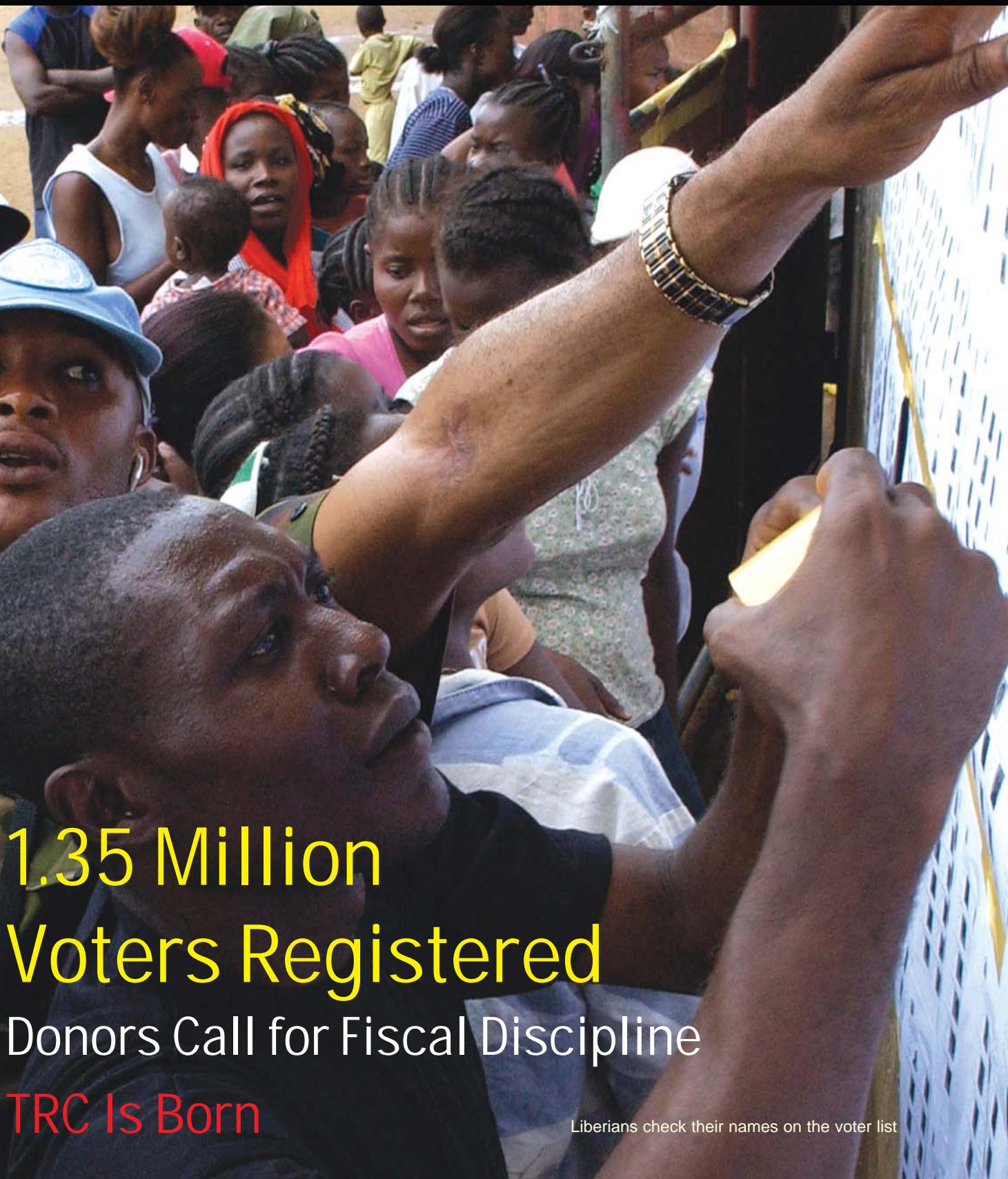


UNMIL FOCUS

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June - August 2005



**1.35 Million
Voters Registered
Donors Call for Fiscal Discipline
TRC Is Born**

Liberians check their names on the voter list

From the Desk of the Officer-in-Charge



Much has happened since I last spoke to you through this column. Most important has been the successful completion of the voter registration by the National Elections Commission (NEC), with full support from the international community.

Braving inclement weather and impassable roads, over 1.35 million Liberians registered to vote in the upcoming October elections. Some of them were at the registration centres soon after daybreak on 25 April, the first day of the month-long registration exercise. This overwhelming response from the ordinary citizens was an unambiguous display of their eagerness to embrace democratic governance. With the completion of the voter registration, Liberia has crossed a major milestone leading to the elections -- the final political step in the country's transition from prolonged civil war to participatory democracy. A most heartening aspect of the registration process was that it indirectly encouraged many refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes.

In this issue of UNMIL FOCUS, we bring to you voter registration scenes from across the country, countywide registration tally and an interview with NEC Chairperson Frances Johnson-Morris.

The unsung heroes behind the successful voter registration are the dedicated election workers, some of whom walked several days to reach the seemingly inaccessible nooks of the country to help fellow Liberians exercise their democratic right. Playing an equally vital role, by maintaining security and offering critical logistical support for the exercise, were the 15,000-strong "blue helmets" deployed in the country. We pay tribute to the indefatigable election staff as well as the valiant peacekeepers in these pages.

In distant Copenhagen, Denmark, the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF) meeting took place on 11 May, attended by UNDP, World Bank, donor nations and the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL). Though appreciative of the progress made so far, the meeting expressed concern over the lack of transparency and fiscal discipline currently prevailing in the Transitional Government. The meeting agreed to develop an economic governance action plan designed to secure Liberia's revenue base for its people, improve expenditure management, tackle corruption and strengthen implementation of the RFTF.

In June I visited United Nations Headquarters in New York to brief the Security Council and present the Secretary-General's Seventh Progress Report on Liberia. The Council was pleased with the progress made with regard to the elections, the security situation, and the return of refugees and IDPs. While in New York, I took the opportunity to meet with a number of permanent representatives concerned with the situation in Liberia, as well as with senior UN officials so as to continue to solicit support for Liberia. I also went to Washington D.C. to meet with World Bank representatives and members of the State Department to secure their support for vital humanitarian activities.

In all of these meetings a high level of support was expressed for an economic governance action plan. Contrary to the claims by some local media reports, there is no intention by the United Nations or Liberia's international partners to impose a trusteeship on Liberia. The Plan is a joint initiative of the NTGL and international partners aimed at enhancing Liberia's revenue base and ensuring that the Liberian people benefit from their country's natural resources and the donor funds from the international community. Discussions on this matter continued during the Africa Union meeting held in Libya early July and, most recently, at the International Contact Group on the Mano River Basin meeting held in Niger on 19 July. I am hopeful that the NTGL and its international partners will finalize the plan in the coming days.

There is much to celebrate for those who believe in the universality of human rights as the long-awaited Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is now a reality. It is now hoped that the TRC, while exerting a stabilising influence during Liberia's transition, will herald the end of the culture of impunity that has been prevalent in the country for so long. UN Human Rights Commissioner Louise Arbour, on a visit to Liberia early July, underlined the country's need for a proper human rights framework.

Finally, I wish to take this opportunity to extend a very warm welcome to Mr. Alan Doss, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who will be coming on board shortly, and thank all those of you who have supported me during my time as Officer-in-Charge of UNMIL.

Abou Moussa
Officer-in-Charge,
Deputy Special Representative of
the Secretary-General and
Humanitarian Coordinator

Alan Doss Appointed Special Representative

United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan has appointed **Alan Doss**, a veteran UN diplomat, as his new Special Representative in Liberia. A citizen of the United Kingdom, Mr. Doss replaces Jacques Paul Klein as the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and head of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).

Mr. Doss has had a distinguished career with the United Nations and brings to his new posting a wealth of regional experience. Until his new appointment, Mr. Doss has been the principal deputy chief of the UN peacekeeping mission in Côte d'Ivoire (ONUCI). Prior to this, he was the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General with the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), while concurrently holding the positions there of UN Resident Coordinator, UN Humanitarian Coordinator and UN Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative. His primary responsibility in UNAMSIL was in the

UN File Photo



area of governance and stabilization. He was responsible for coordinating assistance to the people and the Government of Sierra Leone during the country's transition from restoration to consolidation of peace, as well as emergency aid to development. In particular, Mr. Doss coordinated the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme of UNAMSIL, as well as the organization of the presidential, legislative and local elections in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Doss has spent his entire career working for the United Nations. Until joining UNAMSIL, he was the Director of the United Nations Development Group

(UNDG), established by the Secretary-General as part of the programme of reform of the United Nations. Before that he was Director of the European Office of the United Nations Development Programme in Geneva, Switzerland, where he was responsible for strengthening dissemination and liaison for UNDP in Western Europe, in particular UNDP advocacy for human development. Mr. Doss has also served as United Nations Resident Coordinator and UNDP Regional Representative in Bangkok, Thailand, as well as Director of the United Nations Border Relief Operation, in charge of United Nations assistance to displaced Cambodian people on the Thai-Cambodia border. Before that, he served as UNDP Resident Representative in Benin and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and had held posts in China, the Niger and Kenya, and at the UN Headquarters in New York.

A graduate from the London School of Economics, Mr. Doss was born and raised in Cardiff, Wales. He is married to Soheir Doss and has three daughters.

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LIBERIANS REGISTER

By Yuko Maeda

A young woman in a white dress sat alone on a bench next to a group of men at a makeshift wooden building off Tubman Boulevard in Monrovia on the morning of 25 April, patiently awaiting her turn to see a registrar who would laminate a small card with her black and white photo. She held her back straight up and watched the process quietly, her eyes smiling at people around her. She knew she would soon hold a pass to exercise her right as a Liberian.

"Every time I come back, I have a flashback of what happened to me," Princess Lomax said. "But I just wanted to come back and register to elect new leaders myself for my country."

Princess Lomax was among 54,000 people who registered to vote in the forthcoming elections on the first day the National Elections Commission (NEC)

began voter registration at 1,511 centres spread across the country.

"The elections are more important than anything else," Lomax said afterwards, showing off her brand new voter registration card. She had rushed to a nearby registration centre early in the morning as if she could no longer wait for this crucial moment.

Lomax set foot on Liberian soil late April, a few days before the official launch of voter registration, to be part of this momentous event in her country's history. After living for more than 10 years in Ghana as a refugee, the 27-year-old student had finally decided to return home



PROSPECTIVE VOTERS People queue at a voter registration centre

to Vote

and help rebuild her country.

For Lomax, it was not an easy decision to return home. She has no family left in Liberia as her kith and kin had scattered, seeking refuge in neighbouring countries during the bloody civil war. Indeed, it took Lomax a great deal of courage to return, overcoming flashbacks of rocket attacks that broke her leg three times and tore her away from her family. "Every time I come back, I have a flashback of what happened to me," she said, a cloud of sorrow enveloping her face. "But I just wanted to come back and register to elect new leaders myself for my country."

The elections due on 11 October for

President, House of Representatives and Senate are a major component of a peace agreement signed by three warring factions in August 2003 that ended the civil conflict. Since then over 100,000 combatants have been disarmed, tens of thousands of refugees and internally displaced persons have returned home, and the NEC has been established to prepare for a free and fair election. The UN Mission in Liberia has been spearheading international assistance to such efforts.

"The registration process is taking off better than expected, especially right here at the (Monrovia) City Hall where people are standing in line to register," commented Frances Johnson-Morris, chairwoman of the NEC, who stopped at the registration centre during her tour to monitor the first day's registration exercise. At the centre were dozens of Liberians waiting for a registration card to be issued.

"Liberia's problem is my problem. We have to take part in free, fair and transparent elections to make our country peaceful."

"It's a good sign. I'm optimistic," Johnson-Morris said. However, she acknowledged that in some rural areas the turnout was slow as logistical problems such as the absence of passable roads hindered the exercise. "It is just the beginning of registration.... We will make sure all will register and participate in the crucial October elections," Johnson-Morris said.

By seven in the morning, more than 4,000 national registration staff and hundreds of electoral officials from the NEC and UNMIL's Electoral Division had raced to the centres ready to accommodate eligible voters yet to come. While the national staff carefully processed applicants, monitoring teams toured hundreds of sites to observe the process to ensure a smooth exercise.

"We are very impressed with the level of commitment and dedication of the registration staff, especially those people who have to walk a long distance to deliver registration materials and equipment," quipped Johnson-Morris.

Staff at the Jorkpen Town Market registration centre off Tubman Boulevard were no exception. Benjamin T. Nimeneh and three other staff travelled to a warehouse before dawn to collect registration materials, and later improvised chairs and tables as neither the registration centre nor the NEC could provide proper furniture. Despite difficulties, the registrars were proud of being part of the election process. "Liberia's problem is my problem. We have to take part in free, fair and transparent elections to make our country peaceful," Nimeneh said. "We have to show our appreciation as the international community is here helping us. We have to pay our quota."

Having observed the first-day of voter registration in the City Hall, Charles Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the transitional government who is to turn over the mantle to the newly elected President in January 2006, called on all the eligible voters to register. "I'm appealing to all Liberians to come out and register so that in October we can exercise our franchise to find a good leader for our country."

That's a hope every Liberian shares. Varnie S. Massaquoi stressed that the country must be run by those who understand the suffering and hardship of war victims and have contributed to Liberia's recovery. "We don't want people who just talk about good things but do nothing," he said while lining up to register at the City Hall. The 21-year-old college student, who will exercise his voting right for the first time, explained that he came to the registration centre on the first day to have plenty of time to study the candidates. "There are many candidates. I will relax and take my own time to choose the right person. I'd like someone who loves this nation to support unity, love and reconciliation."

Lomax says she will vote for an intelligent person who is admired not only by the local population but also by the international community. She expects the election results will bring positive changes, but cautioned it would occur only if the elections are held in a transparent manner. "If the elections are free and fair, everything will be OK," she smiled. ♦

Overcoming ODDS



A UN car tries to pull out a stranded truck

Ashim Choudhury

Ashim Choudhury follows the UNMIL electoral team in MARYLAND and comes face to face with the hardships in the field.

There was no electricity at the UNMIL office in Harper. The internet was down. Fortunately, the phones were working. Perspiring, Jose Mateos, the Chief Electoral Advisor (CEA), was on the phone line to Monrovia: "I can send you information on the email only when the power comes." On another phone line, an NEC worker pleaded, "I beg you man...." He was requesting for the power cables. "Welcome to Harper!" Mateos said. That evening the power never came. It was yet another day of fighting odds for the elec-

toral team. But work went on till late in the evening. Electoral materials had to be dispatched to the distant voter registration centres (VRCs) the following day. Our plan was to accompany one of the teams to Barrobo, the farthest of Maryland's four districts.

In all there were 75 VRCs in Maryland. Forty of them were operational, 16 of which were mobile. "Each mobile team covers four VRCs," Joseph Chea, Maryland's magistrate explained. According to him, some people were complaining they would not be able to walk from one town to another. "During voting we may have to split the teams, we may even have to recruit more people," he said. Getting people to go to the polling booths during elections was going to a major problem. "The main challenge is the roads," Mateos averred.

Next morning we were on the road leading out of Harper. Our first destination

was Tubman Farm, an hour's drive. Soon we were on the gravel road winding our way through beautiful countryside. Women in ones and twos were heading towards Harper, carrying the day's produce of pineapples, plantains or cassava leaves to sell. The road was deserted except for the occasional man, cutlass in hand, on the lookout for forest produce. It was difficult to imagine anyone taking the trouble to register or vote from here. After half an hour of driving through thick forests we came across a clearing and some houses. It was Barraken town.

Another half hour drive and we were in the "commercial" town of Pleeb. A banner proclaimed, "Register to vote." Beyond, in the primary school, one saw a queue outside the VRC. Within seconds we had crossed Pleeb and were again in forest country. Shortly we were at the stately Tubman rubber plantation, now occupied by the Senegalese troops. Here

Alfred Zulu, the Electoral Support Officer (ESO), advises me against accompanying him to Barrobo. "It will be very late," he warns. So my plans are changed for Karloken.

Zulu would be visiting five VRCs in Barrobo. It's a routine visit, to oversee registration work and obtain weekly statistics on the number of people registered. Then there were tarpaulins, tents, T-shirts and caps to be carried to the VRCs. "It's basically trouble shooting and data collection," Zulu said, as he sped away with a colleague from the NEC. Of some 10 VRCs in Barrobo, only five were accessible by road. Others could be reached by helicopters. Where the choppers could not land, porters were the only means of 'transport'. In some cases porters had to walk all day to reach a VRC, returning only the next evening.

Picking our Senbatt escorts from the farm, we were once again on the gravel road, leading to Karloken. Soon we pass by Boniken where a mobile VRC has been set up at the elementary school. The camera has developed a snag which Adam Conderman, the ESO, fixes. The registrar requests to shift the VCR to the nearby leprosy camp the following day. "They cannot walk," he explains. That day Boniken registered 72 persons, 11 more than the day before.

As we drive past Gbamaken, Conderman explains, "The mobile VRC was here last week."

Further down, we come across a bad stretch of road that appears impassable.



After a bone-rattling ride, and a mud splattered windshield, it is behind us. In less than half an hour we are at Karloken town. In the sparse market place we chat up a group of men. District Superintendent Agunte, 69, shows his inked thumb.

Where the choppers could not land, porters were the only means of 'transport'. In some cases porters had to walk all day to reach a VRC, returning only the next evening.

"These are my Chiefs," he points to the others. There is some excitement about voter registration. Two old men say they will register next week when the mobile VRC comes to their remote village. "This time we'll not rush to vote for anybody," Agunte says. The others nod in agreement.

Nearby the VRC at the elementary school wears a near-deserted look. By 12:30 only 32 persons have registered. Registrar Edith Wesseh says, "I'm not too happy....people not knowing. We need to talk to them." Civic education should have been better she feels. Messages on Radio Harper do not go much beyond the town. Edith also says there are fewer women registering. Later that afternoon, two women from Pleebo, waiting for a taxi to Monrovia, show their inked thumbs when asked if they have registered.

After Karloken we head back to Tubman Farm. A few minutes drive and our way is blocked by a mini-truck stuck in the middle of the road. It is the same bad patch we had encountered in the morning. We pull up and watch another truck pulling it. It fails. Our driver Dennis too tries to pull out the truck with his Nissan Patrol. No luck. It only gets stuck deeper in the mud. Abandoning the effort we try calling Harper on the HF radio and wait for the Senbatt recovery truck. The number of people waiting on the road swells. So do the cars.

Meanwhile, Harper cannot be reached on radio. So we decide to return to Karloken. As we head back, we are blinded by heavy rains and decide to stop. After a while a truck speeds past. "It's the one that was stuck!" Conderman screams. More vehicles pass by as the rains subside. We turn back, cautiously cross the ditch and sigh in relief. It's dark by the time we return to Harper. The Barrobo team too was stuck on the road, and rescued by a Senbatt truck. For the election team in Harper it was not yet time to call it a day. They had to prepare for yet another day of imponderables.♦

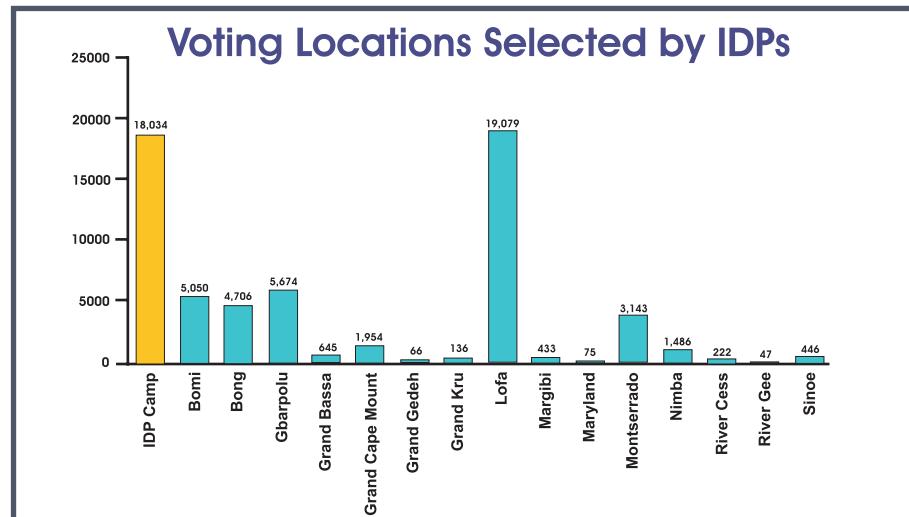


An Opportunity to get Home

The prospect of going home was a major incentive for many IDPs to join the voter registration exercise. Ashim Choudhury visited one of the IDP camps in Montserrado County during registration.

On the second day of voter registration we visited Mount Barclay IDP camp to find out what the mood was like among the internally displaced persons (IDPs). There was visibly more excitement. The queues at the voter registration centers were long. There were more women, many of them old. In fact, the first person we met with a voter registration card that morning was an old woman. "Have you got your VR card?" we asked. "Give me five dollars, for rice," she said, ignoring our question. The young men gathered around us broke into laughter. But they had serious questions. "How will we go to our villages? Will you provide us transport?"

It was the same question we were asked at the camp distribution centre, which doubled as the voter registration centre. Jacob Williams, 56, who had registered the previous day, approached us, concern writ large on his face. "But will we be able to repatriate?" Literally everyone we met had the same concern. Would they be able to go back to their villages



before voting began? And the hope that they would go back to their homes was the biggest incentive driving them to the registration queues. In all, there were four voter registration centers in Mount Barclay camp which had a population of over 13,000 IDPs, including children.

"I will vote, it's my right," Williams asserted. He said he could go home on his own, provided he got his "resettlement assistance." Some 75 persons had registered on the first day of registration. "Over 90 percent of them say they want to go home and vote," Kpassawah Kemah, the voter registration clerk, informed us. However, Darius Zambo, 20, wearing his school uniform, was going to register and vote in the camp itself. Why? The seventh grader did not want his studies to be disrupted. A resident of Nimba, he was living in the camp with his mother, six sisters and five brothers for some two years now.

But Sonne, 40, standing in the registration queue, was sure she would vote in Voinjama, come what may. "I, tired here," she said grimacing. Anyone would be, living in a ten by eight hut, shared with a husband and three children. And Kabbe, 43, had ten children in all and a "boss man" (husband) to share the house with. She would register the next day because, "today the place so packed!" Of course, she too would go back to Lofa and vote there. She yearned for the open spaces and misty mornings in Voinjama.

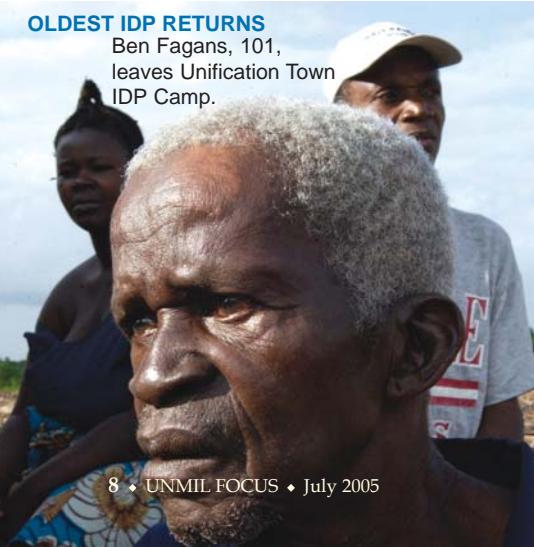
Old man Komor Singba's trembling hands firmly clutched his voter card as he emerged from the registration centre. The 85-year old widower from Kolahun in Lofa was not at all troubled by the prospect of traveling to his remote village on a long bumpy road full of mud and uncertainty. "My town different, people will take care of me. I will be happy there...got plenty plantain, coffee, cocoa..." he said. "I want to go...I no stay here," he said defiantly despite his age, despite his trembling hands. Nothing would be more satisfying than spending the evening of his life in his own place. The enthusiasm to register was definitely high in this IDP camp. For many, it was a long awaited opportunity to get home.♦

71 % IDPs Register to Vote in their Home Counties

According to the NEC's provisional Voter's Roll, processed by its Data Centre, 61,196 internally displaced persons (IDPs) registered to vote, 71 per cent of them choosing to vote in their county of origin. IDPs accounted for 4.5 per cent of the total 1.35 million registered voters. According to UNMIL estimates, official IDP camps around the country accommodated some 140,000 people, including children, as of mid-June.

OLDEST IDP RETURNS

Ben Fagans, 101, leaves Unification Town IDP Camp.



Eleventh Hour Rush



Long queues marked the last day of registration

Above: PCA

Below: Duport

Ashim Choudhury

By Ashim Choudhury

Saturday, 21 May was the last day of voter registration and UNMIL FOCUS set out to feel the pulse at the registration centres. Our first destination, the George Washington School, had a surprise in store. It was closed! The registration centre had closed two days earlier on Thursday. "Their forms were finished, so they went to another centre. Plenty of people are still coming here, so we ask them to go to PCA," Folay Sonnie, the school's security guard, informed us. So we headed for PCA or the Paynesville Central Academy, two furlongs away, on Somalia Drive.

With a long queue of people trying to beat the deadline, the place had the air of a busy market. "Will they all be registered by 4.30 pm?" That was the question on our minds. Inside the school, there was frantic registration work going on. "I will try," the registrar at PCA said, when asked if he could finish registering all the people in the queue.

There were two registration counters at the academy, one of them being the 'missing' team from George Washington. "We had exhausted our forms, so we are helping out here," one of the registration team members said looking up from his work. Despite being overwhelmed with work his enthusiasm was remarkable. His eyes busy scanning a registration form, he said, "If you bring us a generator, we will work right through the night and up to five in the morning." Was somebody organizing elec-

tricity for the night? "No, no," he said, requesting us to put in a word to the election authorities. Work had been hectic in the last days. The previous day they had registered 257 people.

At the Mount Barclay IDP camp too the queues were longer than usual. When we asked a woman who emerged from the registration centre with her card why she had waited for the last day, she said, "My ma was sick, I had to care for her." Had her mom registered? "No, she cannot walk."

In many centres, registration went on till as late as midnight.

Like most residents at the camp she would be returning to Lofa to cast her ballot. Inside the centre the registrar was a trifle annoyed, "For two weeks we were doing nothing ...and now this rush. We cannot speed up any more." She had no instructions to register beyond 4.30 p.m., but said that she would register everybody who

joined the queue by then.

When we passed by the primary school at Duport road around 1 p.m. there was a long queue outside. Someone remarked, "This place used to be deserted every day." The question was, even if the registrars agreed to register them, would the people have the patience to wait in the hot afternoon sun until their turn came? Dickson Yorkor, Vice Principal of SDA High School, outside the Mount Barclay registration centre, had similar concerns about the "eleventh hour rush" for registration. "I hope they increase the time, otherwise a lot of people will be left out of the voting process," he said.

Two days later, on 23 May, addressing a press conference NEC Chairperson Frances Johnson-Morris expressed happiness over the registration of over 1.2 million voters (based on early estimates) as more information poured in from the field. Asked how many people had been missed out on the last day, she said that in many centres registration went on till as late as midnight. "Nobody was left out," she asserted.♦



Elect leaders who

In a frank interview with Editor **Mathew Elavanalthoduka**, the Chairperson of the National Elections Commission (NEC), **Frances Johnson-Morris**, talks about the successful voter registration and the ongoing preparations for the October elections, and urges Liberians to exercise their franchise in a responsible manner.



Mathew Elavanalthoduka

What were the challenges the NEC faced during the voter registration and how did you address them?

A major challenge was the inaccessibility of some areas, towns and villages. Some of our workers had to walk for days to reach their destinations. Many of the roads in the countryside are impassable, bridges have been washed away. We had to pay porters to carry, on their heads, our materials to some of the voter registration cen-

ters.

Additionally, we had the problem of not having access to funding on time to start the voter and civic education. So the message did not get to the people early enough. I went to a school campus and someone was asking me what she would get in return if she registered. It just showed the degree of ignorance and the lack of information of the process.

We had challenges of logistics as well.

Some of the civic educators were not deployed on time because there were no vehicles. Some of the centres had to be private premises. We had to talk to the owners of those premises during the course of the process. Some of them were requesting payment which we did not envisage and therefore did not budget for. So we had to find money from some budget line and provide some token compensation to these people because we didn't want the process disrupted.

At one registration centre I went to, there was nothing in place. I had to give money out of my pocket to the town chief and asked her to get some boys to go in the bush and cut some sticks and then we provided tarpaulin to cover the structure.

Considering the number of people registered, would you describe the voter registration exercise a resounding success?

We are extremely happy about the results. It is a resounding success despite all the criticisms about lack of adequate civic and voter education. It means that people were looking forward to this day. They're looking forward to the elections. There're looking forward to a new beginning. So they came out, with or without voter education.

There was a low rate of registration among the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Could the NEC have done better in this area?

There are a number of factors responsible for the low rate of registration among IDPs. They have become pawns, so to speak, in the hands of various actors. There are people who were telling the IDPs not to leave the camps. IDPs themselves wanted certain incentives before leaving the camps. We went to eight of these camps around Monrovia to explain the process to these IDPs, telling them that if you don't go home, you may not be able

are patriotic...

to vote. Alternatively, you can stay in these camps and vote, but your vote will be counted for this county in which your camp is located. Some of them said they were not even going to register because they had to be resettled before this whole process started. Various issues, concerns and actors confused the IDPs...

How did the donors and the international community in general assist the NEC in the voter registration exercise?

The international community, mainly the United Nations Mission in Liberia, is providing very substantial support to this process. UNMIL provided most of the material for the voter registration. They are again expected to provide the polling material - ballot boxes, ballot papers, indelible ink, and other items. They have paid the 4,000 election workers who participated in the process of registration. They've paid the civic educators. UNMIL is bearing the lion's share of the costs of the process. The only thing our government is doing here is to keep the commission moving, operationally, paying salaries, and some other assistance. There has also been support from the European Union, USAID, and others.

Has the NEC acquired sufficient institutional strength to conduct voter registration in future without external help?

Our capacity has been built to a great extent. We want to leave a legacy here. We have put into place, with the help of the international community, a lot of the framework for electoral management, for the holding of elections. So any other body that comes after us will have to follow what we've done because everything is in place. The policy instruments are there. If this particular group of commissioners were to remain, we have confidence that we'll be able to do it on our own the next time.

How are the preparations for the elections going?

The preparations are going very well. This process started some time back. We've come a long way since then. We've made a lot of strides in the preparations. After accomplishing voter registration -- it is a milestone -- the next important exercise is the delimitation of electoral districts. We're now trying to derive a formula to allocate seats with the political parties.

What steps are you taking to ensure the elections are free and fair?

Our primary goal is to ensure that elections are held and they are free, fair and transparent.

Let me cite some of the reforms that we have introduced. For instance, [during the 1997 elections] they did not use transparent boxes. We are using transparent boxes. Again, the ballot boxes were transported from the field after the polling and brought to headquarters for counting. That is not going to be done this time. The votes will be counted on the spot in the presence of the political parties' agents. International observers, national observers and all interested parties will be there. That is far better than before, when the ballot boxes used to be brought to headquarters and God knows what happened en route.

October is in the midst of the rainy season and roads will become even more impassable by then. How is this going to impact on the elections?

Well, obviously, it's going to impact the elections, but we've always had elections in October in this country.

Is it cast in stone? Can it not be changed?

Well, it's not cast in stone, but this particular election is cast in stone. Maybe for

future elections, we can have a referendum and decide that we want to change the dates. However, we expect that Liberians would make whatever sacrifice it takes to cast their ballots. We have too much at stake. We cannot afford the rainy season to stop us, bad roads will not stop us, nothing will stop us. We have to have these elections. We will pull them through.

Do you have any message to the registered voters of this country?

Well, I would like to tell my fellow compatriots, those who have registered to vote, to consider these elections as very crucial. They must exercise their franchise in a very responsible manner. I ask them to think soberly and to reflect on where we came from, the difficult times that we've had. Let's elect people who can do the job, who are service-oriented and not just because of any other consideration. Leaders who are sensitive to the needs of the people and who are patriotic. That's the kind of leaders we should elect. That's what I have to tell the Liberian people.♦



Mathew Elavanthaloduka

Election Workers Make Registration Triumph

Yuko Maeda



Despite the numerous challenges election officials faced, voter registration for October's national elections was completed with a record number of registered voters: 1.35 million. Observers attribute this success largely to the commitment and dedication of 4,000 national election workers, some of whom walked hours in the bush to reach out to eligible voters even in the remotest villages.

By Yuko Maeda

Election worker James Kerkulah meticulously handles a brand new Polaroid camera at a registration centre in Bong County. He is well aware of the importance of his job -- taking photos of every registrant for the voter ID card. He straightens up a blue sheet behind an old man sitting on a bench in an open-air school corridor and taps the man's shoulders to adjust his position before looking in the viewfinder to press the button. He then pulls the positive out of the camera to dry and carefully hands it out to the man. Kerkulah repeats this cycle of action a hundred times a day.

"I'm proud of myself," says the 25-year-old photographer. "I'm serving the

country in the purpose of peace, not for bullets."

Kerkulah and three other registration staff had just moved out of the bush to set up another mobile registration centre in Zeansue town, about 100 km northeast of Monrovia. The Gbelemah Public School is on a hilltop, off the main road that connects Monrovia and Bong County's capital Gbarnga, and has a basic latrine and water pump in the yard. "This is a little bit safer for us," Kerkulah said, pointing to a half-broken wooden door of the latrine. The old school is their workplace as well as overnight shelter for the period of voter registration. "We can't leave the (registration) materials behind," Kerkulah points out. "We sleep in the centre to protect them."

In the first two weeks of registration,

Kerkulah's team served in the bush in Palala town, about a three-hour walk from the main road. They marched in the heat, seeing no other villages along to find drinkable water or a rest room. Still, the four managed to register Palala villagers while they hardly fed themselves. When rain fell, they were simply soaked in rain as a thatched hut could not block the water pouring in. "Life was hard out there," Kerkulah recalls.

Kerkulah's team was one of 347 registration teams that operated 819 mobile registration centres in remote areas around the country. Another 692 centres were static for the entire four-week period. As most of the mobile centres were only accessible by foot because of deteriorated road conditions, walking for more than five hours each way became a normal exercise for many teams.

"I'm working with incredibly committed workers who are walking such a long distance in the middle of nowhere to reach their registration centres, not eating properly," says Amanda Scotthern, UNMIL's Electoral Support Officer for lower Bong County, who works side by side with her national counterpart to oversee dozens of registration workers. "They are doing a really amazing job."



CRITICAL SUPPORT
An ESO supervises registration staff at Zeansue town

The registration staff were not alone to face difficulties stemming from logistical constraints and limited resources. Most election officials, including magistrates and County electoral supervisors, faced the same predicament. When NEC Commissioner Elizabeth J. Boyenneh visited Totota on 12 May to meet the electoral officials from NEC and UNMIL in charge of lower Bong County, she heard many staff plead for more support to carry out their duties.

Nathaniel Ketter, an Electoral Supervisor who toured a dozen registration centres in Fuamah District in lower Bong County to monitor the registration operation, narrated how he struggled to reach a registration centre across the river in Zulu Hills to collect registration materials and figures. He had to walk six hours on a muddy foot path and crossed the river on foot to reach the centre after his UNMIL counterpart dropped him off at Kankalanta, about 20 km away from the centre. He inspected registration sheets in the centre for a few hours until night fell, and set off early next morning to take the same path back to town. One visit took him two days, and the centre was only one of a dozen locations he toured weekly.

Ketter said he didn't mind walking

such long distances to perform his important task, but he wanted at least financial support to pay a guard to secure the delivery of the materials and get private transport services when UNMIL could not give him a lift. He said lack of financial support would delay the data collection. Many others had similar stories with a litany of difficulties.

"They are not getting sufficient support they deserve," Scothern summed up after hearing the outcry. "I think they feel they're not adequately recognized." Before the meeting adjourned, however, Commissioner Boyenneh solved the financial issue amicably. "We're happy to give money for guards to carry materials because it's critical. Materials need to be collected," she said as she allocated required funds. "We're all working for one goal -- to hold a free, fair, transparent election."

Despite the hardships, national staff members participating in the voter registration were enthusiastic to get involved in the nation's peace-building efforts.

Annie Wilson of Grand Gedeh County says she became a shredder to make a difference. "I wanted to work for the country and peace," says the 41-year-old mother of six. She knows how life is like during war

and doesn't want her children to live in a refugee camp again. She believes the upcoming elections will help the fragile peace take root. "I'm working for our children for a better future."

Mark Jordon Paso, a photographer for a registration centre in Zwedru, feels the same way. "We want to help the elections, which are very important to build lasting peace in Liberia," he says. Paso appreciates UNMIL's help to organize the elections and the efforts to ensure the process is transparent. "We'll make sure we follow 100 per cent UN procedures to have a free and fair election."

This commitment of the national staff has won kudos from international observers. A visiting United States observer delegation comprising members of the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute and the Carter Centre commended voter registration staff for their dedication and diligence, describing them as knowledgeable, competent and well trained. "They controlled their materials carefully and responsibly," said former US Ambassador Robert Gribbin, who led the delegation. "We find the electoral process now underway exceeds by far the 1997 exercise in terms of fairness and inclusiveness." •

"Blue Helmets" Pledge Safety

By Yuko Maeda

Russ McDonard and three of his colleagues were just doing their job -- screening Ganta residents and issuing registration cards for the elections. Suddenly, they heard a crowd of men shouting behind the George Washington School building, their registration centre in the town of Ganta. A moment or two later, they were facing an angry mob trying to knock down the wooden walls of the centre, throwing rocks to smash its windows and overturning the registration table. As the mob rampaged, photographer Yeanay Terence clutched his camera and ran into a classroom while McDonard and others rushed to call a Bangladeshi battalion for help.

"There was a rumour that ex-combatants might do a demonstration, but we didn't expect anything like this," recalled McDonard two days later, pointing at broken window bars of the school near the border with Guinea. "It happened unex-

pectedly."

Capt. Syed Jamil Ahsan and his troops reacted quickly to the call. As the heavily armed Bangladeshi team from Camp Charlie hurried to the scene to control the situation, the frustrated young men armed with only stones and sticks dispersed, leaving no one injured.

"Ganta is a volatile centre," says Col. Syedul Kabir, Commander of the Bangladeshi battalion based in Ganta.

"They (ex-combatants) just wanted to sabotage what we're doing," says McDonard. "We really appreciate the Bangladeshi peacekeepers. If they didn't come (on time), much worse could have happened to us."

On 11 May, thousands of former fighters and their sympathisers went berserk in the capital of Nimba County to protest the failure of authorities to pay their school

Yuko Maeda





SAFE HANDS

A Bangladeshi soldier provides protection at a registration centre

fees promised under the disarmament programme. The ex-combatants exploded in anger at transitional government chairman Charles Gyude Bryant, who visited Ganta to address issues of their reintegration but failed to satisfy the protesters demanding a quick solution to the delay of payment. As Bryant hurriedly left the town by helicopter, the frustrated protesters hurled stones and rocks at shops and voter registration centres and looted NGO offices and properties. Although the Liberian National Police tried to control the situation, the riot began to subside only after Bangladeshi troops patrolling in armoured personnel carriers fired warning shots in the air. The town was back to normal within a few hours.

“Ganta is a volatile centre,” says Col. Syedul Kabir, Commander of the Bangladeshi battalion based in Ganta, who ordered the warning shots. “About 11,000 ex-combatants out of 100,000 disarmed nationwide are here in Nimba. Things can easily boil up.”

“We are determined to ensure maximum level of security during the entire election process,” says Chris Moore, Chief of Staff of UNMIL military force. “We are quite confident the Political campaign will be conducted in a proper way.”

During the four-week voter registration period that ended 21 May, UNMIL’s 15,000 “blue helmets” from 47 countries worked day and night to help the registration process run smoothly. While some 200 Military Observers and other military personnel assessed the security situation around the country, the rest of the peacekeepers conducted country-wide patrolling by air and road, escorted voter registration personnel, protected registrants from any threats or intimidation and guarded registration materials.

“We have only 15,000 troops to ensure security for 1,500 registration centres in the entire country. It was an extremely difficult job to do,” recalls Brigadier-General

Chris Moore, Chief of Staff of UNMIL’s military force. Making the most of their assets, the peacekeepers provided area security, increasing the level of patrolling on the ground and in the air and coordinating the efforts with partners such as the National Elections Commission, UNMIL’s Civilian Police and its Electoral Division.

The Bangladeshi battalions, for example, cover Liberia’s central region of Bong, Grand Bassa, parts of Margibi and Nimba counties—classified as Sector 3—where 471 registration centres were located. Nearly 3,000 peacekeepers provided area security around the clock and assisted in the election process.

“They are very helpful,” says Mahesh Kharel, UNMIL Electoral Support Officer for lower Bong. The troops always accompany election personnel whenever they need to visit remote areas and often rescue them from troubles such as vehicle breakdowns. The military personnel share security situation reports with electoral officials, support logistics to carry out the registration, and maintain security. “The VRCs (voter registration centres) feel secure because the peacekeepers are patrolling the areas... We’re getting good cooperation from the Bangladeshi peacekeepers,” says Kharel.

Nonetheless, peaceful demonstrations sometimes turn into violent public disturbances in troubled areas such as Ganta. On the day following the ex-combatants’ riots over the delay of reintegration payment, the border town witnessed another mob violence over an alleged murder case of a teenage boy. Although the violence calmed down within a few hours of the Bangladeshi peacekeepers’ swift reaction, the volatile situation in Ganta prompted the deployment of a Swedish company of UNMIL’s Quick Reaction Force to enhance security.

“We are determined to ensure maximum level of security during the entire election process,” says Moore. With the voter registration over, the “blue helmets” are now preparing for the election’s political campaign period and the polling exercise. “Given the successful registration, we are quite confident the political campaign will be conducted in a proper way without any major security concerns,” he adds.♦

More than 1.35 million Liberians have registered to vote for the October national elections, with the number of women and men almost equal, according to the provisional voters' roll released by the National Elections Commission (NEC). The registration process ended with figures exceeding earlier expectations.

The NEC conducted voter registration for six weeks -- the first four weeks for Liberians already in the country and additional two weeks for refugees returning from neighbouring countries, which ended 4 June. The final roll counts 1,352,556 voters, of which 676,157 are women and 676,399 men. The data show that the average age of registrants is 35 years, with 40 per cent of potential voters less than 28 years. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) represent 5 per cent of the total registrants, 71 per cent of that group choosing to vote in their counties of origin.

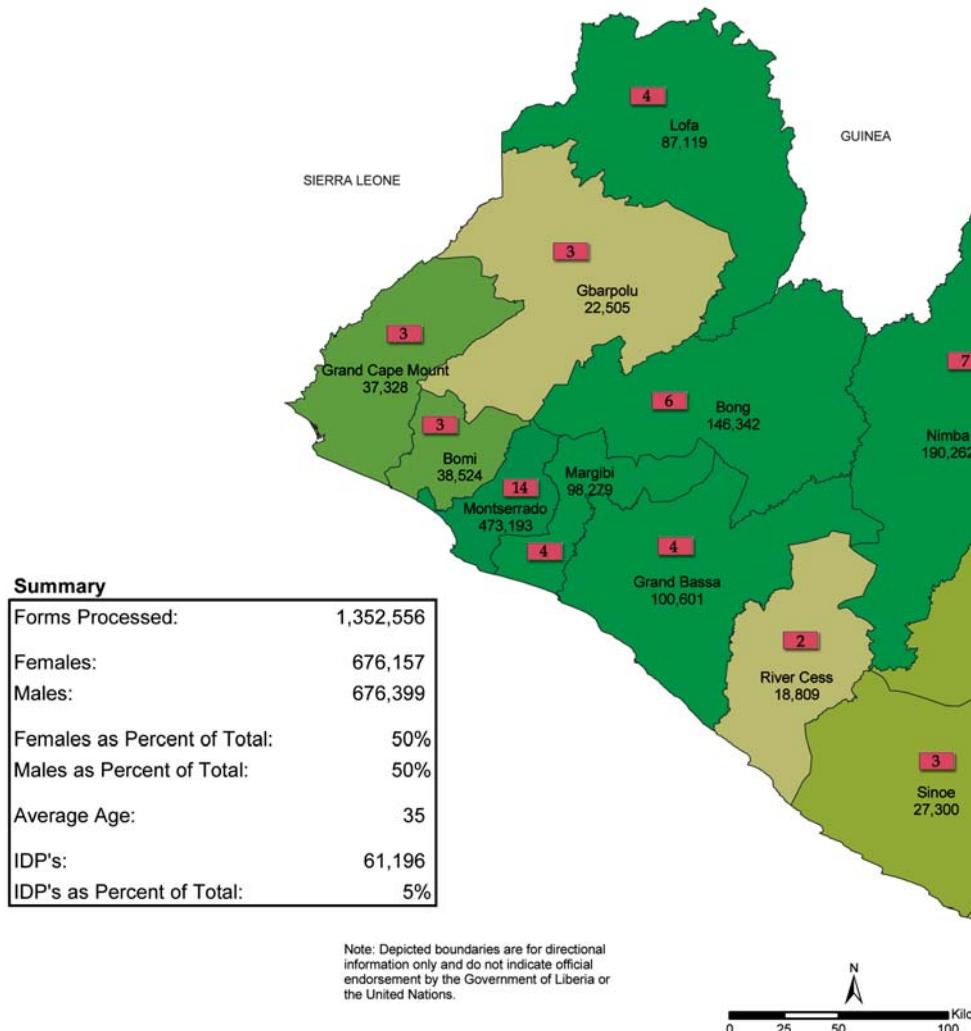
Montserrado county accounts for 35 per cent of the total registrants (over 473,000 people), followed by Nimba (14.1 per cent or over 190,000), Bong (10.8 per cent or over 146,000), Grand Bassa (7.4 per cent or over 100,000), Margibi (7.3 per cent or over 98,000) and Lofa (6.4 per cent or over 87,000). The remaining nine counties each account for less than 3 per cent of the total, and River Cess and Grand Kru counties registered the smallest numbers: 18,809 and 19,561, respectively.

These figures were scheduled to be finalized after the exhibition period of 30 June to 1 July, when registrants would be scrutinized for their legitimacy.

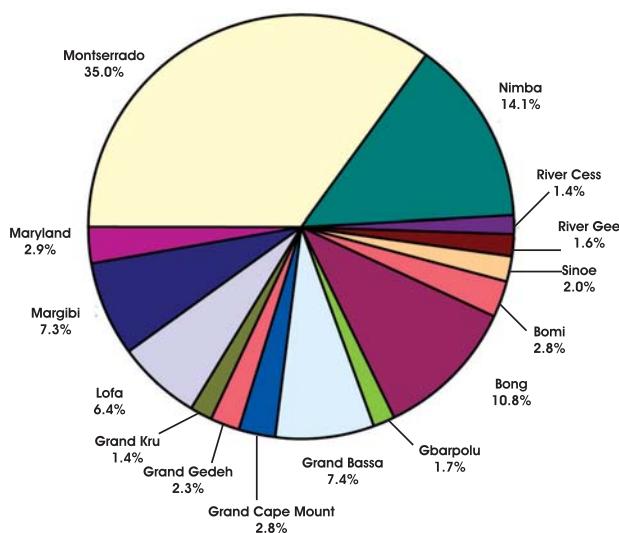
Following the announcement of the provisional results, the NEC has allocated all 64 seats of the House of Representatives to the 15 counties based on the number of registrants in each county. While Montserrado gets 14 seats and Nimba and Bong receive seven and six, respectively, the rest of the counties are allotted two to four seats each. Delimiting electoral districts based on the number of allotted seats was completed in mid-July.

Y.M.

Over 1.35m Voters Registered

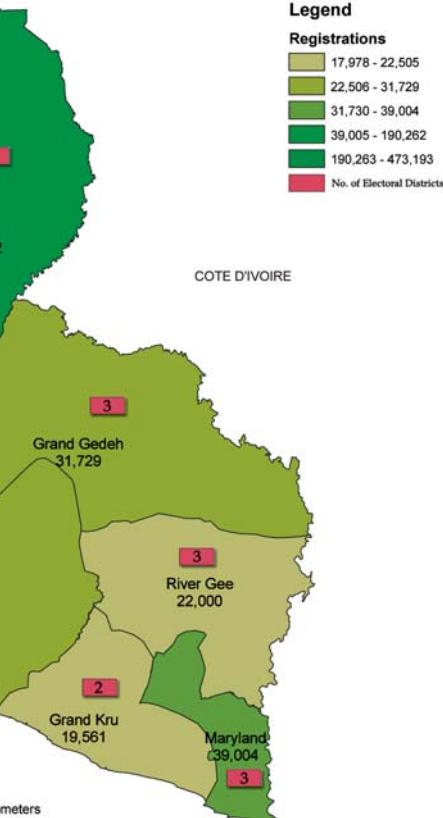


Distribution of Registrations



Registered

Voter Rolls Exhibited



From 30 June till 2 July, Liberians who had earlier registered to vote in the October elections flocked to more than 1,500 registration centres around the country to verify their registration status. The Exhibition of the 1.35 million preliminary voters' roll was their last opportunity to check their names on the voter list. They could challenge the eligibility of questionable registrants or request a review of cases that did not make it to the roll. National Elections Commission's Chair Frances Johnson-Morris described the Exhibition as "successful" despite adverse weather conditions.

Sammuel J. Pratt was one of over 550,000 prospective voters in the country who came to inspect the roll. "I'm quite happy to find my name," said Pratt, "because I want to vote." He hopes the future of his country will improve after the elections. "I know the results will make a difference," he said walking away satisfied to see his name and that of his mother. Benjamin Nimeneh, the Exhibition Officer at the same centre, said the exhibition had been smooth, proving the success of registration. "There's no objection, inclusion or exclusion made so far," he said. "People are

very eager to verify."

A few people came to exhibition centres to report the loss of their registration card, and find out if they could be replaced. Thomas B. Kargar, 61, was upset when he learnt the exhibition centre in Paynesville Road Community had no authority to issue him another card. His card was stolen. "I want to vote!" he pleaded. "You see my photo and name here (in the voters' roll). Why can't you give me a new card?"

Many believed the fate of their country would rest in their hands. "I want peace and a good government," said Sando Johnson, 40, who verified all the three names in her family in the roll at the J. L. Gibson Memorial School in downtown Monrovia. "Our country will be good if we choose a right person." Jamesette Roberts of Paynesville said her participation in the elections was her way of changing Liberia. "We want to do something to change our country. We cannot just sit and wait," she said.

According to the NEC, 230 objections were made while 993 claims for inclusion were submitted during the three-day exhibition. ♦

Yuko Maeda

Campaign to Kick Off in Mid-August, 30 Parties in Race

With 12 more political parties registered by the NEC, a total of 30 political parties will kick off their election campaign on August 15 for the presidential and legislative elections slated for 11 October. The 18 original political parties were signatories to the August 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreements, which paved the way for peace and reconciliation.

According to the Electoral Reform

Law of December 2004, to be registered, a new political party must have a minimum membership of 500 eligible voters in at least 12 of the 15 counties. And only those registered can participate in the elections for President, Vice President, the 30-seat Senate and the 64-seat House of Representatives.

All the registered parties must abide by the guidelines, including an NEC-endorsed Code of Conduct. According to the Writ of Elections issued on 13 July, the

nomination of candidates is to start 21 July and end 6 August. The final list of candidates is to be published 15 August, the day political campaigning starts.

Campaigning, including rallies, media activities and distribution of promotional items can continue until 24 hours prior to the commencement of voting. According to the Writ, polling will take place on 11 October between 8 am and 6 pm. ♦

Y. M.



Yuko Maeda

Women Set For

Election Battle

By Yuko Maeda

Women's leaders aspiring for parliamentary seats are girding up to enter Liberia's male-dominated political arena. From high-ranking officials of Liberia's transitional government to parliamentarians to business owners, more than 30 female leaders across the country gathered in Monrovia early June to spruce up their leadership skills aimed at winning the elections.

The Women's Leadership Capacity Building Workshop was designed for women to refine their leadership skills they have already acquired. The participants

went through various training sessions to assess their skills, reinforce their positive aspects and identify weak areas.

Beatrice N. Sherman, a former opposition senator during Charles Taylor's presidency, said the workshop was a refresher for her to reassess her aspiration to seek a position in the new parliament. "It's inspired me to become a better leader," she said afterward, stating that she learned every person has a different style of leadership as each one has a different personality. "I'm very happy to meet in-coming leaders."

The workshop was the first of its kind the UN Mission in Liberia organized for female political aspirants to help them prepare for selection as candidates by politi-

cal parties. Similar workshops are planned at county levels. As the Electoral Reform Law requires political parties to nominate at least 30 per cent of their candidates from among women, UNMIL's Office of the Gender Advisor has been assisting to promote women's full participation in politics.

Addressing the participants at the opening ceremony, UNMIL Officer-in-Charge Abou Moussa recalled that throughout Liberia's history the society has given women only a limited authority and role. "I believe Liberian women can offer more than childbearing and home-making," he told the participants, adding that Liberia's success in building democracy cannot be achieved without women's

political and economic development. "Any denial of women's participation in politics is a denial of democracy."

In Liberia, women represent little over 5.3 per cent of the National Transitional Legislative Assembly (NTLA), taking up only four seats out of 76. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international body, ranks Liberia among the world's lowest countries in women's representation. This signals a failure of the NTLA to comply with UN Resolution 1325 and the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which call for gender balance in the implementation of the peace agreement. According to the Coalition of Political Party Women in Liberia (COPPWIL), comprising female members of 20 registered political parties, at least 68 members aspire to run for the parliamentary seats as of June.

"I believe Liberian women can offer more than child-bearing and homemaking," Abou Moussa told the female leaders. "Any denial of women's participation in politics is a denial of democracy."

The National Elections Commission (NEC), a neutral body organizing the elections, backs up women's demand to have better representation in the new parliament. NEC Commissioner Mary Brownell encourages women leaders to stand up for themselves. "We cannot be sitting in the back and just supporting men," she says. "We have to fight for the 30 per cent representation and exercise our ability to lead this country."

Nohn Rebecca Kidau, a senior government official and an aspirant for a new parliamentary seat, said the workshop gave her an opportunity to expand her capacity and network. "It gives us strength to continue to encourage women's participation in politics," she said at the end of the workshop. "Half of the registered voters are women. Maybe we'll get 30 per cent of representation in the new House of Representatives."♦

Women's Participation Encouraged



A visiting UN Gender Advisor reiterated late April that women's full participation in the election process is crucial to building lasting peace in Liberia as they take up half of the entire population.

Comfort Lamptey, Gender Advisor to the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, visited Liberia as part of her tour of West Africa to review gender-related issues in the region. During her short stay, she met representatives of the UN family, the National Transitional Government of Liberia and women's organizations to discuss mechanisms in place to ensure "gender mainstreaming" in all aspects of Liberia's post-conflict reconstruction process.

"Liberia has done some good work to support the full participation of women in the peace-building process," Lamptey said, commending the progress the country has made. She said she reviewed women's participation in the process leading to the national elections and found visible signs of encouragement for women to actively involve in politics as voters, supporters or candi-

dates. "Without women's participation, the process of reconstruction cannot be complete," she stressed. "It's critical for the future of the country's development."

The UN peacekeeping operations around the globe have been integrating gender perspectives in their activities in the areas of rule of law, human rights and national recovery to address the needs of both men and women. In Liberia, UNMIL's Office of the Gender Advisor leads this effort to support the transitional government and women's organizations.

Lamptey expressed concern over the increase of rape incidents targeting under-age girls in Liberia. Stressing the importance of adequate support to rape victims and preventive measures, she hoped a new rape law which is currently under revision will address such issues to curb the prevalence of gender-based violence. She said the Liberian Government, as a UN Member State, is obliged to ensure women have a say in the country's decision-making process.♦

Y.M.



'Improve Economic

RFTF Meeting in Copenhagen tells Liberia

Ashim Choudhury

The two-day Annual Technical Meeting of the Results Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF) on Liberia, which took place in Copenhagen on 9-10 May, was clear in its message: The donor community, though appreciative of the progress made since the Accra Peace Agreement, was unhappy with Liberia's slow progress on economic governance. The international community was expecting the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) to work closely with strategic partners to deal effectively with corruption. That has not happened.

Liberia's RFTF is a two-year recovery and reconstruction framework for the country, developed in January 2004 by the NTGL with support from the United Nations and the World Bank. It received US\$ 522 million in pledges from donors in New York at the Liberia Reconstruction Conference in February 2004. The Copenhagen meeting was a stocktaking exercise to check the progress on economic governance made over the year. The results were not too encouraging.

"Corruption and lack of follow-up on a number of agreements on how to improve economic governance are worrying us," Mats Karlsson, World Bank Country Director for Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone, said during a press briefing at UNMIL headquarters a few days after the Copenhagen meet. On the challenges to economic governance in Liberia, he said, "They remain formidable 18 months into the transitional period." Without a clampdown on corruption, it may become increasingly difficult motivating donors to stay with Liberia, more so with their attention now focused on the tsunami and other areas.

Christian Herbert, Minister of Planning and Economic Affairs, who led



"We do not want that to happen to Liberia." Abou Moussa, Officer-in-Charge, UNMIL, referring to the pledging conference on Sierra Leone, which was postponed by donors because certain conditions were not met

the Liberian Government delegation, admitted, "The issue of corruption and lack of accountability should not be taken lightly. The international community will not sit by and watch Liberia sink further into economic disaster." He was reacting to donor comments that the NTGL put a stop to fiscal mismanagement and take

action on the audits conducted, ensuring that those found guilty are brought to book.

Abou Moussa, Officer-in-Charge of UNMIL, who headed the UN delegation to Copenhagen and was closely associated with the RFTF process, clarified that the international community has "not disengaged itself" from Liberia. "However, the Government should make more efforts so that the international community can meet it half-way," he said. Referring to the pledging conference on Sierra Leone, which was to be held in Paris soon, but was postponed by donors because certain conditions were not met, he reminded, "We have to learn from things happening around us. We do not want that to happen to Liberia."

At Copenhagen, the NTGL team, led by the Planning Minister, briefed delegates on the country's achievements over the past year and presented an updated framework, which was extensively consulted among all Liberians. But clearly Karlsson was not impressed. "Economic governance remains a weakness and we have to address it," he said. Steve Ursino, UNDP Country Director was more subtle when he stated, "If after the elections we want the Government to manage the resources of the country in a responsible manner, we have to keep the momentum now. This is what the people are expecting." One of the aims of RFTF is to ensure continuity in economic planning between the NTGL and the new Government that gets elected in October this year.

Minister Herbert also expressed satisfaction with the pledges made, but said that donors need to accelerate and make good the remaining pledges to RFTF. He also gave assurances that he would brief his NTGL colleagues and relay them the communiqué from Copenhagen, and the concerns of the international community. "Our revenue collection system must be put in order, also our expenditure," he

Governance'

admitted. The RFTF has now been extended until March 2006, when a comprehensive review would be undertaken.

The Copenhagen meeting comes at a crucial time when Liberia is trying hard to break away from its turbulent past and ensure lasting peace. With the nationwide voter registration exercise over, the country is preparing itself for elections in October to usher in a democratically elected government. Donors, however, remain skeptical of the pace of reforms and warn that "business as usual is not good enough." If the Liberian Government does not honour its commitment on fiscal discipline and transparency, it may be deprived of the donor money it desperately needs. That would be yet another setback for the Liberian people.♦

"The international community will not sit by and watch Liberia sink further into economic disaster."

**Christian Herbert,
Minister of
Planning and
Economic Affairs**



Key Outcomes at Copenhagen

Expressing satisfaction at the progress made since February 2004 in achieving the benchmarks set out in the RFTF, the meeting strongly called for enhanced leadership, transparency, integrity and accountability by the NTGL on issues of economic governance and sound fiscal management. It expressed satisfaction at the progress in voter registration and called for a free and fair conduct of elections. Participants endorsed the steps taken to reintegrate ex-combatants, IDPs and returnees into host communities and urged for enhanced coordination to expedite their voluntary return. The meeting also emphasized the necessity of providing basic social services upcountry. It urged the NTGL and donors to make adequate provisions for expeditious demobilization and restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia.

To ensure linkages between the core objectives and maximizing outputs, the meeting agreed to reconfigure the 10 RFTF Clusters to six as follows: 1) Security; 2) Governance, Democratic Development and Rule of Law; 3) Elections; 4) Social Development and Community Revitalization; 5) Infrastructure; 6) Economic Management, Development Strategy and Coordination.

The meeting also welcomed the setting up of the aid coordination website www.myliberia.org, urging all donors, implementing partners and stakeholders to use it for tracking RFTF activities, report aid flows and monitor progress against benchmarks. This would also help partners meet their respective responsibilities and obligations.♦



"Economic governance remains a weakness and we have to address it."

**Steven Ursino,
UNDP Country
Director**

US, Sweden and Ireland Donate to RR

In the first quarter of this year, the rehabilitation and reintegration phase of the Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme suffered a setback due to a US\$40 million funding shortfall, the result of an additional caseload of 47,025 ex-combatants. The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in his sixth progress report on the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), appealed to the international community to contribute generously and reduce this shortfall.

The appeal was not in vain. On 12 April, the Swedish Government contributed 25 million Swedish Kroner (about US\$3.6 million) to the RR process, channeled through the UNDP-DDRR Trust Fund. This was Sweden's fourth contribution making it the second-largest contributor to the UNDP-DDRR Trust Fund. Additionally, on 17 June, the US made another contribution of US\$15 million to

RR, making it the single largest contributor. Apart from the two, Ireland also made an additional contribution of 500,000 euros, bringing its total contribution to one million euros.

The donations will ensure an additional 13,000 ex-combatants are placed in pro-

grams approved under the UNDP Trust Fund. In addition, parallel programs promoted by EC and USAID support over 20,000 ex-combatants.

J. Wesley Washington



Reintegration Efforts to Merge

In the period leading to the Results-Focused Transitional Framework (RFTF) conference in Copenhagen (see page 22), a consensus has emerged on the need for a comprehensive national recovery strategy which merges the disparate reintegration efforts focusing on ex-combatants, internally-displaced persons (IDPs), and refugees and

links reintegration assistance with medium term economic support.

As a result, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Humanitarian Coordinator is in the process of establishing a National Recovery Forum. The Forum, in partnership with the Liberian government, will draw up a sequence of development-relat-

ed processes, planning and programming beyond RFTF, which expires in March 2006. To this end, consultations are currently underway with the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) Line Ministries, various UNMIL sections, UN agencies, donors and national and international non-governmental organizations, as well as the private sector.

The RFTF Working Clusters covering Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR), IDPs and Refugees, Basic Social Services, and Productive Capacities will be merged to establish an effective technical working link between reintegration and recovery efforts. The new strategy for recovery will address both the national and local recovery priorities and processes, combining the dual imperatives of reintegrating war-affected populations and revitalizing community infrastructures and economies and ensure that these priorities and imperatives are dealt with concurrently.

DIAMOND

Sanctions Extended



Expressing broad criticism of the Transitional Government, the United Nations Security Council on 21 June unanimously extended for a further six months the existing sanctions against Liberia's diamond exports, which it says have been increasing. Following the Council decision, Secretary-General Kofi Annan on 29 July appointed a five-member Panel of Experts to assess the implementation and impact of the sanctions regime imposed on the country.

Describing the context on which it was basing its decision on diamonds, the Council noted its concern over "the increase in unlicensed mining and illegal exports of diamonds and the National Transitional Government of Liberia's (NTGL) agreement to, and lack of transparency in, granting exclusive mining rights to a single company."

On this basis, it said it would renew the measures on diamond exports imposed by its embargo of 2003 for a further period of six months from the date of adoption of this resolution.

The Council urged the NTGL to inten-

sify its efforts, with the support of UNMIL, "to establish its authority over the diamond-producing areas, and to work towards establishing an official Certificate of Origin regime for trade in rough diamonds that is transparent and internationally verifiable, with a view to joining the Kimberley Process."

Kimberley verifies that the exports are not "blood diamonds" being sold to buy arms for militias. Even though the presence of UNMIL had improved security, the Security Council said, the NTGL had not extended its authority over the country's timber producing areas, or its borders, and although there was no evidence of illegal timber exports, the NTGL had undertaken few of the reforms that would lead to the lifting of the export embargo.

The Council called on the NTGL, therefore, "to urgently to intensify its efforts to reform the Forestry Development Authority, to implement the Liberia Forest Initiative and to implement the Forest Concession Review Committee's recommendations for reform, which will ensure transparency, accountability and sustainable forest management

and contribute towards the lifting of the measures on timber."

It invited the Government to consider hiring independent, temporary, external advisers on the management of Liberia's diamond and timber resources so as to increase investor confidence and attract additional donor support.

The NTGL had not established the transparent financial accounting that would ensure that government revenues were not being used for fuelling conflict, but were used, instead, for the benefit of the Liberian people. Without this improvement, the Council said it would not unfreeze funds, other financial assets and economic resources seized last year.

Former President Charles Taylor, now living in exile in Nigeria, and his associates continued to be banned from using stolen property to interfere in restoring peace and stability in Liberia and the sub-region, the Council said.

The Panel of Experts will look into restrictions on the diamond trade and timber industry and assess the impact of these measures on the local population. The Panel is expected to submit its report to the Security Council in December. ♦

Demobilization of AFL Begins

The first phase of the restructuring exercise of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) commenced on 30 June 2005, with the demobilization of over 9,000 soldiers characterized as "war recruits" at the Camp Sheifflin military barracks, in the outskirts of Monrovia.

The two categories of AFL personnel are "war recruits," those persons mobilized during the period of war after 1989, and "regular service personnel," those in-service personnel before 1989.

The second phase will be the payment to the "regular service personnel" after 27 August 2005. Each demobilized soldier is to receive US\$540, of which \$40 is relocation allowance.

Deputy Minister of Defense for Operations Brown C. Pajibo said the

Transitional Government has earmarked US\$16.4 million to demobilize the current force of over 13,000 documented personnel. Of this amount, US\$5.5 million is earmarked for the demobilization of "war recruits", while US\$10.9 million will be set aside for payment of severance and retirement benefits to those categorized as "regular service personnel."

The demobilization exercise has three steps. After identification, AFL personnel are finger-printed, photographed and issued with identity cards. They will also receive a certificate of recognition for their services in the armed forces and a payment voucher issued. A grievance committee has been established at the demobilization sites to look into possible grievance raised by the personnel.♦

J. Wesley Washington



Former Weapons Become Reconstruction Tools

No one would have thought that metal and wood that were once part of guns and rifles would one day be converted to work tools such as hoes or hammers. That is what the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) did, taking scrap metals from destroyed weapons and converting them to tools. The scrap from the UNMIL's Demobilization and Disarmament programme came in handy as raw material for GTZ's tools production unit, part of its skills training programme in Liberia. The concept of recycling "War Materials" was introduced to UNMIL by Detlef Stoppock, UNMIL Logistics Operations and Special Projects Officer. The latter has already coordinated a similar project between the GTZ and the UN Mission in Sierra Leone. The tools recycled from the former weapons were tailored to the skills programme and relevant to reconstruction

and agriculture activities that are essential to the overall process of rebuilding war-affected communities. The tools manufactured include hammers, nail removers, hoes, rakes, spades, shovels, cocoa harvesting hooks, amongst many others.

The idea of using scrap metals from destroyed weapons as raw material is also symbolic, portraying the change from weapons of destruction to tools of reconstruction. This process also symbolically conveys to the trainees, especially ex-combatants, that there is an alternative to guns, and hope for a new life, after years of conflict. Although the GTZ's skills training programme primarily targets ex-combatants, it also encourages other war-affected people from joining, because reconciliation among different groups can be promoted through this programme as well. In this new approach, artisans from communities work alongside trainees on actu-

al reconstruction or rebuilding activities within the community. This new strategy hopes to bring the skills training and the trainees themselves closer to the community. ♦

A. C.

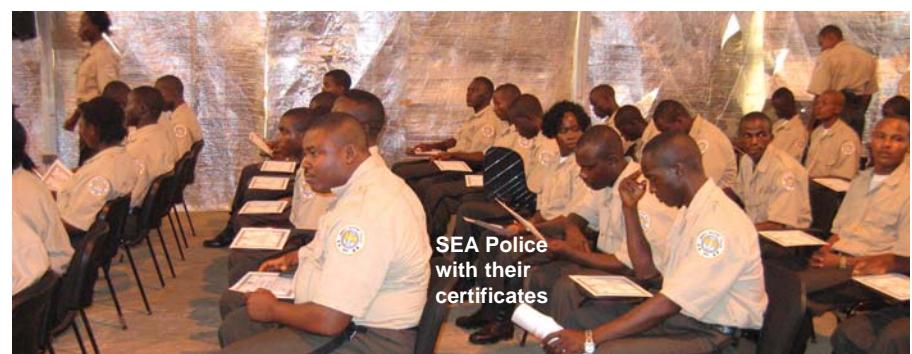


... to tools

Ports Get New Police

Fifty nine Liberian Sea Port Police personnel graduated from the Police Academy on 3 June 2005 after a six-week training course. This was the first batch of 160 Sea Port Police trained by the UNMIL Civilian Police at the Academy in Paynesville. The induction of the new police marks a major step in beefing up security at the Freeport in Monrovia and in its up-grading to international shipping standards for safe and normal maritime business. The event also coincided with the resumption of 24-hour operations at the Freeport of Monrovia, one of the gateways to the revival of Liberia's economy. The security of the port is currently being administered by UNMIL as per the Comprehensive Peace Accord, Article 7 of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1509.

Giving away certificates to the new recruits and describing the day as "his-



Ashim Choudhury

toric", Dr. D Musuleng Cooper, Acting Chairperson of the National Port Authority (NPA) said, "Today's ceremony marks another benchmark in Liberia becoming ISPS code compliant." She also expressed special happiness that several of the graduates were women. Speaking on the occasion, the Managing Director of NPA, Joe T. Gbalah, urged the new recruits to effectively stop pilferage, theft and other nefar-

ious activities at the port. Urging them to be particularly vigilant against terrorism he stressed, "You must respect the rule of law, human rights and other basic democratic values and make the port one of the more competitive on the West coast of Africa." The new police would also handle security at the ports in Buchanan, Greenville and Harper. ♦

A. C.

New Forest Policy for Liberia

By Arthur Tucker

Liberia's vast and diverse forests, covering nearly half its area (47%), could contribute significantly to its social, economic and cultural development. However, the forest resource base and infrastructure have largely been destroyed through indiscriminate felling, widespread illegal trade of forest products, forest fires, looting and damaging of the Forestry Development Authority (FDA) facilities. The loss of forest habitat has adversely affected the availability of bush meat, which constitutes 70 to 80 per cent of the total meat consumed in the country.

To reverse this trend, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and Liberia's Forestry Development Authority (FDA) recently organized a two-day workshop to discuss the adoption of a new Forest Policy as part of the country's National Forest Programme.

Speaking at the workshop held in Monrovia on 7-8 June 2005, the FAO Resident Representative in Liberia, Subramaniam Thirugnanasambanthar, cautioned participants that if timely action was not taken, the forest resources were at a high risk of depletion, leading to a fall in the sustainable flow of timber, charcoal, wildlife products, construction materials and other environmental resources. He lamented the absence of reliable data to facilitate "realistic planning and decision

making" by the FDA.

According to the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) report, Liberia was the only country within the West African sub-region that was covered entirely with rainforest. According to the report, Liberia's forests were being depleted at the rate of 40,000 hectares per annum prior to the UN sanctions. More than 50 per cent of its forests have already been destroyed. As a result, the remaining dense forest areas are now confined to the northwest and southeast of the country, separated from each other by a corridor that extends from Monrovia to Nimba County.

Liberia's forest ecosystem is still a major component of one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots identified by Conservation International.

These two forest blocks are further fragmented and dissected by the advances of shifting cultivation and other population pressures.

Liberia's forest ecosystem is still a major component of one of the 25 biodiversity hotspots identified by Conservation International. This ecosystem can today be divided into four classes: primary dense forest, climax secondary forest, secondary forest (which has not reached climax) and other mixed vegetation. These four areas include 14 centres of endemic plant species within the Upper

Guinea Hotspot. The Mount Nimba, Cestos-Senkwen River Shed, Lofa-Mano and Sapo National Park areas too contain many endemic species.

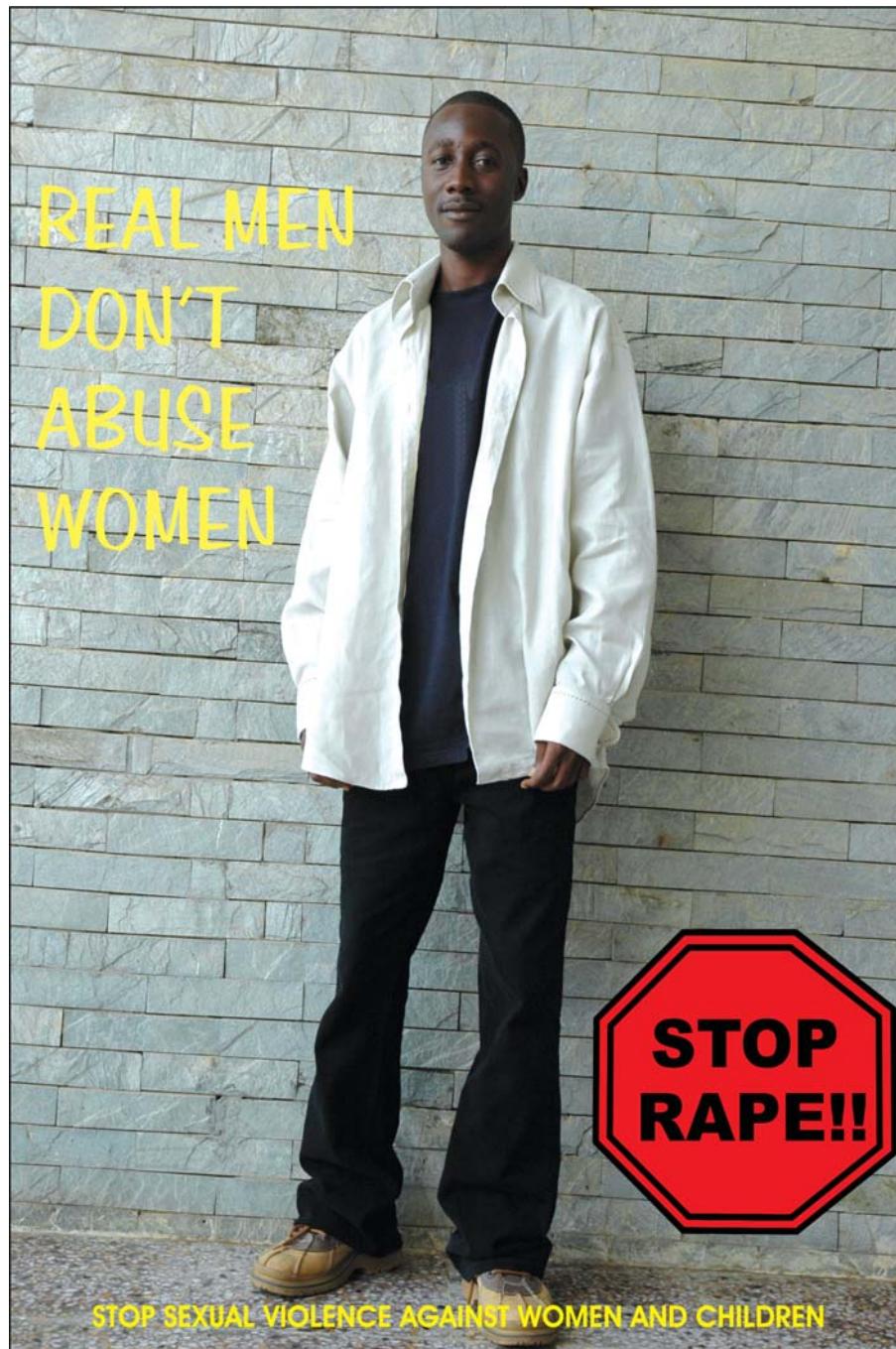
The FDA's agenda is to pursue forestry development in line with international standards to allow Liberians reap the benefits of their forest resources (prior to the war Liberia's forests accounted for 8 per cent of the GDP and was the third foreign exchange earner). Achieving this requires a recognized and restructured forest administration capable of managing and conserving the nation's forest, wildlife and related resources. Towards this end, the FAO approved a project under its Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP), in May 2001 entitled, "Strengthening the FDA and Developing a National Forest Programme (NFP)".

The recent National Consultative Workshop on Liberia's Forest Policy was part of the NFP process aimed at bringing out a new forest policy, which would provide Liberia a global framework to address forestry issues within the context of sustainable development. Four thematic groups and a NFP Steering Committee, including national and international experts, drafted the policy which was discussed at length by various stakeholders during the workshop. The draft forest policy will be finalized and submitted to the national legislature for enactment.♦

The writer is a public Relations Officer with FAO

Addressing Se

By Ashim Choudhury



A poster developed by the UNMIL Public Information Office

SGBV or Sexual Gender Based Violence is a phenomenon not uncommon to many societies across the world. But their incidence rapidly rises in societies prone to violence. During the 14 years of civil conflicts in Liberia, many women and girls suffered various types of violence. They included sexual abuse, mass rape, sexual slavery, enforced sex in exchange for food and survival and unwanted pregnancies after rape. The after-effects of sexual gender based violence are serious and many, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like gonorrhea or syphilis, stigma and discrimination.

All 412 respondents had been victims of one or more acts of sexual violence. "Look at me, I lost my dignity, I lost my marriage and I lost my womanhood. Do you understand what I am going through? I lost all that I ever owned, and worked for."

To address the extent of SGBV in Liberia, the World Health Organisation (WHO), in collaboration with the Ministry of Health/Social Welfare (MOH/SW), conducted a rapid assessment in September 2004. The study covered the country's two most populous counties, Montserrado and Bong, and was carried out in several communities, including camps for the internally displaced. A major objective was to identify the needs of select health facilities so that they could adequately respond to the physical and psychological consequences of SGBV. Some 412 respondents with a mean age of 30.5 years were covered. The study came up with some shocking revelations.

Sexual Violence

All 412 respondents had been victims of one or more acts of sexual violence. While some three quarters of the victims were between 18 and 45 years, nearly one-fifth (18.2%) were below the age of 18. Rape at such a premature age can lead to tearing and scarring of vaginal walls, permanently damaging the reproductive health of the victim. Consequences could include infertility or ectopic pregnancy.

Nearly 80 per cent of the respondents were raped, and some 21 different acts of violence were inflicted. Over half of them were physically assaulted or threatened with a weapon (71%). Again, more than half the respondents said they were forced to watch others being physically (63%) or sexually (50%) assaulted to make them submit to rape or other forms of sexual abuse. Nearly 61 per cent of the victims reported being deprived of food, water or sleep to make them give in. Over a quarter of the respondents were also penetrated with an object. The severity of the sexual violence was not surprising considering that some 90 percent of the perpetrators were from the fighting forces.

Nearly half the victims (43%) were raped by more than two assailants. Survivors found gang rape to be most traumatic and humiliating. In some instances, two or even three assailants raped the victim simultaneously. A survivor said, "I was suffocating.... It was nauseating I still feel as if something is in my throat."

The consequences suffered by the victims were mainly in the nature of physical health, psychological/mental health and socio-economic stress. Some 94 per cent of the respondents suffered one or more physical signs of rape or other SGBV. The physical health consequences were predominantly sexually transmitted infections with severe symptoms such as genital ulcers, genital discharges, fistulae and lower abdominal pains.

All respondents suffered one or more psychological disturbance and the severity of the problem was proportional to the

number of encounters and the length of time suffered. The psychological/mental health consequences included a feeling of humiliation, loss of self-esteem, melancholia and an aversion to sex. This often resulted in insomnia and nightmares. Nearly a quarter (24%) of the SGBV victims suffered depression. One of the survivors said, "Look at me, I lost my dignity, I lost my marriage and I lost my womanhood. Do you understand what I am going through? I lost all that I ever owned, and worked for."

All respondents suffered one or more psychological disturbances and the severity of the problem was proportional to the number of encounters.

The predominant social and economic consequences of rape were stigmatization, high divorce rate, unwanted pregnancy and poverty. Of the 412 respondents, 55 became pregnant as a result of rape. Over half of them terminated the unwanted pregnancy. But of those who did not, nearly 15 percent had still births, which in itself is a highly traumatic and stressful experience.

The affected victims could have coped better with medical or professional counseling. However, many of them did not seek assistance because they had limited access due to poverty. Moreover, nearly three quarters of the victims felt humiliated to go to a doctor and were afraid of possible stigmatization. In many cases the health facilities assessed were not sufficiently equipped and lacked drugs, medical supplies and trained personnel in clinical and psychological management of SGBV survivors.♦

With input from Musu Duworko

WHO Support

WHO's involvement mainly lies in addressing the physical and psychological health consequences of SGBV. It is providing support to the Government of Liberia in the following areas:

- Establishment of a database on the extent of the problem in at least two densely populated counties of Liberia representing all ethnic groups in the country.
- Development of protocols, guidelines, medical history and examination forms, monthly reporting form for monitoring and surveillance of SGBV and other tools.
- Establishing partnership with police, lawyers, especially the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia, civil society groups, including community-based organizations and the media.
- Training of health workers in the clinical management of SGBV survivors.
- Provision of basic equipment, drugs and supplies to health facilities to strengthen the management and care of SGBV survivors.
- Training of trainers' workshop, to have a core of trainers who would train others at the county and community levels.
- Support for advocacy and awareness creation on SGBV to sensitize and empower communities to protect themselves against SGBV.
- Support in collaboration with other partners, support the development of a national SGBV Plan of Action.

Campaign Launched

On 6 July, UNMIL, in collaboration with UN Agencies, NGOs and the Ministry of Gender and Development, launched a nationwide campaign against SGBV. Meanwhile, moves are afoot to set up fast-track-courts to dispense swift justice in matters of Sexual Gender Based Violence.



Gen. Abdulsalam Abubakar with the Panel members

The TRC is Born

By Alexander Loden

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has come a long way since the idea was first mooted during the Accra peace negotiations in June 2003. As part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the warring factions agreed to establish the TRC to create a stabilising influence on Liberia during its period of transition. Without it, it was thought that the culture of impunity, which is sadly so prevalent in Liberia, would persist. Furthermore, by forgetting the mistakes of the past, Liberians might be doomed to repeat them.

The decision has not been without controversy. There are those who feel that the TRC would lead to prosecutions and further destabilisation. There are yet others who think, it was not necessary to rake up painful memories of the past. But after widespread consultations with civil society, negotiations with the Executive Mansion, hearings before the Peace and

Reconciliation Committee at the National Transitional Legislative Assembly and, finally, a vote on the floor of the Assembly the TRC Act, the enabling legislation for the Commission to begin its work, was passed on 9 June.

For those who believe in the universality of human rights and the need to combat impunity, there is much to celebrate.

The selection process will be complex and politically challenging as members of the panel are expected to be impartial and ensure only the best candidates are selected.

The TRC may not be a welcome development for those who have systematically violated the human rights of the Liberian people. It is, however, important to remember that the TRC is not a court, although it will have the power to subpoe-

na witnesses and grant amnesty for those who have made full disclosure and have expressed remorse. In its final report, the Commission will make recommendations for prosecution of those whom it considers most responsible for atrocities committed during the war. It will then be for the democratically elected Government to decide if it wishes to place these people on trial. But, as its name suggests, the TRC will largely seek the truth as the basis for asking the people of Liberia to reconcile. It is a crucial part of the post-conflict peace building process that is taking place in Liberia.

Now that the TRC Act is passed, the next step is the appointment of its Commissioners. Whilst NTGL Chairman Charles Gyude Bryant initially appointed nine Commissioners a year ago by executive fiat, it was felt by many in civil society and the international community that if the TRC was to have legitimacy, its Commissioners needed to be appointed in a transparent manner that involved widespread consultation. To this end, the TRC

Act provides for an extensive selection and vetting process. The selection panel will be chaired by ECOWAS and comprise seven individuals of integrity. There will be three representatives from civil society, two from political parties, one from the United Nations, while the ECOWAS Ambassador will be the chairperson.

The original nine Commissioners will be interviewed and vetted by the selection panel. Some may be selected, some may not. To fill the remaining places on the Commission, the selection panel will prepare a list of 15 further candidates whom they consider to be of high integrity and having the commitment to working in furtherance of the Commission's mandate. The Chairman of the National Transitional Legislative Government will then choose from this short list of 15 to fill the remaining positions.

Liberia may be a very different country in 2008 and many hope that the TRC will play a part in this transformation.

The selection process will be complex and politically challenging as members of the panel are expected to be impartial and ensure only the best candidates are selected. The Commissioners will be the foundation upon which the Commission stands or falls.

A three-month preparatory period will follow the selection of Commissioners, with technical assistance from the United Nations, to raise the necessary funds from donors and undertake their task. A small donor's conference in Accra is envisaged, possibly in September. During this time, key staff members are expected to join the TRC and begin preparing for its activities.

During the consultations stage, the TRC Act was informed by the experience of other such Commissions, particularly the TRC of Sierra Leone. It was pointed out that the Sierra Leone TRC had to finish its entire work in less than 18 months.

This was found in practice to be insufficient and the Commission had to struggle to complete its activities within the time specified. The Liberian TRC Act avoided

this constraint by allowing two years for the Commission to conduct its activities and a further three months to round it up. Furthermore, should the Commission wish to do so, it may apply to the national legislature to extend its mandate for another three months, in realization of the fact that the logistical requirements of conducting hearings in the interior are considerable and require much planning. In addition, compiling a report that covers a period of at least 25 years is no small feat and, therefore, it was felt prudent to allow the TRC more time to do its work.

Thus, the TRC is likely to run for at least two and a half years from the passage of the TRC Act, to the completion of its final report. This means that what is put in motion now will be completed at the earliest by March 2008. This will be well after a fully democratic Government has assumed power. Liberia may be a very different country in 2008 and many hope that the TRC will play a part in this transformation. It may not, however, be an easy process. Through its investigations, the TRC may uncover some unsavoury truths about the conflict in Liberia and those responsible for it. Political interest groups

may seek to derail the process, fearful of what the TRC may report and whom it may name. However, it is important that the TRC fulfils its appointed task as it is a cornerstone of the peace-building process in Liberia.♦



**Una Kumba Thompson,
a panelist of the TRC**

TRC Gets Selection Panel

Liberia's healing process moved another step forward as the Selection Panel for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was inaugurated on 14 July to start the vetting process to select the nine commissioners.

The seven-member Panel, headed by Special Representative of the Executive Secretary of ECOWAS Asumana E. Ceesay, comprises representatives of civil society, political parties and the international community. Dorota Gierycz, Head, UNMIL Human Rights and Protection Section, also serves as a member. The Panel is expected to select nine Commissioners, including at least four females, within three months of enactment of the TRC law, by 8 September.

Speaking at the inauguration, Gen. Abdulsalami A. Abubakar, former President of Nigeria, who mediated the

Liberian peace process, said the inauguration of the Selection Panel was a big step forward in realizing Liberia's true reconciliation. "The establishment of TRC will provide a forum to address the issue of impunity and national reconciliation," he said, adding that Liberia can start a healing process from the 14-year civil war and restore peace and stability through the TRC.

One of the panelists, Una Kumba Thompson, said the TRC is an opportunity for Liberians to make a difference and build a better future. "TRC will help heal the wounds and help us recognize our own wrongdoings to confess the truth," she said. "We must embrace this process; own this process for our future generations."

Yuko Maeda

Establishing the rule of law and creating a credible judicial system are fundamental to rebuilding a peaceful nation, said UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour, concluding a five-day visit to Liberia in early July. Her trip was part of a 10-day tour to three West African countries, including Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone, to assess the post-conflict human rights situation.

"The challenges Liberia faces are two-fold: institution-building and changing attitude," said Arbour at a press conference in UNMIL headquarters on 13 July. "Without the rule of law, no progress can



Louise Arbour with Abou Moussa

Establish Rule of Law ARBOUR URGES LIBERIA

be made. ... Rebuilding the judicial system is the most important initiative for the peace-building effort."

Arbour arrived in Liberia on 9 July to assess efforts in building effective systems of human rights protection. During her stay, she met with Liberia's top officials, including Charles Gyude Bryant, Chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia, Supreme Court Chief Justice Henry Reed Cooper and National Elections Commission's Chair Francis Johnson-Morris. She also met with members of the diplomatic corps, NGO representatives working on human rights, and UNMIL senior officials notably Officer-in-Charge Abou Moussa, to receive feedback on Liberia's pressing rights situation.

Speaking to reporters, Arbour acknowledged the tremendous progress Liberia has made since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in August 2003, and congratulated Liberians "who have demonstrated enormous resilience in their determination to live in peace." However, she said Liberia's dysfunctional judicial system hindered the country's further progress and slows the creation of a credible human rights environment.

Stressing that rule of law was "not a luxury but a precondition to peace and stability," she called for judicial reforms aimed at establishing an independent and professional judiciary.

In Liberia, only 18 of the 52 serving judges hold law degrees and almost all Magistrates lack any formal legal training. The current judicial system also suffers from executive interference, rampant corruption, abuse of power by authorities and a culture of impunity. "Liberia's human rights crisis lies in the weakness of law enforcement and lack of judicial capacity. ...Without an independent judicial system, no human rights culture will take root," she emphasized.

During her stay, Arbour also made a trip to the Guthrie Rubber Plantation in Bomi County, one of Liberia's major rubber plantations illegally occupied by ex-combatants. The plantation faces grave human rights violations compounded by gross exploitation of natural resources, harsh labour conditions and tensions between civilian labourers and ex-fighters. The High Commissioner spent a full hour listening to the plight of former soldiers and civilian tappers who pleaded for security improvement, better education and

health facilities, and adequate vocational training to improve their living standards.

"In the long run, the Government has to take measures to tackle the exploitation of natural resources, collect revenues from the resources and provide a fair distribution of wealth," she said at the press conference when asked about the issues she learned at the plantation. "You need a respectful mechanism to resolve the dispute and create a legitimate employment system."

Arbour became the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in July 2004 after serving at the Supreme Court of Canada. She also served as Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda from 1996 to 2000.

Before departing Liberia, Arbour applauded the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Independent National Commission on Human Rights. Stressing the importance of public confidence in selecting Commissioners, she urged that the selection process be transparent and adequate female commissioners be selected to address issues among the most vulnerable during the civil conflict.♦

Mending Broken Dreams

The only public elementary school in Buanplay, a village of about 1,400 people in Liberia's Nimba County, is falling apart. The walls and ceilings of the tiny school have huge gashes. With nobody paying attention to the school as Liberia's civil war raged for nearly one and a half decades, the building has been reduced to a shell. The Buanplay elementary school is not an exception -- most schools in Liberia have succumbed to the ravages of war and need urgent rehabilitation.

However, as peace returns to Liberia with the end of the civil war more than two years ago, communities across the country are determined to reopen their schools. In Buanplay, every farm family is contributing to a community development initiative -- the construction of a new school building. The families have come together to devote several hours every week to making cinder blocks, which will be used to build the new school.

"Liberia is being revitalized more and more each day as peace becomes a reality, and after 14 years of war, if there's a people who deserve peace and reconstruction, it is Liberians," says Angela Kearney, Representative of UNICEF Liberia, which is lending a helping hand in revitalizing the country's educational institutions. "It's heartwarming to work with communities like Buanplay who, though desperately poor, are pooling their resources together to put their children first."

UNICEF is providing teaching and learning materials to schools across the country. In Nimba County, UNICEF recently completed the distribution of educational supplies to over 200,000 students from over 500 schools in addition to nearly 2,000 'School-in-the-Box' kits. Each kit contains supplies and teaching equipment for as many as 80 students, including writing slates, teaching lessons, pencils, chalk, and educational posters.

UNICEF began distributing these kits in 2003 under the Back-to-School programme, a partnership with Liberia's

Ministry of Education, aimed at jumpstarting the country's educational system. The programme includes teacher training, distribution of educational supplies, and provision of safe drinking water and sanitation services to schools. Since August 2003, UNICEF Liberia has helped more than one million children go to primary school.

"The needs continue to be enormous especially as IDP and refugee populations return home in large numbers, creating an



Samuel W. Johnson/UNICEF

urgent need for schools," said UNICEF Liberia's Education Project Officer Thomas Shafer. Illiteracy levels continue to hover around 70 per cent, and only one third of primary school students reach Grade Five. With only 12 per cent of Liberian girls graduating from secondary schools, support is urgently needed for the Girls' Education Programme initiated by UNICEF.

One response from UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education in training about 400 female teachers to complete

their primary school teaching credential. This credential, condensed into 10 weeks from its traditional one-year length, offers student-centred learning approaches and the opportunity to increase the quality of primary education. UNICEF aims to train 800 female teachers this year.

There is a huge demand for schooling across Liberia. The official age for primary and secondary school is 5-24 years. From the Rapid Assessment of Learning Space (RALS) conducted by UNICEF, the Ministry of Education, and implementing NGO partners in 2004, the total student population in Liberia was found to be 1,007,784 (47% females). It costs parents an average of 2,500 LD (nearly US\$44) for uniforms and fees to enroll their children in government primary schools, and about 4,000 LD (US\$70) in other primary schools run mainly by religious institutions.

"Truly, the needs are huge. UNICEF is supporting the Ministry of Education to address the needs of the estimated 500,000 children -- approximately half of the total student population -- that had significant interruptions in their education because of armed conflict and are now too old for their school grade," explains Shafer. For these children to catch up, UNICEF has helped launch the Accelerated Learning Programme (ALP).

ALP condenses six years of primary schooling into three years of intensive activities, enabling children and youth make up for lost educational years. UNICEF is presently supporting the Ministry of Education to implement ALP in 115 community schools in eight counties. "ALP strives for gender equality and offers a golden opportunity to rapidly impact on Liberia's high illiteracy rates and low primary school completion figures," Shafer says.

With more and more ALP schools opening across the country, thousands of Liberian children, who were deprived of schooling, now have a chance to realize their right to education. For many, it is an opportunity to mend their broken dreams, too.♦

The "WINGS"



of UNMIL Ukrainian Aviation Unit

By Ashim Choudhury

If you are a frequent flyer within Liberia and commute often from Monrovia or other towns, you cannot but miss the efficiency of the UNMIL flying machines. Agreed, the helicopters are no luxury planes like the commercial airlines. But they fly you in and out of Spriggs Payne Airfield with amazing regularity, and in safety. If there is anybody to thank for our safe landings, it is the Ukrainians (apart from the Russians, the other people who fly us around). Both flyers do not speak any English and they look alike. What distinguishes the two 'siblings' are their uniforms. The civilian Russian crew wears the white shirt-black trouser uniform, whereas the Ukrainians wear military fatigues.

Ukrainians began their first peace-keeping operation in 1992, a year after their independence from the USSR. They arrived in Liberia in January 2004, and had till the end of June flown 9,000 sorties with a total of 8,500 flying hours! They

have handled 33,000 passengers and 900 tons of cargo. And if that does not impress you, all this movement has been accident-free. What keeps the Ukrainians 'flying fit' despite Liberia's relatively hot weather, forcing the cold climbers to often take off their shirts? Lt. Col. Yuriy Verbelchuk, the affable Ukrainian Aviation Unit (UAU) commander, says, "The more we fly the more experienced we become.

Of its 300 personnel, 47 are pilots and some 75 are engineers and technicians. To communicate with the 'outside' world, the UAU has 20 interpreters.

Most of my men are in Africa for the third or fourth time. We were also in Kosovo." He admits, though, that the Liberian skies, like that of Sierra Leone, where they worked before, are a little tougher "particularly in the rainy season."

The UAU has a fleet of 14 helicopters,

six of which are the Mi-24 combat gunships and eight Mi-8 multipurpose helicopters for transportation, border observations and occasional medical evacuation. Of its 300 personnel, 47 are pilots and some 75 are engineers and technicians. To communicate with the 'outside' world, the UAU has 20 interpreters. Each helicopter flight has on board one interpreter, apart from the pilot, navigator and the flight engineer. Despite the language barrier, they have done well in collaborating with other contingents. Like all engineering work on the helipad and access roads were done under joint supervision with the Pakistanis.

The unit also has a medical team with seven doctors to keep its personnel 'flying fit'. In case of medical emergencies, the unit can recondition a helicopter into a 'flying ambulance' within 30 minutes. Lt. Col. Alexander Shirokopoyas, one of their pilots, recalls how last year he rescued two pregnant women by air-lifting them to Monrovia for an emergency. But the highlight of the Ukrainian rescue effort was when they saved a Liberian who had fall-

en in the dam off the Firestone rubber plantation on 14 December 2004. The man was first reported to the Ukrainian Air Ops Centre by a Czech military policeman.

It took over 45 minutes before the Search and Rescue helicopter could locate the man and haul him up from the river by a winch. "He was cold, precariously clinging to the branch of a tree," recalls one of the officers. If it was not for their quick-response operation, the man would, in all probability, be dead. Two more Liberians owe their lives to the Ukrainians. The latter rescued two fishermen in the same dam area when their boat capsized in August 2004. The UAU Press Officer, Major Yuri

Lavrov, proudly displays local media clippings, commanding the Ukrainians on their heroic effort.

It's probably their duty and dedication, more than anything else, that contributes to flight safety in the mission area.

About the safety of the flying machines, Commander Verbelchuk asserts, "We have the best engineers."

In the operations area at Roberts International Airport, we see Ukrainian

engineers and technicians attending routine checks to the helicopters to the ground. Come rain or shine, they overhaul the helicopters and attend to the minutest technical problems. It is probably their duty and dedication, more than anything else, that contributes to flight safety in the mission area. Lt. Col. Mischenko Vasiliy, the Chief of Maintenance and Aviation Engineering, looking up from a fault repair, says, "We have more helicopters here, more air tasks than we had in Sierra Leone..... It's a huge responsibility." When one raises questions about the safety of his helicopters, he says with a laugh, "It's more dangerous in your car than on my helicopter!"•

RESCUE ON THE RIVER

Meeting emergency situations is not something the UAU leaves to chance. To keep its pilots and other crew members in top readiness for rescue operations, the UAU recently conducted a sea-rescue operation exer-

cise off Camp Clara near Hotel Africa. The task was to rescue two fishermen from a boat on St. Paul's river. While two Mi-24 combat guns ships circled the sky at 200 meters, providing security cover, an Mi-8 rescue helicopter hovered over the

marooned boatmen at 100 meters to drop them a rope-ladder. On the ground, the UAU Commander himself was leading from the river front, giving orders directly to the 'rescue' pilots. "It was difficult, the boat kept flying away," veteran Pilot Youri Ruschak conceded after he successfully accomplished the first mission.

The task at hand was indeed not an easy one. As the rescue helicopter hovered over the boat, the latter kept drifting away because of the strong winds unleashed by the rotor blades. So the helicopter had to be aligned keeping in view the wind factor. It was only after several aborted attempts that the marooned men could get hold of the rope ladder signalling the mission's success. Two rescue sorties were conducted with two different crew members. While all this happened, Press Officer Major Lavrov kept shooting the event on a video camera. "We will use this footage to develop a sea-rescue training film for other pilots and crew members," he said. More such live exercises would be conducted in the future. So next time you are in a crisis, remember the Ukrainians!



LIBERIANS “What Kind of Leader”



William Jarwood

“I don’t know now, but through the mercy of God, we will be able to decide. I want a leader who will take our country out of this quagmire and move this country forward.”



Marves Soko Sirleaf

“I would like a credible leader, someone who will care for us, someone with a clean character. I see a whole lot of candidates around and I’m still checking to see that person whom I will cast my vote for, because I don’t want us to come back to square one.”



Jeremiah Sammie

“I want an honest president; someone who will deliver on his promises. In the past, this has been our problem. Dishonesty is very prevalent in this country. My first pillar of a good leader would be an honest leader. I would like to see someone who will stand for what s/he says, someone who will live up to their platform and someone who will live up to the dictates of a good leader.”



Stephen Loyah

“I would like to see a fair, transparent and truthful leader. These people have failed us. I would like to see a good leader and an uncorrupt person.”



Cecelia Gould

“I want a leader who will have the country at heart as it relates to development, health and education. We would want a leader who will provide us the basic social services.”



Koffa M. Nagbe

“I would like to see a visionary, a unifier, a man who will not just only care for himself, but for the people. We’ve had leaders that were very selfish. They cared for themselves and not for the nation. They came with political platitudes, saying that it’s in the interest of the people they want to represent, and when they are elected, they do otherwise. So, we Liberians need to take the cue from all past presidents, including the recent ones.”



Paye Me Weah

“Quite frankly, I don’t see anyone who really has the country at heart. All of those contesting the presidency and other elected positions are doing so for selfish gains. For me, I would want a transitional government with an international participation that will put things in place before we have an election in this country.”



Gernai Lieyor

“I want to see a leader who will have interest in education and development in the country. I don’t want to see a leader who would want to be elected to get himself enriched; but will be interested in the reconstruction and development of the country. We are looking for a leader who will prioritize education also.”



Kotna Smith

“I would want to see a good leader who will be able to satisfy Liberia’s needs and wants. Right now, government schools are in a precarious condition, with no teachers, no armchairs.”

SPEAK Would You Vote For?"



Washington Monjolo

“For me, I don’t see anyone capable to take care of this country now. I support the view that international civil servants assist in running the country until such time when Liberians have learnt to manage properly resources of this country for the common good of all Liberians.”



Rev. Isaac J. W. Tarpeh, Sr

“This country is too small for the number of people that have decided to be president. So we are kind of confused and don’t even know who to choose, and at the end, we might choose the wrong one. Elections are good, yes, but not at this particular time. For me, I would want the United Nations to bring someone to oversee this country for six years until we can put our house in order, then we have elections.”



Dennis E. Karpeh

“I would like to see a good leader who will have the interest of the country at heart, who will have feeling for the common man.”



Monzu Karngar

“I would be voting for a good leader, a caring leader. I would like a leader who will reconstruct this country, rehabilitate our schools, roads, hospitals and provide basic social services for the country.”



Emmanuel Benson

“I want someone who is god-fearing to lead us so that the country is transformed and would grant us better opportunities to live decently.”



Lisa Siebo

“We need a competent leader. We need a leader that will have the people at heart, a leader that will revive our economy. We need a leader that will invest in the youth’s education.”



Akai Awuletey

“I want to see a leader that will have the country at heart and will move the country forward. I want to see a leader that will have interest in youth education and development. I would like to see a leader that will focus on reuniting and reconciling our people.”



Olive Y. Taikerwayah

“I would vote for a leader who will bring total peace and unity to this country. I’m not going to be moved by material things because the future of this country lies in the hands of the electorate. I will not vote for someone who will lead us to our detriment.”



Sekou Sesay

“I’m not enthusiastic about the elections this year. For me, there are no credible candidates I see. I would prefer the international community, in partnership with credible Liberians, run this country for about five to six years and revive our basic social services and our economy before we conduct an election.”

Disarmament with Development

Linking disarmament with community development, the United Nations Development Programme is launching a new initiative to create a gun-free Liberia, a UNDP disarmament expert said early May.

Napoleon Abdulai told reporters at a press briefing held at the UN Mission in Liberia that his organization will soon kick off a one-year pilot programme of community-based small arms control projects. In this initiative, a national small arms control and micro disarmament committee will be formed to design a strategic plan to raise public awareness on the issue and set up a mechanism to help develop communities in exchange for turning arms. "We'd like to curb a systematic flow of small arms and light weapons," Abdulai said.

Liberia completed its demobilisation and disarmament process last year, collecting nearly 30,000 weapons and 6.5 million small arms, and disarming over 100,000 combatants. Still, small arms and light weapons circulate in the society.

Unlike the Disarmament Demobilization Rehabilitation and

Reintegration (DDR) programme which encouraged individual combatants to turn in their weapons in exchange for financial and vocational assistance, the new initiative involves the community as a whole. According to a preliminary plan, a community itself helps disarm its members while becoming a recipient for "rewards" to develop common assets such as health clinics, schools and wells based on the community needs. In this scheme, various UN and international agencies as well as local NGOs will work closely with community-based disarmament committees. "Every community wants to develop; every community wants to secure their neighbourhood, which is free of guns," Abdulai said. "We've got extensive experience (in community-based disarmament) in other countries. We believe the programme will work in Liberia."

Similar programmes are now taking place in neighbouring Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire. After the pilot phase, UNDP plans to extend the programme country-wide for a five-year period.♦

Y. M.



Chipping in for Law School



Ashim Choudhury

Alfred Fofie (L) David A. B. Jallah

It was a hot, grimy morning on 20 May, but no one at the Louis Arthur Grimes School of Law in the University of Liberia was complaining about the weather. In fact, they were happy as a UN truck unloaded an array of items, including law books, computers and manuals. The law books were donated by law students of the University of Suffolk Law School, Boston, USA and Lexis Nexis through Lawyers Without Borders, USA. Computers and accessories were donated by Lawyers Without Borders and Messrs. Okuyama San, through Sasha Toperic, the renowned pianist. In addition to the in-kind gifts, US\$25,000 was also raised by a charity concert in Monrovia conducted by Toperic in December last year.

The donation was facilitated by the Legal and Judicial System Support Division of UNMIL. Speaking on the occasion, the Division's Director, Dr. Alfred Fofie said, "We at UNMIL are committed to assisting in restoring the reputation of the Law school to its former glory." The donation is yet another example of UNMIL's efforts to rehabilitate the legal and judicial system in Liberia and to promote rule of law in the country. The Dean of the Law School, Cllr. David A.B Jallah, fondly remembered the efforts of former SRSG Jacques Paul Klein, saying, "Without his efforts, this would not have been possible." The President of the University of Liberia was also present on the occasion.♦

A. C.

UNMIL Mandate

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) was established by Security Council resolution 1509 of 19 September 2003 with the following mandate:

Support for Implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement

- to observe and monitor the implementation of the ceasefire agreement and investigate violations of the ceasefire;
- to establish and maintain continuous liaison with the field headquarters of all the parties' military forces;
- to assist in the development of cantonment sites and to provide security at these sites;
- to observe and monitor disengagement and cantonment of military forces of all the parties;
- to support the work of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC);
- to develop, as soon as possible, preferably within 30 days of the adoption of this resolution, in cooperation with the JMC, relevant international financial institutions, international development organizations, and donor nations, an action plan for the overall implementation of a disarmament, demobilization, reintegration, and repatriation (DDRR) programme for all armed parties; with particular attention to the special needs of child combatants and women; and addressing the inclusion of non-Liberian combatants;
- to carry out voluntary disarmament and to collect and destroy weapons and ammunition as part of an organized DDRR programme;
- to liaise with the JMC and to advise on the implementation of its functions under the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the ceasefire agreement;
- to provide security at key government installations, in particular ports, airports, and other vital infrastructure;

Protection of United Nations Staff, Facilities and Civilians

- to protect United Nations personnel, facilities, installations and equipment, ensure the security and freedom of movement of its personnel and, without prejudice to the efforts of the government, to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, within its capabilities;

Support for Humanitarian and Human Rights Assistance

- to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance, including by helping to establish the necessary security conditions;
- to contribute toward international efforts to protect and promote human rights in Liberia, with particular attention to vulnerable groups including refugees, returning refugees and internally displaced persons, women, children, and demobilized child soldiers, within UNMIL's capabilities and under acceptable security conditions, in close cooperation with other United Nations agencies, related organizations, governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations;
- to ensure an adequate human rights presence, capacity and expertise within UNMIL to carry out human rights promotion, protection, and monitoring activities;

Support for Security Reform

- to assist the transitional government of Liberia in monitoring and restructuring the police force of Liberia, consistent with democratic policing, to develop a civilian police training programme, and to otherwise assist in the training of civilian police, in cooperation with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), international organizations, and interested States;
- to assist the transitional government in the formation of a new and restructured Liberian military in cooperation with ECOWAS, international organizations and interested States;

Support for Implementation of the Peace Process

- to assist the transitional government, in conjunction with ECOWAS and other international partners, in reestablishment of national authority throughout the country, including the establishment of a functioning administrative structure at both the national and local levels;
- to assist the transitional government in conjunction with ECOWAS and other international partners in developing a strategy to consolidate governmental institutions, including a national legal framework and judicial and correctional institutions;
- to assist the transitional government in restoring proper administration of natural resources; to assist the transitional government, in conjunction with ECOWAS and other international partners, in preparing for national elections scheduled for no later than the end of 2005.





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