice President which would continue to be by

tribution to all radio and television media outlets. Symbols for the referendum have been chosen and the ballot is being designed.

This is the first time since the end of Liberia's civil war that Liberians themselves are taking the lead role in planning and holding elections. The 2005 election was organized, largely, by UNMIL. This time, however, the entire UN family is playing a supportive, secondary role with UNDP spearheading that effort.

"UNDP is taking the lead in the United Nation's support to the elections in Liberia. That will enable the UN to provide comprehensive assistance to the conduct of the first nationally organized democratic election since the end of the conflict," said Moustapha Soumaré, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (Re-

This is the first time since the end of Liberia's civil war that Liberians themselves are taking the lead role in planning and holding elections. The 2005 election was organized, largely, by UNMIL. This time, however, the entire UN family is playing a supportive, secondary role with UNDP spearheading that effort.

absolute majority of the valid votes cast.

NEC officials say they have a hectic schedule of tasks that have to be performed simultaneously. While work is being done on the referendum by one group of officials, others are finalizing the list of registered voters. That in turn will facilitate the delineation of electoral districts.

Though the NEC faces a punishing schedule and a herculean set of mandated tasks which must be completed in a short span of time, the institution has met all its challenges and deadlines so far. It has completed the registration of voters, the issuance of the writ of referendum, the publication of referendum regulations, the launch of a civic and voter education campaign about the referendum, the exhibition of the provisional registration roll or voters list for public scrutiny and the accreditation of campaign committees for the referendum. The NEC has even hosted a debate by opposing political parties on the referendum which was taped for dis-

covery and Governance) and UN Resident Coordinator.

Earlier this year, UNDP launched the 2010-2012 Liberian Electoral Cycle Project Basket Fund, outlining the role of stakeholders and partners of the government in long-term institutional capacity building for elections in Liberia. The project aims to provide capacity building support to Liberian institutions, from NEC to political parties to the media and civil society organizations.

Funding for the Liberian electoral process is provided by the European Union, the governments of Sweden, Denmark, Japan, Spain, and Germany through the UNDP which manages a basket fund. The United States Government also supports Liberia's election process through USAID and its implementing arm, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Experts say the election process is a test of the extent to which democracy has taken root in Liberia. •



ANTÓNIO GUTERRES VISITS IVORIAN REFUGEES

By Sulaiman Momodu

As thousands of Ivorians were fleeing to neighbouring countries, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres visited Liberia in March and expressed heartfelt appreciation to the Government and the people of Liberia for the

warm reception accorded to the Ivorian refugees.

Since 29 November 2010, Ivorians have been fleeing western Côte d'Ivoire and arriving mainly in Liberia's Maryland, Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Nimba counties. Commissioner Guterres, a former Portuguese prime minister, had discussions with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and senior officials of the government.

Joined by the Minister of Internal Affairs Harrison Karnwea, the Executive Director of the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) Counsellor Wheatonia Dixon-Barnes and the UN Special Representative Ellen Margrethe Löj, Guterres visited Buutuo, one of the border villages hosting thousands of refugees. Crowds of refugees and members of their host community had gathered



High Commissioner Guterres being greeted by refugees

to welcome the High Commissioner.

The UNHCR works in close collaboration with the Government of Liberia, represented by the LRRRC, UN agencies such as UNICEF, FAO, WFP, UNFPA, and other partners to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to the refugees. At the Bahn Refugee Camp, some 50 km from the border, Guterres interacted with both locals and refugees who cited food, shelter, water and sanitation, and medicines as their priority needs in addition to the rehabilitation of roads and broken bridges. The Bahn camp was established in February by clearing a thick forest and creating access roads with support from the UN Mission in Liberia. The UN refugee chief, who met with partners and UNHCR staff, expressed delight that progress has been made to provide assistance but encouraged refugees to relocate to the camp where the UNHCR and part-

ners can guarantee better humanitarian services.

"This visit has two main objectives. The first is to express deep gratitude and appreciation for what has been an exemplary attitude of the Government of Liberia in opening its borders to refugees from Côte d'Ivoire and granting them refugee status; but not only gratitude and appreciation to the Government of Liberia, also to the people of Liberia," said Guterres while jointly addressing the media with Special Representative Løj at the end of his three-day visit. "I was extremely impressed when I visited the villages close to the border to see how Liberians have received their sisters and brothers from Côte d'Ivoire; to see how they have opened their doors, their hearts, their pockets, how they have shared their meagre resources and expressed their solidarity in way that corresponds to a lesson for today's world.

the international community, a lot of support from all countries that can help us cope with this challenge and that can cooperate with the Liberian government and the population to be able to cope with the extremely difficult situation they face," he said.

With fighting raging in Côte d'Ivoire at the time of his visit but the world's attention focused on crises in other parts of the world, including North Africa, Commissioner Guterres reiterated that the international community should engage more effectively to bring lasting peace to Côte d'Ivoire, stressing that the Ivorian crisis is a threat to the region's peace, security and stability. "It is very important that those who fled the country have the soonest opportunity to go back and to go back in safety and dignity," he said.

During Liberia's civil war thousands of Liberians fled to neighbouring coun-

"It is very important that needs of the local communities are effectively addressed and for that we need a lot of solidarity from the international community, a lot of support from all countries that can help us cope with this challenge and that can cooperate with the Liberian government and the population to be able to cope with the extremely difficult situation they face."

Unfortunately, in many parts of the world we witness forms of xenophobia, frontiers being closed and people sent back and not being allowed to enter a territory. To see this generosity from the Government and the people of Liberia is something that warms our heart and gives us confidence that refugee protection is still alive in today's world."

Guterres said the other reason for his visit was to make a very strong appeal to the international community to express to the Liberian people and Government the same kind of solidarity that the Liberians are now expressing to those coming from Côte d'Ivoire in search of protection. "It is very important that needs of the local communities are effectively addressed and for that we need a lot of solidarity from

tries including Ghana, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. With the restoration of peace in 2003, thousands of them have been assisted to voluntarily return home, but the UNHCR Representative Ibrahima Coly says there are still some 63,000 Liberian refugees in the sub-region, including about 23,000 in Côte d'Ivoire.

Although developments in Côte d'Ivoire have taken a new turn with the arrest of former president Laurent Gbagbo on 11 April, Ivorians continue to cross into Liberia fearing reprisal attacks, and those who had already arrived remain reluctant to return home due to security fears. In these circumstances, both the Ivorian refugees and their host communities will require continued international assistance for many more months to come. •



HUMANITARIAN CHIEF VISITS LIBERIA

By Ataul Osmani and Osman Ben Sankoh

The United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Valerie Amos, warned that

years of investment in Liberia's peace and security could be jeopardized if the international community did not help the country to deal with an influx of refugees from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire.

"Liberia has made great strides in achieving peace and security over the past few years. After years of war, Liberians are

finally seeing the benefits of investments in peace, security and stability. We need to maintain that and ensure that the country gets the help it needs even as it welcomes so many refugees from Côte d'Ivoire," she said. Amos was addressing the media on 2 April in Monrovia as she wrapped up her two-day visit to Liberia.



UN Humanitarian Chief Valerie Amos addresses the media

The Humanitarian chief was in Liberia to see for herself the effects of the refugee influx from Côte d'Ivoire. She travelled to Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties where she interacted with the Ivorian refugees who described their difficult trek into Liberia and their current living conditions.

Amos also met with humanitarian organizations and local residents to take stock of the ongoing relief effort and to learn the challenges they face in meeting the needs of the refugees and the local communities hosting them. Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj accompanied her during the visit.

Making a fervent appeal to the donor countries to contribute to Liberia's emergency action plan, which has requested \$146.5m, she said, "We have so far received \$35 million or 23 per cent of the

money we need. We must not let Liberia down. Investment in humanitarian affairs is also investment in Liberia's peace and security. A stable Liberia is not only good for Liberia but also for West Africa.

"Liberian families are rebuilding their lives and have responded with great generosity. Now aid agencies need to ensure that the host communities also benefit from humanitarian relief," the Humanitarian chief said. "The Liberian authorities, UN agencies, and NGOs and civil society are doing their utmost to ensure their response is adequate. We still have a long way to go.

witness. We need not only to help them to survive, but also to recover," she added.

Amos also expressed her heartfelt gratitude to the Liberian Government and its people for the welcome they have given to the refugees. "Many refugees have had only the time to run for their lives, coming with virtually nothing in Liberia, where many Liberian families, some of whom were themselves refugees in recent years, welcomed them and shared with them their already meagre resources."

An estimated one million Ivoirians have fled their homes since December last

"I am especially concerned about the women and children who are the most affected. The refugee children have lost their homes, their friends, their schooling. Many have seen sights children should never have to witness. We need not only to help them to survive, but also to recover."

With more money, we can deliver more food, can provide more shelter and offer a better medical treatment to those who are sick and we can do much more."

Narrating the agony of the Ivorian refugees fleeing their country, Amos said many of the refugees in the East walked for days, fleeing their homes in Côte d'Ivoire with almost nothing. "I am especially concerned about the women and children who are the most affected. The refugee children have lost their homes, their friends, their schooling. Many have seen sights children should never have to

year following the disputed presidential election and more than 131,000 refugees have sought shelter in eastern Liberia, the majority of them among host communities. As the Humanitarian chief visited the Toe Town Transit site in Grand Gedeh County, the refugees appealed for help, highlighting their dire need for clean water, food, shelter and medicine.

Amos also strongly condemned the reported killing of some 800 people in the western Ivorian town of Duékoué and said that those responsible for the alleged atrocity must be brought to justice. •





Anne Look/UNICEF

UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Hilde Johnson meets refugee children in Karnplay transit centre in Liberia

“We cannot afford to forget these children”

By Miraj Pradhan

“**T**his is a massive humanitarian crisis. It is a children’s emergency and we need to make sure they are protected, fed and educated. Children should not become the victims of political disputes,” said UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Hilde Frafjord Johnson during her visit to Liberia to assess the situation of children and families affected by the Ivorian refugee crisis.

During her four-day visit starting 28 March, Johnson met with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as well as senior officials of the government, UN and international development agencies. She travelled to Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties where thousands of refugees have taken shelter. During her visit to the Bahn Refugee camp, Ivorian children attending school welcomed her with dancing and singing. “Continue to sing, dance and play in this

space,” Johnson told the children. “I know there is a lot of uncertainty in your country and life is not easy right now, but we will do all we can to help you.”

At the transit Centres in Karnplay and Toe town the UNICEF Deputy Executive Director met several refugee leaders and families. “Our children need to go to school, to be together and play with Liberian children, so that they leave the thoughts of the war behind them. Since classes started here, we have seen the children starting to adapt,” said Gouanou Zouo Nazaire, a refugee community leader in Karnplay. Boya Tryphene, 23, shared her experience of how she fled her village in western Côte d’Ivoire on foot with her two-year-old daughter and elderly mother. “We heard gunfire in the next village and saw people fleeing and heading towards the border. We were afraid so we just followed them,” she said.

Johnson also met with the Paramount Chief of Gborplay and several Liberian host families. She commended the hos-

pitality of the Liberian people and reaffirmed UNICEF’s continued support to the Government and other partners to improve the lives of the Ivorian and Liberian children. “The Liberians have been welcoming the refugees, assisting them and giving them food and seeds to help them survive, but the communities are overwhelmed. We need to assist the local population as we assist the refugees,” Johnson said.

At a media briefing in Monrovia at the end of her visit, Johnson expressed serious concern over the situation of affected children and families and stressed the urgency of expediting the humanitarian response. “They need more food, more water, better sanitation facilities, and more shelter. They need more of everything,” she said. She commended the efforts of humanitarian actors and the government for the response efforts so far, and called on the global community for continued attention and support to the Ivorian crisis, even as emergencies in other parts of the world take priority. “We are at a crossroads now where we need to scale up, speed up and be able to deliver at a much higher level than we have done so far. This is a major humanitarian crisis and the world needs to wake up. We cannot afford to forget these children,” she said. •



A group of Ivorian refugees

Little Wlebo, Big Relief

By Sulaiman Momodu

Despite the end of the post-electoral crisis in Côte d'Ivoire, many Ivorian refugees want to see peace and stability restored in their country before deciding to return. The establishment of a camp at Little Wlebo in Maryland County has therefore come as a big relief to the refugees as their compatriots still continue to cross over into Liberia.

"I am very happy today," said a father of four as he boarded a UNHCR truck with his wife and children for the camp about 14km from the coastal town of Harper, Maryland's capital. "We don't know when we will go back home so it is better to go to the camp than stay in the transit centre," said another refugee.

Although refugees were trickling into Maryland County since last November, the mass influx into the county was in early April when fighting broke out in the Tabou region in Côte d'Ivoire forcing thousands of Ivorians to flee. To rap-

idly respond to the emergency, UNHCR erected dozens of tents and rehabilitated derelict structures at the transit centre near Harper. By mid-May, 13, 419 refugees had been registered in communities in the county, including more than 4,000 at the transit centre. "Better services are available in the camp and families are assured of their privacy," said UNHCR Representative Ibrahima Coly, describing the camp as a significant step in improving the delivery of humanitarian assistance to refugees in a centralized location.

Communal shelters, security and health screening areas, dining hall, kitchen and distribution centres had been constructed on the camp site. Upon arrival, the refugees are supplied with food and non-food items. In addition, they are provided tools with skilled and unskilled labour helping them to construct their own family shelter. Liberian National Police had been deployed to provide security in the camp, which has a capacity for 20,000 people, while the UN Mission in Liberia has rehabilitated the access road.

The nearly 200 refugees who have so

far voluntarily relocated to the camp are largely from the communities. "More refugees are coming forward to inform us that they would like to go to the camp after hearing from those who are already there that there are better humanitarian services in the camp and that the place is relatively conducive," said UNHCR Senior Emergency Coordinator Alice Ballah-Conteh.

UNHCR opened the first camp for Ivorian refugees at Bahn in Nimba County in February this year. The camp has medical services, shelter, adequate safe drinking water and educational activities, among others. So far, more than 182,582 Ivorians are estimated to have crossed into Liberia since the influx started. Added to Maryland, refugees are mainly in Grand Gedeh, River Gee and Nimba counties. A verification exercise is underway in Nimba County where most refugees fled at the onset of the emergency in order to ascertain how many people are physically present. For many refugees, some of whom have already started farming activities, the establishment of the Little Wlebo camp offers much comfort. •

UN boosts food security in border communities



ties and refugees consuming seeds they had saved for the planting season. This has jeopardized the long-term food security in affected areas.

"We are already 12 people in my family but when our Ivorian brothers and sisters came to us for help in December, we invited them to stay with us and shared our food. I have been very worried about the future but now that we have received this support I know that the food needs of my family and our guests will be secured," says Nora, a beneficiary of the new initiative.

In March 2011, FAO deployed an assessment mission to the border villages in Nimba County, which has hosted refugees since the first influx and continues to host the largest number of refugees. The assessment showed that a significant number of host communities had already depleted their food stocks and had started consuming their rice seeds.

"We cannot even think of saving rice seeds for planting when people in your village are starving," said one village Chief, when interviewed during the assessment. It reflects the high levels of food insecurity and chronic malnutrition prevalent in areas affected by the refugee crisis. Even before the refugee influx, food insecurity in Nimba County was measured at 32.2 per cent. At national level, chronic malnutrition rates, measured by the number of stunted children, are among the highest in the world at almost 42 per cent.

"The food crisis is not something that we will see only in this instance. If local food production needs are not supported during the present planting season, host communities will be facing long-term food insecurity and a protracted dependence on food aid," warns the District Agricultural Officer in Saclepea, Ben Saye.

FAO is planning to scale up the intervention to support an additional 2,500 refugee and host families in Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties. This intervention will combine lowland rice, vegetable and/or cassava production. FAO has also supported vegetable production in the Bahn Refugee Camp in Nimba County.

Over 21,000 households in areas hosting refugees are to benefit from food production support by a number of partner organizations in the food security sector. •

By Lisbeth Albinus

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Food Programme (WFP) are working closely with the Ministry of Agriculture in Liberia to help boost food security and prevent a food crisis in dozens of border communities that are presently hosting Ivorian refugees. Some 13,000 people from host community households in Nimba County are expected to benefit from this joint initiative.

The Ministry of Agriculture and the FAO are distributing rice production packages to an initial 2,600 families in Nimba County. The package consists of rice seeds, both highland and lowland varieties, assorted tools, fertilizers and integrated pest management resources. Farmers and community members will also receive basic training on improved rice production and continuous support during the planting season. To prevent the consumption of rice seeds, WFP is providing seed protection in the form of a two-month food aid package to the same beneficiaries.

Liberian families living on the border with Côte d'Ivoire have been hosting tens of thousands of Ivorian refugees since De-

cember 2010. Over 175,000 refugees have been registered in Liberia since the crisis began last November. Of these, more than 90 per cent are living in host communities. Host families have generously shared their homes, food and water resources with Ivo-

FAO is planning to scale up the intervention to support an additional 2,500 refugee and host families in Nimba and Grand Gedeh Counties. This intervention will combine lowland rice, vegetable and/or cassava production.

rian refugees, who they say offered them similar assistance when they fled the war in Liberia years ago.

However, hosting refugees for more than five months has put tremendous pressure on local food resources, depleting food stocks and leading to hikes in food prices. It has also resulted in communi-



President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf flanked by UN Envoy Løj and Bachelet

President launches Gender Equality Fund

By Ataul Osmani and James S. King

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has launched a Gender Equality Fund aimed at empowering market women in post-war Liberia by improving existing markets, constructing new ones and providing the women marketers with financial and other support.

Launching the US \$3 million multi-donor initiative at a programme at Jorkpen Town (Nancy B. Doe) market on 8 March, the President said that the fund would help improve the lives of the women and boost the economy at local and national level.

The fund is named after President Sirleaf, Africa's first democratically elected female president and the granddaughter of a rural market woman.

"By launching the fund, I have kept my promise given to you five years ago; some of you now can read and write," the President said, adding that the first phase of the Sirleaf Market Women Fund (SMWF) focused on literacy and the construction and revitalization of the markets.

The second phase would now target

rural areas, she said, adding "More attention is needed in these places."

UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet, who joined the President at the launch, said that the idea of the Sirleaf Market Women Fund is to reconstruct and revitalize Liberia's markets to strengthen economic empowerment of the women and scale up their activities in both

The fund is named after President Sirleaf, Africa's first democratically elected female president and the granddaughter of a rural market woman.

rural and urban areas. "With this fund, you will be empowered, you have a lot of solutions to your challenges...it will give lot of support to you and your families...it will create opportunities for you and your family," she added.

Terming the women marketers as a

"critical part of the Liberian economy", Bachelet said, "It's the market women who sell agricultural products produced in the rural counties and in the west African region...it's the market women who ensure food, clothing and household supplies are available to families and communities... it's the market women who provide economic support to your families, pay school fees for the children or rent houses."

Bachelet hoped that the fund will bring significant changes in the lives of the women marketers and assured that her agency would continue to provide the needed support to help improve their well-being. Wishing all the success to the initiative, she said, "It's never too late to take your challenges, it's never too late to learn, it's never too late to make a difference, and believe me, you are making a difference."

Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj was also present at the programme while Minister for Gender and Development Vabah K. Gayflor, and the Chairperson of Board of SMWF, Olivia Shannon, also spoke on the occasion. •



BACHELET : LIBERIA A M OF WOMEN'S EMPOWER

By Ataul Osmani and James S. King

On Monday, 7 March, the first day of her three-day visit to Liberia, UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet visited the Peace Hut in Totota in lower Bong County to learn first-hand the activities of community women in peace building, enhancing women's access to justice, and dealing with domestic violence and rape.

"I am really happy to be part of this peace hut which is playing an important role in peace building in the country after the war. It really shows the spirit of Liberian women who are confronting the current challenges they are facing such as domestic violence, rape and other issues," said Bachelet, a former President of Chile. She praised the members of the Women in Peace-building Network (WIPNET), which runs the Totota Peace Hut, a community of more than 50,000 residents.

The Peace Hut, a community forum for amicable resolution of domestic violence, has become a place for peace and counseling as most members of the community prefer it to judicial courts because of cost considerations and prolonged bureaucracy. WIPNET is represented in 10 out of 15 counties of Liberia with 10 branches in Bong County.

"I commend you, I congratulate you, for your efforts in peace during and after the war and, of course, now because it



Bachelet meets members of WIPNET

ODEL MENT

will depend on all of you, specially on the young people that peace can be part of this country for ever, because we all know we want peace,” Bachelet said.

During the civil war in Liberia, women made remarkable effort towards resolving the conflict with peaceful sit-in actions in public places and peace marches. Donning white T-shirts inscribed with various peace messages, WIPNET members presented their guest cola nuts, traditionally symbolizing warm reception, when they

formally welcomed her to the Peace Hut.

A joyful and bare-foot Bachelet sitting before a similarly barefoot group of young and old women as tradition dictates, praised the women for their strong commitment to making women’s issues their priority. “We are women, we are from the UN Women, this is a new organization that works for women in the world and we are very happy to be here,” an excited Bachelet told the women of Totota as she led them in an open discussion on their achievements and challenges.

“This is a more comprehensive way to empowering women by giving them knowledge of self-reliance and it is a very important example of how women can make huge contribution to their communities, helping other women to get empowered and also giving them justice. It helps them to get access to justice in a faster way, in a community way,” Bachelet said,

a country which really believes in what women can do.”

The UN Women Executive Director also promised to continue to work with communities to root out violence against women and said, “I will be remembering your faces, your dreams, your expectations, and your challenges...I will continue to work for you.”

Nushann, the Totota Peace Hut Chairlady, outlined the interventions and the amicable resolutions of domestic cases, arrests and turning over to police of rape suspects, as well as gender sensitization that form some of the achievements made by the Peace Hut. “The Peace Hut is routinely visited by abused residents in Totota and surroundings, there is no case beyond our resolution except rape cases that we normally turn over to the police for handling.” Impeding the efforts of the women in the Peace Hut is the lack of logistics, declining

“It is a country where women have been able to achieve much better conditions than in the past. They are fighting against rape, they are fighting against poverty, they are fighting to give more access to health, education. Liberia is a very good model of women’s empowerment and a country which really believes in what women can do.”

responding to a query from a journalist.

Asked about the significance of celebrating the 100th anniversary of International Women’s Day in Liberia, where women were specifically targeted with rape, and trafficking during the civil war, the UN Women Executive Director said Africa was one of her biggest priorities. “I know that all over the world women have lot of difficulties, but more so in Africa, who are poor, victims of rape, violence, sexual abuses. Secondly, this is the country where we have first female President in Africa. It is a country where women have been able to achieve much better conditions than in the past. They are fighting against rape, they are fighting against poverty, they are fighting to give more access to health, education. Liberia is a very good model of women’s empowerment and

economic status of women and poor education, which Nushann asked Bachelet to remedy through the provision of vehicles and support to a vocational training programme for women.

An Elder of Totota, Wilson K. Toto, said the Peace Hut under the women’s leadership has positively contributed to resolution of many of the town’s social problems. Toto promised to continue co-operation with the women as they work towards peace and stability in the community. Lindora Howard-Diawara, WIPNET Executive Director, expressed her delight over Bachelet’s visit to Liberia while Gender and Development Minister Varbah Gayflor said it demonstrated that the peace building effort of the women had not gone unnoticed and the visit would further encourage the women to continue their work. •

“Women can do it...”

Former Chilean President **Michelle Bachelet**, the first head of the newly created UN Women, chose to celebrate the 100th International Women's Day in Liberia on 8 March. In an exclusive interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, the first female president of Chile speaks about her vision for women's empowerment, the challenges facing world's female population, how her own trials and tribulations shaped her destiny, and asserts that "women can do it". Excerpts:



UN FOCUS: Liberia is excited about your visit, this being your first official visit to a country after your appointment as head of UN Women. Why did you choose Liberia for your first visit, and also to celebrate the International Day of Women in Liberia?

Michelle Bachelet: It is my first visit after the launch of UN Women. I thought tomorrow, 8 March, will be a very special day. It is not just any International Women's Day. It is also to commemorate 100 years of international Women's Day celebration. Even though there are still so many challenges, women have progressed a lot. The first time it was commemorated only in just two countries! Women can now vote and it is almost universal. So there is lot of progress.

Why Liberia? I believe that African

women are very capable but, still in many places, because of conflict or because of poverty and underdevelopment, women are still facing terrible challenges. It is said that 70 per cent of the world's poor are women and girls. In some countries in Africa, women make up 85 per cent of the labour force in agriculture but only 2 per cent of women have land rights. Women in many places face high rate of maternal mortality, in some places still high rates of infant mortality. When you look at the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa you see it has the face of a woman or a child, so there are many reasons why for me Africa is a priority. But on the other hand this is a country that has the first democratically elected female President in Africa. She has done a lot in terms of making progress for women in Liberia and the country won last year's award for MDG3. The first peace-

keeping unit made of only females was deployed here. So there are a lot of reasons why I came to Liberia. It is a good example, women can excel and do much more. So it is a very good place to commemorate a century of International Women's Day.

You described the launch of UN Women as the first of many important milestones in the global pursuit of gender equality. What can and should UN Women achieve in your view? What is your vision for UN Women?

My vision is a world where women and girls and men and boys have equal opportunities and they can develop their capacities, their talents, their merits, and together we can build a better world for all. The most important priorities are linked to the empowerment of women. Real gender equality can be achieved only if women

are empowered. If women are empowered, they can stand up to confront violence against women and gender based violence. In countries in conflict and post-conflict countries, we have seen women playing a major role in bringing about peace. Yet, once peace is achieved, women are forgotten. So we need women empowerment in terms of building constituencies through which women's voices can be heard during the conflict and while we shape and rebuild societies after the conflict.

Only 19 per cent of the parliamentarians of the world are females and only 19 are heads of state from the 192 heads of state in the world. So we need to expand women's voices, enhance their capacities in terms of leadership and participation. The other important empowerment is economic. I'm convinced that if women have economic autonomy, they can deal better with all kinds of problems, feed the families, help the communities. We are talking about two different issues, one is to help rural women, improve their capacities to

that the international community is convinced that it is nothing natural, not even in a war. It is a crime, and in war, it is a war crime.

We understand that in conflict and post-conflict situations armed groups use violence against women and rape as weapons of war. This is a worldwide problem, you can find it in developed countries and in developing countries. We are working a lot on changing the mindset of the men and boys. We need to involve men and women, boys and girls, to understand that violence against women is not natural. We need to embark on a very strong campaign against violence, against rape and female genital mutilation and all the other kinds of violence. There is the Secretary-General's campaign, UNITE to End Violence Against Women, to bring top leaders from different fields to talk to other men and boys to create awareness and commitment against violence. We also need to ensure that in post conflict-countries women can have justice. In many places they don't

and your having had to flee the country – all make you more determined to succeed?

I think what they made me was first of all to realize that in the world we have heroes and villains. I want to live in a world that gives respect and dignity to everyone and opportunity to children because if you protect children at the beginning you can prevent many other things -- they won't be future abusers. It also teaches me that in a country that is not able to solve its own problems in civil ways you can get into issues like what happened to us -- the dictatorship, the violations of human rights. My conviction was that I can do things to be able to have good relationships. Understanding our diversities is something good for the country, not the contrary. I started to build bridges, meeting people who were enemies in the past. I think that made me stronger. I never ever looked into being a minister or a president but I always tried to work hard on what I believe and do it as best as I could. People knew me as a minister and they wanted me as president of the country because they knew I was working for them, I was putting them at the center of public policy.

In Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the first female President in the whole of Africa. You were the first female President of Chile. Two highly inspiring icons women worldwide can look up to. What is your message to Liberian women AND men?

I remember I was almost in the second round of my campaigning when I read she was elected the first female President in Africa. That was wonderful, and very soon I was elected too.

I think the Liberian people know from experience that they have very strong women. And I think men and women in Liberia want to continue building a country where opportunities are fair for all -- for women and for men. And I am so convinced that when men support that they will also be better and happier, because when women are better the whole society is better. My message is "women can do it." And men have to walk side by side with women to have a just society.

add value to their products, improve their livelihoods. We are also talking about gender parity at the corporate sector not only about what the public sector can do with poor women but also how we can improve their entrepreneurial capacities. The rest of the areas are very important, health, education, HIV/AIDS.

So UN Women will focus on four major areas: political empowerment, economic empowerment, ending violence against women, and peace and security.

UN Women envisions the end of the worldwide phenomenon of violence against women. How hard a task could this be, considering that this is an age-old phenomenon -- domestic violence as well as violence against women especially during war and civilian conflicts? Homer in the Iliad describes how Trojan women were treated as war prizes during the Trojan war....

For so many years it was like something natural and the important thing is

have access to justice. There has to be no impunity. People will have to really understand that violence against women is a crime.

In the world there are 132 countries that have already passed bills and have laws against violence against women, but there is still a problem of implementation due to lack of resources, human and finance. We have countries in Africa that have made important changes, passing of laws, and carried out campaign activities. In Liberia there is campaign against sexual violence. We visited Totota, where WIP-NET is working with women, communities, traditional chiefs, to campaign against violence. In the UN there is a strong policy on zero tolerance for any peacekeeping member to commit any of these crimes.

You have said that your own experiences have taught you that there is no limit to what women can do. Did your experiences -- death of your father in jail under Pinochet, your own detention and torture,

Thank you very much.



Members of the community with LNP, UNPOL, Nepal and Indian FPU, carried out a clean up drive at Freeport road



All gathered together after a school outre

WINNING HEARTS THROUGH

By Ataul Osmani

Massa Fahnbulleh, Chief of Kanga Town in Garwula District, Grand Cape Mount County, grew up fearing the police. "From my childhood, I had always been told that police is not our friend and there is every reason to be afraid of policeman," he confesses. His impression was not misplaced -- the Liberian police and the army had more predators than protectors during the inglorious days of the country's civil war. Tales of atrocities committed by men in uniform abound.

However, Chief Fahnbulleh now has a different take on Liberia's current crop of policemen and women. The newly trained members of the Liberian National Police (LNP) are now operational across the country. And they are making a deliberate attempt to erase the past stigma by relating to the people they serve through Community Policing. Fahnbulleh is among several Liberians who have learned more about the police from training offered through

LNP's new initiative.

"After the training on Community Policing and doing work closely with the police to solve security problems in our community, my notion has been changed. Now I see the police differently, as our friend, as our partner, as our security," says a smiling Fahnbulleh. "We have to help the police to fight crime in our community. This is for our sake, to build a secure and safer community and country," he says, adding, "We need a stronger relationship between the community and the police to root out the crime."

The Chief of Kanga Town has every reason to praise the police because the community recently rid themselves of a bunch of drug dealers with the help of the police. "We had serious problems with drugs in our town. But now with the help of police, we became able to drive the drug dealers out of the town with some of them arrested. The illegal drugs have now gone from our community," Fahnbulleh said, adding, "The crime rate dropped drastically in my area because of the active role of Community Policing, and if it runs well,

I am sure we can create a crime-free community nationwide."

The Community Policing concept was launched in 2004 with the realization that the mandate of LNP cannot be achieved effectively without the support of the communities. United Nations Police (UNPOL) is playing a mentoring role to the LNP by providing technical assistance in establishing Community Policing in different counties. Built on a joint police-community partnership approach, the Community Policing is slowly creating a positive atmosphere of trust and confidence between the community and police.

Funded by UN Development Programme (UNDP), the LNP in partnership with their UNPOL counterparts have been vigorously involved in revitalization of different Community Policing Groups. Till date, about 700 Community Policing Groups have been formed in different counties across Liberia.

"The police alone cannot be sole guardian of law and order, all members of the community will have to be active allies in the effort to enhance the safety



Beach programme at Teebey Memorial High School, Bushrod Island



Assistant Minister for Justice Asatu Bah-Kenneth at the launch of the Community Policing Manual

THROUGH COMMUNITY POLICING

and quality of neighbourhoods," says UNPOL Commissioner Guatam Sawang. "In some communities, it will take time to break down barriers of apathy and mistrust so that meaningful partnerships can be forged. Trust is the value that underlies and links the components of community

Community Policing could offer a comprehensive, long-term approach to reduce crime and help bring lasting peace and security to Liberia.

In April, the LNP launched its Community Policing Manual. Addressing the launching ceremony at the LNP Training

them." She asked the owners of the houses in the city to collect detailed information about the tenants before renting houses to them.

The manual, which is a successful outcome of the Community Policing Best Practices Retreat held in April 2010, is particularly intended for training and guiding the establishment of Community Policing meeting groups. Designed by the LNP with support from UNPOL and UNDP, it discusses in practical terms the concepts of Community Policing, the actors and stakeholders who should be involved in the implementation and their respective roles and responsibilities in the partnership. It also looks at the establishment of Community Policing meeting groups; its composition, structure, mandate and sustainability.

"It is our hope that this practical manual will enlighten all the stakeholders involved in this partnership about their various roles and responsibilities and help create an atmosphere of trust and confidence between the police and community," said Inspector General of Police Marc A. Amblard. He urged all Liberian citizens to help the LNP make the country a safer place to live. •

The Community Policing concept was launched in 2004 with the realization that the mandate of LNP cannot be achieved effectively without the support of the communities. Built on a joint police-community partnership approach, the Community Policing is slowly creating a positive atmosphere of trust and confidence between the community and police.

partnership and problem solving. Without trust between police and citizens, effective policing is impossible."

Stressing the need for reinvigorating the communities to deter crime and create a more vital neighbourhood, Sawang says

Academy at Paynseville, Assistant Minister of Justice Asatu Bah-Kenneth stressed the need for citizens to cooperate with the community policing programmes. "This interaction will flush out the crooks in the community as they are well known to



Senior UNPOL officer Vildana Sedo with Deputy Inspector General for Administration of LNP Rose Stryker

WACPS MAKES STRIDES IN COMBATING SGBV

By Ruby Ofori

There has been a significant improvement of late in the ability of the Liberia National Police (LNP) to combat sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) – a welcome development experts attribute to the strengthening of the LNP's Women and Children Protection Service (WACPS) with technical support from UN Police.

Sexual and gender-based violence cases are handled exclusively through the WACPS, which is made up of 241 officers, one third of whom are women. WACPS is

led by Assistant Commissioner of Police Vera Manly, a veteran police officer with 19 years of law enforcement experience, who is also credited with much of the unit's success.

Before joining WACPS, each officer must complete a three-month specialized training. With line managers in place, 52 units are currently fully functional in police stations throughout the country.

Supporting the WACPS are six UNPOL officers – four of whom are women – managed by Vildana Sedo, a senior female officer from Bosnia and Herzegovina with 15 years of experience. UNPOL's task is to monitor and analyze the work of the

WACPS and advise middle level management. They are also working with WACPS to draft a manual on standardized operating procedures for the unit.

Deputy Inspector-General for Administration of the LNP, Rose Stryker, is proud of the work the WACPS is doing and notes, "We are fortunate to have UNPOL by our side". The head of LNP Operations, Chief Inspector Dixon Jlatech, also works closely with UNPOL and commends the close mentoring UNPOL provides. "They guide us and advise us on best practices," he says.

Proper record-keeping and documentation are essential to prosecuting crimi-



Assistant Commissioner of Police Vera Manly

nal cases, and in this the WACPS has made dramatic progress. “Our officers are processing these cases much better now. They are completing the necessary forms correctly and, in the past months, not a single case has been thrown out of court because it was improperly presented. We are also getting much better at handling victim confidentiality,” says Stryker. These positive signs have given rise to hope for greater success. “Logistical challenges continue to exist, but I am confident we can overcome them, as we have made great strides thus far,” notes Stryker.

Sedo, who also comes from a post-conflict country, is keenly aware of the technical and monetary difficulties that post-war police forces face. She believes that in time the LNP will overcome these challenges because the way they handle their cases is most important, and they do this well. “When they have the support they need, WACPS can handle everything that’s thrown at them. Of course we sometimes provide support in the form of transport, advice on planning operations and conducting investigations, but generally the WACPS officers do their jobs well

and they are capable of working on their own,” says Sedo.

WACPS’s success can be seen in the increasing number of SGBV reports it receives, especially in Monrovia – a clear sign that public confidence in the section is growing. “Our phones are constantly busy, 24 hours a day and seven days a week,” says Manly. She also notes that her team receives many domestic violence cases and their work involves family counseling in those disputes. The cases land in court if counseling fails.

Norwegian government has funded the construction of a new, three story headquarters for the WACPS in Monrovia that is designed to cater to the privacy needs of women and children. UNDP will assist with furnishing the building. The government of Denmark has also donated three mini-buses to the WACPS. This assistance is a tremendous benefit, but LNP officials say many other needs remain unmet – for example, funding for office equipment for the new WACPS headquarters is still being sought and the LNP lacks forensic technol-

The Norwegian government has funded the construction of a new, three story headquarters for the WACPS in Monrovia that is designed to cater to the privacy needs of women and children. UNDP will assist with furnishing the building. The government of Denmark has also donated three mini-buses to the WACPS.

The WACPS is supported by a fairly sophisticated network of government agencies, including the Ministry of Justice’s SGBV unit. Manly explains that this unit is a “key partner”, as “they are the link between the LNP and the courts”. The Ministry of Health and Social Welfare also pays for the medical care of victims of sexual assault and rape, and five nationwide “safe houses” help to shelter victims.

In addition, international donors have stepped up to help provide the WACPS with some of the resources it needs. The

ogy to support their investigative work.

Despite the challenges that the WACPS confronts daily, Sedo says the WACPS serves as a role model for other LNP units. The dedication of the WACPS staff is responsible for this success, she says. “This is extremely trying work – you have to have a great deal of commitment to be able to do this, day in and day out,” she explains, adding, “This commitment that I see, and the results that it brings, gives me an enormous amount of optimism.” •

Newly constructed WACPS headquarters in Monrovia





Deputy UN Envoy Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu hands over the new WACPS headquarters to Minister of Justice and Attorney-General Christiana Tah

New Headquarters for WACPS

By Ruby Ofori

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, has praised the successes chalked up by the Women and Children Protection Section (WACPS) of the Liberian National Police (LNP) in combating violent crimes against women and children.

The UN Envoy was speaking at the inauguration of a newly constructed US\$550,000 headquarters building for the WACPS as she handed over the keys of the building to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Liberia, Christiana Tah.

The Deputy UN Envoy noted that despite the many challenges it faces, the LNP has made it a point to prioritize crimes against women and children because crimes of that nature are most damaging to those directly affected. She described the victims of such crimes as "silent victims" whose ordeals often go "unreported and or unpunished."

She said: "The LNP has recognized this and taken up the challenges that these crimes present. This is most clearly evidenced by the impressive success so far demonstrated by the LNP Women and Children Protection Section. The WACPS is in many ways a model unit for the LNP."

The new building was inaugurated jointly by Tah and the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Norway, Espen Barth Eide.

The DSRSG thanked the Norwegian Government for helping to fund the project. She also thanked the UNDP and UNOPS for implementing the project and for providing furniture for the new offices. She said Norway has been a steadfast partner to Liberia and UNMIL since the end of the civil war.

"Indeed, the support that Norway has given to combating violence against women and children in Liberia is invaluable, and this support will have far reaching benefits for Liberia," said Mensa-Bonsu.

Referring to the new three-storey WACPS building which is annexed to the LNP headquarters, the Deputy UN Envoy said: "This beautiful edifice is one more

manifestation of the commitment of the Government of Norway, to ensure that the protection of women and children remains an important focus of law enforcement in Liberia. It also represents a vote of confidence in the LNP's WACPS and the successes it has chalked up so far."

"I hope now, the victims will get proper treatment and security and will feel more comfortable to come to the justice system," said Minister for Justice Tah.

Referring to the new building and the LNP's efforts to combat violent crimes, the Norwegian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Espen Barth Eide said: "Reconstruction of the physical infrastructure is much easier task than the reconstruction of lives. There are many challenges in the justice and security sector in Liberia. We tried to be helpful together with the UN and international community."

The WACPS was created through a Memorandum of Understanding between UNICEF and the LNP and became operational in September 2005 with the aim of tackling violent crimes perpetrated against women and children. •



Swedish Ambassador Per Carlson and Land Commissioner Cecil Brandy at the signing ceremony

Grant Boost for Critical Land Reform

By James S. King

The government of Sweden has provided US \$2.3 million to support land reform programmes in Liberia. The funds will be managed by UN-Habitat on behalf of the Land Commission.

Under the grant agreement, UN-HABITAT and the Government of Liberia will collaborate in joint initiatives that focus on urban land, land disputes and land management. UN-HABITAT will provide technical support and advice that will help the Land Commission identify practical directions and outline strategies for urban planning with a focus on upgrading informal settlements, slum prevention and poverty reduction in towns and cities of Liberia.

Land reform became a priority when the Government of Liberia recognized the importance and the complexity of land issues in post conflict Liberia. The resolution of land disputes is critical to Liberia's economic and political recovery, says the newly appointed Land Commission Chairman, Cecil Brandy. "A framework for development and resolution of land disputes must be sought in

a comprehensive and deliberate fashion," he said. He described the grant as "a clear manifestation of Sweden's commitment to

The Swedish government grant will enable the Land Commission to pursue effective land management and governance in Liberia by building capacity and training staff. The commission will undertake an inventory of land in priority areas for public-private concession holding and verify base maps which will assist with the resolution of land disputes.

assist with the reconstruction, rehabilitation and development of Liberia."

Sweden's Ambassador to Liberia Per

Carlson said the Swedish Government through its development cooperation agency, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) "is delighted to contribute to the work of the Land Commission which it regards as a fundamental driving force for moving the necessary reforms and land issues forward." Liberia's land history has created a land rights system that is inequitable in access to and use of land, he added.

Ambassador Carlson said the established pattern of land rights in Liberia has tended to be discriminatory and as a result "tensions and mistrust remain amongst claimants of land." He said Sweden also realizes the crucial role that land reform can play in the nation's overall economic development and the consolidation of lasting peace and democratic governance. Liberia's productive sector is hampered by existing land rights that provide "weak incentives" to productive investments in its agro and forestry sectors, he said.

"There is a need for comprehensive land policies that provide access for all citizens, ensure and enforce security of tenure and rule of law in land matters," Land Commission Chairman Cecil Brandy said. He said that in order to avert future land conflicts "a framework has to be developed to manage land disputes amicably." He stressed the need for the Land Commission to engage with citizens on land related issues, to educate citizens on land rights, administrative processes of land and property transactions.

Brandy said conflicting claims over land ownership between individuals and groups, overlapping boundary claims and lack of an effective adjudicatory framework for resolving land disputes are threats to peace and security in Liberia.

The Swedish government grant will enable the Land Commission to pursue effective land management and governance in Liberia by building capacity and training staff. The commission will undertake an inventory of land in priority areas for public-private concession holding and verify base maps which will assist with the resolution of land disputes. UN-HABITAT will provide technical assistance to the Land Commission staff. UN-HABITAT is the United Nations agency responsible for human settlement. •



FIRST BA EXERCISE

By Daniel Mensah-Brande

A recent military training exercise has boosted the capacity of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) on its path to becoming a military force to be reckoned with in the defence of the nation. Over a two-week period in April, the AFL completed its first ever battalion level training exercise in which participants set up a logistics base to provide vital supplies and held a mock battle in Naama, central Liberia, using jungle warfare tactics. The aim of the exercise was to train the newly restructured AFL in conventional as well as unconventional warfare. In the past, the AFL has only held squad and platoon level exercises with logistics provided by external agents.

Around 1,200 troops took part in the exercise. "It was a great experience; we learnt how to move through the woodland, navigating dangerous obstacles, covering long distances without maps or compass-



Soldiers during the exercise



BATTALION-LEVEL EXERCISE FOR NEW ARMY

es. We got the feel of the bush," said Lt. Michael Wilson Wilson, who commanded the opposing force in the simulation battle. "We need more of such exercises to sharpen our skills."

Code-named "Watch Over," the exercise was facilitated by a team of US military mentors in collaboration with UNMIL, which airlifted over 80 AFL troops to the exercise location, rehabilitated roads and bridges in the area, and assigned three military experts to evaluate the training.

AFL Chief of Staff, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Alao Abdurrahman described the exercise as a success and praised the AFL troops. "I will give them a very good pass mark," he said. The Chief of Staff said the AFL would undertake more demanding exercises to ensure its readiness for the constitutional tasks it must carry out. "As we say in the military, we try to sweat during peace so that we bleed less during war," he said.

"It was a great exercise; the first of its kind at a battalion-level, with the troops

travelling long distances from their bases, and supporting themselves logically with food, water, fuel, medical supplies and communication," said Maj. Andrew Hamilton, the head of the US military team that coordinated the maneuver.

For Defense Minister Brownie Samukai, a former Chief of Police in the mid-1990s, who pioneered a rapid reaction force to clamp down on armed robbery, the friendly interactions between the public and members of the AFL during the exercise were re-assuring signs of the emergence of a new model army in which soldiers treat civilians with respect and honour civilians' rights. "We were very pleased that the citizens of the area welcomed the soldiers. This is a departure from the past," he said.

Residents of the area had similar praise. "Unlike the previous AFL soldiers, the new AFL soldiers look very friendly and disciplined. For the two weeks that they were with us here in Naama, they did not harass or beat up anybody," remarked

one resident. Another added: "If not for this exercise, I wouldn't have seen any personnel of the new AFL. They are always confined to their barracks, and are not roaming around, molesting civilians. Moreover, they can all read and write, and solve problems; this is good for peace in our nation."

Originally named the Liberia Frontier Force in 1908 when it was first established, and later renamed the AFL, Liberia's national army was demobilized in 2005 after 14 years of civil war and reconstituted in 2006 in line with the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement which stipulated that the new army would be a professional, apolitical army orientated to defend Liberia's national sovereignty and respond to natural disasters when needed. The AFL currently has 2,017 soldiers including 74 women. There is one soldier protecting every 1,750 Liberians against external aggression.

The AFL now engages in building bridges, training HIV/AIDS peer educators, and conducting free medical outreach programmes in local communities. It also undergoes intensive training to sharpen its professional skills.

"This is the kind of military we want to have -- well trained and well disciplined -- to win the confidence and trust of the people. And we will continue to carry out training exercises of this nature to expose them to different terrains of our country," said the Defence Minister. •

NEW CLINICS BOLS



ics in the district and provided an ambulance to enhance the healthcare services in the community.

"Before the clinic was constructed, patients were carried in hammock to the next village which is several miles away from Yolo Town to be transported to Phebe for further treatment and in many cases the patients died before reaching the referral hospital," Yonglo says, recalling that in 1984 his sister nearly died due to the lack of a health facility in his area. "Now, at least we have a clinic and nobody has to die for not getting treatment."

UNDP, under its Millennium Development Village Project, funded by the Norwegian government, constructed the clinics -- one in Yolo town and the other in Rock Crusher Community area -- in Kokoyah district to support Liberia's struggling health sector.

The estimated cost for each clinic is US \$120,000 while the ambulance is put at US \$65,000. Each clinic has 21 rooms, including an outdoor patients department and a maternity ward. The ambulance will be used to carry critically ill patients to referral hospitals for emergency medical treatment. The distance to the closest hospital where major operations can be conducted is about 70 kilometres.

The Millennium Village Project is

By Ataul Osmani

For Yonglo, an elderly resident of Yolo Town Community in Kokoyah District, Bong County, to see two new clinics and a new ambulance in his district seemed like divine intervention.

"To us, this is really God's gift. Now, at least, nobody will die for not getting treatment because we got a clinic in our own town and an ambulance to carry patients to the referral hospitals for emergency medical treatment," he says.

Kokoyah district never had a clinic in the past. Recently UNDP set up two clin-

MASTER HEALTHCARE



A view of the new clinic



also trying to set up a Community Health Volunteer programme which will support community health education, hygiene as well as pre- and post-natal care, UNDP sources said.

While inaugurating the clinic in Yolo Town, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf urged the community residents to take full advantage of the modern healthcare facilities and help manage and maintain the community clinics. She also reiterated her government's priority to rebuild the country's health sector, which is still struggling to cope with the needs of the people. "Providing healthcare facilities to all Liberians,

Liberians to make large farms and produce more food to feed the nation. She also said that premium would be placed on the rehabilitation of feeder roads in the country.

"This would enable the people to engage in large scale farming activities in a bid to ensure food security, peace and development," she said, adding, "Grow more rice, plantains, potatoes, eddoes, coffees, cocoas, sugar canes, peppers, cassavas and other cash crops in order to foot the bills of your education and medical needs as well as your dependants," the President urged the residents.

Health Minister Dr. Walter Gwenigale

ficials, must ensure the accomodation of those who will take up the assignments at the clinic," he added.

"Besides the clinic project, several other projects have been earmarked and are being implemented at strategic locations in Kokoyah district," said UNDP Country Director Dominic Sam.

The Norwegian Government has provided US \$5 million to jumpstart feasible development and economic empowerment projects for implementation in Kokoyah District. "The UNDP-KMVP initiatives in Kokoyah include internet installation, provision of seed rice and peanuts to local farmers for up and low land farming," Sam said.

According to available data, about 95 per cent of the pre-war figure of 325 health stations in Liberia had been partially or completely destroyed. Even where services existed, citizens either found access blocked by financial barriers or encountered poor-quality health care.

The KMV project runs from 2008-2013 and is supported by the Government of Norway. It aims to transform subsistence livelihoods into small-scale commercial entrepreneurship and provide robust guidelines for how villages can achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the target date. •

"Providing healthcare facilities to all Liberians, irrespective of geographical location in the country, is one of the key priorities of the government and development support partners," - President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

irrespective of geographical location in the country, is one of the key priorities of the government and development support partners," she said.

The President also praised development partners for the initiative and urged

the people of the communities to provide suitable accommodation for the health workers who will be working in the new facilities. "I will send nurses and medical personnel here, but you, the community people and local government of-



New Primary Schools Promise Better Education

By Ataul Osmani

United Nations children's agency UNICEF is supporting the government to construct and renovate 90 primary schools across the country aimed at increasing access to primary education by 4.2 per cent and improve the quality of Liberia's education system.

Under the project titled "Support to Child-friendly Schools Development", UNICEF will construct 30 new schools, including six under the initiative "Learning Along Borders for Living Across Boundaries (LAB4LAB)" in five counties bordering Sierra Leone, Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.

The 60 other dilapidated schools in 11 counties will be renovated or expanded, increasing the access to schooling to 22,500 children, including some above the primary school age whose education was disrupted by the conflict.

The US\$ 8.3 million project, funded by the Government of Japan, will be implemented through the Ministry of Education. The 30-month project will be completed by November 2012. The project will help reduce the numbers of school drop-outs and absenteeism; increase retention and completion rates as the schools will be closer to the communities with ad-

equate water and gender-sensitive sanitation facilities. The schools will be staffed with qualified teachers.

"The construction and renovation of 90 schools through the Children-friendly Approach aims to bring a qualitative change in primary education in Liberia," said Isabel Crowley, UNICEF Country Representative.

Terming the project a "landmark initiative" to rebuild the country's primary education sector, she hoped that this initiative "will significantly increase the school attendance rate and will help turn these youngsters into national assets to the war-battered country."

For Liberia, emerging from a 14-year civil war, quality primary education is crucial to rebuilding the nation. "Nothing can make a child feel more secure than having a school to go to. This is certainly a great initiative by UNICEF for the next two years with the support of Government of Japan to rebuild the education sector of Liberia to have children within the environment of learning," the UNICEF chief added.

Since free education was introduced four years ago, student enrollment has increased dramatically, with some schools experiencing overcrowding. Thousands of children have returned to school -- even those who are well past primary school age.

According to UNICEF data, at the end of the civil conflict, over 80 per cent of primary schools had been destroyed or dilapidated. The School Census of 2007-2008 found only 40 per cent of the schools with solid structures. The rest were made of semi-solid or make-shift structures.

Of the 30 new schools, seven each will be constructed in Nimba and Montserrado counties, five in Sinoe, four in Rivercess and one in Gbarpolu. Six schools under the LAB4LAB initiative will be constructed in Lofa, Bong, Grand Cape Mount, Grand Gedeh and Maryland Counties.

The 60 others which will be renovated or expanded include 14 in Sinoe County, 13 in Nimba, 10 in Montserrado, eight in Rivercess, seven in Bong, four in Gbarpolu, and two each in Grand Gedeh and Bomi. UNICEF has already set up a construction unit to help implement the project successfully.

Under the project, UNICEF will build or renovate 582 classrooms, reducing the learner ratio from 1:50 to 1:35. Besides providing necessary chairs and desks for the new and renovated schools, it will ensure adequate water and gender-sensitive sanitation facilities which will promote good health and hygiene practices and reduce absenteeism.

The construction and renovation of 90 schools will also facilitate the expansion of the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP) to more counties, benefiting 9,000 learners. The ALP compresses six years of primary education into three years and targets those whose schooling was disrupted by the civil conflict.

Child-friendly School Development Approach looks at children's education holistically. "It's intended to help a child become a complete person intellectually, morally, socially academically, because we are also teaching them values that will help them become productive citizens," said, Keturah Siebu, Assistant Minister for Primary Education.

She also termed the construction and renovation of 90 schools a "great stride" to rebuild Liberia's education sector. "The challenges for us will be maintenance of those structures, training the teachers, and giving the country a good educated generation by utilizing the facilities properly."

National School Census Continues



By James S. King

For the first time in its history, Liberia's most populous county, Montserrado, is conducting a census of schools so as to more effectively determine and plan for the long term educational needs of the fast growing and youthful population. The exercise is part of a national census of schools being carried out by the Liberia Institute for Statistics and Geo Information Services (LISGIS) under the direction of the Ministry of Education with funding support from UNICEF and technical assistance from the European Union Support to Education in Liberia (EUSEL).

"This exercise has helped us a lot because this is the first time in Liberia that we have been able to demarcate education districts," said Benjamin Sumo, Director of Education Management and Information System (EMIS) at the Ministry of Education.

This is also the first time Liberia is using satellite technology for a school census. "The purpose of the school mapping project is to capture information about every school in the country using the Global Positioning System (GPS) technology to identify the actual locations of schools

in Liberia," said Thomas Davis, Director of Geo Information Services at LISGIS.

Once the authorities have detailed information about every school in the country, they can then begin the process of planning the national educational system. "After the school mapping exercise, we would be able to advise education authorities and policy makers about where to build school facilities," said Sumo, adding that the census will allow for more equitable distribution of educational resources nationwide. "You cannot concentrate schools in one geographical location of the country and leave out other areas," he said.

Davis said the significance of the school mapping exercise is to put in place "a clearly mapped school network in villages, towns and cities and information about school distances and population ratios so that education planners can accurately meet the educational needs of the nation."

Describing the dearth of information which faced Liberia's education planners before the census, Sumo said: "It is a reality that schools in Liberia could not be easily identified and stratified in terms of geographical location without a comprehensive mapping regime using the global positioning system technology."

UNICEF funded the project from its

inception in 2009 and the agency is making it possible to complete the project by approving a further amount of funding of US \$40 million which will cover part of the cost up till 2020.

The fruits of the census are already apparent in the new maps of schools produced in all the counties of Liberia except Montserrado. "The exercise covered the entire country but Montserrado because of its huge number of schools which proved to be a special challenge. So we did less than 100 per cent."

In April this year, LISGIS and the Ministry of Education began the second round of mapping of schools in greater Monrovia. This exercise involves LISGIS cartographers as well as county and district education officers who are gathering information about the exact number of school buildings and the number and gender of the student populations. School facilities that have been damaged or destroyed will be included in a database of schools that are to be rebuilt. The exercise covers primary and secondary education facilities in government run and private schools.

Emphasizing the radical change the census will bring about Sumo said: "This exercise, when completed, will require only a click of the computer keys for one to know how many schools there are and areas of location." •

Liberian

Have Liberians Reconciled Eight



Peter Y. Kerkula: Attorney at Law; "Let me just state very categorically that we have not reached a 100% reconciliation but I think the process is underway. We are working towards the process of reconciliation for the fact the government is doing whatever possible to see how we can reconcile our people in the counties. I think everybody has divergent views, a lot of people consider reconciliation from different perspectives. The process of democratization is another means of reconciliation. When that can happen it means that people are reaching to a point that their voices can be heard."



Junior Smith: Shoe Shiner; "I think we need to reconcile. We have not reconciled yet, for one fact if you look at the situations in the country they look the same nothing has changed yet. You see some people in the streets stealing others' properties, they have no jobs. We never had such situations in the country before. The government should find job avenues for its people so they can live like good citizens. There are too many little girls in the streets who should be encouraged to leave the streets and help them to live good life too."



Milton K. Kesselly: Resident of Bardnersville Community; "Yes, I will tell you that we have experienced reconciliation over the past time. You can see reconciliation is not physical. It is something within. To say that we have not reconciled and we see ourselves interacting with people accused of heinous crimes and wrong doings moving around freely is in itself reconciliation. Relatively there is reconciliation in Liberia. I will call on other Liberians who have not reconciled to do so."



Whelimina N. Doe: Inter-Digital Computer School; "We have not yet reconciled as a people. There are some people who are still thinking about causing war, so we need to forgive others who hurt us during the war to be able to go ahead with our lives. Forgiveness has not yet taken place and this means Liberians are not yet ready for peace. Going to the TRC to admit the wrongs they committed against fellow Liberians does not mean they have reconciled themselves with Liberians. UNMIL has played its role in the process and I think it is now time for Liberians to take on their own reconciliation process."



Theophilus T. Thomas: Front Street, Monrovia; "Yes we have reconciled with one another in the sense that after war we can see a difference in Ellen's leadership which Liberians appreciate." People may say the non implementation of TRC report is not reconciliatory, that's their view. But I think we have achieved some level of reconciliation in Liberia.



Milton Dwana: Resident of 8th Street Sinkor; "My perception about reconciliation is indeed unique. It has been healthy and Liberians have endorsed reconciliation amongst themselves. The church and Christian community in Liberia are playing major roles in reconciling Liberians. The gospel of love and reconciliation has been preached. The continuous preaching of messages of love and peace in churches where Liberians gathered every Sunday and other days of the week indicates reconciliation amongst Liberians. If you were a Muslim worshiping in mosques, the Imam there preaches love and reconciliation. So you see holistically Liberians have reconciled with themselves. As much as our people live in peace we don't care about TRC report."

They Speak 10 Years After the End of the War?



Fatu H. Paye: Employee of MedLink Clinic, Randall Street, Monrovia; "Yes we have reconciled because after the election we see everything going on fine in the country. We have to forget the past. There are a lot of people who were affected by the war and we must forgive one another. No need of going to TRC. We see people taking pay, people are working and these are signs of reconciliation. You see Ivory Coast that has gone back to war if we were not reconciled, we would be like Ivory Coast. Because we are reconciled this is why we are enjoying our peace."



Michael D. Tipayson: Student, United Methodist University (UMU); "Before I go forward let me say thanks to UNMIL for this interesting topic. I think we have not reconciled as a people. I see reconciliation from a different perspective and in terms of the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission). If Liberians should continue to enjoy the prevailing peace, policy documents like the one from the TRC should be implemented. During the 14 years of civil devastation parents were killed, children and women were raped etc. Liberia set up the TRC to probe the past and recommendations from the probe called for prosecutions of perpetrators of war crimes and that has not taken place. We see those accused going with impunity. If Liberians continue to thread the path of impunity in favor of people accused of crimes like the violent removal of government then we will remain in perpetual cycle of people taking arms against government and this cannot reconcile us."



Florence Z. Sando: Employee of Indo-Liberian Pharmaceuticals, Carey Street, Monrovia; "We have not reconciled ourselves yet. One of the things we have to do as Liberians is to put our past behind us. We are walking towards reconciliation but we have not reached there yet. One of the things the Liberian government should do is to make jobs available for Liberians to work together as Liberians. Liberians don't want to go into any violence again. Going out there into the streets to demonstrate may cause some problems."



Beatrice A. Blamn: Airfield Community, Sinkor; "Yes I fell that we have reconciled because Liberians are forgiving people. Nobody is actually thinking about war again. All you hear from people is peace. Wherever there was war like the one that happened in Liberia, you will have to experience some hardships before the country can get back to its rightful place again. Now in Liberia everyone is striving for better life and it takes patience to get there. All we have to do is to be patient"



Lucia A. Kerkula: Resident of Newport Street, Monrovia; "Well I will not say we have really reconciled because some people still have a problem with the reconciliation programme, for example, people point fingers at ex-combatants and others who one way or the other caused them pains during the war. I think we still need to work on the process of reconciliation. If I should give percentage of reconciliation I could put it at probably 50-55% reconciliation has happened in Liberia. I think the reason we have not achieved full reconciliation could be the process is not reaching everybody and every location."



UN FOCUS, Vol. 7, No. 03

A publication of the United Nations Mission in Liberia Public Information Office
www.unmil.org