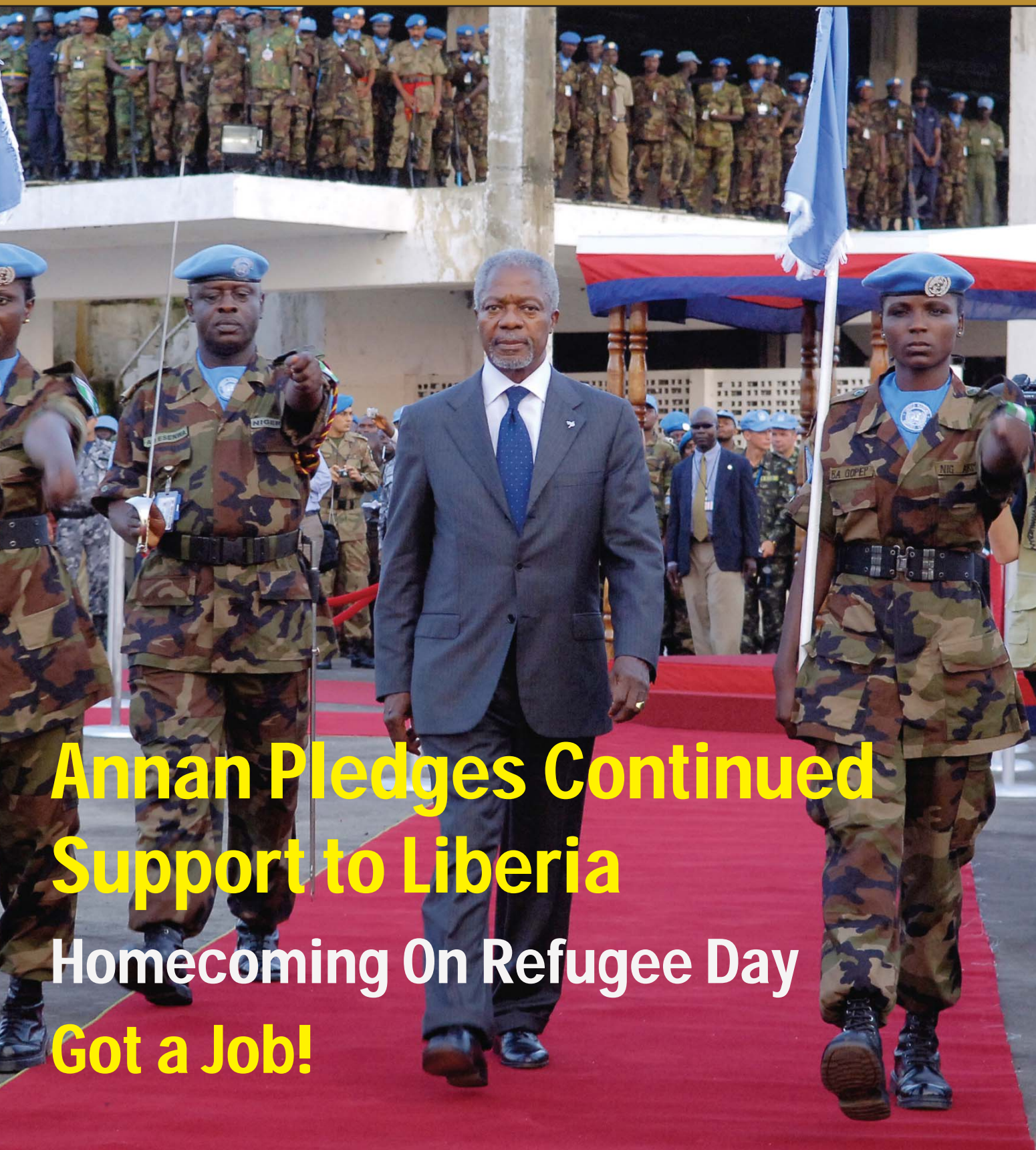


UNMIL FOCUS



Vol. 2, No. 04

June - August 2006



Annan Pledges Continued Support to Liberia

Homecoming On Refugee Day

Got a Job!

Message From the Special Representative of the Secretary-General



As Liberia celebrated its 159th independence anniversary this year with dignity and pride, the air was unmistakably full of hope and optimism. While the country embarks on a long journey of recovery amidst mounting aspirations, the sentiment among the international community is one of goodwill and confidence in the new

government's agenda of reconstruction and development.

The visit to Liberia by Secretary-General Kofi Annan early July was a sign of the importance the international community attaches to Liberia's transition to peace after decades of conflict. He held talks with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, members of the Cabinet and the UN Country Team and also addressed a joint session of the Legislature. While paying tribute to the courage and resilience of the Liberian people, he stressed the importance of good governance and rule of law and the need to fight the scourge of corruption. He also urged the parliamentarians to act as peacemakers and display the spirit of tolerance and mutual respect.

While pledging to stand by Liberia as the country consolidates peace, the Secretary-General also highlighted the challenges that lay ahead -- the reintegration of war-affected populations, restructuring of the security services, extension of state authority throughout the country and restoration of basic services as well as job creation and revamping of the health and education sectors.

The two-day visit to Liberia a few weeks later of the President of the World Bank, Paul Wolfowitz, was yet another strong signal of support to the country from the international community. He witnessed firsthand the enormous reconstruction needs of the country as he visited, together with President Johnson-Sirleaf, some parts of the capital, including Monrovia's dilapidated port. He pledged continued support to Liberia's reconstruction and highlighted the US\$68 million grant the Bank has provided to

help rebuild roads, ports, the airport, schools and to restore water and electricity.

Beyond the high-level visits, Liberia in July hosted a two-day donors' partnership conference aimed at taking stock of the achievements during the first six months of the new government and to develop the right strategies for recovery, development and reconstruction. During the conference, President Johnson-Sirleaf presented the government's vision for the medium-term development of the country to the international community and outlined the priorities in four strategic areas of security, education and health, economic infrastructure, and governance -- an "ambitious agenda" in her own words.

As part of the Humanitarian Mid-Year Appeal for 2006, Liberia has sought assistance from donors to bridge the gap in funding for humanitarian projects amounting to US\$104 million as only 28 per cent of the requests in the 2006 Consolidated Appeals Process has been met so far. The priority projects highlighted in the appeal, the majority of which is to be implemented by UN agencies, include provision of basic social services to vulnerable populations, revitalising communities, strengthening the capacity of civil society and local authorities, rehabilitation of roads and bridges and fighting HIV/AIDS.

In recognition of the acute unemployment problem facing Liberia today, the United Nations Mission in Liberia committed US\$1 million in July towards the creation of employment opportunities during the launch of the Liberia Emergency Employment Programme, an 18-month programme aimed at creating labour-intensive job opportunities for the youth. This effort at job creation, supported by Liberia's partners, is vital to the country's stability during this period of consolidation.

As Secretary-General Kofi Annan noted during his visit, Liberia has made a promising start in the direction of economic recovery and consolidation of peace. As Liberians strive to rebuild their nation, UNMIL will continue to stay fully engaged in Liberia.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alan Doss".

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



4 During his visit to Liberia early July, Secretary-General Kofi Annan pledged UN's continued support for Liberia as the country recovers from prolonged conflict and consolidates peace.



10 Visiting World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz applauded Liberia's remarkable progress in promoting fiscal discipline and witnessed firsthand the enormous reconstruction needs of the country.



12 On World Refugee Day, UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres received Liberian refugees returning from Sierra Leone.



18 UNMIL committed US\$1 million towards the creation of employment opportunities during the launch of the Liberia Emergency Employment Programme.

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Secretary-General Kofi
Annan meets President
Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf

Annan Pledges Continued Support to Liberia

By Yuko Maeda

His three-day whistle-stop visit to Liberia was nothing short of an unequivocal reassurance of the United Nations' continued engagement in the nation's reconstruction. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan wasted no time to deliver his message to the leaders of the war-ravaged West African country, ordinary citizens, peacekeepers and international partners.

"It is the people of Liberia who deserve the credit for where we are today. It is their courage, their perseverance, their resilience that brought us here," he said, paying tribute to Liberia's transition from the cycle of brutal violence to peace and budding democracy in just under three years. Annan was in the country for the first time since the UN Mission in Liberia was established in 2003 following the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement. "It is for them we must stay the course with Liberia for the long term. The United

Nations looks forward to building further on our partnership with the Liberian people on the road ahead."

After touching down in the capital Monrovia late in the day on 3 July, he spent the next day reassuring United Nations' commitment to Liberia on every single occasion, starting from his discussions with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and her Cabinet Members, an address to the joint-session of the National Legislature and the inauguration of UNMIL's new headquarters, to discus-

sions with the UN Country Team, a brief encounter with the media and an interaction with national and international partners at a government-hosted reception, before heading to neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire early next morning.

"It was an honour and a duty to work with the Liberian people to get to where we are today," Annan told reporters at the Executive Mansion, the presidential palace. He said he was impressed by the performance of the new government led by Africa's first female elected head of state, and reaffirmed the UN's engagement as the country moves forward. "The international community has a great deal of confidence and goodwill towards this government," he assured.

Welcoming the UN's top official, Johnson-Sirleaf described his visit as "a

While he called on the government and every one of Liberians to take collective responsibility in nation-building, the Secretary-General particularly urged the international community to stay engaged to help consolidate the achievements Liberia has made.

vote of confidence" in Liberia's development efforts and reaffirmed her administration's commitment to the recovery process. "This visit is a demonstration of the support for all that we are doing to respond to the needs of the Liberian people."

The Secretary-General's visit came a few weeks after the Security Council endorsed his 11th progress report on Liberia and allowed the integrated peace-keeping mission to stay on course for some time until peace prevails. "The United Nations will continue to provide security and assist in consolidating the peace so that the government can get on with the job of national recovery, reconciliation and development," Annan told reporters at the press conference.

In his address to the National

Legislature earlier that day, the Secretary-General outlined daunting challenges ahead on the path of nation-building after 14 years of vicious violence. "The many years of instability and armed conflict have left Liberia with scars," he said of the unfortunate legacy. "Your institutions

were destroyed, your infrastructure was devastated, your country was torn apart and your people were traumatised." To recover from such a state of failure, he said, Liberia needs to take the healing process forward, reintegrate war-affected populations, restructure the security serv-

Highest Honour for Kofi Annan



Annan receives Liberia's highest civilian honour

By Sulaiman Momodu

At the seaside Executive Mansion in Monrovia, office of Liberia's President, cabinet ministers, senators, diplomats, senior UN officials and other distinguished guests had all come together on 4 July evening.

Soon walked in the guest of honour - Secretary-General Kofi Annan - and his wife Nane, to a standing ovation as the traditional trumpet sounded. Annan was received by his host, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. The occasion was an investiture ceremony to honour the Secretary-General with Liberia's highest honour -- the Grand Order of the Knighthood of Pioneer.

Conferring the honour, Johnson-Sirleaf said the event was an occasion for quiet and sober reflection and for gratitude and appreciation. Lauding Annan for his exceptional contributions to the nation, she said the Secretary-General's "singular and selfless act of

thoughtfulness has given Liberia a rebirth."

Paying tribute to his exemplary life, Johnson-Sirleaf described Annan as one of the world's greatest leaders in the past 60 years. At the UN, the world had been his stage and come December when he retires, Annan will leave the world a better and more peaceful place, she said. "It is Liberia's turn 'in our own small small way' to thank Annan by giving him the highest award in the country," the President added.

"I am indeed moved and humbled," Annan said soon after he was decorated with the honour. He said the relationship between United Nations and Liberia has paid off, as evident by the peace Liberians enjoy today. He told the President that the Liberian peace process, which led to her election, was an inspiration for the entire world and will thrive if her government succeeded in reconciling the people by ensuring good governance and maintaining the rule of law. ♦

ices, reform public services, strengthen the judicial sector and restore economic growth, among others. "It is only if all parties work together that Liberia can meet those goals," he stressed, highlighting the need for national unity.

While he called on the government and all Liberians to take collective responsibility in nation-building, the Secretary-General particularly urged the international community to stay engaged to help consolidate the achievements Liberia has made. "For the international community, it is imperative that it stay with Liberia in the long term," he stressed. "Too many times, we have witnessed the same weaknesses in

continued to escalate, which brought the international community back into peace brokerage in 2003. "We have given you a chance, a second chance, to have peace and to stabilise the situation in the country," Annan told the journalists, referring to the UN's current intervention to support the recovery. "The UN member states are now beginning to accept that nation-building is a longer term proposition, and I expect that they will stick with Liberia for some time to come."

In his discussions with Johnson-Sirleaf and other national leaders, the Secretary-General touched on the pressing issue of lifting the UN sanctions on timber and dia-

became a lucrative source for warring factions to finance the war inside and outside the national boundary. Now that a democratically elected government is in place and reforms are under way, Liberia is hopeful to get both the embargos lifted to pave the way for accelerated economic recovery.

Annan said the lifting of the sanctions is a matter of time. "I have no doubt that, in due course, in a reasonable period, the sanctions would be lifted because we and the Security Council would want to see Liberia move on, exploit its resources for its own development and for the benefit of the people." But he cautioned: "There are certain conditions which will need to be fulfilled."

Annan will step down from the top position at the end of 2006. "I'm proud to see you, this noble son of Africa, in the UN for 10 years, having transformed its image to one of credibility, respectability, responsiveness to the needs of the world," said Johnson-Sirleaf, referring to Annan's stewardship of the United Nations. "We thank you, the UN family, for all that our country has received in supporting us to achieve this transition from conflict to peace and set us on a path to sustainable development."

Later that evening, the President decorated the Secretary-General with the Order of Knighthood of the Pioneers of the Republic of Liberia, the country's most prestigious civilian award. Accepting the honour, Annan said the Liberian peace process is an inspiration to the entire world, which will closely watch the country's reconciliation and reconstruction in months and years to come.

The international community and the Liberian government will sit together at a donor conference in October in Washington DC, where the government will present its comprehensive development agenda while the donors are expected to pledge financial support. Annan says the consolidation of peace is a process that takes time. A serious, patient and collaborative effort will be required of all Liberians to rebuild the nation emerging from such a devastating war, he reiterated. "Change will not happen overnight. The United Nations will be at your side as you continue on your journey." ♦



Annan with his Special Representative, Alan Doss

international responses to post-conflict situations -- in the shortage of funds, in the lack of international coordination, in the tendency for international actors to leave too hurriedly," he noted. "This can reverse hard-won results and weaken the attempts we are making to build solid societies... We cannot allow those weaknesses to take hold again in Liberia."

The international community's earlier attempt to stop Liberia's civil war in the mid-1990s was only partially successful. Once the 1997 national elections were over, the UN Observer Mission in Liberia was reduced to a peace-building support office to facilitate national reconciliation and reconstruction, but factional fighting

mond trade. Prior to his visit, the UN Security Council partially lifted the sanction on timber for three months on the condition that the government passes legislation, a Forestry Reform Law, to guarantee "transparent management of the country's forestry resources for the benefit of Liberians," and renewed the diamond embargo for another six months to give the government "sufficient time to establish an effective certificate of origin regime for trade in Liberian rough diamonds."

Those natural resources used to be a backbone of Liberia's economy, accounting for a significant per cent of the national Gross Domestic Product, but the revenues from the diamonds and timber

Nane Annan Opens Market

By Sulaiman Momodu

“We are very happy today because the roof of our market does not leak any more, and the rain will no more soak us and spoil our goods,” a visibly elated marketer, Nancy Kromah, said as groups of market women passionately sang gospel songs and danced enthusiastically. The sounds of drumming from a brass band echoed all around as the crowd welcomed their guest of honour, Nane Annan, wife of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan.

Located on Bushrod Island in Monrovia, scene of fierce fighting and heavy shelling between government forces and rebels during the war, the rehabilitated market was dedicated on 4 July by Mrs. Annan, who was accompanied by Kartumu Boakai, wife of Liberia’s Vice President, and government ministers. Shouts of “women, oh women!” rent the air.

Visibly overwhelmed by the enthusiasm of the women marketers, Mrs. Annan said it was a great joy and honour for her to open the rehabilitated market, describing it as a sign that peace and stability have returned to Liberia. The renovation of the market, one of UNMIL’s Quick Impact Projects, was implemented by Liberians United to Serve Humanity, a local non-governmental organisation.

Mrs. Annan hailed the market women for their contribution to the economy and encouraged them to continue their efforts in rebuilding their lives and their country. She said she was very pleased that UNMIL was also building a playground at the school for the children of the marketers and presented the approval documents of the project. The inauguration was fol-



Nane Annan
inaugurates
the market

lowed by a tour of the market facilities during which Mrs. Annan interacted with the marketers who symbolically displayed their wares, including fish, palm oil and vegetables, and competitively tried to capture her attention.

The Minister of Commerce and Industry, Hon. Olubanke King-Akerele, remarked that UNMIL was not only performing peacekeeping functions but was also contributing to poverty alleviation by responding to the needs of the civilian population. “The dedication of this market building is expected to create security and safety for both pedestrians and the marketers themselves and their children,” she said.

Expressing hope that the occupants of the market would make the best use of it and ensure their children attend the school next door, the Minister said that such a facility was an important feature of what the government would like to promote in

terms of a model market. “We look to the UNMIL initiative as setting the pace for what we want to see in terms of a new market and the opportunities for our people.”

Visiting the Children’s Assistance Programme (CAP) in Congo Town, a child rights advocacy organization established in 1991, Mrs. Annan affectionately spoon-fed some of the children who were having their lunch. Proceeding to the vocational training facility for ex-combatants in the complex, she had animated discussions with some of the girls who were busy with their working tools, and also visited the cooking, carpentry and cosmetology departments where she encouraged the girls to continue to work hard in the interest of peace and development.

Mrs. Annan thanked CAP and UNICEF for facilitating the skills training centre and supporting the girls to put the past behind them and start life anew. ♦

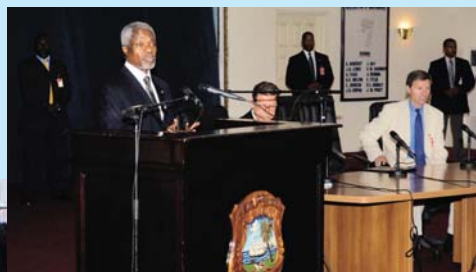


Photo Kofi Ann





Gallery an's Visit





Wolfowitz Visits Liberia

By Sulaiman Momodu

To most people the World Bank (WB) means money, and Liberians desperately need money to rebuild their country devastated by 14 years of conflict. So the importance of the visit to Liberia of Paul Wolfowitz, the first ever visit by a President of the World Bank, was not lost on anyone.

Wolfowitz was in the country from 21-22 July as guest of the government during which he held high level talks with

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, senior government officials, members of the civil society, the United Nations Country Team and development partners, and visited some WB financed projects. He acknowledged the progress Liberia is making to join the ranks of African nations coming out of long-running wars and conflicts.

Addressing a joint session of the National Legislature, Wolfowitz reminded the lawmakers that they were representing the voices of Liberia's three million men, women and children. "They, too, have the expectation of walking into a brighter

future -- from children, eager to learn in the classroom to mothers seeking health care for their infants, from youth who want jobs to aging parents who want to feel safe in their homes and communities.

"Today, the average Liberian survives on just US\$120 a year. That is barely 30 cents a day. This is well below the extreme poverty line of US\$1 a day, and it paints an alarming picture of deprivation and suffering. For every 1,000 babies born in this country, 157 die before their first birthday," he said, highlighting the huge challenges facing the country. Wolfowitz

Paul Wolfowitz with President Johnson-Sirleaf at Monrovia's Free Port



overnight and cannot be achieved by one individual, he stressed, and encouraged the legislators to ensure that every tax dollar is spent in the wisest, most responsible way.

"We have provided US\$68 million in emergency grants to rebuild roads, ports, the airport, clinics and schools and to restore water and electricity to the

Wolfowitz applauded the efforts of the government for what he described as "remarkable progress" in promoting fiscal discipline and praised the establishment of the IMF Staff Monitoring Programme in record time that will help accomplish a comprehensive debt relief for the country.

Liberian people," Wolfowitz said, describing the Bank's support to Liberia on its journey towards durable peace and development. Following his rendezvous with the legislators, Wolfowitz launched the Liberian branch of the World Bank's Parliamentary Network. The goal of the

Network is to engage parliamentarians in the dialogue on development and offer support to strengthen the legislative branch of the government. He said some 800 parliamentarians representing more than 100 countries are already part of the Parliamentary Network.

In a meeting with local authorities in Monrovia, the WB head hailed the determination of Liberian women to contribute to nation building. He witnessed firsthand the challenges of reconstruction when he visited a dilapidated hospital, the run-down port of the capital and an elementary school, the roofs of which leak when it rains and students sit on bare floor while learning. Accompanied by senior UNMIL officials, Wolfowitz also visited Camp Clara on the outskirts of Monrovia where he had discussions on security issues with UNMIL's Irish and Swedish troops who form the Quick Reaction Force.

At a joint press conference held at the Executive Mansion, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said her government was very much appreciative of the visit by the World Bank President. She said the visit had brought the government and people of Liberia renewed hope and expressed appreciation for the support the Bank continues to give Liberia in areas that she said are vital to accelerate the country's development agenda. ♦

said half of Liberia's children are out of school and noted that four out of five Liberians are out of work, calling it "a staggering unemployment rate."

"Unless these needs are addressed, it will be impossible to sustain the fragile peace this country has worked and prayed so long to achieve," he cautioned.

Visiting Liberia as part of a five-nation tour of Africa after attending the G8 summit in Russia, the WB President said for the first time in a quarter century Liberia has a real budget that was drafted to provide for the needs of all the Liberian people.

He applauded the efforts of the government for what he described as "remarkable progress" in promoting fiscal discipline and praised the establishment of the IMF Staff Monitoring Programme in record time that will help accomplish a comprehensive debt relief for the country. Rebuilding a nation cannot happen

Wolfowitz confers with Finance Minister Antoinette Sayeh



Homecoming on Refugee Day

By Annette Rehr

For most refugee children, “going home” is almost always a fearful but adventurous experience. Born in a refugee camp outside their home country, they are one day told by their parents that it’s time to leave. They see their parents frantically packing their belongings and suddenly realize that they are about to leave their friends behind. For older children, returning home may mean going back to a place from which years ago they had to run away, bringing back sad or even terrifying memories.

Finally, the day comes. Trucks arrive at the refugee camp. The often meagre belongings are carried in, families step inside and the journey home, a known-and-yet-unknown destination, begins.

António Guterres, High Commissioner of the UN agency for Refugees, UNHCR, decided to commemorate this year’s World Refugee Day (WRD) on 20 June by spending time with returnee families who had just decided to repatriate. He did not want to endure hours of official speeches to commemorate the brave, but instead wanted to visit remote villages in a post-conflict zone or a recovering war-torn country. In the end he chose Liberia.

It was Guterres’ first visit to West Africa since he took office as High Commissioner in June 2005. And he got what he wanted.

On arrival in Monrovia on the eve of the Refugee Day from Côte d’Ivoire, Guterres stepped down from the airplane and was welcomed by two returnee children. Christian and Ruby had been quite nervous, rehearsing their little speech. The flower bouquet they were supposed to present him turned out to be too big for



António Guterres receives refugees returning from Sierra Leone



their little hands. Standing at the airfield, waiting for the head of an agency most familiar to them since they literally grew up with UNHCR in a refugee camp in Nigeria, they truly represented what World Refugee Day's 2006 theme stood for: HOPE.

Guterres approached the children, embraced them and talked to them like a father would. The two were delighted, overcame their shyness and smiled toothily. Flanked by Ruby and Christian, Guterres addressed the media and came straight to the point: "Liberia needs donor's support and help now. Investments must be made now, because in two years it will be too late."

As a former prime minister of Portugal, and having founded the Portuguese Refugee Council in 1991, Guterres displayed a very direct and open approach towards people, an attitude that won hearts and opened the doors of the Liberian Government, with which UNHCR cooperates closely in order to reintegrate its displaced population.

"We greatly cherish the dynamic and genuine democratic spirit demonstrated by Liberians to restore peace and stability," he said, "but we are also aware that Liberia needs massive support during the transitional period to maintain peace, sanity and a conducive environment for all Liberians."

To mark the Refugee Day, Guterres travelled to Bo Waterside to receive a convoy with 123 returnees from Sierra Leone, most of whose final destinations were either villages in Grand Cape Mount or the city of Monrovia. Children, dressed in oversized WRD T-shirts inscribed HOPE, were led into their new life by the High Commissioner himself. "We are very happy that you are here. Now you are in your own country. We wish you lots of happiness in your new life and I wish you to be very active, building a democratic, strong and prosperous Liberia," he welcomed the returnees to their new home.

Immigration formalities completed, the convoy was handed over to "team leader" Guterres. He decided to accompany the returnees on the 45-minute ride in the truck to Sinje Transit centre, sitting next to them. It is one thing to decide over the fate of UNHCR's 19 million benefici-

aries worldwide sitting in a comfortable New York or Geneva office and another to experience muddy roads filled with potholes in remote post-conflict zones, interacting with real people and being able to share their emotions. The returnees go through an array of feelings -- joy, fear, hope, nervousness, curiosity and fatigue -- as they journey home or stand in line at the transit centre to receive their return packages, transport allowance, hot meal, medical screening, WFP food ration and counselling.

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf later in the day joined Guterres at the WRD celebration at Sinje High School. "People of Liberia have decided to move away from war, to embrace peace and to move towards a future of hope and promise," she said. "We take the return of a high number of people as a sign of confidence."

Guterres, whose own country Portugal had endured decades of dictatorship, stressed the vital importance of achieving democracy in order to walk towards a peaceful and prosperous future, but also admitted that it is a challenge for every newly elected government to meet the expectations of its people.

After interactions with senior Government officials, dozens of Liberian returnees and former internally displaced persons, a group of beneficiaries whose needs worldwide are taken very seriously by UNHCR, Guterres expressed his satisfaction of having witnessed the agency's biggest repatriation operation currently in the world: "In less than two years, more than 500,000 Liberian refugees and internally displaced persons have gone home. 323,000 IDPs have been assisted by UNHCR and over 70,000 refugees have been repatriated with our support."

In view of Liberia's total population of 3.3 million people, this is a major movement within Africa, he noted. "However, I'm fully aware of the enormous development challenges Liberia is facing today. That's why I'm strongly advocating for the development partners to be much more active in creating sustainable conditions in Liberia," Guterres said, concluding his visit. ♦

The writer is a Public Information Officer, UNHCR Liberia.

Building a New Partnership

By Yuko Maeda

“**L**iberia needs almost everything, everything all at once.” The remark by visiting World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz was spot-on, symbolising the country’s devastation, a legacy of the long political instability and civil war. From undelivered basic social services and collapsed infrastructure to dysfunctional public institutions and corruption, the list of areas that cry out for effective, urgent remedy is long. “Donors must step up assistance to help Liberia recover.”

His call echoes a sense of urgency felt by the scores of delegates who welcomed the development agenda and strategy President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf laid out at a donor conference held in Monrovia in mid-July. The conference, called Partnership Meeting, pulled together top officials of the Liberian government and representatives from a wide spectrum of the donor community to assess the country’s readiness for initiatives to reconstruct the war-ravaged nation. Through open dialogue on previous emergency recovery programmes, fiscal performance under both the transitional and the new government, a blueprint of Liberia’s economic development agenda and major constraints, the two-day conference succeeded to build a renewed sense of partnership among the participants.

“We had a great beginning of the meeting with the President giving us a vision of where she wants this country to go. It’s a vision that’s very consonant with the values of the United Nations,” commended Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Resident Coordinator of the

UN Country Team, who took part in the conference for the entire two days. “It’s great to see a country like Liberia coming out of war and heading in the right direction towards peace and development.”

The conference was a stocktaking endeavour to review Liberia’s achievements, especially under the leadership of Johnson-Sirleaf who took office barely six months ago, assessing the government’s “implementing capacity” and its “pace” to bring the results on the ground. It was a prelude to a larger donor conference scheduled for 16-17 October in Washington DC where donors are expected to make financial commitment to support Liberia’s development agenda.

On 12 July when they first gathered in Monrovia, the international partners were keen to know which path Liberia would take from now on. “The benchmarks set out in the Accra Peace Agreement have been largely met,” said Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, in his opening remarks. “So where does Liberia go from here? And how can Liberia prepare for a better future while guarding against the evils of the past?”

Johnson-Sirleaf presented a clear answer to that question. She outlined her government’s development priorities in the coming months and years, portraying the stark realities of the country’s socio-economic situation. She said her administration aims to complete the security sector reform by restructuring the national army and police to protect the nation and the people, to reverse the situation where 85 per cent of the population is illiterate and only 5 per cent of the 300 pre-war health facilities are operational, and to improve the livelihood of the people by rehabilitating national road networks, restoring electricity and running water and giving finan-



Delegates at the donor conference

cial incentives to villages to initiate community development projects. She also vowed to fight corruption, “right-size” civil services by eliminating ghost and corrupt staff and increasing salary, improve fiscal management performance and create a foundation for the rule of law.

“Overall, this is an ambitious agenda,” she admitted. But by setting identifiable targets and benchmarks in each prioritized area, she said her government will be able to deliver visible results, at least partially. “We will try to focus on specific goals, estimating our capacity limitations... We aim high to whatever we can to get Liberia back on its feet; to get Liberian people a chance to have decent education and health care and to be able to live and work in a stable and safe environment.” To realise her vision, she vowed to accelerate her efforts in national reconstruction and appealed to the international community to give her a helping hand. “We will continue to promote democracy, transparency, accountability, hard work and the encouragement and support of our partners.”

The delegates embraced her vision and expressed staunch support for her development agenda. They commended the President’s ability to deliver what she promised in the last six months and her unwavering determination to bring more improvements in the lives of Liberians.

“In six months, they’ve got much further than any of us could expect what they



could accomplish when they started in January,” said Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US Deputy-Secretary for State Department for African Affairs, who represented the single largest donor country to Liberia. “They got a fast start, a very positive start.”

Since the end of the civil conflict in 2003, the transitional government together with the international partners including UNMIL worked out priorities in emergency recovery programmes under a two-year coordinated framework known as the Results-Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF). With more than US\$692 million poured in the RFTF emergency programmes, Liberia succeeded in demobilising more than 100,000 ex-combatants, assisting hundreds and thousands of uprooted people to go home and conducting the free and fair national elections last year. However, much of the work was practically done by the international humanitarian and development actors, who widely accused the transitional government of inability to own the nation-building efforts and of gross mismanagement of the state funds. That led to the establishment of the Governance and Economic Management Assistant Programme (GEMAP), a three-year anti-graft mechanism to ensure fiscal discipline in economic governance, a year ago.

The situation reversed after Johnson-Sirleaf took office in January. Her admin-

istration took a number of new initiatives in collaboration with the international partners, outlined in the 150-Day Deliverables in the four strategic areas of peace and security, economic revitalization, infrastructure, and governance and rule of law. Security sector reform is now underway, a part of the city has got electricity and running water for the first time in many years, revenue collection has increased, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has begun its work and emergency jobs are being created to absorb unemployed youth by involving them in repairing roads and cleaning the capital city. Having drawn up its first national budget for the fiscal year 2006-2007, the new government is now developing a short-term recovery strategy linked to the Millennium Development Goals to reduce poverty and revitalise the country’s ruined economy.

“This is a very convincing forum,” said Mats Karlsson, World Bank’s Country Director based in Ghana, after listening to all the presentations of the past achievements, the national vision, and a preview of the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) currently being prepared. The IPRSP will be a roadmap of the country’s development initiatives for the next one year. “There’s no doubt that you will have very energized partners’ encouragement and support.”

However, beyond the immediate

recovery and reconstruction needs, Johnson-Sirleaf’s government must resolve an estimated US\$3.7 billion in debts acquired during the previous regimes. The debts, including US\$740 million to the International Monetary Fund, US\$530 million to the World Bank and US\$255 million to the African Development Bank, now account for 800 per cent of the Gross National Product and 3,000 per cent of the country’s export earnings. “Simply there’s no way we can pay our debts back,” said Johnson-Sirleaf.

There is a silver lining, though. Multilateral institutions and bilateral donors are working out a way to write off the debts and give more financial aid to speed up recovery.

“We’re very optimistic about this. I’m hopeful the donors will come up with resources to do so,” said Foday Mansaray, Executive Director of the African Development Bank. “There’s a lot of donors’ goodwill towards this country, which has gone through so much in the past 10 years, and now has got a new serious government which is committed to reform. So I’m not surprised the donors are really keen to assist in the (reconstruction) process to contribute as much as they can to new programmes.”

Antoinette Sayeh, Minister of Finance who co-chaired the conference together with Planning Minister Toga McIntosh, was pleased to see the renewed partnership. “It was a very good dialogue with partners... Discussions we had were very productive around the poverty reduction strategy and what we need to do,” she said after the conference. “We had a very strong support from them (the partners), who were clearly expressing their intention to continue their support.”

The government is now tasked to produce a complete version of the poverty reduction strategy paper with a matrix of benchmarks in every strategic area and a proper monitoring and evaluation mechanism to trace the prioritised projects and activities to be presented at the pledging conference in October.

UNMIL and the UN Country Team are in the frontline of Liberia’s partners. “We look forward to donors responding to the call—now is the time to do more for Liberia,” said Ryan. ♦

TRANSITIONAL RECOVERY PROGRAMMES END

By Yuko Maeda

Despite a widely shared notion of the transitional government's alleged corruption and mismanagement of state affairs, Liberia has actually made noticeable progress in a number of areas such as restoration of peace and humanitarian services, says the final report on the Results-Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF), a two-year emergency recovery and reconstruction package which officially ended in March this year.

The RFTF, jointly set up by the then National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and its international partners including the UN Mission in Liberia and presented at the first post-conflict pledging donor conference held in February 2004 in New York, was a roadmap for emergency assistance for recovery. The report, released during an assessment donor meeting in mid-July, reviews the major activities under the RFTF initiative and details how those activities made positive, even small, impacts on the lives of Liberians.

"The picture coming out of it is very interesting and positive," said Mats Karlsson, World Bank Country Director for Liberia based in Ghana, after a presentation of an overview of the RFTF by Toga McIntosh, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs. The Bank, along with other members of the UN family, played a major role in formulating the framework, leading the socio-economic recovery activities under the package and evaluating the achievements. He said NTGL's lack of ownership of the programmes and alleged misappropriation of state funds often overshadowed the collaborative efforts in Liberia's reconstruction, and the international partners fell short of appreciation and overlooked the real impacts the emergency recovery initiative made on the ground. "In fact, we also had lots of suc-

cesses."

As the transitional government was set up in late 2003, the focus was on securing peace, providing basic services to the war-ravaged Liberians, assisting refugees and internally displaced people to return home and restoring ruined infrastructure, among other priorities. With nearly US\$700 million in financial assistance actually disbursed by donors in the transitional period, the country completed the demobilisation of more than 101,000 ex-combatants including women and children, gave more than 65,000 demobilised former-soldiers opportunities to enhance their skills and knowledge, assisted over 500,000 displaced Liberians to return home, gradually began restoring state authority across the country and held democratic elections that produced the first female elected head of state in Africa. "There has been noticeable achievement in key RFTF areas," the report says.

Although school enrolment increased and people became healthier as a result of improvements in education, nutrition, health care and sanitation services through joint efforts, the socio-economic situation and the livelihoods of ordinary Liberians have not reached the level initially expected, however. The slow establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Independent Human Rights Commission denied earlier opportunities for national reconciliation and the protection of human rights. Agriculture, the mainstay of the economy, still remains to pick up, even though efforts were made to provide seeds, tools and training to farmers in some strategic areas, according to the report.

Insufficient government ownership and low institutional capacity are the first to blame for such a slow progress in the socio-economic situation, but uneven funding and slow disbursement of the committed funds to the strategic areas also contributed to the sluggish progress, the report says.

Overall, donors' response was overwhelmingly positive with more than US\$1 billion in pledges for the RFTF initiative, nearly twice the initial pledge of US\$522 million, and actually disbursed US\$692 million, exceeding the initial request of US\$667 million. The speed of disbursement has been relatively slow, however, especially in the areas of security and infrastructure which only received less than one third of the pledges. Agricultural activities, economic management, rehabilitation of physical infrastructure and cross-cutting issues such as human rights, gender and HIV/AIDS were under-funded and met only partial targets.

The collaborative work under the RFTF mechanism also led to the realisation that the country must strengthen accountability, integrity and transparency to win donors' confidence and build up individual and institutional capacities to deliver tangible results.

"When we move forward from emergency recovery to sustainable development, we have to develop strategies to meet the long-term development agenda," said McIntosh. To achieve the long-term targets, though, massive international assistance is needed, especially as the government's national budget is limited to a mere US\$120 million.

The new government, in collaboration with international development partners, is now finalising a one-year economic development strategy linked to the Millennium Development Goals, the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP), which is expected to serve as a roadmap to guide further nation-building efforts. Donors will scrutinise the strategy at the next pledging conference slated for October in Washington DC. "Lessons learnt from the RFTF are mainstreamed into the structure and function of the IPRSP," McIntosh said. "We have to consolidate all the progress we've made so far. We have to expand our own programmes to move into the next phase." ♦

Liberia Seeks Additional Funds

By J. Wesley Washington

Having reassessed priorities to address humanitarian needs, Liberia is seeking additional US\$104 million to fund humanitarian assistance initiatives in the areas of basic social services, community revitalisation and capacity building of civil society and local authorities for the rest of 2006.

Liberia's Humanitarian Mid-Year Appeal for 2006 is a revised reminder of the initial 2006 Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP), in which the Liberian gov-

"We have looked at funding challenges. Liberia's humanitarian actors worked hard and identified urgent humanitarian needs," said Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia, at a press conference held in Monrovia on 19 July.

According to the mid-year appeal report, since the launch of 2006 CAP, the country's humanitarian situation and political climate have improved significantly with a new government installed, former President Charles Taylor taken into custody and transferred to The Hague and

states.

Highlighting only 9 per cent of rural Liberians are food-secure and only 26 medical doctors among 400 qualified doctors trained in the pre-war period are now active in healthcare services, Ryan said these urgent vulnerable situation should receive donors' attention before moving to focus on long-term economic development. "Needs are dramatic and clear. Urgent humanitarian needs should be addressed before development needs to be addressed," he said.

With the revised priorities, the country's humanitarian actors will focus on activities that provide more basic social services to vulnerable people in counties of Bomi, Lofa and Nimba where a majority of refugees and IDPs returned and in the neglected south-east region. The efforts to promote community-based projects to revitalize rural Liberia also continue while rehabilitation of infrastructure such as roads and bridges carries on. The humanitarian actors also continue to work on the capacity building of local authorities and deal with the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

"The effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian assistance is depending on funding from donors," said Dennis Johnson, Chief of the UNMIL's Humanitarian Coordination Section. "We're making sure the needs of the people are met."

The money appealed for is being channelled through the UN agencies and NGOs, not the government. These humanitarian needs, priorities and activities are now being mainstreamed into a government's short-term development strategy, the Interim Poverty Strategy Paper, currently in progress. "As we move to the mid-year appeal and move forward to the development stage next year, we have to mainstream and harmonise the efforts in resource accountability," said Toga McIntosh, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs. ♦



Jordan Ryan with Toga McIntosh at the launch of the mid-year appeal

ernment, the UN family on the ground and both local and international NGOs jointly appealed to donors to fund urgent humanitarian activities and requested US\$121 million in December last year. Liberia has received US\$40.6 million altogether as of mid-June, but the country's humanitarian actors say Liberia still requires more than US\$104.1 million to meet the needs after reviewing the ongoing urgent activities, revising the total financial requirement to US\$144.7 million for this year's programmes.

more than 314,000 internally displaced people assisted to return home, leading to the closure of all the 35 IDP camps in the country. However, the longer-term reintegration and rehabilitation of the returnees is still in progress as many of their basic needs remain unmet, the report says. The health and education sectors stay problematic due to an overall lack of capacity, and sexual and gender-based violence continues unabated across the country, according to the report. Liberia still has the world's fifth highest level of mortality rate, it



Got A Job!

By Yuko Maeda

For over a year and a half, Emily Brooks, 21, knocked on the doors at many places, from restaurants and shops to small enterprises, to find a job, any job. Without a high school certificate, any special skills to offer or influential connections, however, she met with rejection after rejection until her self-esteem dried out. “I tried so many places, different places, to apply for a job, but never got one. They simply turned me down.”

That was then. The miserable jobless life is now over for the high school dropout as she recently got a sanitation work to clean the capital city of Monrovia along with other 200 temporary workers. Her temp job is one of 500 start-up jobs created under the Liberia Emergency Employment Programme (LEEP) the government kicked off on 15 July.

“This is a pleasant initiative for young women and men to feel happy about,” smiled Brooks, waiting for her turn to sign the one-month temporary work contract at the Monrovia City Hall. In the next one

month, she was to be part of the three teams assigned to sweep the roadsides and narrow strips, collect garbage from residential areas and clean the beachfronts for US\$3 per day. For Brooks, who was forced to discontinue her education at 11th grade for lack of money to pay school fees, having the simple labour job is a huge leap. “\$3 a day is not enough to feed myself and save for school fees, but it’s a good start. At least we can start something to build up.”

In post-conflict Liberia, where 14 years of civil war destroyed everything from state structures to economic activity to productive livelihoods, an estimated 85 per cent of the labour force is unemployed with only one in 10 young people belonging to the formal economic sector. Many work in the informal sector to survive, engaging in petty trade, domestic work or other piece-meal jobs. Three in every four Liberians live below the poverty line of US\$1 a day, and more than half the entire population of some 3 million survives on less than 50 cents per day. Per capita Gross Domestic Product now stands at only US\$163, a dramatic drop from the 1980

level of US\$1,269.

Although peace has been restored and a democratically elected government is now in place, the country has no industry to absorb the massive jobless population. With a majority of the 100,000 demobilised former soldiers getting out of the vocational training courses under the country’s reintegration scheme and more and more refugees and internally displaced people returning home, Liberia is in dire need of jobs to put the idling population into the labour market and make the country’s economy tick.

“Liberia is facing a jobs crisis that is virtually unprecedented anywhere in the world today,” sighed Juan Somavia, Director-General of UN’s International Labour Organization (ILO), at its annual conference in Geneva in June. The conference held a special session on Liberia to boost international assistance in creating jobs in the West African nation. Presenting her vision for immediate employment creation and long-term labour force restoration, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf challenged an audience of 4,000 delegates to respond to her call to action with urgency.

"We need the support and resources. The rebirth of our nation will rest on the emergency programme in the short run," appealed Africa's first elected female head of state.

The 18-month programme LEEP and a long-term employment scheme, dubbed Liberia Employment Action Programme (LEAP), are national initiatives to confront the country's employment crisis. Mobilising all the resources available from the state institutions, the UN agencies, donors and NGOs, the government aims to create labour-intensive jobs to employ thousands of jobless people in several areas of rehabilitation and reconstruction and to build the foundation for a private investment-driven labour market. The UN's labour agency assisted in drawing up these two programmes.

"LEEP is a stop-gap measure to address the urgent employment issue," says Deputy Minister of Labour, Sedia Massaquoi-Bangoura. While LEEP strives to provide labour intensive job opportunities for Liberians until the country's economy revives and begins to create jobs in the private sector, LEAP sets a national policy on long-term employment strategies for reformulating regulations on minimum wages, working conditions and social security, strengthening labour market information and analysis and promoting social dialogue among unions, employers' associations and the regulatory institutions. "We need to collaborate with all our partners to implement LEEP successfully... Mobilising resources to give them jobs -- it's a big, big challenge."

As a first step, the government in late July created 500 jobs in sanitation, beautification and road repair work to employ discharged soldiers, ex-combatants and other youth in collaboration with the Ministries of Labour, Defence, and Public Works, the Liberia Water Corporation and the Monrovia City Corporation. The international community is also backing up Liberia's efforts in job creation, committed to offer more than 17,000 jobs with over US\$4.2 million altogether in the next few months.

ILO is about to provide more than 1,000 jobs in public works with US\$3 million funded by Netherlands as part of a US\$13 million medium-term employment

initiative proposed by the labour agency. The projects, which are slated to start as early as mid-August, include emergency maintenance of three roads in Grand Kru, drainage cleaning for city streets and community-based waste management in Monrovia and a road rehabilitation project in Montserrado County.

The UN Mission in Liberia also has allocated US\$1 million for the emergency job creation initiative to offer nearly 3,000 jobs in various counties. The mission's Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery section kicked off a drainage cleaning project in Monrovia early August, offering 200 temporary jobs. About 1,100 villagers along the 135 km road from Fishtown to Harper in Liberia's southeast region will soon begin improving drainage systems and maintaining road-sides. Another 1,000 people will do the same along six major road corridors around the country in September. In the north-west county of Lofa, more than 200 residents will engage in quarrying starting in mid-August. UNMIL's engineering troops have already started hiring Liberian labourers to help repair main and secondary national roads, ultimately employing 300 workers.

The World Bank is committed to fund US\$600,000 to hire 1,200 Liberians to rehabilitate the Voinjama-Zorzor national route, while the UN Development Programme will give 300 jobs in rehabilitation of the Greenville-Sinoe rubber plantation. The World Food Programme has begun rehabilitation work of critical feeder roads in seven counties in its Food-for-Work scheme, in which 12,000 labourers receive food in exchange for the work they put in.

"Employment is one of the keys to

successful peace-building," said Alan Doss, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Coordinator of the UN Operations in Liberia, at the launch of LEEP. He said the development of the private sector is critical for the long-term solution but urgent job creation for young population is imperative to fend off the risk of instability and to reduce poverty. "I hope this will be truly a great leap forward."

Applauding the close partnership Liberia receives from the international community, Johnson-Sirleaf urged Liberians at the launching ceremony to refine their skills and develop work discipline under the emergency job creation scheme. "We must set a good example of performance so that our partners will see that Liberians are ready to take responsibility for their own development and work hard to achieve that."

Hilton Socksock, a 32-year-old returnee from a refugee camp in Guinea where he spent 16 years, sees a temp job he got in the city's sanitation work a golden opportunity. "It's a great initiative for us youth, especially for ex-combatants," he chirped. As he worked in the camp with several NGOs as a sanitation supervisor and acquired skills required to manage workers, he is confident of his temp job leading to a permanent one. "Based on performance, may be they will push me up to somewhere a higher position. It's a great opportunity to prove myself."

Like Socksock, there are hundreds of thousands of Liberians, young and not-so-young, who are waiting for an opportunity to work and prove their worth. The pace of Liberia's recovery depends a great deal on providing them that opportunity. ♦



President Johnson-Sirleaf at the launch of LEEP

Nation-building Is Not A Short-term Exercise...

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, along with wife Nane, paid a three-day visit to Liberia starting 3 July to assess UN's "investment in peace" in the country. He met with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, addressed a joint session of the national legislature, inaugurated UNMIL's headquarters in Monrovia and held talks with senior UN officials. In an exclusive interview with Head of UNMIL Radio Joseph Roberts-Mensah, the Secretary-General discusses the UN's priorities in Liberia, stresses the importance of good governance and urges Liberians to rise above individual interests to rebuild the nation.

Thank you for joining us, Sir. What would you say is the purpose for your visit to Liberia this time?

Well, I am here to see how things are on the ground for myself. As you know, the UN has made a major investment here, investment in peace. We are working very actively with the Liberian Government in consolidating the peace that have been achieved and I wanted to discuss with the UN Team on the ground and with the government how things are going and how we can further support the government's effort.

What has been the main impact on Liberia and the sub-region of UNMIL's presence here?

First of all, when you look back to what the situation was like about two, three years ago, there has been a tremendous change. The war has ended. You have relative stability and peace in the country. But we need now to begin to focus on the question of recovery and reconstruction. This is an area where we need to work very energetically with the Government. I had the opportunity of telling President Johnson-Sirleaf and her team that there is quite a bit of goodwill and support internationally and that we should be able to pull our efforts to get the job done.

What would you say are the priorities for the UN in Liberia today?

I think one area where we should work



with the Government is Security Sector Reform. By Security Sector Reform, I mean police and the army will have to be reformed. We also need to work with them to strengthen the Judiciary, the Rule of Law, respect for Human Rights. We would also want to work with them on job creation, particularly for the youth. You have quite a lot of unemployed youth which is a problem and will continue to be a problem unless it is tackled aggressively.

I have also noticed that we are working with them in reviewing their own regulatory systems. They are reviewing the timber contracts. They are reviewing all contracts that had been issued in the past, which I think is very healthy and necessary and there may be lessons here for other African countries who may have signed similar contracts.

Good Governance, much talked about over the last few months, particularly here. How critical is this for the achievement of stability and national harmony in Liberia?

Good governance is extremely important. It means an effective civil service, effective regulatory system, effective decision-making and it also implies that state institutions must have the capacity to perform. Here, we need to work with the Government to build capacities in ministries and key institutions for them to be able to carry out their work.

They have started off with elections - elections which were fair and on a level playing field. Liberians have had a say in who governs them and how they are governed and that is a good beginning; but now the Government must deliver.

I've also made it clear whenever I have had the opportunity that we should not leave everything to the Government alone to deal with. Government needs help. It needs help from the people, from the private sector, from civil society. We need to work in partnership to tackle the major challenges ahead and, of course, the Government will need, through its legal system and its laws, to create the right environment that releases the entrepreneurial energy and creativity of its people.

People tend to expect a lot from the UN. But does the UN do enough to deal with

the problems of countries when it is putting them back on their feet? We have the recent experience of East Timor -- is there something more that we should be doing and haven't done?

I think one lesson we've learnt over the past years is that we should accept that nation-building is a long term proposition. It's not a short term exercise and the international community must be prepared to stay on for much longer than had been the case. In the past we had tended to look at elections as more or less the exit point; but that is a beginning and we need to stay longer and work with the Government to stabilize and ensure that the investments we've made; the efforts we've made to stabilize the country, are not wasted and things don't fall apart because we've left too hurriedly.

We've seen it, as you've said, in East Timor. But I think the international com-



munity has learnt that lesson. I'm confident that it will not happen here in Liberia. But having said that, let me stress that the issue of nation-building, consolidating peace and stabilizing the situation, is a responsibility of the Government and the people of the country concerned. It is their responsibility, first and foremost. The international community can and should help, but the country and the people should take the ownership. They should assume responsibility with the full support of the international community and I have a good feeling that that is precisely what this Government is doing.

What are your major achievements during your stewardship at the UN?

Well, let's not forget that I'm still in office. I still have six more months to go and I'm going to go full steam until mid-

night of 31 December 2006. So we never know what happens between now and then. But I think we have made some achievements.

I'm pleased with the Millennium Development Goals which came out of my report, "We the Peoples," and how it has galvanized governments and peoples around the question of development. If we do not eliminate poverty and fight the diseases that confront many billions of people, particularly on this continent, then we are going to face a very difficult world, a world of inequality. A world in which the rich and poor sitting side by side with immense wealth and extreme poverty next door, is not sustainable.

So I would say having succeeded in putting the fight against poverty the centre of public decision-making and to get the whole world to accept the MDG as a common framework for development, I think it's an agenda that I'm proud of.

A final word to Liberians?

I tell my Liberian brothers and sisters that they do have an opportunity now to set their country on the right path. They know the alternative. They know the suffering they went through, the trauma, the destruction, the misery. No one wants to go through that again. Peace is like good health. You never know the value of it until you lose it. They have lost peace once and now they must appreciate it and yearn for it. They have to work together and turn diversity into strength. They have only one Liberia and it is in their interest to work together to make this country what it ought to be.

They should not go after group interest or individual interest. They must always bear in mind the interest of the nation and those in office must work for the interest of the people who elected them and on whose behalf they govern. I think the Liberians need to support the Government. They need to also chip in and do whatever little things that they can do at the community level, at the village level and work with each other and the Government to rebuild this nation and not just sit back and wait for the Government to do everything for them. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Sir.

UN Labour Agency Returns



Many Liberians idle away their time due to lack of employment opportunities

By Yuko Maeda and J. Wesley Washington

Responding to a cry for the creation of decent jobs for Liberians and the establishment of a proper labour market and administration, UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) has returned to develop Liberia's labour sector.

"We're very happy to come back and get re-engaged in Liberia," said Sina Chuma-Mkandawire, ILO Regional Director for Anglophone West Africa. "We're working with Liberian counterparts in a very systematic way so that we can consolidate the achievements in the past."

For the last few months, the ILO has sent experts in capacity building to the Ministry of Labour and helped develop the Liberia Emergency Employment Programme (LEEP) to create labour intensive jobs to absorb a vast number of unemployed youth and a long-term labour initiative, the Liberia Employment Action Programme (LEAP), to set the country's employment strategy for decent work. Under the LEEP initiative, the government as well as the international partners have launched an emergency job creation initia-

tive to offer more than 17,000 jobs in the next few months.

Due to the long years of political instability and civil conflict, Liberia's labour sector has collapsed with only a little economic activity and no proper labour administration in place. Liberia's unemployment rate now stands at 85 per cent, and half of the population live under US\$50 cents per month. Literally, Liberia faces "a jobs crisis" that is unprecedented anywhere in the world, as ILO worldwide Director-General Juan Somavia put it. That crisis led the ILO to choose Liberia as one of the priority countries for the UN labour agency's Decent Work Programme initiative.

"The ILO is very rich in providing tools to develop a healthy labour sector," said Chuma-Mkandawire, who was in Monrovia for a week to attend a donor conference in mid-July and the launch of LEEP initiative later that month.

Chuma-Mkandawire sees a lot of challenges ahead in the war-ravaged country to develop a labour environment which can provide decent work for skilled and unskilled Liberians, administer labour market information and nurture tripartite labour relations among trade unions, employers' associations and the regulatory Ministry. She says the labour law reform

must be a priority to standardise the minimum wage, minimum age for work, social security system and access to employment market information, among others. "The labour law reform must be effective to set up a solid foundation to stabilise the country's economy and labour sector," she said.

In addition to the technical assistance, the ILO has also committed US\$3 million to offer more than 1,000 jobs in public works in coming months as part of a US\$13 million medium-term employment initiative to support the LEEP/LEAP programmes. The labour agency will soon set up a project office in Monrovia to assist the implementation of those programmes.

Labour Minister Kofi Woods welcomes the ILO's re-engagement. "The return of the ILO has helped to strengthen the capacity of this Ministry in terms of being able to become more productive, efficient for service delivery to society," he said.

Liberia was one of the original signatories to the establishment of the labour agency, which formulates international labour standards in the form of Conventions and Recommendations setting minimum standards of basic labour rights, freedom of association and other guidelines regulating work related issues.

Settling Land and Property Disputes

By Sulaiman Momodu

“We get land and property cases every-day at the Lands Ministry,” a senior government official confirms, flipping through a ledger where the cases are recorded. Corrupt practices usually compound the issues, the official admits, but points out that efforts are being made to minimize the problem by drawing up new policies and having a code of conduct for commissioners, surveyors and others involved in land and property issues.

To support the government’s efforts to settle the land and property issues, UNMIL’s Civil Affairs Section has drawn up a set of Guidelines on Housing and Property. The rationale behind the guidelines stems from the fact that after 14 years of civil war, thousands of Liberians fled their homes abandoning properties and became refugees and IDPs. “Consequently, as typical in all post-war countries, a number of illegal occupations of houses and property occurred in various parts of the country,” says Zainab Bangura, Chief of the Section.

In the absence of adequate and functioning police and judicial facilities in many parts of the country, UNMIL has supported the establishment of Land and Property Committees (LPCs) comprising County Superintendent as Chair and UNHCR as co-Chair in all 15 counties. Also on the committee are traditional rulers and elders, youth groups, as well as non governmental organizations, the Liberian National Police, Ministry of Justice, Development Superintendent and UNMIL representatives.

To ensure that land and property disputes do not create a security problem, Civil Affairs facilitates and provides technical support to LPCs in their deliberations

and whenever necessary, engages the parties in proximity talks and dispels fears or rumours. “We encourage peaceful resolution and promote peaceful coexistence and national reconciliation and provide expert advice to local government authority and Ministry of Internal Affairs on possible ways forward,” says Bangura.

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf recently set up a 17-member Commission to investigate land and other real estate issues that are causing conflict among various ethnic groups in Nimba County and make recommendations for a lasting solution to the problems that are identified. Experts on land and boundary demarcation from the Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy assist the work of the Commission.

UNMIL has been supporting the assessment visits of the Presidential

Commission to Nimba County. The work of the Commission has substantially helped to reduce tension in the County amidst the pervasive rumours of plans by an ethnic group in exile to launch an attack to forcibly re-possess property taken from them. Several of those occupying disputed properties have also shown willingness to either vacate or at least enter into negotiations with claimants who have been identified as the rightful owners.

Before they return home, Liberian refugees are briefed on LPCs and what to do if they discover that their land or property had been occupied. “Together with other partners, we ensure that returnee rights to re-occupy and have access to property are respected and we ensure that no returnee is deprived of his or her property,” a senior UNHCR official explains. ♦

Land and property disputes are a legacy of the civil war





Mothers queue up for vaccination

Battling Tetanus

By Samuel W Johnson

Tuesdaymar, 27, a mother of three in District Three of Grand Bassa County, shut her eyes firmly and clenched her fists just as she was about to receive her vaccination against tetanus. “It wasn’t too bad,” she said with a smile when asked if the injection had hurt.

Tuesdaymar was among the many mothers in five of Liberia’s counties who received tetanus toxoid (TT) vaccinations in June during a campaign to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus (MNT) from Liberia, an initiative funded by

UNICEF in collaboration with the Government of Liberia, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

The first phase of the vaccination campaign took place from 25 June through 01 July, targeting more than 258,000 women of child-bearing age in Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Margibi counties.

Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Nimba are relatively hard-to-reach areas while Grand Bassa and Margibi are more accessible. The second phase of the campaign, which will reach the remaining 10 counties, will take place in May and June 2007 and January 2008, targeting 543,084 women of

child-bearing age. The third and final phase, a mopping up campaign, will be held in 2008.

“For the first time in Liberia, a national tetanus vaccination campaign is underway. Our work on MNT elimination is building on successes and lessons learned from emergency vaccination campaigns in 2003-2005 when the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare led an effort to vaccinate more than 1 million Liberian children from measles and polio,” said UNICEF Officer-in-Charge Keith J. Wright. “The aim in this first phase is to reach over 250,000 women of child-bearing age in these five counties with the TT vaccines.

Three doses of TT will protect the women for up to 15 years and will pass on their immunity to their newborns for the first few months of life."

The nation-wide campaign will ensure that more than 800,000 Liberian women of child-bearing age receive three doses of the tetanus toxoid (TT) vaccine necessary to protect them and their newborns from tetanus. Tetanus is a major cause of morbidity for children in Liberia under age one.

"Because of the efforts championed by UNICEF, the increased use of this vaccine and improved birthing conditions have virtually eliminated MNT from 107 developing countries formerly at risk, and now it is Liberia's turn to reduce MNT so that it is no longer a significant health problem in Liberia," said the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Alan Doss.

Tetanus is caused by a bacterium that thrives in humid and unhygienic conditions. Tetanus bacteria are pervasive -- they live in the soil, in animal dung and in faeces -- and can enter the infant at birth if the umbilical cord is cut with dirty instruments or the incision is treated with contaminated dressings. Once inside the body, the bacteria produce an extremely potent toxin, which attacks the nervous system causing spasms and tightening of muscles in the newborn's jaw and neck and later, in

the back and abdomen. The baby's mouth grows so rigid that it becomes "locked" (thus the name "lockjaw" given to tetanus) and the child will no longer be able to breastfeed, or ultimately, breathe. The fatality rate is high -- between 70 and 100 per cent. The true extent of the tetanus death toll is not known as many newborns and mothers die at home and neither the

The first phase of the vaccination campaign took place from 25 June through 01 July, targeting more than 258,000 women of child-bearing age in Grand Bassa, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, and Margibi counties.

birth nor the death is reported. For this reason, tetanus is often called the "silent killer." In 2004, at least 150,000 babies and more than 30,000 mothers died from the disease worldwide.

"In 2005, TT coverage for women in Liberia was 72 per cent. For a country to eliminate MNT, it must have at least 80 per cent of all its women population vaccinated with the TT," said Liberia's Minister

of Health and Social Welfare, Walter Gwenigale. "But to also tackle MNT, safe birthing practices must be greatly improved in Liberia. It is estimated that 80 per cent of all births in Liberia are administered by untrained birth attendants in unsanitary and unhygienic conditions."

UNICEF and its partners are working closely with the Ministry to improve birthing practices and also to strengthen community MNT surveillance. Those involved in the campaign to eliminate MNT in Liberia include WHO, the United Nations Population Fund, the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health, the U.S. Fund for UNICEF, Becton Dickinson, the Gates Foundation, Basic Support for Institutionalizing Child Survival/United States Agency for International Development, and Save the Children-US, among others.

The role of UNICEF in this global effort is to procure and deliver vaccines, maintain the cold chain, educate health workers, and offer technical support to immunization programmes. To ensure that the disease is eliminated and to avoid its re-emergence, UNICEF is also engaged in teaching and promoting clean birthing practices. ♦

The writer is a Programme Assistant with UNICEF Liberia.



UNICEF Donates School Benches

By Patrick Slavin

The Vice Principal for Administration at the Special Projects Government School in Monrovia, Victor Dumaxasi, raises his hands in exasperation. “During the war, everything was looted, even school roofs were torn off,” he says. “How can students learn if they don’t have a desk to use when they come for class? That’s why the donation by UNICEF and the Ministry is so important.”

Dumaxasi was reacting to the donation of new benches to his school by the United Nations Children’s Fund. To prepare for the new school year in September, and in partnership with the Ministry of Education, UNICEF is constructing 10,000 three-seat benches for distribution to 100 government schools in five counties. A combined total of 30,000 students in Bong, Grand Gedeh, Lofa, Montserrado and Nimba Counties will benefit from this donation, including the 800 students who attend the Special Projects School in the Stephen Tolbert Estates community in Monrovia.

“There’s no such time than now that our schools are in need of furniture. So these benches are very helpful in addressing the seating problems facing many schools, as we strive to rebuild our educational system,” said the Minister of Education, Joseph Korto, expressing gratitude for the donation. “This is part of the Government’s 150-day deliverables to our people and it’s an indication of how we are working to rebuild our country.”

UNICEF Liberia’s Officer in Charge, Keith J. Wright, said the benches will go to government schools like Special Projects which are offering the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP). ALP condenses six years of primary schooling into three years of intensive activities to enable

children and youth make up for lost educational years.

“ALP schools serve an extremely useful function in the rehabilitation and reintegration of war-affected children, including returning refugees, demobilized children associated with fighting forces (CAFF), and all those whose education has been repeatedly disrupted over the last 15 years,” Wright said. “By this donation to our partners at the Ministry of Education, UNICEF is assuring the Government about its commitment to helping it revive Liberia’s educational sector.”

ALP addresses the needs of an estimated 400,000 children, approximately half of

Liberia’s total student population, whose education has been interrupted due to the years of armed conflict. In addition to special teacher training, schools that offer ALP can cater to all school-age children and receive additional supplies including recreation kits, school gardens, and other support.

Wright pledged UNICEF’s continued collaboration with the Ministry of Education, stressing the crucial task before the Ministry in Liberia’s post-conflict recovery and reconstruction drive. ♦

The writer is an Information/Communications Officer, UNICEF Liberia.



New recruits get ready
for training

Training Begins for New Army

Edith Bawn/SSR

By J. Wesley Washington

Just as Liberia was celebrating its 159th independence anniversary in July, the first group of recruits for a new professional army began training in the capital Monrovia.

The number of the first group of the new recruits is small, just over one hundred, but the significance of the exercise is huge. For the country's former army, the bloated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), disintegrated during the years of war having become factionalized and became an instrument of brutality and oppression. It's this ignominious past that is being erased by the planned creation of a new, well-trained army.

The 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement among parties to the Liberian conflict called for the restructuring of the AFL and UN Security Council Resolution 1509 mandated UNMIL to assist the creation of a professional army for Liberia as part of a broad security sector reform.

Under the supervision of DynCorp International, a private security company contracted by the United States Government to train the new Liberian army, 110 recruits including 12 women began a 15-week Initial Entry Training (IET) at a refurbished Barclay Training Center (BTC), serving as a temporary training facility.

Recruits will learn basic military rules and regulations, skills and techniques, and

how to use weapons. They will be taught the Constitution, rule of law, human rights and gender issues, and will also have an opportunity to bolster their educational level. Over the next three years, DynCorp will assist with recruiting, vetting, training and equipping the new army of 2,000 soldiers, including 94 civil servants for the Defence Ministry.

During the two-year transitional period following the peace accord, the former AFL was disbanded. Over 9,000 former soldiers recruited after the 1989 civil uprising were demobilized and served severance benefits while nearly 4,500 soldiers who joined the army before 1990 were retired. The latter group was decorated by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf during the anniversary of independence.

As the new recruits pledged total allegiance to the country and its constitution just before beginning the training, Defence Minister Brownie Samukai advised them to observe and adhere to all the training regulations. "Demonstrate seriousness and tactfulness. I am sure at the end of this training, your family, friends and the entire Liberian nation would be proud of you," he said.

Commenting a week after the training began, a spokesperson for DynCorp, Edith Bawn, said the recruits seemed to be coping very well. "They are extremely interested because they realize that there are lots of people observing them. They are the first class in the new AFL and the first

chapter in the new Liberian army," she said.

Graduation of the first group of trainees will take place in November. By then, they will be divided into three categories -- officers, non-commissioned officers and privates. Everyone will then continue with advanced training according to their ranks.

Already many housing units, administrative, medical, recreational and other facilities have been renovated and refurbished at the military barracks along the Robertsfield Highway renamed the Edward Binyah Kesselley Military Barracks by President Johnson-Sirleaf as part of the celebrations marking this year's independence anniversary. The barracks will host what is to be called the 23rd Infantry Brigade of the new AFL.

The training exercise then becomes a revolving process with an increment of over 300 recruits for the second class, expected to begin early January 2007. Notification of new recruitment will begin in December 2006.

The minimum requirement for a recruit to the new Liberian army is a high school education. All recruits must pass an aptitude and physical fitness test, medical examinations and illegal drugs use test and must have a clean human rights record.

There were a number of attempts during Liberia's intermittent civil war to restructure the army but all were unsuccessful. ♦

Human Rights Clubs

The belief that the early years of life are crucial in shaping later life is fast gaining ground. Catch them young and their minds can be shaped, runs the argument. It's the same "catch them young" assumption that has led to the establishment of 41 human rights clubs in high schools across Liberia, scene of gross human rights violations lasting several decades, aimed at attaining a national human rights culture.



Human Rights Club members march to promote human rights in Sinoe County

Sadie O'Mahoney/UNMIL

By Josephine Moss

It began with the celebrations marking the International Human Rights Day in December last year. With the aim of increasing human rights awareness among school students, UNMIL's Human Rights Officers established 36 Human Rights Clubs in high schools across the country. That number has since grown to 41 Clubs with more

than 1,500 members in public as well as private high schools in 13 counties. By the end of the year, more clubs are expected to come to life.

Established in close cooperation with school principals and teachers, who also participate in meetings, the human rights clubs have attracted the support of several NGOs that deal with human rights in Liberia. The clubs also enjoy the support of other members of the UNMIL family as

well as county authorities.

The promotion and protection of human rights in any country requires a population that is capable of identifying and asserting its rights as a check on possible abuses by the State. This is particularly the case in Liberia, which witnessed gross human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law. Even today, despite the end of the civil war, human rights protection is severely limited

due to the poor operation of the Courts and other essential State services needed to guarantee fundamental human rights

UNMIL's Human Rights and Protection Section decided to pioneer the human rights clubs as a means of working directly with young Liberians, who will soon enter adulthood and play a part in shaping their county's future. As Liberia's long-term peace and stability will depend on them, it is essential that they begin to expect and demand that the elected Government will meet its obligations to implement Liberia's international human rights commitments. The clubs encourage students to participate actively in promoting a human rights-based future for Liberia.

The Cape Palmas High School Club, in Harper, Maryland County, has established its own regular talk show on local radio and the Club of Pleebo High School, also in Maryland County, hopes to follow suit during the next academic year. When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission launched its public activities on 22 June, members of the Seventh Day Adventist and Bassa High School clubs participated in the ceremony held in Grand Bassa County.

Initially, Human Rights Officers concentrated on explaining and leading discus-

sions on general human rights issues, such as the fundamental freedoms contained in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. As students have become more familiar with human rights issues, they have frequently taken the initiative in suggesting discussion topics or seeking further information on issues that are of particular relevance to them. Topics that have drawn enthusiastic participation so far this year include a human rights analysis of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), discrimination on the basis of sex, child rights and national reconciliation. In relation to SGBV, students have shown particular interest in the legislative amendments adopted in January this year providing heavier penalties for sexual offences. With rape a particular problem for girls, highlighting the right to be free from sexual and physical abuse and the State's duty to enforce the anti-rape law has been a major focus during the discussions.

Devastated by the war, the schools across Liberia are in dire conditions. Students lack access to text books, stationery and materials that are essential to formal education. The human rights clubs also aim to support the students' academic development by encouraging them to think analytically and critically about issues,

express their opinions and always ask questions.

UNMIL components, local authorities and civil society members enhance club sessions by providing a range of views and expertise on human rights issues. In Bomi County, the Guthrie Plantation School club learnt about the role of the police in a democratic society directly from the County LNP Commander and UNPOL officers. In Bong County, UNMIL Corrections Advisory Unit explained the importance and rationale of human rights guarantees relating to detention conditions to members of the Doloken Gboveh High School club. In Nimba County, joint meetings were arranged for the three clubs there to learn about democracy and human rights in a forum that encourages sharing of ideas and building relationships with students from other schools. UNMIL Corrections Advisory Unit and Legal and Judicial System Support Division provided invaluable assistance.

In the coming months, the Human Rights and Protection Section of UNMIL plans to establish a national network of the clubs to encourage students to share ideas and experiences with their counterparts in other counties -- yet another step towards a national human rights culture in Liberia.

♦



A Corrections Advisor explains the importance of human rights in detention to young students



Luiz Carlos da Costa
congratulates the
TRC Commissioners

TRC Work Set to Begin

By Yuko Maeda

After four months of preparation, Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has opened its door to start documenting evidence on alleged crimes against humanity and wartime atrocities committed during a quarter-century of the country's political turmoil and civil conflict.

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf officially launched the Commission on 22 June and tasked it to look into human rights violations associated with coups, instability and war that began in January 1979 and ended in October 2003 in order to reconstruct the national truth.

"Today marks a historic and defining moment in our effort to rebuild, reunite, reconcile and heal our nation," she declared at the ceremony to launch the reconciliation process. "There will not be lasting peace, nor will there be unity and reconciliation, if the truth of the crisis remains speculation, assumption and hearsay."

The TRC was created under the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra signed by the warring factions and was subsequently enacted into law by the power-sharing Transitional Assembly in June 2005. In February this year, the then

one-month-old government inaugurated the Commission to begin the preparatory work.

"Our country cannot afford to evade justice and the protection of human rights throughout our land," the President told the crowd gathered at the Centennial Memorial Pavilion in Monrovia. "My government will ensure that those perpetrators of crime against humanity will face up to those crimes, no matter who you are, no matter when and how it was committed."

Cllr, Jerome J. Verdier, Chairman of the nine-member Commission, said his team is committed to find out what actually happened to Liberia and rebuild a "historical reality" in order to heal the nation's deep wounds. "After 150 years of existence, we are today launching the TRC to find out the truth of the past and establish a firm basis for reconciliation and lasting peace and development in Liberia."

The Commission will soon start collecting testimonies from both victims and perpetrators on human rights violations of any kind, including massacres, killing, looting, rape and arson. The TRC is now selecting 192 statement takers throughout the country, preparing to set up field offices across the nation and intensifying community outreach campaign to urge every single Liberian to come forward to tell his or her story. Once hearing of testi-

monies is over in December, the Commission is scheduled to begin a historical review and specialised hearings on women, children and economic crimes before drawing a conclusion. At the end of the two-year mandate, the Commission is expected to compile a report of its findings and make recommendations, which may include suggesting amnesty upon full disclosure or prosecutions.

"We would like people and communities to participate in the process of TRC so that eventually we will be able to bring recommendations that reflect the views and wishes of people," Verdier said at a public forum held following the launching ceremony.

The UN Mission in Liberia, which has been actively supporting the creation of the Commission from drafting the law to selecting the Commissioners and now assisting in its main tasks, also sees the full participation of Liberians as a key to success. "The task before the Commission is not an easy one. It is not only to examine the past but also to delve into what caused communities to turn against one another and people to go against their neighbours," said Luiz Carlos da Costa, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General. "Participation of the people freely and without fear is essential to the success of the Commission's mandate." ♦

Revamping the Justice Sector

By J. Wesley Washington

As Liberia makes the transition from long years of lawlessness to a society that respects the rule of law, the country's legal and judicial system is facing myriad challenges in the administration of justice across the country.

Among the challenges are the lack of qualified judicial personnel, poor or non-existent infrastructure, the culture of corruption and impunity and people's lack of confidence in the judiciary, the legacy of the prolonged civil war.

To constructively address these challenges, UNMIL, through its Legal and Judicial System Support Division, is currently engaging the Judiciary, Ministry of Justice, the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law and other legal institutions in developing and implementing a variety of initiatives, in collaboration with other international partners.

One area in which UNMIL has contributed significantly is in the reform of a number of key targeted laws which are expected to have a major impact. UNMIL cooperated and collaborated closely with the Ministry of Justice in a legislative reform initiative which resulted in the enactment of new laws relating to rape, human trafficking, jury law, and a law which provides for the financial autonomy of the judiciary. The latter is of major significance and will serve to ensure and uphold the independence of the Judiciary and provide for the more effective and efficient administration of the judicial system.

UNMIL continues to provide technical expertise for the establishment of the Law Reform Commission, an important initiative aimed at strengthening the national legal framework by providing a sustainable mechanism for the progressive development and reform of the law.

Already, a strategy paper prepared by UNMIL has been provided to the Minister of Justice who has accepted the recommendations contained in the paper, and a small task force of prominent Liberian lawyers has been constituted to facilitate the establishment of the Law Reform Commission.

In an effort to strengthen the capacity of the prosecutorial division of the Ministry of Justice and reduce the backlog of cases in the courts, UNMIL has engaged the services of 12 qualified Liberian lawyers for a six-month period to act as prosecutorial consultants to prosecute cases and provide support to existing prosecutors. UNMIL has also hired the

Greenville. Eight other court renovation and construction projects are underway in Buchanan, Gbarnga, Zwedru, Harper, Bopolu, Cestos City, Ganta and Sanniquellie. The completion of these projects will significantly bolster the operation of the justice system in these areas.

UNMIL also provides training programmes for magistrates, justices of the peace, court clerks prosecutors, legal aid providers and senior law students with a view to strengthening the capacity of the judicial system. These training programs are conducted in collaboration with national partners (Ministry of Justice and Supreme Court) and draw on national legal experts as facilitators in conjunction

with personnel from UNMIL's Legal and Judicial Support Division. Emphasis is placed on national ownership as well as building the capacity of Liberian trainers. An interactive workshop-based approach is adopted which incorporates pre and post training assessments.

Recently, the Division ended the first round of basic training for magistrates and justices of the peace throughout Liberia. In a series of four

and five-day workshops, 222 Magistrates and 220 justices of the peace were trained in Monrovia, Zwedru, Gbarnga and Kakata. These training workshops represented the first comprehensive training programme for judicial officials in Liberia since 2000.

The Division's staff are currently deployed in 11 of Liberia's 15 counties and are assisting in building and strengthening the capacity of the legal, judicial and prosecutorial systems. Their work involves providing extensive on-the-ground advice and assistance to judges, magistrates, court officials, prosecutors and defence counsel to enhance their skills, knowledge and abilities. They also promote correct practices and procedures as well as international fair trial standards.

♦



A newly constructed police station

services of 18 qualified Liberian lawyers as public defence consultants for six months to strengthen the capacity of the public defence system as well as to represent indigent defendants charged with criminal offences in the circuit courts but who cannot afford to hire lawyers to represent them.

A major challenge for the restoration of the rule of law in Liberia is the renovation and rehabilitation of judicial infrastructure; most of them are in a deplorable state of disrepair. UNMIL, through its Quick Impact Projects' Rule of Law scheme, is currently reconstructing and rehabilitating court houses and police and prison facilities throughout the country.

Five of these projects already completed include court houses in Tubmanburg, Kakata, Bensonville, Careysburg, and

Small Business, High Hopes

By Annette Rehr

Just two hours past midnight every day, Bessy gets up to bake bread. She does it quietly, trying not to wake her children. By 5 a.m., the single mother of two fixes a modest breakfast for her daughters before leaving her house on the outskirts of Monrovia to sell the bread on the streets of the capital. “I started baking bread while I was a child,” recalls Bessy, a former refugee.

Today, however, she considers her bread business to be just a small additional source of income. With the help of a micro-loan provided by one of UNHCR’s implementing partners, the American Refugee Committee (ARC), she has been able to diversify her business, and her main income now comes from the second-hand clothes stall she runs in one of Monrovia’s popular markets.

“Without the micro-loan, it would have been much more difficult for me to expand my business,” says Bessy, who received 3,000 Liberian dollars (around US\$50) in a loan she’ll have to repay on a bi-weekly basis within four to five months.

“I’m working hard... by eight at night I’m back home, then I take care of my children, by eleven I go to sleep and then I just have three hours to rest.” But she does not complain. Just a few years ago, she was a refugee in Guinea, with nothing to call her own. Today, she makes a profit of 3,000 Liberian dollars on average every month and she is proud. “I do have my own house now.”

Liberia’s economy collapsed during the years of civil war, and refugees and displaced people alike face a dire situation upon return. It will probably take years to restore Liberia’s economy. Nearly 85 per cent of Monrovia’s are jobless. Usually, it is women who engage in small trading activities, walking the streets of Monrovia with plates on their heads selling a few items to feed their families. Many of them, like Bessy, are the only breadwinners for the family.

It is these women that the ARC programme seeks to empower by providing loans that also aim to strengthen Liberia’s informal sector. Since the start of the programme in 2005, more than 1,174 people – 1,056 of them women – have been helped under the scheme, which follows a rigorous selection system.

“Only groups of seven to 10 people can apply,” explains Jacob Boimah, Branch Manager of ARC. “They should know each other, trust each other and they must have been in business for the last six months.” Returnees, however, get special consideration and need only show that their small business has been running for

“Our group did not know each other very well when we applied,” Bessy recalls. “But through the loan we became friends. Whenever I get sick, one of the other women takes care of my stall.”

Like Bessy, Nyamah Weedor was a refugee in Guinea until she and two of her children came back to Liberia with UNHCR’s help in 2004. Her husband and other children are still in a camp in Guinea. She doesn’t know when, or if, they will come back and has decided she must rely on herself to feed her family. She has opted to open a rice shop, not far from Bessy’s stall. “I did engage in rice, because bananas or soap don’t give



Bessy at her clothes shop

two or three months.

Each group must present a joint application and a profit sheet. If the business idea seems promising, each member gets 3,000 to 3,500 Liberian dollars during the first cycle. If all goes well, the group can then apply for a second cycle, getting 4,500 to 5,000 Liberian dollars. One member of the group is responsible for repaying the loan on time. In this way, the micro-loan system provides not only the funds necessary for people to start up again after years in refugee or internally displaced camps, it also encourages social support and commitment from beneficiaries.

enough profit,” this tiny woman says firmly. Her stall has a privileged position, close to the main road through the crowded Duala market.

“I have regular customers, they do come every day,” she says. “A cup of rice sells between 10 and 12 Liberian dollars, depending on the quality, and on good days I make a profit of 150 Liberian dollars.”

Things are gradually improving now, and she will soon apply for the second loan cycle. Meanwhile, she is looking forward to the future. “I think everything will be all right,” she says. “We had enough wars. I don’t want to run away again.” ♦

Longing for Water

Despite abundant rains,
safe drinking water is
scarce in Liberia

By Sulaiman Momodu

It's daybreak in the Liberian capital, Monrovia. Teenager Elizabeth Tulay wakes up and reaches out, as usual, to the empty bucket in the corner of her spartan room. It's a morning ritual for her to fetch water for home use before she gets ready to go to school. "Sometimes by the time I finish fetching water, I am late for school and start thinking about what punishment awaits me," she sighs.

Liberia has no dearth of water. Not only does the country experience heavy seasonal rains from April to September, but its beautiful landscape is also dotted with streams and rivers. In addition, there is the Atlantic Ocean that hugs its long coastline. However, despite the abundance of water, only 17 per cent of Liberians have access to safe drinking water and water-borne diseases, often leading to death, are rampant.

James Kromah, who lives in the Paynesville area of the capital, says the problem of water is usually acute in the dry season when most traditional hand-dug water wells become dry. "Sometimes if you go to neighbouring houses to fetch water in the dry season, you are required to pay a small fee to maintain the well," he says.

Residents say the problem of water in Monrovia varies from area to area, and due to neglect, looting and vandalism during the years of war, access to safe drinking water has become a serious health problem with pipe-borne water almost non-existent. Today, most pipes that once carried

water are rusty and full of leakages.

Ministry of Health records reveal that in 2005, there were 10,650 suspected cases of diarrhoea of which 3,560 were severe with 17 deaths. It is estimated that five times this number did not go to hospital. The incidence of water-borne diseases (cholera and dysentery) in 2005 was the highest since 1990, according to the Ministry.

In late June the United Nations Mission in Liberia transported containers carrying water pumps using its helicopters to White Plains, in the outskirts of Monrovia, where a project for rehabilitating water to the city is picking up. The Liberia Water and Sewer Corporation (LWSC), the European Commission (EC), the World Bank and relevant line ministries of the government are working together to bring safe drinking water to the population.

The pumps are part of the EC's €3 million (US\$3.6 million) water rehabilitation project that aims to repair the reservoirs at White Plains as well as the main water pipes across the city. "The pumps being installed will increase the amount of water sent to the purification and treatment centre before it is distributed across the city," says Monika Hencsey, Head of Operations of the European Commission. Two local contractors are repairing the rusty and leaking pipes without which water from the reservoir will waste along the way. In addition to infrastructural support, the EC and the WB are also offering technical assistance to LWSC to improve monitoring and revenue collection.

It is expected that the taps will start

running in some parts of Monrovia by December 2006, while with the funding of US\$2.5 million committed by the World Bank many more areas of the capital will hopefully have water by December 2007. Rural areas will also benefit in the longer term.

A recent geophysical study by EC shows that there is underground water which is of better quality and cheaper to treat than the river water to be used at White Plains. Currently, test drills are being done on the underground water which could be purified in future thus giving more security to Monrovia residents who would have two major sources of water.

Celebrating the country's 159th Independence anniversary on 26 July, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf opened a few taps much to the excitement of the city residents. However, this was part of the President's 150-day deliverables programme to provide basic services, a precursor to the project undertaken by the EC and partners to provide safe drinking water to the entire city.

Billboards with the painting of a girl helping herself with a cup of water have been put up in some parts of Monrovia, announcing the arrival of clean drinking water in the near future. "If the taps are running, I won't struggle every morning to fetch water and I will go to school on time and concentrate on my studies," says teenager Tulay. Like her, the rest of the Liberians too are longing to see drinking water in their homes. ♦

Timber Sanctions Lifted

By Sulaiman Momodu

The lifting of a UN Security Council ban on timber on 20 June came as a great relief to the government and people of Liberia, struggling, as it is, to recover from the ravages of war and poverty.

The Council, while lifting the ban that has been in place since 2001, applauded President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf's "commitment to transparent management of the country's forestry resources" and took note of her recent announcement of a moratorium on timber exports and new concessions, pending the passage of appropriate forestry legislation.

Deciding not to renew the sanctions which directed Member States to prevent the import into their territories of all round

logs and timber products originating in Liberia, the Council decided to review that decision after 90 days, and expressed its determination to reinstate the measures if appropriate forestry legislation had not been passed by that time.

Voting unanimously to lift the ban on timber, the Council however extended sanctions aimed at preventing Liberia from exporting rough diamonds, saying the situation in the country continues to pose a threat to international peace.

The Council renewed for six months the sanctions that call on Member States to prevent the direct or indirect import of all rough diamonds from Liberia in order to allow the Government to set up an effective "Certificate of Origin" regime for such trade.

The Council also requested that

Secretary-General Kofi Annan renew for an additional six months the mandate of the Panel of Experts that was appointed in July 2005 to assess the implementation and impact of the sanctions regime in Liberia.

The Council first imposed wide-ranging sanctions on Liberia in May 2001 after receiving reports that the country's natural resources were fuelling conflict in the region.

Forests, dotting the country's landscape, are a major source of national income. However, during the 14-year civil war, such forests were ruthlessly exploited to fuel the conflict, in addition to providing a safe haven for the fighting forces. Liberia's natural resources include iron ore, gold, hydropower, timber and diamond. ♦

Diamonds for Development

By Sulaiman Momodu

Drenched in sweat and soaked in muddy water, miners in West Africa daily pan newly dug-up soil for diamonds that could change their lives from misery to prosperity. However, the same gems have also been used to fuel conflicts in the region, earning them the infamous sobriquet, "blood diamonds."

Converging in Liberia's capital, Monrovia, at the end of June, some 150 delegates including government ministers from Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and representatives from the Secretariat of the Mano River Union (MRU) as well as local mining communities and other stakeholders met at a regional conference to discuss how diamonds could be used for development. The confab, under the theme "Diamonds for Development," was jointly organized by the Government of Liberia, UNDP and International Alert.

Addressing the opening of the three-

day conference, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf called on the delegates to examine how mining can be used to decrease poverty, fuel economic growth and promote peace in the four West African nations. Participants debated how miners, who often live on less than a dollar a day and work in dangerous conditions, could benefit from the revenue generated by the diamond trade.

"It's time to move away from blood diamonds to diamonds of hope, diamonds for development," said Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Governance and Recovery. Ryan said Africa is blessed with enormous resources, but noted that the continent has often found these resources to be a curse. He encouraged delegates to ensure that the relationship between diamonds and conflict is forever destroyed.

The Secretary-General of the MRU, Aliou Diallo, praised participants for attending the conference and said its outcome would strengthen the resolve of the Union to pursue peace and development within the region. International Alert's



Dan Smith said diamonds had long been a resource for conflict and it was time for them to serve as a strategic resource for development.

At the close of the conference, participants issued a communiqué confirming their commitment to ensuring that henceforth diamonds from the region will not be used to undermine peace, security, development, human rights or the environment.

A UN Security Council ban on the export of rough diamonds remains in force in Liberia. Prior to the civil war, the mineral sector contributed more than 75 per cent of the country's Gross National Product. ♦

No Discrimination!

By Sulaiman Momodu

There are still laws in the books of Liberia that discriminate against women and which need to be amended or repealed, according to members of a high-level delegation on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) who visited Liberia in June.

During the week-long visit, the delegation held meetings with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, government officials, key selected ministries and UNMIL personnel during which they discussed priorities, shortcomings and challenges in the implementation of the Convention. Addressing a press conference at the end of their visit, members of the delegation said many people in Liberia were unaware of the exis-

tence of the Convention.

The Convention defines discrimination against women as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” Adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, the Convention was signed by Liberia in the 1990s.

By accepting the convention, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including incorporating the principle of equality of men and women in their legal systems, abolishing all discriminatory laws and adopting appropriate ones prohibiting discrimina-

tion against women. Countries that have ratified the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also required to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with the treaty obligations. No such report has ever been submitted by Liberia, according to sources at the Ministry of Gender and Development.

Report of the delegation’s visit, along with recommendations, is to be shared with government and other partners including UNMIL Gender Unit, which acts as liaison between the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW) and the Ministry of Gender and Development. Members of the delegation included Dr. Charlotte Abaka, Gorcas Coker-Appiah, Elizabeth Belpert and Professor Joseph Oloka-Onyango. ♦

UN Experts Train on Treaty Obligations

By Yuko Maeda

More than 130 government officials and lawmakers in mid-July drafted an action plan to meet the obligations of international treaties in various areas, such as international trade, trans-national organised crime, corruption and money laundering, at the end of a five-day workshop conducted by UN experts.

The workshop, hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and sponsored by the UN and the World Bank, was to build the capacity of the ministries, the legislature and national law enforcement agencies to implement the international treaties Liberia has ratified. Last September, then Chairman Charles Gyude Bryant of the National Transitional Government of

Liberia submitted 103 treaty actions at the annual UN treaty event in New York.

“The problem of treaty law management and implementation lost its focus due to the 14-year-plus armed conflict, which has destroyed every sector of the Liberian society,” said Foreign Minister George Wallace in his opening statement. There is a great need for data storage, back-up and retrieval systems in order to effectively implement the obligations because so much data were lost during the civil war, he added.

During the workshop, the participants learned how to implement the obligations domestically, and identified challenges in implementation, not only legal and political but also operational and material. They recognised that documentation, access to information and basic office equipment are critical elements for a successful

implementation of the treaties.

The action plan the participants drew would be put into practice in cooperation with expert trainers, the UN Development Programme and the UN Mission in Liberia. UNDP Resident Coordinator Steven Ursino said the workshop would help Liberians leave war behind and develop “a legacy of recovery” in the capacity-building process, which in turn would allow problems to be solved.

The workshop’s experts came from the UN Office of Legal Affairs, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Regional Office for West and Central Africa of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Bradford Smith, of the UN Office of Legal Affairs, said the UN family and its partners are committed to Liberia’s international treaty reforms. ♦

Sweden Contributes to Peace in Liberia

Swedish peacekeepers during
a routine patrol

Therese Holmberg/Swedish Army

By J. Wesley Washington

Sweden is one of 48 countries contributing troops to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The first contingent of 231 Swedish soldiers was deployed to Liberia in March 2004, less than six months after the peacekeeping mission began.

The Swedish Mechanized Infantry Company reinforces an Irish battalion to make up a three-company joint Irish-Swedish Quick Reaction Force (QRF). The Battalion acts as a reserve force to provide rapid support for Sector Commanders at a short notice. The QRF also undertakes special security tasks directed by the Force Commander.

Of the 231 soldiers, 153 form a mechanized company, while 73 soldiers constitute the contingent support element (CSE), which includes 11 female soldiers. The rest are staff officers assigned to the battalion staff and UNMIL headquarters.

During the past two years, the Swedish contingent has rendered invaluable services to Liberia. Recently, the Swedish and Irish Quick Reaction Force conducted a major exercise along Liberia's border with Côte d'Ivoire to prevent recent instability in that country from spilling over into Liberia. The joint QRF played a major role in providing comprehensive security fol-

lowing the arrest and subsequent transfer of former Liberian President Charles Taylor to Freetown and later to The Hague.

"Because of their operational flexibility and ability to deploy across land, air or sea, the QRF is considered one of the Force's most powerful, reliable and mobile assets," says Special Representative of the Secretary-General Alan Doss.

After successfully serving the mission for over two and a half years, the Swedish Mechanized Battalion will be leaving Liberia in mid-November 2006 and will be replaced by a Pakistani Company.

Maj. Jan-Erik Olsson, Commander of Swedish Mechanized Infantry Company, says he'll miss the welcome of the Liberian people who showed his troops that they were really needed here to help bring peace. "I hope that as we leave, Liberians keep up the spirit by working to keep democracy alive," he said.

The commitment of the Swedish Armed Forces to international causes is nothing new. Sweden has a long tradition of working with the UN and is one of the countries the Secretary-General turns to when troops are needed for a mission. Since the United Nation's creation, Sweden has been sending individuals and units on peace support operations to trouble spots around the globe. More than

70,000 Swedes have participated in some 30 such operations.

Sweden's contribution to peacekeeping began as far back as 1948, only three years after the formation of the United Nations. The first Swedish troops were military observers sent to the Middle East (Israel, Egypt, Lebanon and Syria) to serve in the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO).

The Swedish military is no stranger to Africa. In 1960, Sweden contributed troops for the United Nations Operation in Congo (ONUC). Currently, the Swedish troops are involved in a number of peacekeeping operations around the world, including those of the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. In Africa, the Swedish have UN peace keeping troops, military observers and staff officers deployed in Liberia, Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia/Eritrea and Sierra Leone. Other areas include the Middle East, Kashmir, Georgia and Korea.

Beyond peacekeeping, Sweden enjoys a special place in UN's history with one of its citizens, Dag Hammarsköld, serving as the organisation's Secretary-General from 1953 until his untimely death in a plane crash while struggling for cessation of hostilities during the conflict in Congo in 1961. ♦

TOWARDS DURABLE PEACE

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

The renewed violence that engulfed Timor-Leste, a tiny half-island on the south-eastern tip of the Indonesian archipelago half a world away from Liberia, rendered a sharp edge to Secretary-General Kofi Annan's visit to the West African nation early July.

Formerly East Timor, Timor-Leste emerged from prolonged struggle for independence and became the world's newest nation in 2002 with extensive assistance from the United Nations. The presence of UN peacekeepers was significantly scaled down soon afterwards and, until recently, it was touted as top among UN's peacekeeping success stories. However, less than four years after the peacekeepers left, the fragile nation slid back into widespread violence again, raising questions about how long the United Nations should stay actively engaged in a post-conflict country.

Comparisons between Liberia and Timor-Leste abound. While Liberia lost more than 250,000 lives to the 14-year civil conflict, over 100,000 Timorese are estimated to have died in their 24-year struggle for independence from Indonesia. A third of the population in both countries became refugees. Infrastructure lay in ruins and charred shells of buildings stand out as a sad testimony to the mindless violence in both nations.

With a newly elected government in place following the deployment of 15,000 UN peacekeepers in late 2003, Liberia today is where Timor-Leste stood in the latter half of 2002 -- rising from its ashes, full of optimism, yet fragile.

Visiting Liberia soon after Timor-Leste plunged into violence again, Annan could not escape the question -- Now that the civil war has ended and peace has returned, will the UN make a hasty retreat from Liberia *a la* Timor-Leste?

"I think the international community has learned a lesson and I am confident that it will not happen here in Liberia," said the Secretary-General in an exclusive

interview with UNMIL Radio. "But let me stress that the issue of nation-building, consolidating peace and stabilizing the situation is a responsibility of the government and the people of the country. The international community can and should help, but the country and the people should take the ownership," Annan warned.

The renewed violence in Timor-Leste and the belated recognition that the UN should have stayed longer in that fragile nation may help prevent a precipitous withdrawal of peacekeepers from Liberia. However, as the attention of the international community is increasingly drawn to other hotspots and emergencies elsewhere, it is certain that the presence of the UN peacekeepers in Liberia cannot go on indefinitely. As peace prevails and recov-



ery efforts pick up, maintaining a large number of peacekeepers will become unviable.

That is why the recent creation of the Peacebuilding Commission, the first inter-governmental body devoted specifically to peacebuilding, should come as welcome news to Liberia.

The Commission has been established in recognition of the fact that although there has been a decline in the overall number of conflicts through UN's peacekeeping and other assistance, around 50 per cent of the conflicts of the past 20 years have recurred within five years of peace agreements. With peacekeeping becoming a central piece in the UN's work for over a decade now, it is now widely acknowledged that many conflicts remain only superficially resolved, with all the

elements of a relapse remaining intact.

"We have seen an unacceptable number of peace agreements disintegrate within five years after the end of a civil war, with countries lapsing back into deadly conflict," said Annan, addressing the first session of the Peacebuilding Commission late June. "As we have seen in Timor-Leste, undue haste to disengage from a transitional situation can result in reversals and a need to redeploy, at great cost to all, particularly the helpless civilian victims."

Liberia today is a text-book example of a post-conflict country -- infrastructure in tatters, basic services such as pipe-borne water and electricity non-existent, medical facilities in ruins, high levels of poverty and unemployment, national institutions in disarray, and a society largely traumatized. This makes Liberia an ideal candidate to be taken into the fold of the Peacebuilding Commission, specifically designed to support countries emerging from conflict.

"We need urgent action to ensure a speedy recovery but at the same time we should also address the root causes of the conflict. The new Peacebuilding Commission can play a role in helping Liberia avoid sliding back into conflict again down the line," says Alan Doss, Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Liberia.

The Peacebuilding Commission is expected to marshal resources at the disposal of the international community, focusing attention on reconstruction, institution-building and sustainable development in countries emerging from conflict. It will bring together the UN's broad capacities and experiences in conflict prevention, mediation, peacekeeping, respect for human rights, the rule of law, humanitarian assistance, reconstruction and long-term development.

The long-suffering people of Liberia, now ever so hopeful of a peaceful future, certainly deserve continued engagement by the international community. The Peacebuilding Commission can be a very useful instrument to sustain that engagement. ♦

How will the Truth and Reconciliation Comm

"I believe that perpetrators who knowingly committed atrocities should not face a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) but another court of arbitration with a much harsher punishment."

Tyson Woods (Businessman)



"The TRC is very good. There are those who have not forgotten what has happened in the past, so this is an institution that will advocate that Liberians forget about the past."

Aaron Kangar (Contractor)



"The TRC will bring about healing and reconciliation which are fundamental steps in the construction of a new vision for Liberia. It enables people to come forward to tell the truth. TRC will help Liberia rewrite its history and construct a new vision for Liberia."

Cllr. Pearl Brown Bull (Commissioner)

"I think the TRC will be very helpful because it will bring together both the perpetrators and victims at which time both parties will reconcile their differences which is healthy for a nation coming out of a 14-year civil conflict."

Samuel Cole (Contractor)



"The TRC is the only forum where peace and reconciliation will thrive because after so much bloodletting it's now time to forgive one another and move on."

Marie Dolo (Student)



"I believe that the best way forward in Liberia is to use the TRC to reconcile the Liberian people. I am taken aback by people calling for a war crimes court. If we do that then I don't think there will be genuine healing and reconciliation. I feel that the process of having lasting peace in Liberia can be through the TRC."

T. Nicholas Faryombo, Jr. (Journalist)



"All our brothers and sisters that caused atrocities against their fellow brothers and sisters should be tried. If we, in the country, do not face the fact, we will not have peace. We wanted peace and reconciliation as they had suggested when they established the TRC. Still, we believe our brothers and sisters should confess and maybe they would be forgiven."

Bannah Tech (Business woman)



"The TRC will help by being very fair, not being biased, looking into cases and listening to both parties and actually working sincerely in bringing about reconciliation. If people can honestly come and talk about what they did wrong, then we will be moving the country and the peace consolidation forward."

Gormah Momo (UNMIL Staff)

Commission (TRC) help reconciliation in Liberia?



"I opt for a TRC because we are just from a civil war and the only thing that can bring healing is if we as a country can reconcile."

Oretha Toukao (UNMIL Staff)



"Actually, looking at the culture of impunity people will continue to commit crimes. There are a lot of people who have committed heinous crimes and in the end talk about reconciliation. TRC is a very good thing provided these people who committed atrocities admit, seek forgiveness, and desist from the acts."

Alexander S. Nemah (Security Officer)



"The TRC can help the process of reconciliation when it's able to bring all Liberians together - the victims, perpetrators and everybody else - in a truth telling session. When this is done, peace and reconciliation in the country will be enhanced."

Paleh Lassanah (Security Officer)

"Though Liberians have to reconcile with one another, there must be punishment for those who committed atrocities against their fellow Liberians to deter others from choosing the same path of violence, death and destruction of their country."

Jeremiah Vah (Student)



"I feel the TRC will help the reconciliation process because for me I believe in the truth. Once you've offended me and you say the truth, I'll forgive you. I believe most Liberians are like that. The issue of people coming forward not fearing reprisals will encourage a lot more people to come forward."

Makigna Boakai (Security Officer)



"I believe that the TRC is good to exist. In order to put behind us all the problems that we caused for ourselves, the TRC is the best way out so that we forgive one another and then move on with nation-building."

Weah Karpheh (Journalist)

"I'm sure it will help if those who committed atrocities are ready to admit their wrongdoing and the victims accept and forgive them. This will enhance the process of healing, forgiveness and reconciliation in order to move the country forward."

Cora Wallace (Principal, Paynesville SDA High School)



"I think Liberia needs reconciliation to move the country forward and no better forum than the TRC. There has been so much hurt and pain inflicted on this country and a way to get over this is for perpetrators and victims to share their stories, forget their differences and move on."

Decle Gorge (Housewife)



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