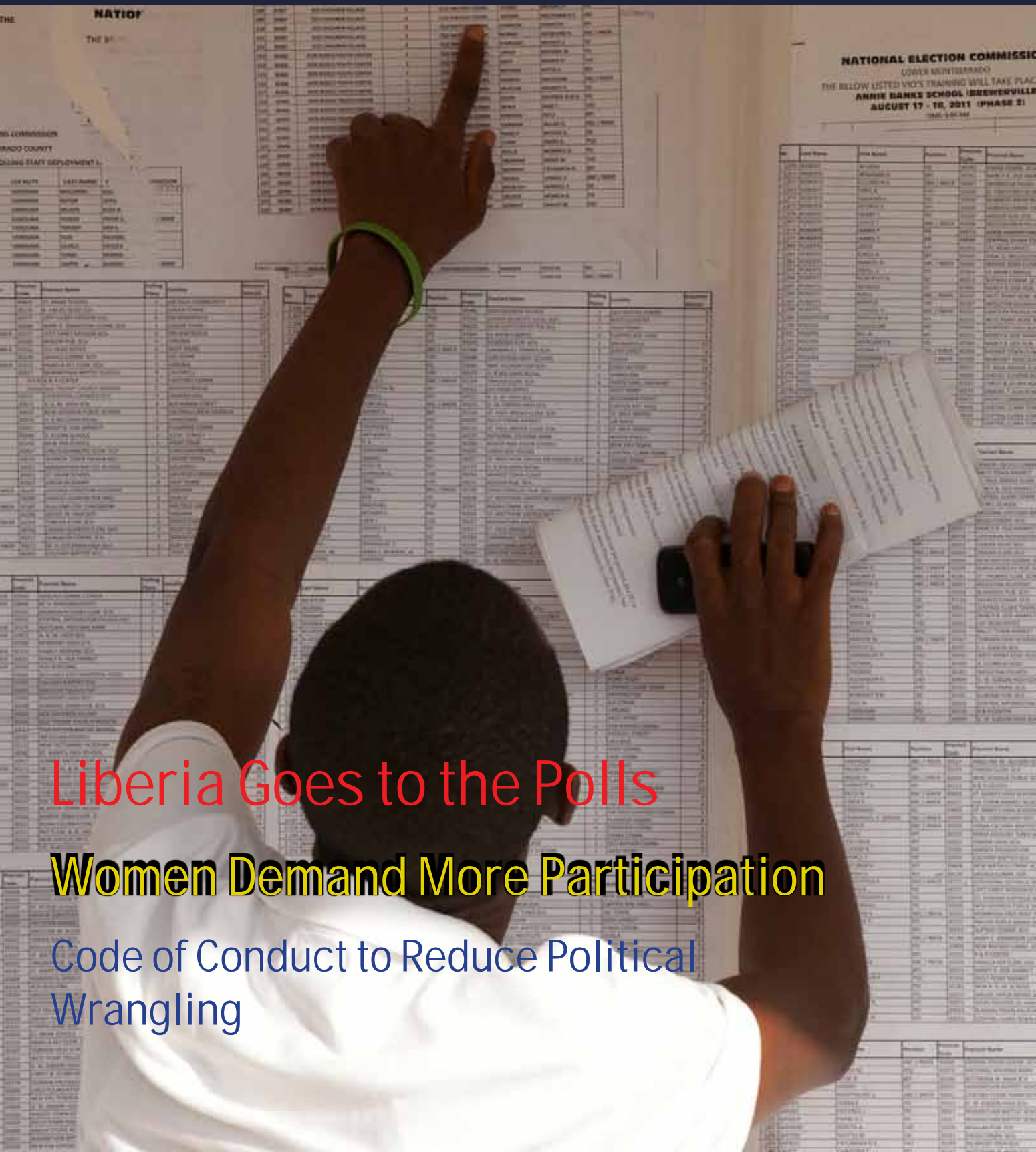


UN FOCUS



Vol. 7, No. 04

June - August 2011



Liberia Goes to the Polls

Women Demand More Participation

Code of Conduct to Reduce Political Wrangling



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

As Liberia stands ready to go back to the polls to elect its second post-conflict democratic government, the country will hopefully once again proudly declare that democracy, and peace, are here to stay.

A national referendum was successfully held on 23 August, demonstrating the National Elections Commission's increasing capability to conduct a national event of grand magnitude, but also that the Liberian people respect the democratic process. Referendum Day was peaceful, and although not all political parties were in agreement with the holding of the referendum, the people expressed their will through the vote, or even through the decision not to vote.

As Liberia approaches the general elections, the over 1.7 million Liberians, who registered to vote in January and February, will consider their options for a new Government. It is vital that the campaign period and the vote itself are exemplary of the peace that Liberians have worked so hard to achieve and continue to work hard to consolidate. The large numbers of registered voters unmistakably shows the eagerness of Liberians to have a say in

the future direction of the country; and it is heartening to note that 49% of all registered voters are women, showing great interest from Liberian women to make their voices heard.

The 2011 national elections are wholly run by Liberians, unlike in 2005. The United Nations has been engaged with the NEC, but only to help coordinate international assistance, fill logistic gaps, and to ensure dialogue between the NEC and political parties to foment agreement on the process.

Elections are always a challenging exercise in any country, but by upholding the nation's interest above personal ambitions and adhering to the rule of law, political parties and candidates play a major part in ensuring a peaceful process.

The next issue of UN FOCUS will be after the elections have taken place, so I would like to urge all Liberians who are registered to vote to exercise their democratic right and to cast their ballots to peacefully elect a new government in October. This is the opportunity for the people of Liberia to conclusively move away from the country's violent past, from bullets to ballots, and to entrench democratic governance, setting a shining example in the West African region.

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



4. Liberia Goes to the Polls

Liberia gets ready for national elections, the second since the end of the civil war. Many observers consider it a litmus test for the country's progress towards consolidation of peace and participatory democracy with significant impact in the volatile West African region.



8. Code of Conduct to Reduce Political Wrangling

Ahead of the elections, political parties and independent candidates sign a Code of Conduct that will reduce conflict and govern settlement of disputes.



14. Women Demand More Participation

Liberian women battle discrimination in the political arena and demand opportunities for greater participation in the national elections

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Chief of Public Information
Isabelle Abric

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

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unfocus@unmil.org
www.unmil.org

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LIBERIA GOES

By Ataul Osmani

Liberia will go to the polls to elect a new parliament and president on 11 October.

The national elections, the second round of democratic elections since a peace agreement was signed in August 2003 that ended the 14-year civil war, will be a litmus test for Liberia's peace consolidation and fledgling democracy.

"The success of these elections, and the peaceful inauguration of a new administration, will be critical to the consolidation of the tremendous progress the country has made over the past eight years," said UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, in his latest report on Liberia.

Urging Liberians to do everything possible to ensure free, fair and peaceful elections, he said, "As the elections draw near and campaign activities in-



"The success of these elections, and the peaceful inauguration of a new administration, will be critical to the consolidation of the tremendous progress the country has made over the past eight years."
- Ban Ki-moon

tensify, I urge all political parties to use the democratic space to canvass support for their political positions while refraining from inflammatory remarks and provocative actions. It is important to adhere to the election timeline." The Secretary-General said that the UN family in Liberia will continue to provide technical and logistical support, as required, to ensure the operational success of the elections.

"The preparation for the elections is on course...going on in full swing," said James Fromayan, Chairman of the National Elections Commission (NEC), which is leading the nationwide exercise. The last elections were held in October 2005 and were largely overseen by the United Nations Mission in Liberia and other international partners.

NEC has already successfully completed the voters' registration. Over 1.79 million voters have registered, al-

Proposed Constitutional Changes Not Ratified

Liberians went to polling centres on 23 August to vote in a referendum on four key constitutional changes, with three of them having a direct bearing on the national elections scheduled for later in the year. The voters rejected all four of the proposed changes, according to the results announced by the National Elections Commission (NEC) on 31 August.

The National Elections Commission (NEC) termed the referendum, which was seen as a test of the country's democratic progress and its voting mechanism ahead of the legislative and presidential polls, a success.

"The referendum was held in a very peaceful manner and it was suc-

cessful," said NEC Chair, James Fromayan, at a press conference at SKD Complex in Monrovia, a few hours after the voting came to an end.

In the constitutional referendum, voters were asked to make a decision on four proposed amendments -- to change the electoral system from an absolute to simple majority for all elections except those for president and vice-president, to move election date from October to November, and to revise the residency clause for presidential and vice-presidential candidates from 10 to five consecutive years immediately prior to an election. The fourth provision sought to increase the mandatory retirement age for justices to 75 or retain the current limit of 70.

A total of 1,798,930 registered voters were eligible to vote and 615,703 did cast their ballots, a turnout rate of 34.2 percent. None of the propositions won the electorate's approval as the 'yes' vote fell short of the necessary threshold of two-thirds of votes cast.

"On the basis of the turnout rate, to be validated each proposal would have to reach the barrier of 410,469 votes", said national electoral commission vice-president Elizabeth J. Nelson, announcing the results. "This therefore means that all the four propositions were not ratified. The Liberian people have spoken and their decision and wishes must be respected," said Nelson.

TO THE POLLS

most half of them women. The number of the voters in the 2005 elections was 1.35 million.

Candidates for the presidential and legislative elections have already submitted their nominations and the NEC will publish the final list in early September.

UNMIL is coordinating international assistance for the polls, providing logistical support, particularly to facilitate access to remote areas, and supporting the Liberian institutions and political parties to create an atmosphere conducive for peaceful elections.

The UN Development Programme (UNDP), under its US\$ 27 million Election Basket Fund, is providing technical assistance to NEC and is implementing a sustainable capacity-building programme for 2010-2012 Liberia Electoral Cycle. The project aims to support building the operational



"The success of the elections will demonstrate to the entire world that Liberia is ready to pave the way to a bright and democratic future."

-Ellen Margrethe Løj

line with international standards and ensuring awareness of gender equity and conflict prevention. UNDP is also supporting the NEC to engage political parties in discussions and dialogue over electoral procedures, timelines and legalities and to find consensus and compromises. The European Union, Japan, Germany, Sweden, Denmark, and Spain have funded the project.

Special Representative of Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj has called on all Liberians to ensure successful, free, fair and peaceful elections noting that the 2011 elections will be a "milestone" towards strengthening peace in Liberia.

"The success of the elections will demonstrate to the entire world that Liberia had turned the page of its difficult past and is ready to pave the way to a bright and democratic future," notes the UN Envoy.

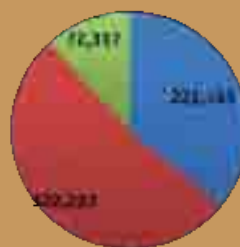
Referendum Results

Proposition 1



■ Yes Votes
■ No Votes
■ Invalid Votes

Proposition 2



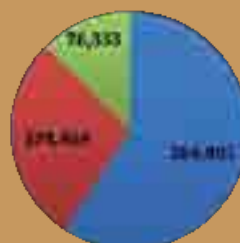
■ Yes Votes
■ No Votes
■ Invalid Votes

Proposition 3



■ Yes Votes
■ No Votes
■ Invalid Votes

Proposition 4

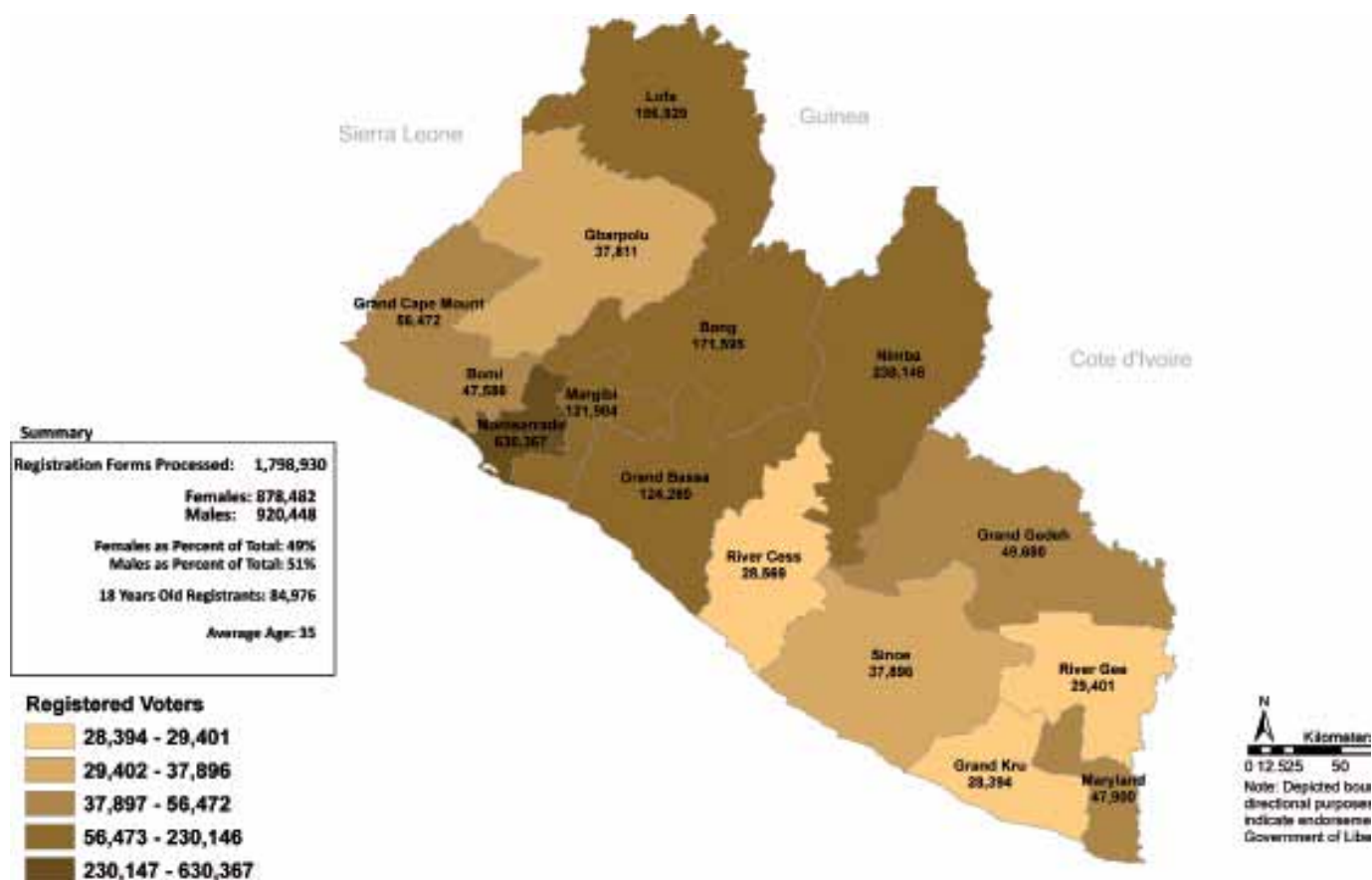


■ Yes Votes
■ No Votes
■ Invalid Votes

Source: NEC

NATIONAL ELECTIONS COMMISSION

Voter registration (2011) Statistics



OVER 1.79 M VOTERS REGISTERED

By Ataul Osmani

More than 1.79 million Liberians have registered to vote for the upcoming national elections, almost half of them women, according to the final voters' roll released by the National Elections Commission (NEC).

The voter registration exercise was originally scheduled to run from 10 January to 6 February 2011, but was subsequently extended to 12 February, 2011 in response to numerous

appeals from a cross-section of the Liberian society. The Exhibition period of the Provisional Registration Roll (PRR) ran from 7 to 11 April.

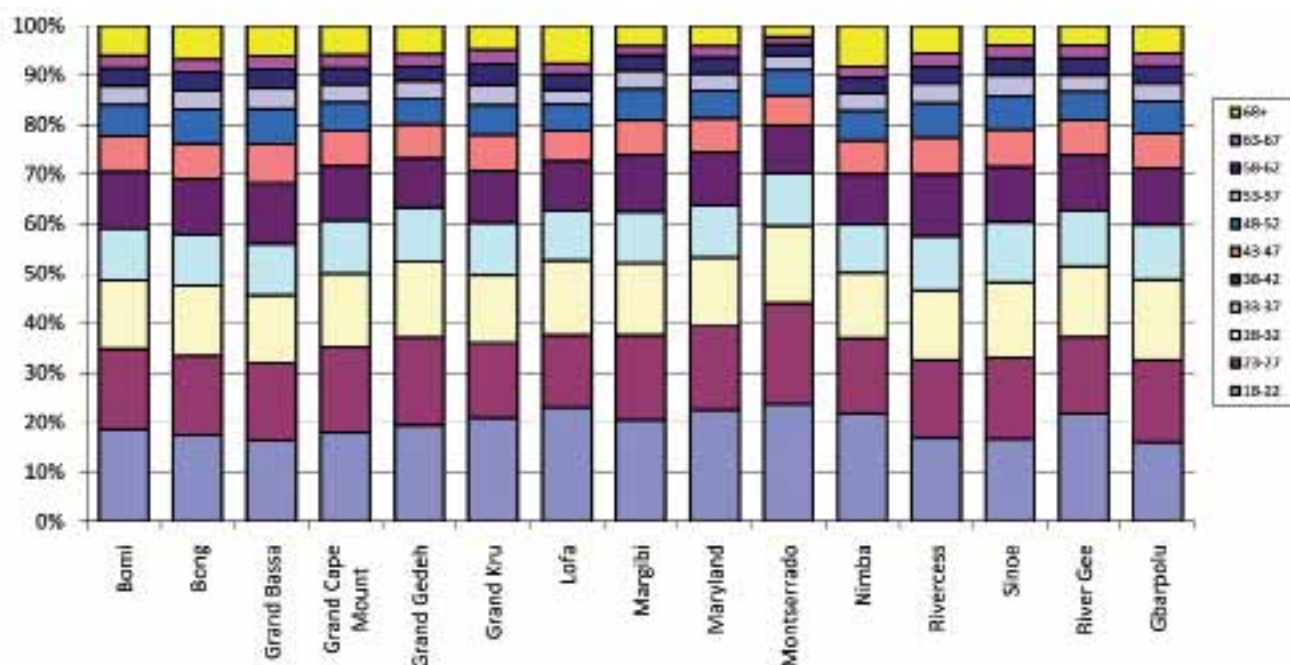
The final roll counts 1,798,930 voters, of which 920,448 (51 per cent) are men and 878,482 (49 per cent) are women. The number of the voters in the 2005 elections was 1.35 million.

According to the NEC data, the average age of registered voters this time is 35 years, with 66 per cent of potential voters less than 37 years. The 18-22 age group constitute 22 per cent of the total voters while 23-27 age group stands at 18 per cent and 28-32 age

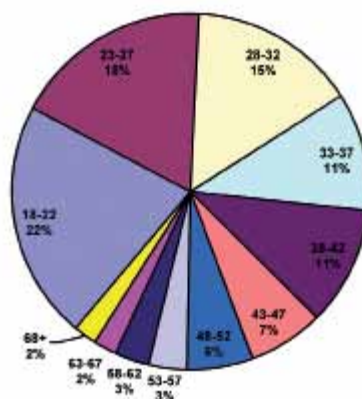
group at 15 per cent.

Montserrado county accounts for 35 per cent of the total registrants (630,367), followed by Nimba (13 per cent or 230,146), Bong (9 per cent or 171,595), Lofa (9 per cent or 156,929), Grand Bassa (7 per cent or 124,280), Margibi (7 per cent or 121,904). Four counties -- Grand Cape Mount (56,472), Grand Gedeh (49,680), Maryland (47,900), and Bomi (47,586) -- account for 3 per cent each. The remaining five counties account for less than 2 per cent each of the total votes with River Cess and Grand Kru counties registering the smallest numbers, 28,569 and

Age of Registrants by County



Age of Registrants



28,394 respectively.

The NEC was supported by the United Nations during the voter registration process. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) supported training of some 50 Electoral Commission staff, and helped purchase and distribute more than 2,000 registration kits including materials such as indelible ink, camera equipment and solar panels to reduce energy costs. The Elections Commission worked with more than 30 civil society organizations to disseminate voter and civic education messages across the country in English and local languages through

radio, newspaper articles, television programmes, billboards and flyers.

UN Mission in Liberia along with UNDP and other partners have supported the Liberian authorities, particularly the NEC, especially in the area of logistics for this year's constitutional referendum and presidential and legislative elections.

Funds managed by UNDP and contributed so far by Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, Spain and Sweden have been used to support the smooth running of the first election wholly organized by national authorities since the end of the

country's civil conflict in 2003. The United Nations was actively involved in the 2005 elections but in this year's elections, it only plays a supportive role as the national authorities and institutions take the lead.

Some 1,780 registration centres have been set up nationwide under a US\$27 million election support project that is also strengthening institutions such as the Elections Commission, bringing electoral law into line with international standards and ensuring awareness of gender equity and conflict prevention.



Representatives of political parties come together to sign the code of conduct

CODE OF CONDUCT TO REDUCE

By Ruby Ofori

The National Elections Commission (NEC), in partnership with all the registered political parties and independent candidates, has revised and updated the 2005 Code of Conduct governing the settlement of disputes among political parties and contestants to ensure that conflicts which might arise among them are resolved peacefully in the lead up to legislative and presidential elections later this year as well as during the referendum scheduled for August.

"The importance of the code of conduct is to make sure that political parties among themselves regulate their own activities to avoid election related violence," said Nathan P. Garbie, NEC's Deputy Director of External Affairs, in an interview with UN Focus.

Indeed the Code of Conduct stipulates that, "All parties hereby agree unequivocally to adopt and adhere, in

its entirety, to this Revised Code and by so doing commit to contribute to free, fair, transparent and credible elections."

Garbie said the code of conduct served Liberia well in 2005 when the first post-war multiparty elections were held. "We did that successfully in 2005 and to some extent it helped to regulate the activities of the parties as well as the independent candidates because they also signed to abide by the code."

The NEC made sure to obtain the views of the political parties and independent candidates in the process of revising the 2005 code of conduct. "When the revisions were being made, we had several consultations with the political parties," said Garbie. He said it was as a result of that inclusive process that all but one of the registered political parties signed the document pledging to abide by its rules. "That was a successful process. That is what became the Revised Code of Conduct for Political Parties," he said. Independent candidates wishing to contest

the election will also be asked to sign onto those codes and abide by them.

Asked why the code of conduct was so important to the peaceful conduct of the elections, Garbie explained that it was important because there are certain places and issues in which the NEC would not always be present or be in the know of. For example, if there is conflict on the question of venue for a rally, the code of conduct says that at least the parties involved must first meet at their own level to try and resolve the issue amicably, if needed along with the local leaders. And if they cannot then they can take the first step by complaining to the Inter Party Consultative Committee (IPCC) which is the collaborating committee for all political parties.

"If there is a party that is still aggrieved even after consulting with the IPCC, the matter can be taken to the NEC where we can take a final decision that can afford the injured party to go to court if they so desire. So the code of conduct is very important as far as it relates to the activities and



NEC staff at work

JUCE POLITICAL WRANGLING

conduct of political institutions in the country,” said Garbie.

The IPCC forum itself serves as a very important catalyst for dealing with many of the issues of contention between the political parties. The IPCC is made up of all the registered political parties in the country meeting under the auspices of the NEC and it is the NEC that presides over their meetings.

Asked if the Code of Conduct deals with issues related to disputes over election results, Garbie said: “The election results are in the purview of the National Elections Commission -- the parties on the one side and the Commission on the other side. So that cannot be a provision within the code of conduct. It is actually the issue that is strictly restricted to the Commission.”

The NEC has worked hard to ensure that all parties know their rights and they can resort to legal methods in cases where a political party disputes the results announced by the NEC. “The IPCC has served as a very good

setting where we discuss all of these issues. More than that we have had a lot of seminars educating the parties telling them what it takes, what are the provisions in the law you need to take advantage of when they are injured by any actions or aggrieved by the conduct of the Commission. And it is inclusive of how even election re-

those concerns.”

“But that determination is not the end of the matter” said Garbie. If that complaint was taken to a magistrate court and the magistrate takes a decision the matter doesn’t necessarily end there. The parties still have a right to take their formal complaint from the magistrate to the NEC itself. “Now

According to Garbie, only the NEC is legally empowered to declare election results. He said, “if a party feels injured by that result they first have to formally complain to the Commission and the Commission will investigate and make a determination about those concerns.”

sults are handled. The laws are clear on that,” said Garbie.

According to Garbie, only the NEC is legally empowered to declare election results. He said, “if a party feels injured by that result they first have to formally complain to the Commission and the Commission will investigate and make a determination about

two things happen there. When it gets to the NEC, it may appoint a hearing officer who will hear the case and determine on the merits and demerits on that. Again the party has the right to make an appeal to the Board of Commissioners as a next step or decide to go strictly to the Supreme Court for redress,” says Garbie.



WOMEN DEMAND MORE PARTICIPATION

By Ataul Osmani

Bemoaning the current lower representation of women in politics, female political aspirants in Liberia are demanding that political

parties offer them more opportunities for greater participation in the upcoming national elections.

They made the demand at a “Political Parties’ Gender Media Conference” held in Monrovia in early August. The Gender Office of National

Election Commission (NEC), in association with UNDP and International IDEA and UNMIL, organized the conference under the theme “Gender Equality in Liberian Politics”.

The main purpose of the conference was to shed light on political



Liberian women are battling discrimination in the political arena

against the men -- those who are not active but enjoys power in most of the political parties."

"I am capable to represent my district, my people. I have the confidence to beat any opponent," she said, adding, "Now time has come to change the stereo-type mindset."

"Don't be deterred. Nothing can stop you," she told her fellow female aspirants amid huge claps from the audience.

Echoing the same sentiment, another independent female aspirant said, "Recently many of the political parties held their primaries. And this was really frustrating to see that most of the political parties had no female candidates in most of the counties. Most of the top posts in the counties are filled up by the male politicians." She urged the political parties to elect and support more women into parlia-

participation in the elections. But we have to keep in mind that women's participation in the politics is not an act of kindness, it's a right." She urged the women to involve themselves in more political activities. "Women are action-oriented. So now this is the time to take action. Participate more in political process."

Terming the women's participation in political process very 'critical' for flourishing Liberia's nascent democracy, NEC chairman James M. Fromayan said: "We encouraged the political parties to involve more women in the electoral process. Women are just as competent as men and sometimes they are more competent than their male counterparts."

"Only the political will of the parties is enough to get more women on board," he said, adding, "Women are a powerful voice for peace and an in-

"Women are a powerful voice for peace and an instrument of development when given the opportunity. No country can get ahead if it can't ensure representation of half of its population."

-NEC Chairman James M. Fromayan

parties' initiatives in mitigating the existing gender-based inequalities that limit the participation of women in intra-party decision-making processes, which translates into their underrepresentation in the political and decision-making spheres at local and national levels.

"Women in Liberia were always limited in participating in political process despite their ability to lead the country, to be a president, a parliamentarian, to change the country's fate," said an independent political aspirant from Montserrado County.

Taking a swipe at the political parties for their indifferent attitude towards women, she said, "I am still fighting to get my space...but I will not be deterred...I will be fighting

ment and also offer them other key political positions to enhance their participation in the democratic dispensation.

Lamenting the low representation of Liberian women in political process, Margaret V Korto, a representative from a civil society organization said, "I want to tell the political parties that those days are gone. Now this is the time to create more opportunities for women."

"Despite promises made by the political parties, the political will and the commitment towards the agenda is yet to be seen," Korto, also the coordinator of Nimba United Women Association, added.

Co-chair of NEC, Elizabeth Nelson said: "The political parties are still very far from equalizing women's

strument of development when given the opportunity. No country can get ahead if it can't ensure representation of half of its population."

Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) recognizes that achieving sustainable and durable peace requires the full involvement and equal participation of women in conflict resolution and subsequent peace-building. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, expresses the conviction that peace is inextricably linked with the equality of women and men.



A series of training sessions have been conducted for female political aspirants

FEMALE ASPIRANTS GET TRAINING BOOST

By Ataul Osmani

For a female political aspirant from Grand Cape Mount County, it was not an easy decision to contest the upcoming general elections. As women in Liberia still face an uphill struggle for equal rights, she was concerned that her male partner

might rebuke her for dabbling in politics.

Beyond the stereotypes, she faced many more hurdles. Proving herself in the party forum that she is the best candidate to make the party win, drawing a strong campaign strategy to outwit the opponents and raising funds for the campaigns are among a long list of obstacles she had to confront.

But the challenges could not dampen her determination. And a leadership training for female political aspirants she recently attended invigorated her to wage an all-out effort to secure a party ticket to contest the election.

"I was lacking in confidence...I was at my lowest ebb. Even I could not chart out a plan, figure out where to start. But after attending the train-



management and preparations for the polling day and after. At the group discussions, they assessed their skills and identified the positive aspects and their weak areas.

"We tried to give them the confidence to aspire for political position so that they can break the barriers that have prevented them from carrying out their roles over the years," said Rebecca N Boakai, lead facilitator at a session held in S.T. Nagbe United Methodist Church, Monrovia in June. "You know, a majority of the men believe that they are the only ones created to be in control. Let me assure you today we are able to encourage other women out there, with the level of knowledge acquired from the workshop," she added.

The training involved techniques

majority. Although Liberia's National Elections Commission (NEC) guidelines call on political parties to reserve 30 per cent of nomination slots for women, none of the political parties has done so.

"Liberia, like many other democracies, faces the problem of identifying and implementing appropriate strategies for bringing women at par with men in terms of national governance and decision-making at all levels of society. As such, the female aspirants' empowerment workshop is seen as pivotal for mainstreaming gender in political decision-making," a Representative who is going to vie for second term from Montserrado County. She also demanded that political parties implement 30 per cent representation for women among the candidates.

A total of 440 female aspirants from all 15 counties of Liberia took part in the series of trainings to refine their leadership skills. Throughout the three-day extensive training, the female aspirants went through a gamut of issues ranging from gender, understanding the leadership, self-analysis and capacity building to campaign management and preparations for the polling day and after.

ing, now I know very well what to do. Now I become able to draw my plan more meticulously," she said. "It gave me confidence in myself. I don't feel now that I have anything holding me back any more."

The National Election Commission (NEC), in collaboration with the International Alert, an independent NGO and with support from the UNDP Elections Project, organized the training titled "Empowering Female Aspirants for A Competitive Bid in the 2011 General and Presidential Elections" across the Liberia.

A total of 453 female aspirants from all 15 counties of Liberia took part in the series of trainings to refine their leadership skills. Throughout the three-day extensive training, the female aspirants went through a gamut of issues ranging from gender, understanding the leadership, self-analysis and capacity building to campaign

to deal with people, face opponents from rival political parties and remove negatives from people's mind. It also dealt with how to mobilize funds and conduct a successful campaign. "The most important thing is that it injected in us the trust and confidence that YES, WE CAN," said Hill, full of election zeal.

Despite having the first ever elected female president in Africa, women's representation in the Liberian Parliament is less than a paltry 14 per cent in both houses, behind many nations on the continent, including Angola, Burundi, Mozambique and Uganda, all with more than 30 percent of elected positions. Rwanda's parliament is the world's first and only to boast a female

UNDP Elections and Gender Specialist Juana B. Bhonopha said the UNDP was happy to be part of the process of empowering female aspirants. UNDP is collaborating with a number of groups to ensure that women are fully integrated into the political decision-making process in the country.

UNDP, under its US\$ 27 million Election Cycle Basket Fund, has been working with the Ministry of Gender, political parties and other partners to boost women's participation in politics. Contributions for the Basket Fund have so far come from Denmark, the European Union, Germany, Japan, Spain and Sweden.



EMPOWERING WOMEN T

By James S. King

By setting the continental record of electing Africa's first female president, Liberia has taken women's empowerment a notch up and the country's women and their supporters have become more vocal on issues that affect women's advancement. Today Liberia boasts of a women's radio station, the first of its kind, which serves as a forum for women and girls to voice common concerns and issues.

The Liberia Women Democracy

Radio (LWDR) was launched last year with financial support from the United Nations Democracy Fund (UNDF). LWDR has developed programmes geared towards educating women and girls about gender-related issues such as rights to equal opportunity, employment, and political decision-making, among others. A survey conducted in July 2008 to determine the best way to enlighten Liberian women about their rights led to the establishment of the radio station. The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) led the survey in partnership with UNIFEM (now UN Women) and

Liberia Women Media Action Committee (LIWOMAC).

According to YWCA General Secretary Roseline Toweh, the survey was conducted in five of Liberia's fifteen counties: Bomi, Margibi, Grand Bassa, Montserrado and Grand Cape Mount. She said the result of the survey indicated women in those counties wanted a radio station through which they could access information about gender issues.

"Radio broadcast forms the best means of education and information dissemination amongst Liberia's illiterate populations," says Estella Nel-



Photo Courtesy/LWDR

A radio producer in action

CAYWIDMA is an outreach project which conducts live radio field debates amongst women and girls on gender issues. LWDR's best trained female radio journalists take the lead in the CAYWIDMA project. "The women were trained in radio journalism, specifically in adobe edit, production, news script writing, interview techniques and continuity announcing," says Nelson.

LWDR in partnership with UNDP carried out live radio broadcast covering the recently concluded voter registration. Nelson said a message of peace broadcast by LWDR diffused a potential conflict amongst voter registrars in Todee District over "unfair" remuneration package. She said

tional Research and Exchanges (IREX). According to Nelson the project is a component of Civil Society and Media Leadership (CSML) in collaboration with Women Media Initiative.

Despite gains made by the government and its development partners in the realm of women's advancement, Liberia is still faced with major socioeconomic challenges, notably an unacceptably high illiteracy rates among women and high rates of rape and gender-based violence. Nelson said "social and political development of women remains a concern" for Liberia Women Democracy Radio.

Liberian women played significant peace roles in ending long years of armed hostilities in the country.

The role played by women calling on regional leaders and the international community including UN to bear pressure on conflicting parties was one of many moves that brought about the Accra Peace Accord that led to the end of the civil war in 2003. Women continue to advocate for greater representation at all levels of decision-making.

THROUGH RADIO

son, Executive Director of the station, citing the high illiteracy rates among Liberian women and girls. While radio is the cheapest means to access information, most women and girls are less privileged in terms of radio ownership, Nelson said. To overcome this challenge, the Campaigners for Young Women's Involvement in Decision Making (CAYWIDMA) organized listeners clubs for women and girls and provided transistor radios to 20 of the clubs in Montserrado County to enable them access radio programmes broadcast by the Liberia Women Democracy Radio.

women's participation in the ensuing national elections is very crucial as it would provide them with an opportunity to have their voices heard.

The fund provided by UNDF was meant to operate the radio station for a period of two years which expired in March this year. LIWOMAC now runs series of women development programmes aimed at enhancing the role of LWDR in gender mainstreaming. Twelve female senior high school students will be trained under a special project called "Girls Making Radio" to be carried out in partnership with Plan International and Interna-

The role played by women calling on regional leaders and the international community including UN to bear pressure on conflicting parties was one of many moves that brought about the Accra Peace Accord that led to the end of the civil war in 2003. Women continue to advocate for greater representation at all levels of decision-making. A bill seeking 30 per cent women representation was recently submitted to the national legislature for passage into law.

Programmes that are broadcast by Liberia Women Democracy Radio serve as women and girls' forums to access information on human rights, health, gender and policies. "Liberians in the diaspora and those at home exchange views on national issues through specially designed radio programmes" says Nelson.



STEPPING UP THE FIGHT

By Ataul Osmani

In a significant step forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS, the UN system in Liberia recently launched the “UN Joint Programme of Support on AIDS” to help the government halt the spread of the deadly disease in the country.

The Executive Director of the National AIDS Commission, Dr. Ivan Camanor, and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UN Resident Coordinator Moustapha Soumaré on 28 April signed a landmark agreement on behalf of the respective parties. UN Theme Group

on AIDS Chair and UNICEF Country Representative, Isabel Crowley, was also present.

The joint programme, a collective UN support to national AIDS response in Liberia, aims to provide appropriate, adequate and timely technical and financial support to the government and other national partners to enhance organizational capacities to improve access to HIV and AIDS prevention, treatment, care and support as well as to address stigma and discrimination.

The two-year programme is based on the National AIDS Strategic Framework (2010-2015). A total of 11 UN agencies, funds and programmes have

come together to fund and implement the initiative. The total budget of the programme is US\$ 2 million, of which 75 per cent has been funded.

“This programme is fundamental to Liberia’s efforts to dramatically turn the tide of HIV epidemic and provide treatment, care and support to those living with HIV and their family members,” Soumaré said while launching the programme.

Terming the joint programme as “strategic, focused on what can be done collectively by the UN”, he stressed the UN’s commitment to continue supporting the government in the fight against HIV and AIDS and



A boy reading a comic telling him that Aids is real

AGAINST AIDS

The two-year programme is based on the National AIDS Strategic Framework (2010-2015). A total of 11 UN agencies, funds and programmes have come together to fund and implement the initiative. The total budget of the programme is US\$ 2 million, of which 75 per cent has been funded.

also to build the capacity of the National AIDS Commission.

"I am confident that with leadership of the government and support of the UN and other partners, Liberia can attain the 3 zeros: Zero New Infection, Zero Discrimination and Zero AIDS Related Deaths," he added.

"Both the government and UN have identified four priority areas to fight the HIV and AIDS. The areas are prevention of sexual transmission of HIV, Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV (PMTCT) and pediatric care, mitigation of stigma and discrimination related to HIV and HIV treatment, care and support," said Dr. Camanor. Reiterating the government's commitment to halt the spread of HIV and AIDS, he also thanked the UN for providing technical and financial support to fight the deadly disease.

Some of the initiatives that will be undertaken under the Joint Programme include data collection, monitoring and information management; a study on modes of transmission and generation of strategic data and information for HIV prevention; provision of youth and adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health services; assistance in formulating an appropriate legal and policy environment that will address stigma and discrimination issues; and support to Government for the treatment and care for persons living with HIV.

"Despite a low HIV prevalence country with a current rate of 1.5 per cent, Liberia has the potential risk in increasing the vulnerability of HIV/AIDS due to widespread inequality and poverty, gender-based violence, and rapidly evolving reconstruction and recovery efforts," said Crowley, Chair of the UN Theme Group on AIDS.

Highlighting the different aspects of the UN Joint Programme, she said, "As a post-conflict country in a dynamic recovery phase, Liberia requires appropriately tailored and flexible HIV initiatives to address the vulnerability and risks associated with insecurity, instability, recovery and economic growth."



BATTLING HIV STIGMA

Ataul Osmani

With the slogan “Stigma Fuels HIV”, UN Cares, a UN system-wide workplace programme on HIV/AIDS in Liberia, launched a national anti-stigma campaign in late July aimed at creating awareness on the effects of HIV related stigma and discrimination in the UN workplace, reaffirming zero tolerance to HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

Launching the campaign at Monrovia City Hall, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance and UN Resident Coordinator in Liberia, Moustapha Soumaré, said that stigma is a negative perception not based on fact or action and leads a person to discrimination to exclude him or her from social, political and economic participation.

“Stigma is caused by silence, rejection and isolation. When stigma is acted upon, the result is discrimination.

And the discrimination is the arbitrary distinction, exclusion or restriction affecting a person,” he said, adding, “People living with HIV/AIDS have been stigmatized, discriminated against in a number of ways and the negative effects have been felt in our workplaces.”

Terming that stigma “unnecessarily burdens the people and constrains them from working toward achieving full potential”, Soumaré said, it negatively affects HIV prevention. “Where the perception is strong against HIV/AIDS, a person with HIV/AIDS is less likely to actively seek out knowledge and access to treatment.”

“Stigma and its resultant discrimination are strongly entrenched and present very real obstacles to achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support and the Millennium Development Goals,” he said, making a fervent appeal to all to wage a war to wipe out the stigma of HIV.

Quoting UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the DSRSG said, “UN workplace should be a model workplace

free of stigma and discrimination of any kind and that cannot happen if we ourselves do not want to happen. Only we can make it happen, making our environment stigma-free.” He reaffirmed the UN’s commitment to zero tolerance on AIDS related stigma and discrimination.

Deputy Minister for Labour John Josiah praised the UN for its fight against the HIV-related stigma and discrimination and expressed his government’s commitment to wipe it out from the country. He observed that rejection is a serious situation that needs to be pushed out of every system in Liberia. Discrimination on account of HIV/AIDS, he said, is a breach of the sufferers’ fundamental rights.

UN AIDS Country Coordinator David Chipanta, who is HIV positive for the past 20 years, said, “20 years ago, I was afraid that I would not live for a long time, but now I am afraid that I will live for a long time because the things were not possible 20 years ago, are now possible today [due to modern medical treatment].

“I am afraid that our communities,



Stigma is caused by silence, rejection and isolation, said Soumaré

countries may not be ready to live with people like me as we begin to invest in lives, as we go to school, start having family, including having children, changing career, getting into politics, because of HIV related stigma and discrimination," he said, adding, "I am afraid that international community may not provide forever life-saving critical HIV services, prompting the needs of broad national government investment and ownership and leadership of AID responses."

Urging all not to discriminate or criminalise HIV, he said, "Every person living with HIV has potential and skill. Let not the potential and skills go to waste because of stigma and discrimination."

"You have to keep in mind that HIV positives are not just commercial sex-workers...they are the professionals...they are the head of agencies, they can be the people sitting next you," he added. He also reaffirmed the UN's commitment to provide effective HIV/AIDS prevention treatment and services.

Under the programme, the UN Cares will conduct an extensive campaign against the HIV-related stigma and discrimination in UN workplace including disseminating information, advocacy programme, and increasing access to HIV related services to UN staff and their families.

UNMIL Destroys Arms Recovered from River Gee

By Ataul Osmani

The United Nations Mission in Liberia in early July destroyed a huge cache of arms and ammunition recovered by the Liberia National Police (LNP) in River Gee County in June. The haul included a heavy machine gun, rocket-propelled grenades, assault rifles and several thousand rounds of ammunition.

The Deputy Police Director for Administration of LNP, Rose E. Stryker, said that weapons were destroyed so that they cannot go back to the streets. "The weapons were destroyed through a very open and transparent process. We destroyed the weapons so that it can't return to the streets or be re-circulated into the society to kill or harm anybody," she said, assuring all that the government remained vigilant in ensuring safety and security of all citizens of Liberia.

Regarding forensic investigation into the arms, Stryker said, "Well, arms did go through the forensic investigation and once finalized, the report will be published through the press."

Replying to a question from a journalist about the prosecution of criminals involved in the arms case, the Deputy Police Director said, "Suspects are currently in Grand Gedeh and they are being brought down in small numbers...the investigation is still going on and we, obviously, will seek to prosecute those involved according to the law of the country."

She also thanked the UNPOL and UNMIL for exercising the destruction of the arms and ammunition. The weapons were believed to have originated from neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire which was embroiled in post-electoral violence in which thousands died. Alleged Liberian mercenaries were believed to have taken part in the Ivorian conflict.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalisation (BIN) in



August seized several quantities of arms and ammunition from the jungles of the Southeastern region of Liberia.

"The Bureau of Immigration with maximum support from the Ministry of Justice was successful in retrieving a cache of arms and ammunition through the cooperation of some ex-combatants," BIN Commissioner Col. Christopher Massaquoi told journalists at a press conference in Monrovia on 9 August.

The weapons were found in the counties of River Gee, Maryland, Grand Gedeh and Nimba. The weapons included rockets, machine guns and assault rifles and a large amount of ammunition.

"The arms and ammunition were collected by Immigration Special Border Patrol Officers following intensive intelligence gathering in certain towns along the Liberian-Ivorian border," the immigration commissioner said.

The BIN Commissioner has also warned that the joint security of the state will drastically deal with anyone who will try to disrupt the peace and stability of the country, especially as the nation goes through crucial elections this year.

He added that BIN is set and ready to work with the Liberia National Police (LNP) and other security apparatus in ensuring that the security of Liberia is protected.

Survey on Sexual and Gender Based Violence

By Ruby Ofori

A new survey of public opinion about the revised Rape Law, which was introduced in 2005, suggests that the expected level of awareness of the law is not as high among ordinary Liberians as the authorities had envisioned it would be by now. The survey was conducted by the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation and commissioned by the UN/Government Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) Joint Program.

"We found that there are a lot of information gaps," said Madhumita Sarkar, Programme Advisor to the UN-Government SGBV Joint Program.

The survey report titled Rape and the Revised Rape Law: Perception, Knowledge and Realities on the Ground includes interviews with 94 people made up of professionals, market women, religious and traditional leaders, community members, youths and school children in areas of the capital Monrovia such as Red Light, Watanga, Clara Town, Chugbor, Banjor, Duala and Popoe Beach.

Sarkar says the report was developed as a result of training sessions held by the Joint Programme on SGBV for border security sector personnel and prison inmates. Out of those training sessions a set of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) were generated which became the basis of the questions posed to those surveyed.

The FAQs are included in the report and are meant for use by SGBV trainers to enable them to answer basic questions which often crop up in workshops. These questions and answers are meant to help fill the information gap which the report has identified.

While noting that much has been achieved in meeting the multifaceted challenges of combating Gender Based Violence (GBV), the report acknowledged that a number of challenges

persist. These include the inadequate provision of services to survivors of GBV especially in rural communities where clinical management facilities at medical institutions are woefully low in quality.

The report also noted the low rate of retention of qualified health professionals as a major hindrance in the provision of quality care to survivors of rape. It further noted that the fight against SGBV is hampered overall by "inadequate and weak infrastructure in counties."

The survey, funded by the Swedish Development Agency (Sida), noted that the successes of the Government



of Liberia and its international partners in combating GBV include the establishment of an SGBV Crimes Unit at the Temple of Justice and the setting up of Criminal Court E in Monrovia which is dedicated to hearing rape cases only. Another success has been the availability of a document known as the 'Rule of Procedure' for use by the Criminal Court E, and copies of the Bench Book which have improved the institutional response to GBV incidents, particularly rape.

The report argues that the consistent monitoring and tracking of GBV cases has increased the number of cases that come to court. However, there

is an acknowledgment of a fundamental challenge to increased public acceptance of rape as a basic violation of rights. The report suggests this could be a result of entrenched traditional attitudes, customs, laws and practices.

The report says that even though the capacity of several national and country level judicial institutions has been enhanced as a result of interventions by the Joint UN Government SGBV Programme, the "successful adjudication of cases continue[s] to be a challenge," because of "the culture of impunity, settling of cases 'the family way', inadequate logistics and infrastructure, low quality of investigation and limited capacity of the members of Jury Boards."

The survey also found that the views held by some traditional and religious leaders, community members and youth who ascribed the causes of rape to the "loose dress code of women" indirectly blame the victim for being raped. The report adds that those who hold these views "also advocate highly for a regulation of the dress code by the government."

These commonly held views are wrong says Sarkar. "There is no justification for attributing the cause of rape to dress code because when you have children as young as 2 to 5 years of age being raped how can you blame the dress code?," she said.

The majority of youths surveyed saw the need for programmes and projects targeted at their age group and suggested the government set up youth clubs to provide them with the physical space to allow them to discuss topics such as SGBV in safe, secure environments.

The report noted that even though the legal age of consent was raised to 18 years, most of the respondents regarded the age of consent as being 16. Knowledge and understanding of the legal age at which a person is considered a minor has to be improved in forthcoming sensitization work, the report recommended.

Peacebuilding Commission Reviews Progress, Challenges

By Ataul Osmani

The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), Liberian Configuration, has praised Liberia for its recent progress in three main areas -- national reconciliation, security sector reform, and rule of law.

"I am delighted to say that since my first visit here, I have witnessed some significant development in terms of three areas," said Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid Al-Hussein, Chair of the PBC, Liberian Configuration. He was addressing a press conference at Pan African Plaza in Monrovia on 17 June as the PBC delegation led by him wrapped up a five-day visit to Liberia.

The delegation also cited some of the key challenges facing national reconciliation --oversight of security forces, access to justice and reshaping a peaceful Liberian identity. The high-powered group visited Liberia to take stock of the progress the country is making eight years into its post-conflict political transformation.

The delegation also recommended the development and implementation of a national reconciliation strategy aimed at reaching a common Liberian identity addressing the root causes of marginalization within social and political structures.

In developing the national reconciliation strategy, members of the delegation identified the "Palava Hut" model as a valuable forum for discussing injustices at the community level and finding a common historical narrative, useful for constructing a shared Liberian identity.

On, the first day of the trip, the delegation visited Gbarnga, the capital of Bong County, where members oversaw progress on the construction of the first Security and Justice Hub. Expressing his satisfaction over the pace of work in building the hubs that



would be completed by September this year, Prince Zeid said, "The hub will service the justice needs of the people of Nimba, Lofa and Bong counties, house regional offices, barracks and training centres of the police, immigration and prison, as well as courts and offices of the Ministry of Justice."

"After all this work and in the years ahead, Liberia will firmly be on the path of peace. We think this is the noble way of doing things. If successful in Liberia, this could be replicated in other countries that have emerged from conflict and need to have their infrastructure rebuilt and services extended. We are very excited about it," Prince Zeid added.

In Gbarnga, the delegation also visited Cuttington University, where it considered the study of Liberian history as a tool for national reconciliation. The delegation also met with a local branch of a women's organization to discuss grassroots activities and challenges facing recovery and reconciliation in Bong County.

The delegation also met with members of the donor community and attended a security sector reform (SSR) roundtable and discussed remaining security needs and key SSR challenges in Liberia in the light of anticipated drawdown of the UN peacekeeping mission in the country.

On the security sector, the delega-

tion observed that several challenges remain, first among them the current limited capability of Liberia's security service. "The capacity of the nation's security forces must be enhanced to deal with the internal and regional challenges such as transitional crime, the circulation of arms, and mob violence."

"It is clear that UNMIL will not be in Liberia forever and there must be planning and integration of efforts accomplished to ensure that when the mission leaves, Liberia has the capacity to fulfill some of the key functions that UNMIL would have been fulfilling," Prince Zeid told the media.

Replying to a question from a journalist about specific timeline of UNMIL's departure, the PBC chair said he did not envisage a sudden departure of UNMIL after the election. "What is clear though is that there are many crises around the world begging for UN attention so I do not think we need to be relaxed about this thinking that they are here for a number of years and we should take our time. As Liberia grows from strength to strength, it only makes sense that the scale of the UN presence is revised."

The delegation also visited the National Police Training Academy in Paynesville, local police station and magistrate courts in West Point and the Central Prison in Monrovia.



Agencies such as UNHCR report that the refugee influx has exacerbated food insecurity in host communities

EMERGENCY AGRICULTURE IN HOST COMMUNITIES

By Ataul Osmani

In collaboration with the government of Liberia, the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) has launched a new emergency agriculture project aimed at assisting food-insecure Ivorian refugees and Liberian host families in Nimba, Grand Gedeh and Maryland counties, all bordering neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire. The residents of these counties are threatened with food insecurity due to the influx of Ivorian refugees

into Liberia.

The project titled "Emergency Food Production for Ivorian Refugees and Liberian Host Families", a US\$ 500,000 emergency effort, will help the Ivorian refugees and Liberian host families to grow rice, tuber, and vegetable crops to enhance food security. It also aims to improve the capacity of food security cluster to better coordinate food security and agriculture related interventions.

"The project seeks to address the immediate food security and income

generation needs of Ivorian refugees and to complement the food aid of WFP through the production and consumption of nutritious vegetables and short cycle food crops," said FAO Country Representative George Mburathi, after signing the project agreement with the government of Liberia on 29 June. "This is a very critical intervention to save human lives, improve food security, enhance nutrition status and promote income generation opportunities to reduce vulnerabilities of host communities affected by the



PROJECT

refugee influx,” he added.

Agriculture Minister Dr Florence Chenoweth signed the agreement on behalf of the government.

“Though at first the project aimed at only two counties -Nimba and Grand Gedeh -targeting 2,500 families, later we expanded it to one more county -Maryland—considering the move of 8,000 refugees from Nimba to Bahn refugee camp,” said FAO Food Security Coordinator Jacopo D’Amelio. “And the coverage of the families has also been increased to 4,300 families to get maximum families to ensure their food security,” he said, adding, “We are now trying to reach out to the families that were left out earlier by the other stakeholders, mainly local and

international NGOs.”

Expressing his high hope over the project, FAO’s Mburathi said, “We are expecting that the kind of training and expertise the farmers and communities are getting from the project will obviously help them in ensuring food security in coming days.”

The Government of Liberia has expressed a strong commitment to support the humanitarian needs of Ivorian refugees while also stressing the need to reduce vulnerabilities of host communities affected by the refugee influx. The government has allocated arable land to address the food production needs of the Ivorian refugees, FAO sources said.

The recent post-election violence caused large scale population displacements both within the country and into neighbouring Liberia. To

the initial food distribution in February rely on donations from their host families. As a result, host families are running very low or have already depleted their stocks.

“Given the food shortages, many families have begun to eat their rice seed, risking a seed insecurity ahead of the planting season in May and June,” D’Amelio said, adding, “Therefore, an emergency intervention became crucial to quickly stimulate agriculture production in host areas.”

He, however, cited poor road conditions, non-availability of quality planting materials from the local markets, and beneficiaries’ lack of access to land as major impediments to successfully implementing the project.

Meanwhile, at a “Food Security Assessment” workshop held in Monrovia on 21 July, the food security ac-

The Government of Liberia has expressed a strong commitment to support the humanitarian needs of Ivorian refugees while also stressing the need to reduce vulnerabilities of host communities affected by the refugee influx. The government has allocated arable land to address the food production needs of the Ivorian refugees.

date, more than 145,000 Ivorians have sought refuge in Liberia, majority of them in the three bordering counties. Food security has been severely jeopardized by the influx and particularly in areas of Grand Gedeh where food provisions are already low. It is anticipated that many refugees will continue to stay in Liberia at least for several months, if not more.

Justifying the project, D’Amelio said, “Refugees arriving in Liberia find an already precarious food security situation with host families expected to experience a four-six months hunger gap later in the year.” Citing a joint rapid assessment carried out in February 2011 by the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO, he said many of the refugees who have arrived after

tors also expressed their apprehension that land availability and tenure for emergency agriculture interventions could be potential sources of problem in implementing the project if not carefully handled.

They stressed the need to get a better consensus with the Government of Liberia on a food security roadmap for the country and how emergency food security interventions could be shifted more toward development, including the provision of more technical support in both lowland and upland farming ecologies.

Among others, representatives from German Agro Action, Catholic Relief Services, OXFAM, Norwegian Refugees Council, attended the workshop.

NEW TOOL

By Ruby Ofori

A new, multimillion dollar, integrated computer software and IT infrastructure, which will potentially minimize corruption in the management of government finances and speed up the issuance of vouchers and audit reports, was launched in July for use by government ministries and agencies.

Known as the Integrated Financial Management Information System (IFMIS), the US\$ 9.19 million software and infrastructure is funded by the World Bank, the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) and the Government of Liberia. IFMIS eliminates the possibility of ghost workers on the government payroll, improves the timely payment of monthly salaries and integrates a number of key functions of government ministries and agencies.

The software, developed by Canadian company FreeBalance, is already in use in Uganda, Sierra Leone, Southern Sudan, and Namibia.

At the IFMIS inauguration on 12 July, President Sirleaf was shown the huge difference the new technology can make to the efficiency of government operations. At the demonstration conducted by the Comptroller and Accountant General and his staff, a transaction which would normally take seven days to process was carried out in just one and a half hours.

Minister of Finance Augustine Ngafuan said: "With IFMIS, internal controls and financial management oversight will be strengthened. With IFMIS, reports will be issued on a timely basis in compliance with the PFM [Public Finance Management] Law and Regulations. With IFMIS, audits of Government institutions by the General Auditing Commission (GAC) will be enhanced as the GAC will be



TO FIGHT CORRUPTION

connected to the system, thereby enabling the Commission to use Computer Assisted Auditing Techniques (CAATs). The IFMIS system has inherent audit trails, user activity logs, and user access restrictions.”

UNMIL Civil Affairs Team Leader Tesfu Tadesse says the basic objective of IFMIS is to improve the “effectiveness and efficiency” in the budgeting and accounting of the Liberian public finance and accounting system. “In the long term, it will have a lot of impact in minimizing corruption and illicit practices in the financial sector within the Liberian system,” he says.

IFMIS went online at the Ministry of Finance from 1 July and will fully integrate all civil servants biometric data with the Civil Service Agency by December this year, says Bernard Jappah, Coordinator of the Finance Ministry’s Public Finance Management (PFM) Reforms Coordination Unit, which coordinates the implementation of a range of PFM reforms, including IFMIS. Jappah says phase two of IFMIS will involve the roll out of the new software system and infrastructure to additional ministries and agencies, in line with the PFM Reforms Strategy.

In order for IFMIS to integrate the government payroll through the civil service agency, the biometric data of all government employees are being gathered including finger prints, dates of birth, and photographic identification. All government employees will need to have a bank account to receive payment through their accounts.

IFMIS Project Manager James Onyoin says the move to include other government ministries and county authorities over the next four years is part of a fiscal decentralization plan to give autonomy to the ministries and local authorities in the overall financial management system without compromising on supervision and control

by the Ministry of Finance.

Beatrice Targa of UNMIL Civil Affairs Section says follow on IFMIS Project is a major part of a broader reform project known as the Public Finance Management (PFM) Reforms Strategy (2011-15), which is key to Liberia’s economic development. “The IFMIS is one of the major reforms within the Public Financial Management Reforms launched by the gov-

process, we have secured a total of US\$ 9.19 million for the project – with the World Bank donating US\$3.7m, the Swedish International Development Agency donating US\$ 4.99m and the Government of Liberia, US\$ 0.5m. On behalf of the Government of Liberia, let me express bountiful thanks to the World Bank and Sida for their generous support thus far. We have begun on a good track and the challenge is

In order for IFMIS to integrate the government payroll through the civil service agency, the biometric data of all government employees are being gathered including finger prints, dates of birth, and photographic identification. All government employees will need to have a bank account to receive payment through their accounts.

ernment in 2009 to completely reform the use of public resources so as to ensure effectiveness, transparency and accountability,” says Targa.

The Liberian government acknowledges that funding continues to be a major challenge to sustain the IFMIS project. Finance Minister Ngafuan appealed to donors to continue to support the project.

“Since the start of the entire IFMIS

to stay the course until we run the full distance on the IFMIS track. The initial estimate for the roll out of phase two of IFMIS is between US\$ 8-10m. The Liberian government is definitely going to step up its support to the project, but we call on our partners in progress to join us with their generous donations as we transform these objectives into reality,” said Ngafuan.

Servers running the IFMIS software





"We'll make a better d

By Ataul Osmani

At a gathering of hundreds of excited UN Volunteers, university students and teachers and civil society representatives celebrating IYV+10 in Monrovia, UNMIL Radio presenter Eva Flomo announced a musical interlude between speeches.

A female national volunteer wearing a white T-shirt inscribed with slogans and messages of IYV+10 began to walk slowly to the stage and started singing. "There comes a time when we heed a certain call...when the world must come together as one...." The chattering in the audience stopped, suddenly leading to pin-drop silence engulfing the auditorium of University of Liberia.

One by one, the UNVs, both Libe-

rians and others, joined the chorus. "There are people dying and it's the time to lend a hand to life..." Voices choked, eyes wet, they sang: "We are the world, we are the children... we are the ones who make a brighter day...So let's start giving." And they took the vow, anew. "We'll make a better day...Just you and me."

Breaking the minute-long silence that ensued, Moustapha Soumaré, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Recovery and Governance, took the podium, and said, "I salute those who are volunteering for peace and development around the world and especially for Liberia."

Launching the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV+10) in Liberia, he said, "The anniversary affords us the opportunity to recognize and celebrate the

will, positive energy, determination and contribution of individuals and groups who, through volunteerism, have turned around hapless situations and put smiles back on the faces of people."

The Ministry of Youth and Sports, in collaboration with the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and National Youth Organizations, organized the programme on 5 August. The Liberian Volunteer Coordination Committee for Development (LVCC4D), a platform of all national volunteer organizations, also introduced on the very day.

"You are the inspiration and role model for your peers, you are the type of young people the country needs if it is going to succeed," said Soumaré, also the UN Resident Coordinator in Liberia, remembering the power of



ay, just you and me..."

giving. Listing the UNVs' contribution worldwide in establishing peace and recovery, including rebuilding Liberia, he said, "UNVs contribute a lot to national development and global economy at large. Annually, volunteers contribute US\$ 400 billion to the global economy."

In 1997, the UN General Assembly, convinced that the need for volunteer effort was greater than ever and that a year designed to enhance the recognition, facilitation, networking and promotion of volunteer service could make a significant contribution to generating increased awareness of the achievements and further potential of volunteerism, proclaimed 2001 as the International Year of Volunteers (IYV).

To consolidate successes attained and build on the momentum created by the IYV, the General Assem-

bly called for the marking of IYV+10 in 2011. The overall goal of marking the IYV+10 is to focus on promoting greater global recognition of the contribution of volunteerism to society and to achieving peace and development.

Speaking on the occasion, Siasa Kpovor Hage, Special Assistant for Policy and Aid Coordination, Planning Ministry, said, "Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in the democracy...you vote in election once a year... but when you volunteer, you vote everyday about the kind of community in which you want to live."

He praised the UNVs in Liberia for their critical role in rebuilding the country and said, "You are making the world a better place. May be you are not getting enough credit for your services you are doing, but today makes a special day and you shall re-

ceive your flowers. I say thank you for your commitment, for your hard work and thank for what you are doing for Mama Liberia."

"Those thousands of volunteers, each one has a reason why they are volunteering. They not only save lives, but they change minds," said Sando Wanye of Public Policy Administration. President of the University of Liberia, Dr. Emmet A. Dennis, recommended institutionalizing volunteerism in Liberia.

Earlier, the UNVs brought out a colourful rally from Broad Street that ended at University of Liberia, parading through different city thoroughfares.

About 272 volunteers, both nationals and internationals, are currently working in Liberia in UNMIL and different UN agencies playing critical roles in restoring peace and security and rebuilding the war-torn country.

Police Support Unit Grows in Strength



PSU members under training

By Ruby Ofori

Efforts by the Government of Liberia and UNMIL to train and deploy 1000 Police Support Unit (PSU) members by December of this year are progressing, according to the Deputy UNPOL Commissioner John Nielsen. The PSU provide the LNP added operational capabilities, in particular in response to incidents of civil disorder incidents. The PSU is not separate from the LNP. They are in fact an operational component within the LNP, just as the LNP Emergency Response Unit is part of LNP.

Officers recruited into the PSU are drawn from the existing ranks of the LNP which currently stands at about 4,000 strong. The candidates undergo a vetting process, and testing, including examinations that determine their professional knowledge and their physical abilities. The project to

develop the PSU has been bolstered by funding support from the USA, Germany, and Ireland; with funding from the latter two administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); enabling training and some equipping of the unit.

Currently over 600 PSU officers have been trained and deployed. Crowd control, protection of VIPs and safe guarding vital national sites and installations are among the topics covered in training and these represent the core areas of duty to which the PSU are responsible. UNPOL advisors were instrumental in developing the PSU training program and they train and assist LNP instructors in delivering the PSU training at the National Police Training Academy. UNPOL have trained a number of LNP officers who are now serving as instructors at the academy; including some from the PSU ranks.

The aim of the instructor training,

as noted by Napoleon Abdulai, UNDP Security Sector Reform Programme Manager, is to assure that when UNPOL is no longer present in Liberia, that the police academy has sufficient trainers to assure that “there will be no vacuum.” As UNMIL transitions security responsibilities, the demands on the PSU will be substantial, as they will be engaged in many of the functions currently undertaken or supported by the mission, including VIP protection and protection of vital installations.

Though the PSU training is progressing, challenges remain in “operationalizing” the unit. Mobility limitations hinder PSU operations. “You need about 18 vehicles for each company and you find out that you have only four vehicles per company and that is a major challenge right now” Abdulai said; adding that once the PSU are trained they need to be able to move at a moment’s notice to any part of the country. “When you train them you need to deploy them. For example, if something should happen in Grand Gedeh right now we need to move them from Monrovia to Grand Gedeh and for that you need troop carriers and you need pickups. In addition to that you need camps where they can sleep because outside Monrovia there are not always barracks for them. So you need tents, you need all those things that would enable them to do their work. So mobility is the number one challenge to national security now,” said Abdulai.

Though faced with a difficult challenge, the PSU also have specific strengths says Abdulai. “Their strength right now is that they have been trained in all weather, they have been trained to handle public demonstrations, crowd control, safe guarding of vital national sites and installations. Their strength is that they have been well trained by UNPOL’s international police officers.”



Mensa-Bonsu addresses the new magistrates



New Magistrates Head to Rural Liberia

By James S. King

The Professional Magistrate Training Programme (PMTP) of the James A. A. Pierre Judicial Institute in Monrovia in June graduated 61 newly qualified magistrates, giving further boost to Liberia's justice sector.

The PMTP is designed to assist the government of Liberia build a professional justice system in the country by training a new generation of magistrates. The newly graduated magistrates have pledged to work for four years in rural communities where access to justice has been limited.

Liberia's Vice President Joseph Boakai said rule of law was cardinal to Liberia's reconstruction process and therefore programmes that promote rule of law were welcomed by the government of Liberia. Vice President Boakai described the PMTP as "one of the best programmes" for improving the justice system in post-conflict Liberia.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Rule of Law, Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu, reminded the graduates, among them three females, to consider themselves as the

face of the Liberian judiciary.

"Whatever the Chief Justice and Associate Justices of the Supreme Court Bench do in Monrovia could only be felt by people in remote Liberia through you. Remember that you are the custodians of the reputation of the judiciary, your integrity bears faith in party litigants," said Mensa-Bonsu. The Deputy UN Envoy thanked the Chief Justice of Liberia, Johnnie N. Lewis, and the Associate Justices for their support to the programme.

Chief Justice Johnnie N. Lewis reminded the graduates of their core values, including distinguished leadership, staying above reproach and commitment to service. He said all judges and lawyers must exhibit those values to ensure public trust in the judiciary. "Even though you are not yet lawyers, the training you have received distinguishes you as worthy of those values thus making you accountable to them."

United States Ambassador to Liberia Linda Thomas-Greenfield said the PMTP has created "pragmatic solutions" to address one of Liberia's most complex rule of law challenges. "It provided and supported the need for skilled magistrates," she said.

The US Ambassador said the grad-

uates presented a "wonderful image of what the future holds for Liberia" and described the 61 graduates as embodiments of the success behind the programme. She congratulated the graduates, their family members, and the trainers for supporting the programme.

German Ambassador Bodo Schaff said the PMTP is a "ground breaking initiative." He said the graduates have the potential for a "collective transformation" of Liberia's rural magisterial courts.

Speaking on behalf of his fellow graduates, J. Vincent Kollie assured Liberians and the international development partners that the graduates were fully prepared to deliver transparent and committed legal services as expected of them. Kollie said the graduates are aware that magistrates are the first contacts for litigants and that ordinary people rely on magistrates to conduct judicial proceedings in a transparent manner. "We are determined to change the perceptions widely held by members of the public that the judiciary is corrupt," the newly graduated magistrate proclaimed.



Liberian

What should each Liberian do

Khalifa V. Sheriff: University of Liberia Law Student; I see tensions mounting everywhere as we approach elections. People are becoming high tempered and this is not good for the elections. What I want Liberians to do is to put our differences aside, stop the accusations and allegations and put Liberia first. I hear people issuing verbal attacks against the other, this is also not good. Let Liberians realize that this is the only country we have. Let us organize ourselves peacefully to vote into offices who ever we want to be our leaders. Liberians should work to maintain the peace we now have in the country.



Daniel Lake: Resident, Pipeline Community, Paynesville; What I want to advise Liberians to do is to remain peaceful on elections day. No pushing around (scuffle) in the line (queue). Let them be patient. You can't force anyone to vote your candidate. Everyone has his or her own candidate they like. I want to advise my fellow youths to stop violence because violence is what destroyed our country and we should learn from our past. Whatever election result is announced, let us accept it. Not everyone we support may win election.



Alfred Massalay: A tailor, Monrovia; The first thing here is that Liberians should become one during the elections period to avoid anything that causes violence. Let Liberians go to the polls and elect the candidates of their choice, but we can only do this when the campaign process is free of violence and intimidation. People always blame young people for violence, but older ones should stop doing things that anger young people. I ask National Elections Commission to plan the elections carefully to prevent future problems that people may blame them for. I also appeal to the international community particularly the Carter Center to come and help us conduct our elections for transparency. Because in 1997, Carter Center was here and the "election" was fair no body complained about cheating. NEC (National Elections Commissions) should play a transparent role to prove to the world that we are ready to keep the peace UN has given us. After 17 years of war we chose not to run from one another as Liberians. I appeal to all Liberians for peace in Liberia.



Saye E.L. Mussah: Employee LBDI; Let Liberians consider the elections as their own just as parents would do for their children. If you love your child you can do anything to prevent any harm to them. Elections campaign is all about being peaceful and constructive; meaning it takes patience for one to win people over. The major thing here is not to harm or insult one another but to conduct ourselves very peacefully on that day. Attacking personalities can cause anger within those whose candidates' personalities one may attack. If Liberians stop attacking the personalities of others I am sure we could have a very peaceful campaign process for the elections to be free of violence. Let NEC (National Elections Commission) try its best also to make the elections credible so that we can continue to have peace in Liberia after the elections.



Bendu Sumo: Adult Literacy Student, Global Learning Academy; I want us to be peaceful, love each other all the time. Let us do the campaign peacefully. If someone (a candidate) is campaigning somewhere, the other people (another candidate) should not go there. If they go there, confusion would break out and it would not be good for us as Liberians. We should not get vex at each other because we are the same people. The only different thing is all of us have our own candidates to vote for. We should not make palaver for election business. (for election's sake)

ns Speak

to ensure peaceful elections?



Ellis G. Smith: Resident, Monrovia; The entire civil society movement throughout Liberia should convene all political parties and stake holders to a conference and inform them that politics is not about creating enemies or violence. I also call on all political parties to advise their members to stay away from all forms of violence. Let them go through the judicial process to settle any grievance that may arise as result of "alleged" electoral fraud. We fought wars in this country that took us to nowhere only because of electoral fraud that happened far back. Liberians should refrain from repeating such again. For the elections commission, let me advise them to conduct themselves like a mother of twins who listens to the cries of her twins.



Karnay Sabey: Resident, Lower Johnsonville, Montserrado County; I want Liberians to behave good on election's day not to fight so that we can have peaceful election. If they go out to campaign, let them do it peacefully. We must respect each other's views and choices. Don't make anyone your enemy because that person does not support your candidate. No, everyone has right to support who they want to be their president.



Betty D. Harris: Seamstress; We as citizens should do away with violence and anything that would cause disturbances for the elections. At the same time I urge National Elections Commission to conduct the elections in a way that would discourage fraud or anything that may ignite violence. Even though I don't foresee fraud, but there is a saying "in time of peace prepare for war", this is why I want National Elections Commission to put into place all mechanisms to prevent such things from happening. Let every Liberian do away with violence. Let us go to the poll peacefully and leave peacefully. Let us do away with anything that will cause disturbances for the election process. Election campaigning is about convincing people who differ with you. Let us be focus on those we think can better lead us and not to dignify every criticism that may come from critics.



Matthew A. Pearce: Employee of land Commission; First of all we have to go by the rule and respect each others' views. We can't go about violating the rights of other people and expect others to respect our rights. No two or more political parties should have rallies the same day and time at the same venue. We can't do that. Politicians should engage the microphones to inform their supporters to conduct violence free campaigns, not to discuss personalities but the issues affecting Liberia, with this done we could have healthy elections. The elections are indeed crucial, in the past we have always depended on others to conduct our elections, this time around it's going to be ourselves spearheading the exercise. This is a chance the NEC (National Election Commission) has to prove its critics wrong that it is capable of conducting free and transparent elections as it did in past by elections when both oppositions and governing parties won. NEC's credibility is at stake in the coming elections.



Keach Ivy: A business man, Monrovia; We should all pray to Almighty God to grant us peaceful elections. I want all supporters of various political parties to know that elections are about electing good people for leadership. If you go to campaign do it with love for one another, this is the only way we can have a peaceful and free elections in Liberia. If someone does not like your candidate that should not cause you to hate him or her. We are all one people. The politicians we support have their own plans different from ours.

