

issue 01, volume 10 | september - november 2013

UN FOCUS



united nations liberia | at work together



**Elders and Chiefs
Promote Cross-Border
Cooperation**

**UNHCR Exceeds 16,000
Repatriation Target for
2013**

**UNICEF Transforms
Rural Communities in
Southeastern Liberia**

CONTENTS



4

ELDERS AND CHIEFS PROMOTE CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

"If you disarm, disarm your heart. You can put down the gun but if your heart is not satisfied you will still be thinking of war. All of us should now be thinking about receiving one another, embracing one another so there can be peace."



6

UNHCR EXCEEDS 16,000 REPATRIATION TARGET FOR 2013

Paying his maiden visit to Liberia's largest Ivorian refugee camp with a current population of about 12,000 as the UN refugee agency assists thousands of Ivorian refugees to return home, the UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in late October interacted with dozens of refugees from Côte d'Ivoire.



8

UNICEF TRANSFORMS RURAL COMMUNITIES IN SOUTHEASTERN LIBERIA

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has continued to work with the Government of Liberia in establishing projects, rendering financial and human resource in the various counties.

10 **Forensic Laboratory Launched**

12 **Palava Hut Takes Centre Stage as Liberians Seek Reconciliation**

14 **Joint Border Patrols Boost Regional Security**

16 **Building Liberian Returnees' Capacity**

19 **Early Warning System Launched**

20 **Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange Promotes Grassroots Sharing**

22 **UNHCR Puts LRRRC and MoJ on the Move**

24 **"Come Home"**

26 **For One Female Farmer Dreams Come True**

28 **U.S. Congressmen See UN Impact in Liberia First-Hand**

30 **How will Palava Hut Help Reconciliation?**

UN FOCUS

CHIEF OF PUBLIC INFORMATION
Isabelle Abric

STAFF WRITERS
Stefanie Carmichael
Daylue Goah
James S. King

PHOTOS
Staton Winter
Emmanuel Tobey

EDITOR AND HEAD OF PUBLICATIONS & SOCIAL MEDIA
Mathew Elavanalthoduka

DESIGN & GRAPHICS
Paddy Defoxy Ilos, II
Thomas S. Blidi

UN FOCUS is published quarterly by the Public Information Office, United Nations Mission in Liberia

CONNECT WITH US
unfocus@unmil.org
www.unmil.unmissions.org
www.facebook.com/unmil2003
www.twitter.com/unmilnews
www.youtube.com/unmiltv
www.flickr.com/unmil

Printed by Buck Press Ltd., Accra, Ghana



Message from the Special Representative of the Secretary-General

As 2013 comes to a close, we can collectively reflect on the past year with a sense of fulfillment, and hope for the future. Just as we have joined with Liberia to celebrate ten years of peace, the United Nations looks towards 2014, recommitted to consolidating the gains made in the past decade, and to the hard work that still lies ahead.

In September, the Security Council renewed UNMIL's mandate for another year. Liberia's progress towards building a strong, professional and able security and rule of law sector will allow UNMIL to continue its gradual security transition in 2014. The March 2013 LNP Management and Accountability Study and Criminal Justice Conference, which informed an SSR retreat in September, as well as a joint Government-UNMIL Baseline Assessment of the LNP undertaken during the course of last year, pave the way for future reforms. However, long-term stability will also require the Government of Liberia to build the confidence of all Liberians in its ability to solidify peace and security in Liberia and to effectively protect civilians.

The Security Council acknowledged the important work Liberia has done to enhance regional security, including together with its neighbors, and its political will to address complex and sensitive issues. October saw the first Joint Council of Chiefs and Elders Meeting, which brought stakeholders from the border regions of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire together to discuss issues of common concern. This was a major milestone, which reinvigorated and deepened the bilateral

relationship between the two countries and its peoples. UNMIL, together with our sister mission in Côte d'Ivoire, will continue to support such measures to foster security and stability along the border.

Sexual and gender-based violence remains unacceptably high in Liberia, especially against children. In November, the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence campaign was an important opportunity to enhance awareness of sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia, and particularly the role that men and boys can play in eliminating it. UNMIL will continue to actively support the Government in all its efforts to end sexual and gender-based violence, and to improving access to justice, protection and redress for those affected.

In recent months, I have been struck by how in step the UN, the Government, and our international partners are on how we can work together to help Liberia shape its future. The Security Council has recognized the need for Liberia to accelerate critical reform processes, including national reconciliation, constitutional reform and decentralization. As Liberia presses forward with these reforms, it will be imperative that the Government and people also address in earnest difficult questions of governance and natural resource management. Looking forward to 2014 and beyond, the UN will continue to engage with Liberia as it prioritizes and advances these processes.

In the meantime, I would like to wish all Liberians, UNMIL's peacekeepers and their families, and all readers of *UN FOCUS* a peaceful, prosperous and happy New Year.

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

Elders and Chiefs Promote Cross-Border Cooperation

By Stefanie Carmichael

The JCCEM brought together 50 chiefs and elders from each of Liberia and neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire in the first of what is intended to be regular cross-border dialogue between local and traditional authorities.

“ If you disarm, disarm your heart. You can put down the gun but if your heart is not satisfied you will still be thinking of war. All of us should now be thinking about receiving one another, embracing one another so there can be peace.”

Alfred Doeba is the Land Commissioner for Grand Gedeh County. From 16-19 October 2013, he was also a delegate at the Joint Council of Chiefs and Elders Meeting (JCCEM) in Zwedru.

“As Grand Gedean, we have the longest border with Côte d'Ivoire so we are totally involved. This meeting

is necessary if we are to bring about total peace in the region, especially between Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.”

The JCCEM brought together 50 chiefs and elders from each of Liberia and neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire in the first of what is intended to be regular cross-border dialogue between local and traditional authorities. Born from a quadripartite meeting in March 2013 between the two Governments and the United Nations peacekeeping missions in each country, the JCCEM was meant to facilitate a common and coherent approach towards cooperation, reconciliation, and development.

For three days, the small town of Zwedru was overrun by some 300 JCCEM participants, a chaos made all the more noticeable by the arrival of Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Côte d'Ivoire President Alassane Ouattara on the final day.

“It is not an option for Côte d'Ivoire and Liberia to work together. Dear friends, it is a necessity,” Sirleaf told the delegates. “We will explore all avenues to make sure there will never be conflict again between our two countries, among our Mano River Union countries, and throughout all of West Africa.”

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) in Côte d'Ivoire and Deputy SRSG in Liberia



A Liberian tribal elder offers cola nut to a group of Ivorian tribal elders at the opening of the JCCEM on 17 October 2013



both attended the JCCEM, where although they highlighted the cooperation between the UN missions, they also emphasized the importance of traditional leaders.

"You all have critical roles to play in bringing peace to your countries and communities and in so doing you draw on the vibrant cultural and historical ties that define you," said Deputy SRSG Aeneas C. Chuma. "It is your commitment to transform your common border into a zone of peace, reconciliation and development that has brought us here."

With the help of translators, the chiefs and elders were able to work jointly over the course of the meeting, coming together in working groups to discuss common approaches to common challenges, such as the return of refugees, reconciliation processes, youth employment, and community development.

Victor Coulayes is the Paramount Chief of Guiglo in Côte d'Ivoire who was full of praise for Liberians for

hosting this first exchange.

"The hand that was stretched out here in Liberia by Madam President Ellen Johnson is a hand of peace... peace through tradition," he said. "The people who will take the biggest profit from this meeting are the elders, the traditional chiefs."

Despite the fanfare around the meeting, local residents carried on with their daily business. Moses Gurley, a farmer, went to Zwedru City Hall to see what all the commotion was about.

"I don't want anything from this meeting except I want to do my farm work," he said. "I want to do my farm work in peace. If this meeting will help me with that, then I am happy for it."

A final Communiqué agreed, among other things, on the establishment of a technical working group for the implementation of recommendations and called on both countries, while involving the JCCE, to implement appropriate economic, social

A Liberian woman waves an Ivorian flag while performing a cultural dance at the JCCEM on 17 October 2013

and cultural cross-border interventions. The next JCCEM will take place in Côte d'Ivoire after six months.

"IT IS YOUR COMMITMENT TO TRANSFORM YOUR COMMON BORDER INTO A ZONE OF PEACE, RECONCILIATION AND DEVELOPMENT THAT HAS BROUGHT US HERE."

UNHCR Exceeds 16,000 Repatriation Target for 2013

By Sulaiman Momodu

"THE SECURITY SITUATION ALONG THE BORDER HAS GREATLY IMPROVED. THIS IS A WELCOME DEVELOPMENT."

16,000

Ivorian refugees have been repatriated by UNHCR this year exceeding the target the UN agency had set for 2013

UNHCR commenced the facilitated voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees in October 2011 following the signing of the Tripartite Agreement on the Voluntary Repatriation of Ivorian Refugees with the Governments of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Paying his maiden visit to Liberia's largest Ivorian refugee camp with a current population of about 12,000 as the UN refugee agency assists thousands of Ivorian refugees to return home, the UN Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Resident Coordinator in late October interacted with dozens of refugees

from Côte d'Ivoire while urging them to remain peaceful and law abiding.

"You must respect and abide by the laws of Liberia at all times," said Aeneas C. Chuma, who led a high-powered delegation to the PTP Refugee Camp (located at the former Prime Timber Production company site) in Grand Gedeh County, a camp that has been expanded to receive additional refugees as the Solo Refugee Camp in the same County is being closed as part of camp consolidation efforts.

The DSRSG toured various facilities, including the water facility and the health centre where he interacted with medics and admitted patients. He held discussions with the Liberian National Police regarding camp security, and visited the camp extension area called PTP-2. He also held a meeting with refugee leaders and with humanitarian actors providing various services to refugees.

Chuma was accompanied by the United Nations High Commissioner

UNHCR Representative Khassim Diagne addresses Ivorian refugees during DSRSG Chuma's visit
Photo: Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR



for Refugees (UNHCR) Representative Khassim Diagne, the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) Executive Director, Cllr. Abla Williams, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Country Director, Dr. Kamil Kamaludeen, and Acting Police Commissioner Cesar Binag of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

During his visit, Chuma and members of the delegation made a symbolic presentation of a consignment of 744 bales of assorted clothes to alleviate the clothing needs of the refugees, most of whom are in dire need of something to wear. Unique Clothing (UNIQLO), a Japanese company, made the donation through UNHCR. Chuma expressed gratitude to UNIQLO for the gift while handing over some clothes to an elderly woman. Other members of the delegation also made symbolic presentations to various groups of refugees such as the physically challenged, children who were separated from their parents while fleeing to Liberia, and nursing mothers.

With nearly 55,000 Ivorian refugees currently living in Liberia, the DSRSG encouraged the remaining refugees to take advantage of the ongoing UNHCR-facilitated voluntary repatriation and follow the example of those who have returned home.

This year, UNHCR has repatriated more than 16,000 Ivorian refugees, attaining the 16,000 repatriation target the agency had set for 2013.

The target attained for 2013 is double the combined total of 8,000 Ivorian refugees repatriated in 2011 and 2012. The goal was achieved in November as more than 1,500 refugees were repatriated from camps and communities in one week, including more than 1,000 individuals who crossed over the Cestos River by boat from Buutuo communities in Nimba County into Douhouba in Bin Houye, western Côte d'Ivoire.

"Together with the Government of



Liberia and partners we have achieved our goal of assisting 16,000 refugees to go home in 2013. We have some more convoys scheduled to leave in the next few weeks which means that this number will further increase by end of December," said Diagne, reiterating that assisting Ivorian refugees to return home in safety and dignity is now the focus of the UN refugee agency operation in Liberia.

UNHCR commenced the facilitated voluntary repatriation of Ivorian refugees in October 2011 following the signing of the Tripartite Agreement on the Voluntary Repatriation of Ivorian Refugees with the Governments of Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire. Security concerns along Liberia's border with Côte d'Ivoire had, however, been a challenge to the repatriation process in addition to deteriorating road conditions during seasonal rains. In 2012, the killing of seven UN Peacekeepers on the Ivorian side of the border interrupted the momentum, while refugees had security concerns in March 2013 following attacks by unknown armed men on some Ivorian villages.

"The security situation along the border has greatly improved. This is a welcome development," remarked Diagne, pointing out that to achieve the 2013 repatriation target, UNHCR, in consultation with refugees, employed innovative means of facilitating returns

DSRSG Chuma presents UNIQLO-donated clothes to an elderly refugee at PTP Refugee Camp
Photo: Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

by boats across the Cestos River to complement road convoys.

Several of these refugees have applauded the innovative method of assisting them to return home. "The journey home by road is long and requires that we spend a night at a transit centre," said Pierre, an Ivorian farmer returning home with his wife and three children after two years of refuge in Liberia. "By using the river we can be home in less than a day."

Meanwhile, in November, UNHCR held a strategic direction retreat in Monrovia with staff from Monrovia and Field Offices to discuss the focus of the operation for 2014 and 2015. Protection, durable solution, assistance, management, partnership and external relations, and logistics issues were discussed and recommendations made.

55,000

Ivorian refugees are currently living in Liberia

12,000

People currently live in Liberia's largest Ivorian refugee camp

UNICEF Transforms Rural Communities in Southeastern Liberia

By Bwewusa William

Commenting on his visit, Dr. Fazlul Haque observed great enthusiasm in communities benefiting from the assistance, including a strong resolve to protect all public installations.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has continued to work with the Government of Liberia in establishing projects, rendering financial and human resources in the various counties.

Recently, Acting UNICEF Resident Representative, Dr. Fazlul Haque, accompanied by a Monitoring and Evaluation Officer visited Harper to appraise activities and projects supported by the agency in Maryland County.

In a briefing attended by *UN Focus*

in Harper, Dr. Fazlul Haque enumerated various interventions and the achievements in meeting community needs, including the social cash transfer programme among others.

UNICEF is supporting the Maryland County Health Department. The agency has trained 130 General Community Health Volunteers (GCHV) in Integrated Community Health Case Management who are supposed to help the communities in managing acute respiratory infection and diarrhea diseases. They will also be trained in malaria case

management. The GCHV are to work in distant areas where there are no health clinics around five kilometers away from the health facilities.

UNICEF is collecting baseline data to assess the health situation of women and children in Liberia. The findings will guide UNICEF, the Government and County Health Team (CHT) to come up with various interventions.

In the sphere of nutrition, UNICEF assists the CHT by providing support in the management of malnutrition. Under an Out Patient treatment programme still in its initial stages, malnourished children are provided supplementary food treatment and guidance in Maryland.

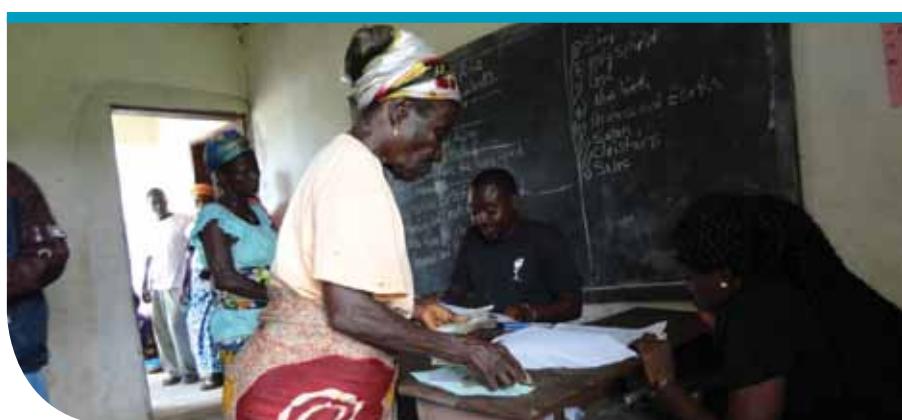
In addition, an NGO, Samaritan's Purse has been engaged in developing the capacity of staff providing nutrition services in the County.

In the area of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), UNICEF is working in 22 communities. The agency's interventions include the repair of water pumps and the training of WASH committees responsible for the upkeep of water pumps and drilling of wells.

The Ministry of Public Works is to drill bore holes in the area while UNICEF would train facilitators to enforce public hygiene in the communities.

UNICEF is further helping with the

UNICEF meets with beneficiaries of its pilot Social Cash Transfer Programme in Maryland County
Photo: William Bwewusa/UNICEF



provision of water and toilet facilities as well as hygiene education in health institutes, health centers and E-schools. It also intervenes in the construction of E-schools and provision of classroom supplies and start up kits for children.

Under the Peacebuilding Education Advocacy Programme, UNICEF is working with school communities, teachers, and management committees on how to resolve conflicts peacefully and how to reinforce peace education within the system in Liberia.

Commenting on his visit, Dr. Fazlul Haque observed great enthusiasm in communities benefiting from the assistance, including a strong resolve to protect all public installations. He, however, noted that there was a need to revisit some projects to solve outstanding problems.

"There are no health centers in the nearby communities and no functioning water points. So people are not getting the service the way we expect," he conceded. "I know the international community, including UNICEF and the Government of Liberia, is doing a lot of things, but I think that we need to do more."

Meanwhile, a joint team from Liberia's Social Protection Service, UNICEF and the European Union recently met with beneficiaries of the Pilot Social Cash Transfer Programme in Karluway and Pleebo Districts in Maryland County. The US\$ 24 million programme is funded by the European Union with technical support from UNICEF and implemented by the Ministry of Gender Development.

UNICEF Child Protection Specialist in Liberia, Christopher Ngwerume, says it is a social protection instrument used to cater for people who are extremely poor and labor constrained, i.e., they cannot work either because they are too old or too young, are orphans or are chronically ill.

Individuals are provided cash every



other month following double assessment and administration of questionnaires on the level of inability to work, poverty and number of dependents by enumerators from the Ministry of Gender Development at the County level.

"When a programme sets up specific criteria, for people in this programme, sometimes some people who do not fit these criteria are disappointed that they are not in this programme at the end and sometimes create some tension in the community," said Ngwerume. "But what we have noted is that with the help of the County, Commissioners and Town Chiefs this has been manageable. They have been able to explain to the communities."

While re-emphasizing the relevance of the Social Cash Transfer Programme, the European Union representative Alonso Adofo-Cires said the Pilot Programme funded by the European Union through UNICEF started in Bomi County in 2009, was implemented for a couple of years, and by the end of 2011 it was expanded to Maryland County and will continue at least up to the end of 2014.

"We are working together with the Government to see how it can be expanded to all the Counties," he said.

Meanwhile, the National Social Protection Coordinator in the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs of Libe-

ria said at the moment the programme targets 5,000 households. According to him, "the Government realized that to be able to reduce poverty and vulnerability, one has to be able to address household vulnerability. This is part of the Government's social contract with its people to ensure that as we work towards inclusive economic growth we are not leaving anybody behind."

"This is all part of the National Agenda for Transformation and is going to help us achieve the objectives of Vision 2030 of being a middle income country," the Liberian official explained.

"THIS IS ALL PART OF THE NATIONAL AGENDA FOR TRANSFORMATION AND IS GOING TO HELP US ACHIEVE THE OBJECTIVES OF VISION 2030."

Forensic Laboratory Launched

By James S. King

"WE HOPE THAT CASES AGAINST ALLEGED PERPETRATORS WILL NO LONGER BE DROPPED DUE TO LACK OF EVIDENCE."



841

rape incidents were recorded in Montserrado County between January and July 2013

759

of the 841 rape incidents recorded involved children



Prosecution of rape cases remains one of many judicial challenges in Liberia due to the absence of forensic facilities. With the establishment of a forensic laboratory facility at the James N. Davis Jr. Memorial Hospital in Neezoe, Paynesville, prosecutors can now rely on forensic evidence to prosecute alleged rape perpetrators. This is thanks to the collaborative efforts of the Government of Liberia and partners, including the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Government of Sweden.

Speaking during the launch ceremony, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Aeneas C. Chuma, said between January and July 2013, 759 of 841 rape incidents recorded in Montserrado County involved

Lab technicians demonstrate the use of equipment

children. Chuma said 22 of the rape cases were referred to court during the last seven months, with three cases tried due to difficulties in the collection of "credible enough evidence."

"Success of prosecution should be based on a wide range of evidence, including recording statements and gathering evidence from the crime scene," said Chuma. "We hope that cases against alleged perpetrators will no longer be dropped due to lack of evidence."

Adjudications of cases involving rape usually pose conviction difficulties blamed on lack of evidence and the reluctance of victims and their family members to pursue prosecution for fear of stigma. As a result, rape

cases are usually settled at the family and community levels, a situation the Government and its partners sought to address five years back with the establishment of a rape court, Criminal Court E, located within the premises of Liberian National Police (LNP). Several safe homes where survivors of rape and sexual violence can share their experiences in privacy are being set up across Liberia with support from UNMIL, UNFPA, UNDP, and the Swedish Government.

Rape became a crime with a maximum penalty of life in prison following the enactment of a new rape law in December 2005. Still, rape cases are on the increase eight years later. Despite increased nationwide awareness, rape remains one of Liberia's biggest post-conflict challenges.

Chuma, however, thanked partners for their relentless support to Liberia's development. He also challenged medical staff at the laboratory facility to exercise maximum professional responsibilities in conducting forensic laboratory investigations involving rape.

Anna Saaw, Swedish Chargé d'Affaires said, "The launch of the facility represents an additional step towards improving access to justice for all." Saaw recognized that despite making a step forward, there remains "challenges associated with gathering compelling evidence" to ensure prosecution and conviction of perpetrators.

Saaw cited lack of admissible evidence, capacity performance, as well as lack of legal awareness, among others, as several factors contributing to prosecution difficulties in Liberia. She said her own Government recognizes improved access to justice for all requires a justice system that is accountable and responsive to the needs of women, men, girls and boys who live in poverty.

"All individuals should be empowered to control development of his or her life, by which Liberia is obliged to



guarantee the rights of its citizens," said Saaw, encouraging Liberia and its partners to continue their efforts towards addressing sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia.

The end user of forensic laboratory results will be Criminal Court E whose judge, Ceaineh Clinton-Johnson, called the establishment of the laboratory an "addition to professional responsibilities in passing transparent judgment" in sexual abuse cases.

Johnson admitted the challenges that come with establishing a forensic lab when she cited "difficulties" on the part of lawyers to understand defendants' rights as well as difficulties for magistrates to understand their roles during in-camera-court hearings. Other challenges cited by Johnson included "gathering specialized evidence, understanding ordinary evidence and inability of users (judges) to understand intricacies of forensic evidence during court hearings."

She called for increased training opportunities on sexual violence for judicial personnel in order to address some of those challenges.

Government agencies represented at the event included the Ministry of Gender and Development, the Ministry

DSRSG Chuma cuts ribbon at the opening of a new forensic laboratory

of Health and Social Welfare, and the Liberian National Police among others.

"THE LAUNCH OF THE FACILITY REPRESENTS AN ADDITIONAL STEP TOWARDS IMPROVING ACCESS TO JUSTICE FOR ALL."

22

of the rape cases were referred to court during the last seven months

3

cases of the 22 cases were tried due to difficulties in the collection of "credible enough evidence."

Palava Hut Takes Centre Stage as Liberians Seek Reconciliation

By Napoleon Viban



For many, the Palava Hut is a forum par excellence for soothing what feelings of hate and revenge still smolder from the country's 14-year conflict.

Ten years on, hard feelings from the civil war remain a potential threat to Liberia's social fabric. Among other remedies, the country's leadership is implementing a system of atonement that has for generations held the seams of traditional society in place.

For many, the Palava Hut is a forum par excellence for soothing what feelings of hate

and revenge still smolder from the country's 14-year conflict. Particularly in official circles, it is emerging as a key option in the Strategic Roadmap on National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation – a brainchild of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR).

"It will give added impetus to all of our people who are committed to peace and

President Sirleaf, flanked by Ivorian President Ouattara, officially launches the national Palava Hut programme in Zwedru.

USD 10,000

was made as a token donation in support of the initiative by President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire

reconciliation,” President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf declared when she officially launched the process in the southeastern town of Zwedru in mid-October, on the margins of a meeting of chiefs and elders from Ivorian and Liberian border communities.

Adepts tout the Palava Hut as a tried and tested platform for brokering peace between victim and offender in the brushes of everyday life in the communities. But the trivia traditionally handled by the Palava Hut pail in the face of the kind of atrocities some victims endured during the war. Animosities from the conflict still run deep, and the authorities do not expect the nation to heal overnight.

“It will take a while. Reconciliation is gradual, and could even take a generation,” cautions Boakai A. Dukuly, Acting Chair of the INCHR, which has oversight of the Palava Hut process. “Ten years is too small a time for a whole nation to heal.”

Boakai also concedes to the limits of the mechanism.

“The Palava Hut won’t necessarily resolve just every wrong committed during the war. Things like crimes against humanity or war crimes are for an international body to handle. The system is not suited for such,” he hastens to point out. Still, the rights commissioner insists the forum could enhance post-war reconciliation by settling, for instance, land disputes and minor abuses associated with the conflict.

The recourse to this traditional system of justice and reparation was a key recommendation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) – an offshoot of the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

Established in 2006, the TRC inclusively probed a number of cases. Its dealings, however, remain shrouded in controversy. Conversely, proponents of the Palava Hut believe this cultural heritage of Liberia offers abusers a much wider space to own up and sin-



cerely seek pardon.

“There’s been an overwhelming quest among Liberians for perpetrators of wrongful acts during the war to come up and answer for their deeds,” Boakai affirms, and he believes the Palava Hut process sets the stage for this. At the launch in Zwedru, Boakai extolled the system as “the best alternative for redressing some outstanding transitional grievances and for fostering national healing, social cohesion and reconciliation through dialogue.”

To get the process off the ground, though, the INCHR would first have to reconcile ethnic nuances and variations in the Palava Hut culture as practiced in different regions of the country. The Commission will have to harmonize these and give them a national appeal.

“The Palava Hut system has never before been used nationally. This is the first time that we’ll attempt to use it nationally to resolve issues arising from the war,” Boakai concedes.

To walk through the maze, the INCHR is relying on guidance from experts and traditional leaders. The Commission plans to conduct a countrywide ethnographic study of Palava Hut practices and, from the findings,

Cultural dancers perform at the opening ceremony of the Palava Hut programme for reconciliation

develop the methodology for a national Palava Hut system.

“We are very confident that this process will work,” Boakai says of the venture. “We have committees operating on the ground and we have laid a solid foundation for it to work.”

The INCHR couldn’t be more upbeat. President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d’Ivoire, who accompanied his Liberian counterpart to the launching ceremony, made a token donation of USD 10,000 in support of the initiative.

“Our two countries have been through terrible times,” the Ivorian leader reminisced.

“IT WILL TAKE A WHILE. RECONCILIATION IS GRADUAL, AND COULD EVEN TAKE A GENERATION.”

Joint Border Patrols Boost Regional Security

By Stefanie Carmichael

Border security is considered very crucial for maintaining peace. That's why both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire are keen to collaborate.



There are but a few places where UN peacekeepers on either side of the Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire border can actually gain access to that border. Often, the closest lateral road is still 20-30 kilometers away, and even that through thick vegetation that is only accessible by unmapped foot paths. And yet, monitoring and gathering information from the border areas is vital in assessing regional security.

That is just one of the reasons why the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI) have teamed up to conduct joint border patrols as part of Operation Mayo.

As Capt. Juan Carlos Zapata, an Ecuadorian peacekeeper based in Zwedru, explains, these monthly or bimonthly joint patrols allow access and information that would otherwise be near impossible to get.

"There are points that we can reach that they [ONUCI peacekeepers] cannot reach and vice-versa," he says. "What we do is, we meet at different border crossing points. We exchange information; we discuss our findings on either side of the border."

In the six months that he has been based at Team Site 7, Zapata is reassured by the security situation.

"We've been noticing a lot of prog-

Military Observers from peacekeeping missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire meet at a border crossing point in Grand Gedeh County to exchange security information

ress that they're making out here. The situation has been calm, peaceful," he says. "We want to make sure that the Liberian security agents are setting the example. They've got to keep it calm and cool. That's what it's all about."

In last month's joint patrol, Zapata and teammate Lt. William Abbott went to B'hai Jorzon, a border crossing point 80 kilometers northwest of Zwedru. There, they met with Lt.-Col. Roque Farias and Lt. Darimossi Mohamadu of UNOCl to exchange information.

"Everything has been calm since I've been here," explains Mohamadu. "I heard before I arrived that there were some problems but since I arrived everything has been fine."

Mohamadu has been based in Toulépleu for the last four months, where he and his seven teammates work as Military Observers for UNOCl.

"After this, we will go back to Toulépleu and do a summary report to see what we can learn from it. The collaboration works well."

On this particular occasion, Zapata and Abbott crossed the border to speak to members of the Force Républicaines de Côte d'Ivoire (FRCI) and other national security agents on the Ivorian side, including Theodore Balo. Balo has been based at this border crossing for months and insists the heavily armed officers and Moroccan peacekeepers in tanks – a markedly stronger security presence than their Liberian counterparts – are there only to deal with any emergency.

"So far everything has been quiet," he said. "But we want to be ready just in case."

Operation Mayo, which signals the cooperation of military and police forces between the two countries, was reactivated in March 2012. Since then, these regular joint patrols have helped inform Force Operations and Planning.

"There are times I would send our patrol report and within a couple of hours I would get a phone call or an



email saying, 'Hey, what is this that you're talking about that there's movement along the border. We need more information. Redo your patrol schedule and go visit that place again in a couple of days,'" recalls Zapata.

Abbott also notes positive changes as a result of their patrols. "If I report something like a border crossing point is significantly undermanned, under-trained, it won't happen overnight but I have seen on succeeding visits increased manpower, better equipped manpower, uniformed agents. I have seen those things."

Given the history of West Africa, where armed groups have in the past easily crossed borders to cause trouble in neighbouring countries, border security is considered very crucial for maintaining peace. That's why both Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire are keen to

Lt. Col. Roque Farias (left), a Military Observer from UNOCl, discusses border patrol information with Cpt. Juan Carlos Zapata (centre) of UNMIL

collaborate to ensure their borders remain calm and trouble-free.

"WE MEET AT DIFFERENT BORDER CROSSING POINTS. WE EXCHANGE INFORMATION; WE DISCUSS OUR FINDINGS ON EITHER SIDE OF THE BORDER."

Building Liberian Returnees' Capacity

By Romeo Juwle Togba

50 Liberian returnees benefitted from the two-month training that skilled them in the setting up and managing of small businesses.



An excited Charlotte Kieh cannot wait to get on board the next car headed for Grand Kru County. Her goal is to move into one of Liberia's far away counties to train young women and men in the setting up and management of small businesses.

Kieh is one of the graduates of a United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)-sponsored Entrepreneurship Development Training of Trainers programme.

The initiative is an offshoot of a scheme aimed at reintegrating Liberian returnees through skills training and job creation.

50 Liberian returnees benefitted from the two-month training that skilled them in the setting up and managing of small businesses.

"I am thinking of going to places like Grand Kru and Gbapolu to help vulnerable girls and women attain business skills that will improve their wellbeing," said Kieh, who returned to Liberia two years ago along with three of her male siblings.

"I am running a pastry shop and have

employed two persons. I am going to use the knowledge acquired to better manage my business in a way that enables me to provide more employment opportunities to Liberians."

UNIDO-Liberia Technical Adviser Jovita Culaton Viray is already upbeat about the impact the business development is going to have on the economy of Liberia.

"With fifty people who now have the capacity to train others in how to start and manage a business, I don't see why we cannot put in and plant the small seed for the small and medium enterprises that will soon provide employment for our people here in Liberia," Viray asserted.

Viray also disclosed plans by UNIDO to take the capacity building of Liberian returnees a step forward by engaging into a partnership with vocational and technical institutions.

"We will be working with some of the vocational schools to provide skills trainings for three hundred returnees," said Viray.

"All those who will be doing skills training, it will be mandatory that they undergo business development training. This is going to improve their employability," added Viray.

The Executive Director of the Liberia Refugees Repatriation and Resettlement

LRRRC Executive Director Abla Williams speaks at the graduation of 50 UNIDO trainees
Photo: Romeo Togba/UNMIL



UNIDO presents certificates to the 50 trainees of its skills training programme
Photo: Romeo Togba/UNMIL



Graduates of UNIDO skills training programme attend their graduation ceremony
Photo: Romeo Togba/UNMIL

Commission (LRRRC), Abla Gadegeku Williams, commended UNIDO for the training.

"Providing skills training for returnees is a catalyst for helping returnees resettle well after living in exile for

many years," Williams observed.

"This is also an important step towards helping Liberians acquire the skills needed to be their own employers and reduce heavy reliance on the government for employment."

The Liberia Returnee Network, an organization of Liberian returnees also played a part in mobilizing the trainees.

The group's head, E. Tyrone Mar-

shall, is hopeful that the training will help in creating a group of entrepreneurs that can be active players in their country's economy.

"With skills acquired, it is important that we form ourselves into cooperatives and set up businesses that make us have a key stake in the economy of this country in the next ten years," a hopeful Marshall said.

Williams is convinced that entrepreneurship development training for returnees like the one sponsored by UNIDO will send out a message that Liberians are ready to gather the skills needed to transform their country.

"This training could hopefully serve as a sign-post that Liberians are ready to take charge of their economy," said Williams.

"IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE FORM OURSELVES INTO COOPERATIVES AND SET UP BUSINESSES THAT MAKE US HAVE A KEY STAKE IN THE ECONOMY."

FAO Conducts Training for Blacksmiths in Metal Silos

By Wellington Railey, Jr.



As part of a plan by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to fight hunger and boost food security in Liberia, close to 100 metal silos have been constructed for farmers in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County.

In mid-November, some 30 blacksmiths from Grand Gedeh, Nimba, River Gee, Maryland and Sinoe Counties were trained in the fabrication of metal silos.

According to the FAO, the idea was to train the blacksmiths, and then award them contracts to produce more silos for local farmers.

Project Manager Albert Kpassawah says the programme is part of a cross-

FAO trains 30 blacksmiths in the fabrication of metal silos.

Photo: Wellington Railey, Jr./UNMIL

border food security project launched recently by FAO to boost food production in communities along the Liberia-Côte d'Ivoire border.

Kpassawah says the silos will be a big relief for farmers, as they will no longer suffer losses generally associated with traditional methods of grain storage.

The FAO Field Officer notes that traditional storage methods account for 30-40 per cent of losses in Liberia's cereal harvests.

At the weeklong training workshop in Zwedru, Kpassawah told *UN Focus*

that some 500 metal silos will be put at the disposal of farmers in the border communities to preserve grain and seed over long periods.

"These metal silos can hold between 90 and 500 kilos. One of them with a capacity of 500 kilos can conserve the grain needed to feed a family of five for six months or more," Kpassawah explained.

The trainees, too, were very thankful for the initiative. Visibly thrilled at the idea, Nathaniel S. Saaleh from Nimba County said he devoted a great deal of his time to the production of metal silos.

Ruth D. Wilson, a female participant from Grand Gedeh County was no less delighted. "It's good for women to learn such skills," she quipped, boasting, "What man can do, woman can do!"

"IT'S GOOD FOR WOMEN TO LEARN SUCH SKILLS," SHE QUIPPED, BOASTING, "WHAT MAN CAN DO, WOMAN CAN DO!"

30-40%

of losses in Liberia's cereal harvests is due to traditional storage methods

Early Warning System Launched

By Daylue Goah

Having an early warning system, especially for forecasting the weather system, provides the capacity to respond in a more systematic and effective way to safeguard the environment and its people.



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) took a step forward towards achieving greater environmental protection and sustainability with the launch on 7 October 2013 of an Early Warning System (EWS) to monitor Liberia's climate.

The Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Aeneas C. Chuma, speaking at the formal signing ceremony said having an early warning system, especially for forecasting the weather system, provides the capacity to respond in a more systematic and effective way to safeguard the environment and its people.

He said the launching of the EWS demonstrates the UN's strong com-

mitment to strengthening Liberia's capacity to provide information that enhances climate development and adaptation for climate change.

Chuma also applauded the Government of Liberia for what he calls a "laudable initiative," which is aligned with its national plan of action and agenda for transformation.

"We thank the Government for prioritizing the Early Warning System and climate change issues, and call upon all stakeholders to support the project to ensure its successful implementation," said Chuma. "We've come a long way, but there is still a lot more to be done in our collective effort to build resilience and reduce vulnerability related to climate change."

The EWS is being supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF)

DSRSG Chuma speaks at the official launch of Liberia's new Early Warning System

through the Least Developed Country's Funds (LCDF) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The LCDF is supporting similar initiatives in ten other countries in Africa, including Benin, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Liberia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, São Tomé & Príncipe, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

"This Early Warning System will have three key outcomes: The capacity to predict weather and climate related hazard, the use of environmental and social economic data and increased awareness of all stakeholders including the coastal community," said Chuma.

Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange Promotes Grassroots Sharing

By Daylue Goah



The main objective of the Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange is to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability of poor farming communities to the adverse impacts of climate change.

The Ministry of Agriculture, through its Climate Change Adaptation Project funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and United Nations Development Programme, and

in collaboration with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), recently concluded a two-day Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange in Grand Gedeh County. Its aim was to renew commitment to strengthening farmers' resilience to

climate change and protecting the environment.

At the two-day event, locals translated "climate change" into their local Krahn and Kpelle vernacular: "Nohn-bee ji" and "Meinnee ma fallahnwon /



A cross-section of farmers at the workshop

hellay ma fallawon" respectively.

"It was important to translate climate change in a local vernacular so that this phenomenon can be understood well and the message spread across the communities and regions in order to help find a local solution and not blaming it on any supernatural powers," said the Assistant Minister of Agriculture Chea B. Garley.



He noted that the Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange will also help the farmers learn and adopt the innovations so that they can increase their incomes and better support their families, as well as encouraging them to remain organized, build a center and continue the exchange of lessons.

Atty. Roland Lepol is the National Project Coordinator of the Climate Change Adaptation Agriculture Project (CCAAP). In his remarks, he assured the farmers that naming climate change in their vernacular was a key step forward to ensuring that local knowledge and experience are fully captured as part of adaption measures.

The main objective of the Farmer-to-Farmer Exchange is to enhance resilience and reduce vulnerability of poor farming communities to the adverse impacts of climate change. To achieve this, the project aims to mainstream adaptation concerns into agriculture sector development policies, plans and investment decisions.

In his remarks, Ministry of Agriculture County Coordinator Maxwell Juwor

thanked supporting partners for their interest in getting first-hand information about farmers' knowledge when it comes to climate change. He indicated that the exercise will help rural farmers in adapting to the changing time and seasons and act accordingly in safeguarding their crops.

Kanie Merfee of the FAO reviewed the risks, impacts and vulnerabilities associated with climate change, and took the farmers through photos of climate change impact taken from Panta and Gbarzon Districts.

Meanwhile, Oretha W. Geneyan, a local farmer from Gbarzon District spoke of relief and said she was excited about the initiative and promised to apply the lessons learned in her coming harvest. Speaking of her experience, she said due to the changes in the condition of the climate, she yielded a small harvest from past seasons but with the lessons acquired from this exchange and the establishment of the Farmer Field School, she could now look in a new direction and make sound decisions to suit changing conditions.

UNHCR Puts LRRRC and MoJ on the Move

By Sulaiman Momodu



As part of its efforts to contribute to institutional capacity building, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in October donated 32 Yamaha motorcycles and dozens of assorted office equipment and supplies valued at over US\$ 150,000 to the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) and the Ministry of Justice.

27 of the motorcycles, each valued at nearly US\$ 4,000, were donated to the LRRRC, while five of them were donated to the Ministry of Justice. The Ministry of Justice also received various office equipment and supplies such as desktop computers, typewriters, chairs, drawers, and tables.

UNHCR Representative, Khassim Diagne, handed over the keys to the motorcycles to the Executive Director of the LRRRC, Cllr. Abla G. Williams,



The Executive Director of the LRRRC tries out one of 32 motorcycles donated by UNHCR for the protection of refugees and border monitoring.

Photo: Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR

Diagne said the donation to the LRRRC, UNHCR's main Government partner, was part of the UN refugee agency's continued support to the Government of Liberia for the protection of refugees, while the Ministry of Justice is one of the key ministries the UNHCR works with as it deals with issues of asylum and refugee laws.

Pointing out that the UNHCR has been supporting the LRRRC over the years, and assuring that the motorcycles would be used for the intended purpose of border monitoring and community mobilization, Cllr. Williams expressed sincere gratitude to the UNHCR "for once again demonstrat-

ing its sense of duty to the cause and safety of refugees and other persons of concern in Liberia."

For her part, Deputy Minister Cllr. Barnes, who is a former Executive Director of the LRRRC, lauded the UNHCR for its continued collaboration with Ministry of Justice. "We are very grateful for this continuous collaboration with the UNHCR as we implement our activities aimed at strengthening the justice system for the promotion of peace and stability in our country".

In addition to the LRRRC and the Ministry of Justice, the UN refugee agency in November donated agricultural tools to the World Food Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization. Each sister UN agency received 3,715 axes and 4,090 pickaxes to boost agricultural activities in countries hosting refugees.

while the items for the Ministry of Justice were handed over to the Deputy Minister of Justice for Administration and Public Safety, Cllr. Wheatonia Y. Dixon Barnes.

The 32 motorcycles, valued at over US\$150,000, will be used by both LRRRC and the Ministry of Justice. Photo: Sulaiman Momodu/UNHCR



“Come Home”

By Sulaiman Momodu



220,000

Ivorians fled to seek refuge in Liberia three years ago

55,000

Ivorian refugees currently living in Liberia

Making a rather passionate plea and assuring them of security and safety, President Alassane Ouattara of Côte d'Ivoire has called on thousands of his compatriots still living as refugees in Liberia to return home.

“The country needs you. The country needs your contribution to the ongoing reconstruction efforts,” the Ivorian leader appealed in Zwedru, the Grand

Gedeh capital in south-eastern Liberia.

Addressing the end of a three-day Joint Council of Chiefs and Elders Meeting held near the Liberia border with Côte d'Ivoire in October, which was attended by 100 chiefs from the two countries and by Ivorian refugee representatives, the Ivorian leader noted that 15 years ago it was Côte d'Ivoire that hosted Liberian refugees while three years ago, it was Liberia that received Ivorians seeking refuge.



Some Ivorian refugees in Liberia.
Photo: Sulaiman Momodu/UNMIL

To loud cheers and applause, President Ouattara disclosed that the two countries have decided to pave the Toulépleu - Zwedru road, a major axis being used during the ongoing voluntary repatriation exercise, in order to enable the free movement of people and goods. UNHCR recently rehabilitated critical portions of the road to

prevent the repatriation process coming to a halt.

Assuring nearly 55,000 Ivorian refugees currently living in Liberia that they will be assisted to return to Côte d'Ivoire and contribute to the development of their country, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia pledged her Government's support to UNHCR's repatriation efforts. "We will do all we can to support you to return home," the Liberian leader assured the refugees.

Among other resolutions, the Communiqué issued at the end of the meeting urged the Liberian and Ivorian governments to work with the administrative and political authorities, the refugees, and UNHCR in order to find durable solutions aimed at facilitating the voluntary repatriation of refugees.

Fourteen representatives from the four Ivorian refugee camps in Liberia

made a presentation at the meeting, recommending improved security, an increase in the repatriation grant, and addressing land disputes as issues that would encourage more returns to Côte d'Ivoire. They also thanked the Government and people of Liberia for their generosity in hosting them.

About 220,000 Ivorians fled to seek refuge in Liberia following disputed presidential elections in Côte d'Ivoire three years ago. Most of the refugees have, however, returned home on their own or through UNHCR's assistance. The refugees are mostly living in four refugee camps and communities in Grand Gedeh, Maryland and Nimba counties.

President Ouattara appealing to Ivorian refugees to return home



For One Female Farmer Dreams Come True

By Daylue Goah



Korpo Mawolo travelled all the way from Voinjama District, Lofa County, just to take part in this year's celebration of World Food Day in Fendell, outside Monrovia. Not even the heavy downpour of rain on that day could stop her as she struggled with chickens that her organization, Vezela Rural Women, had bred to put on display at the celebration.

Korpo started her business with a small farm in Lofa County principally for subsistence purposes but the dream gradually got bigger with

the expansion of her farmland in order to meet the growing demand for produce in that region.

"I sat by myself one day and saw the need for so many things in our local market here. People were bringing produce from other countries that we can produce here. I expanded my farmland and started producing cash crops and everything started going well before I turned the entire dream into an organization so that other women can be part of the process," said Korpo.

Korpo, a mother of eight, said her dream of becoming a commercial farmer gradually took

shape when the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) came in and introduced her to a new form of farming -poultry. This eventually enabled her to recruit over 100 women, thus establishing Vezela Rural Women, an organization that has since gained sponsorship from the FAO.



Korpo Mawolo displays her chickens at World Food Day celebrations
Photo: FAO

Vezela Rural Women recently received 1,000 chickens and 200 layers from the FAO as a form of empowering the organization and the women in realizing their dream of making a positive impact in rural Liberia.

"After we received the chickens and the layers, FAO also trained us in tak-

ing care of the chickens and provided other equipment that we currently use in preparing meal for the chickens. This initiative is helping us greatly and the chickens are reproducing in large numbers," Korpo noted.

Korpo said she will work with the other women and turn the project into a township dream where the poultry site will be made into a community to house the caretakers and their children.

humans face daily food shortages that prevent them from working, stunt the growth of their children, expose them to illness and lead to premature death. The health of another 2 billion people is compromised by nutrient deficiencies. At the other end of the spectrum, another 1.5 billion are overweight or obese, consuming more food than their bodies need and exposing themselves to a greater threat of diabetes, heart problems and other diseases."

"I sat by myself one day and saw the need for so many things in our local market here. People were bringing produce from other countries that we can produce here. I expanded my farmland and started producing cash crops and everything started going well before I turned the entire dream into an organization so that other women can be part of the process."

"I am hoping that as the project expands and we start to get enough money, we will build shelters here and also erect schools for our children, thus turning the poultry ground into a community."

As the day came to a close, Korpo received more than 10 buyers for her chickens and could be seen with a big smile.

World Food Day was first celebrated in 1979 to help increase understanding of the problems and solutions in the drive to end hunger. This year's event was held under the theme, "Sustainable Food Systems for Food Security and Nutrition."

FAO Director-General Dr. Jose Graziano da Silva's message was read on his behalf by the organization's Country Director, Mr. Jean-Alexandre Scaglia. In his message, Dr. Silva reminded the world that close to "840 million fellow

840 Million

people face daily food shortages that prevent them from working, stunt the growth of their children, expose them to illness and lead to premature death

2 Billion

people are compromised by nutrient deficiencies

1.5 Billion

people are overweight or obese, consuming more food than their bodies need and exposing themselves to a greater threat of diabetes, heart problems and other diseases

U.S. Congressmen See UN Impact in Liberia First-Hand

By Stefanie Carmichael



The Rhode Island Democrat and Illinois Republican were visiting Liberia to assess the impact of the UN in the country's ten years since its civil war.

It was a whirlwind four days for United States Congressmen David Cicilline and Adam Kinzinger. By the time they arrived at Roberts International Airport on Monday, 4 November, a packed schedule of events and meetings that would take them from the President's Office in Monrovia to the Tubmanburg Central Prison and much more in between, was already waiting for them.

Organized and paid for by the United Nations Foundation, a private non-profit organization established by CNN Founder Ted Turner that mobilizes support for UN work around the world, the Rhode Island Democrat and Illinois Republican were visiting Liberia to assess the impact of the UN in the country's ten years since its civil war.

During their visit, the Representatives visited a One-Stop Centre for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) in Monrovia, which provides free services to SGBV survivors. The Centre is funded by the Government of Liberia/UN Joint Programme on the Prevention and Response to SGBV. The Representatives toured a Women's Centre in the West Point Township and a partner of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), established after two girls from the community were gang raped and killed in 2002.

To better understand the state of Rule of Law in Liberia, the Representatives visited the Liberian National Police Academy, where UN Police are working to improve the capacity and capability of the national police force, and the

The UN SRSG welcomes U.S. Congressmen to UNMIL Headquarters (Left)
The U.S. Congressmen meet with Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf (Right)
Photo: Ahmed Jallanzo

Tubmanburg Central Prison, where the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is providing support in the form of Corrections Advisors and Quick Impact Projects, which recently funded a health post in the facility. A meeting with Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf also saw her reassure the Congressmen of the Government's commitment to upholding the Rule of Law following UNMIL's impending departure.

Speaking to journalists at home, Cicilline said the trip opened his eyes to the realities of what it means to be post-conflict.

"They're literally rebuilding a country almost from scratch," he told the *Providence Journal*, a local newspaper in his home state of Rhode Island. "But they're at a really critical stage right now. Over the next two years, they're going to have to significantly step up their capacity to take on these challenges. It's sort of the moment of truth."

The stories of sexual and gender-based violence he heard from young girls in West point, some as young as nine years old, proved to be the most challenging part of his trip, he said.

"Really heartbreaking stories. Rape is a pervasive, horrific and a very, very serious problem."

Rhode Island is home to one of the largest concentrations of Liberians in the U.S. During his visit, Cicilline delivered tens of letters of thanks from his constituents to UNMIL as part of the Better World's Thank a Peacekeeper campaign. Cicilline also met with several in the Liberian community on his return to update them on the situation in their home country.

The U.S. Congressmen meet with local women to hear their stories
Photo: Ahmed Jallanzo



The stories of sexual and gender-based violence he heard from young girls in West point, some as young as nine years old, proved to be the most challenging part of his trip.



How will Palava Hut



HARRIET S. GULADIA, RESIDENT, Roberts' Field Highway: Palava Hut approach for peace and reconciliation is a good idea. Liberians are now focused on maintaining peace and reconciling themselves. Palava Hut will be the right forum to settle all matters arising from Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations.



MARGARET WEAGBA, STAFF, Inquirer Newspaper, Monrovia: Peace and reconciliation depends on the individuals concerned. Palava Hut will bring back past bitter experiences from our conflict. It takes strong hearts to forgive and forget. Admittance of guilt alone may not bring about peace and reconciliation. Liberians should just forget the past and forge ahead with their lives as a way of reconciling ourselves.



HARRIS KORVAH, FARMER, Berdnerville Community: I strongly believe that Palava Hut approach is the best for achieving peace and reconciliation in Liberia. Everyone hurt everyone during our civil war. The coming together of perpetrators and aggrieved parties at the Palava Hut to iron out our differences arising from the civil war will lead us to peace and reconciliation. This is going to take a long time, but gradually we will achieve peace and reconciliation.



MORRIS KOLLINE, MECHANICS, 11th Street, Sinkor: I think the idea of introducing Palava Hut forum to settle grievances against perpetrators of crimes committed during our civil war will take us to peace and reconciliation. Palava Hut is a place where traditional leaders and towns' people gather to hear complaints against another person.

Help Reconciliation?



E. FREDERICK BAYE, National Executive Chairman, Patriotic Consciousness Association (PACA): Any attempt now to introduce a Palava Hut arrangement for peace and reconciliation in Liberia is belated. Such approach should have been initiated at the Accra Peace arrangement in 2003, when the Transitional Council was set up and the settling up of the TRC. Palava Hut is an attempt by some individuals in the current system and their international partners to siphon justice.



MERCY DWEH, VENDOR, Monrovia: Palava Hut may remind us about our ugly past and cause some people to stay away from the process. Because sitting before somebody who narrates story about the death of your loved ones is a painstaking experience. I think Palava Hut should be avoided. My father was killed during the war. I don't know who killed him. If someone tells me he or she was responsible for the death of my father I may be upset by that. But as Christians, we are told to forgive.



TITO JUAH, YOUTH LEADER, Block 'C' Community, Neezoe, Somalia Drive: Palava Hut will be another long way off to peace. But after Palava Hut what follows? We have welcomed the court process by letting our ex-president (Charles Taylor) go to court and it would augur well if Liberians pursued the conventional approach by utilizing our court system as opposed to Palava Hut. Palava Hut approach can be applicable at community level but when it comes to state actors who committed crimes, the court becomes the best arena for justice.



SEH C. KAMARA, SR., Resident, New Georgia: I think the idea behind Palava Hut is intended to ignore TRC. Too much money was spent on TRC activities and to date no impact has been felt. Again we are going after Palava Hut where huge sum of money will be spent again probably with no achievement.



UN FOCUS, Vol. 10, No. 01
A publication of the United Nations Mission in Liberia Public Information Office
www.unmil.unmissions.org