

UNMIL FOCUS



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Liberia Gets Set For Elections

Refugee Returns Continue

Military Doctors Reach Out

Farewell Message from the Outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General



On Sunday, the 1st of May, I shall depart Liberia to return to the United States of America, and leave my post as head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia.

It has been an honour and a privilege to have played a part in the establishment of this Peacekeeping Mission, and to have helped in bringing Liberia out of conflict, and step by step, onto the path toward peace and prosperity.

UNMIL today includes civilians, international police officers and 15,000 peacekeepers from almost 50 countries. This is the largest peacekeeping mission in the world. Liberians know the difference the presence of these peacekeepers has made.

The United Nations came here to help a small country to finally escape the violence of 14 years of war and increasing and desperate poverty. There were failed efforts, failed elections, and broken agreements, along the way. But today I believe that I can say that UNMIL is succeeding, and this peace is holding.

Our work together – The UN, other agencies of the international community, the transitional government, local civic organizations – has had only one goal: to ensure that Liberia rises from the ashes and regains its place in the family of nations. And as peace is restored, as we prepare for the October elections, the responsibility for meeting that important challenge will fall more and more – upon Liberians themselves.

This country is immensely rich. It is rich not only in gold, diamonds and timber, about which we hear so much. The main resource of Liberia is its people. Investing in people – in their education, health, culture, standard of living – always carries the promise of the greatest benefit for the state which is wise enough to make such an investment.

Emerging from so much conflict and bloodshed, the task of investing in the people of Liberia will not be easy. Schools that have been closed for so

long are only now reopening. Education must be open to all, from children to adults. Training and the opportunity of skilled jobs must be sought for all Liberians, men and women, returning displaced persons, victims of the war and ex combatants themselves. Nutrition, health care and the prevention of diseases such as malaria and polio will ensure that the children of Liberia can lead long healthy and productive lives.

Liberia must now rely on its people to learn how to work together to rebuild and to make better this great nation. Liberians must return home to help in this process. Liberians living in refugee camps in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire and in Ghana must return home to their communities and villages, to rejoin their country. Liberians living abroad, in the United States and in Europe – must all hear the clarion call to return and to lend a hand and help rebuild Liberia.

Step by step, we are succeeding. The next test for Liberia will be to hold fair, free and democratic elections and then will come the greatest test of them all, which is really getting everybody back to work.

Of course, our achievements will be sometimes accompanied by setbacks, and as there are always those who are quick to take credit for success, there also exists a considerable number of people equally fast and adept in finding fault with somebody else's work. It is not ultimately, the critic who counts; nor the man who points how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to those who are actually in the arena. Over the past two years, I have met many Liberians who have met that test.

Liberians like the artist Mr. Fato Wheremongar, who, by helping children to develop their creative talents, is helping to make Liberia a better place.

People like Alexander Peal, a great Liberian who, through determination and effort, helped to create Sapo National Park, Liberia's only environmental preserve and the crown jewel of

her natural heritage.

People like Leyma Gbowee, a great Liberian who heads the Women in Peace Building Network, which has been quietly and patiently working to build peace woman to woman – not only in Liberia, but across West Africa as well.

Liberians like the new recruits and graduates of the new United Nations-trained Liberian National Police Academy in Paynesville, young men and women, trained public safety officers, ready to protect and serve all Liberians.

And Liberians like the countless children that I have seen in my travels around this great country: in school, learning how to read, being fed, at play, in their homes, with their families. No longer are the children of Liberia at risk of war and conflict. These children are the future of Liberia.

To succeed in the challenge before all Liberians, it is my hope that Liberians will dedicate themselves to the ideals on which the UN was founded: faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person, the equal rights of men and women, tolerance, and living together in peace as good neighbours.

In parting, I want to thank Liberia, and all Liberians, for the friendship, support and encouragement that I have received over the past 18 months of the United Nations Mission in Liberia. Liberia will always be in my heart and in my thoughts.

I wish all Liberians success and good fortune in the years to come as you continue to work together to make this nation great. I met many fine people during my all-too-brief time here, and I am sure that I will see many of you again as we continue our respective walks through life.

God bless you all, and God bless Liberia.

Jacques Paul Klein

From the Desk of the Officer-in-Charge



As we go to press, thousands of eligible Liberians are queuing up every day at some 1,500 voter registration centres scattered across the country to register in the national elections scheduled to take place in October. This mammoth exercise, crucial to the success of the ballot, will enable Liberians choose their government democratically. A massive voter education campaign has been going on in the country since January to encourage eligible citizens to register and to exercise their right to pick leaders without fear or favour. In our cover story on the upcoming elections, we highlight the role played by the United Nations Mission in Liberia in preparation for this final political step in the peace process.

Liberian women, among the worst affected by the country's civil war and long neglected in the corridors of

power, are emerging as a political force to reckon with. They have succeeded to include in the Electoral Reform Law a provision calling for 30 per cent representation of women in the selection of candidates by political parties. Their struggle to be recognized as equal partners in shaping the country's destiny is an inspiring story we bring to you in this issue.

While the political process is well on course, the "blue helmets" deployed in the country -- often the unsung heroes of peacekeeping -- are vigorously engaged in a host of activities beyond their traditional role of maintaining peace and security. Many of the peacekeeping contingents are involved in reconstruction -- repairing roads and bridges, rehabilitating dilapidated buildings and even assisting orphanages with their donations.

But touching the lives of ordinary people more intimately is the work done by the military doctors. Through the military hospitals set up by various

contingents, these doctors have offered free treatment and surgeries to hundreds of thousands of ailing Liberians. In this issue we bring you the medical face of the peacekeepers in a country where the health sector lay in ruins due to the prolonged civil strife. We also carry a story on the efforts by the UN family in Liberia to rid the country of polio by vaccinating more than one million children.

Meanwhile, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to stream home from neighbouring countries and IDP camps within Liberia. We also bring you a story on the return of a group of Liberian ex-combatants who were interned in Sierra Leone, the first such operation undertaken by the United Nations in West Africa.

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

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

Abou Moussa

Deputy Special Representative of the
Secretary-General for Operations

Steinar Bjornsson

Chief of Public Information

Christine Koerner

Editor and Head of Publications

Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Design and Graphics

Paddy Defoxy Ilos, II

Photos

Eric Kanalstein

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Liberia Gears Up for Elections

The national elections - the final political step in the peace process - offer Liberians a window of opportunity to replace a violent contest for political power with a non-violent one and to accord popular legitimacy to government authority. The prospects of democracy, lasting peace and national reconciliation in Liberia will largely rest on the success of the forthcoming elections.

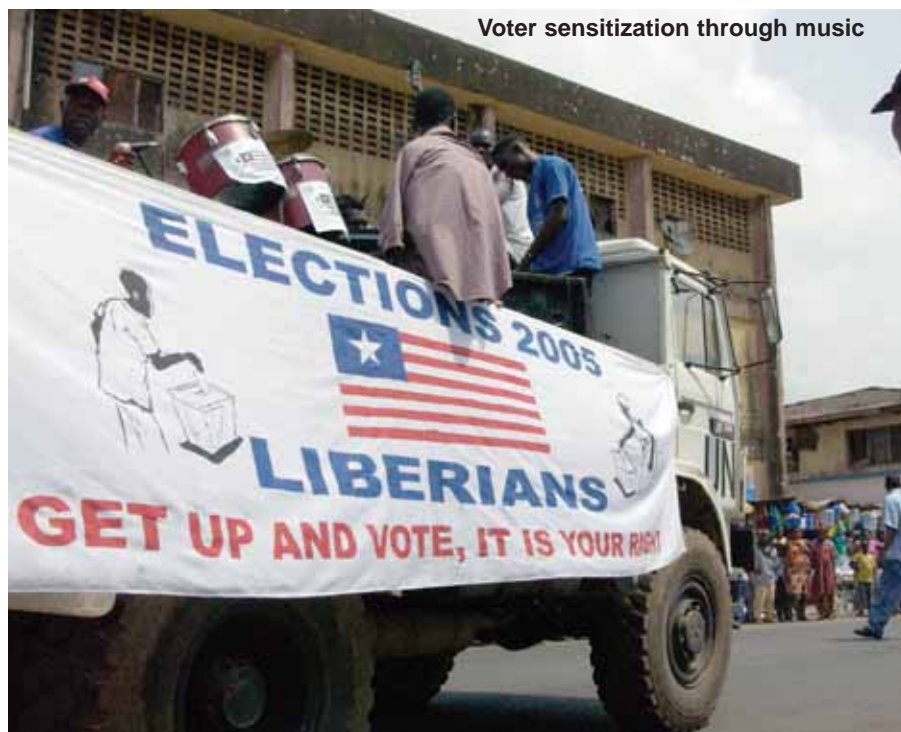
Liberians a second chance -- many say the last chance -- to choose ballot over bullet and return to the league of civilized nations after the prolonged civil war. This time around the prospects look brighter. The reasons are many.

Unlike in 1997, when the balance was tipped heavily in favour of Taylor, the 2005 elections offer political aspirants a level playing field. Members of the Transitional Government, mostly functionaries of the warring factions, are not eligible to run for political office, according to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra that led to the end of hostilities.

Over 100,000 combatants have been disarmed by the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). Many of them have joined reintegration programmes, including vocational training, agriculture and education, funded by the international community, including the UN, European Commission and the United States Agency for International Development. More programmes are in the pipeline to accommodate the remaining ex-combatants. A whopping 98 per cent of the former child soldiers have rejoined their families with the assistance of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

UNMIL has collected and destroyed over 28,000 weapons, 33,600 pieces of heavy munitions and more than 6.4 million rounds of small arms ammunition, making Liberia a largely weapons-free society today. The three warring factions, after dissolving their military outfits, have vowed not to take up arms again. Some of them have opted to join mainstream politics in line with the avenues provided in the peace deal. Liberians from all walks of life clamour for a peaceful future for their country.

The national elections - the final political step in the peace process - offer



Voter sensitization through music

By Mathew Elavanalthoduka

Come October, Liberians go to polls once again, eight years after the elections that brought Charles Taylor to power. Although imperfect in many ways, the 1997 elections, backed by the United Nations, had raised the hope of ending the brutal civil war that had ravaged the country since 1989. That hope proved to be tragically misplaced. After a

brief interlude, Liberia again plunged deeper into crisis, taking a massive toll on civilian lives and leaving the country in ruins. The bloodbath continued unabated until the UN-backed ECOWAS troops were deployed in August 2003 and Taylor had to leave for exile in Nigeria.

The forthcoming national elections, two years after peace dawned in the country following the deployment of a 15,000-strong UN peacekeeping force, offer

Liberians a window of opportunity to replace a violent contest for political power with a non-violent one and to accord popular legitimacy to government authority. The prospects of democracy, lasting peace and national reconciliation in Liberia will largely rest on the success of the forthcoming elections.

Unlike in 1997, when the balance was tipped heavily in favour of Taylor, the 2005 elections offer political aspirants a level playing field. Members of the Transitional Government, mostly functionaries of the warring factions, are not eligible to run for political office, according to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in Accra that led to the end of hostilities.

“This is a golden opportunity for Liberia to shed its violent past and embrace democracy. Investing its resources heavily in the peace process, the international community has once again intervened to assist this unfortunate country,” says Jacques Paul Klein, the outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia. “As the international community grapples with an increasing number of problems worldwide, including natural disasters such as the recent Asian tsunami, this may be Liberia’s last chance to rescue itself,” he added.

Despite the end of the civil war and the prevailing peace in the country, the challenges involved in conducting nationwide elections are formidable. By providing technical assistance and capacity building support to the National Elections Commission (NEC), responsible for organizing and conducting the polls, the United Nations family in Liberia is striving to ensure a successful culmination of the electoral process. As a Liberian-owned process, the policies, regulations and key

decisions affecting the elections are made by Liberians themselves.

With the establishment of the National Elections Commission and the approval by the Transitional Legislative Assembly of the Electoral Reform Law, the legal foundations for the electoral exercise are in place. The guidelines for the registration of political parties have been adopted and an Inter-Party Consultative Committee has been established.

The UN Mission in Liberia has hired and trained 4,000 Liberian national staff members, out of 27,000 applicants, for the voter registration process taking place from 25 April to 21 May. Approximately 1,000 registration teams, some of them mobile, are currently registering eligible Liberians aged 18 and above at 1,500 registration centres spread across the country. Internally displaced persons living in camps are allowed to register in any one of the 64 electoral districts. Some 240 international staff from UNMIL’s Electoral Division offer support to the voter registration exercise.

In December 2004, the UN Development Programme (UNDP) funded a Liberian observer mission to the Ghanaian elections, providing members of the NEC an opportunity to experience first-hand the operational and technical issues involved in planning a nationwide ballot. UNDP is also providing technical expertise in financial planning and budget development to the Elections Commission.

UNMIL is working closely with NEC to develop election messages targeting

various segments of the Liberian population, including women, youth and ex-combatants. It will provide support to the civic and voter education campaigns through its radio, video and community outreach programmes. Scores of print and broadcast journalists have already benefited from UNMIL’s media development training programmes specifically tailored to the elections.

The 15,000 international peacekeepers deployed in the country will play a major role in supporting the electoral process by providing security and offering logistical support. With support from UNMIL’s international civilian police, almost 2,000 UN-trained Liberian police officers will supplement the peacekeepers in ensuring a secure atmosphere during the elections. They will have full responsibility for the immediate security around registration centres and polling stations.

Some 18,000 Liberians, hired and trained by UNMIL as polling staff, will assist the voting exercise on polling day when eligible voters will cast their ballots to choose a President, Vice President and members of the Senate and the House of Representatives. The newly elected government will mark the end of the current transitional arrangements established by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

With a popularly elected government in place by January 2006, Africa’s oldest republic will begin a fresh chapter in its history, hopefully one that shuns violence and embraces democracy, rule of law and peaceful co-existence. ♦



By Yuko Maeda

As the countdown to the national elections begins, grass-roots information campaign on voter registration is in full swing all over the country. From street performers to community organizations to electoral officials, all those involved in this massive campaign have a single message to deliver: register to vote on election day!

Lester Varkon, Assistant Magistrate for lower Montserrado, was not worried about no one paying attention to her when she stood up on a display table clutching a flip chart at the Rally Town Market in Monrovia's downtown on a late March morning. "Once it gets started, people'll come." Curious grocery shoppers and market vendors gathered around her as she started talking about how to participate in the upcoming general elections and where to go for voter registration.

"If you're 18 years old or above, you got a right to vote," Varkon told the crowd of a dozen people, pointing out a colourful drawing in the voter education flipchart. In the picture were a blind person with a stick, a man on a wheelchair and women with children walking toward a voter registration centre. "If you want to vote, you need to register first."

As she explained every step of the election process following the nine-page flipchart, which starts with a scene of post-war poverty and ends with a picture portraying a rosy future after the elections, the crowd responded with approving nods or puzzled looks. "I don't have my passport. How can I register without it?" a vendor asked as soon as the storytelling was over. Varkon answered she could register as long as she has a birth certificate or another official document of proof. "I was born here but went to school in another country. I don't have my birth certificate. Can I still register?" a man in his early 20s cut in. Varkon persuaded him to find two witnesses who could prove he was born in Liberia.

"My ma and pa are from Nigeria. Can I still vote?" a middle-aged woman asked, apparently worried about her eligibility. Varkon said unless she could prove she holds a Liberian citizenship, she has no right to vote. The woman insisted she was

Campaign Heats Up!



People jostle for election leaflets

born and grew up in Monrovia although she has no paper to prove. Varkon told her if she could find witnesses to prove her Liberian nationality she could register. "I'm happy to know I can vote," the woman beamed afterward. Once their questions were answered, the crowd quickly dispersed and Varkon moved to another spot to repeat her storytelling with the flipchart.

It is a face-to-face civic education activity 36 electoral officers, 18 each from the National Elections Commission and the UN Mission in Liberia, and 40 newly hired national civic educators conduct

every day in all 15 counties of Liberia. The officials visit schools, churches, markets or just stand at street corners to motivate people to participate in the elections due on 11 October by registering to vote during the registration period from 25 April through 21 May.

"What we are doing is informing people about the elections and motivate them to register in a more personalized approach," said Luzerino Oliva, Civic Education Coordinator with the UNMIL Electoral Division. He said not only electoral officers but also other community groups and non-governmental organiza-

tions are working together to hit the goal of 1.5 million registered voters. "It's progressing. We're on the right track. We just need to heat up a little."

After building up a comprehensive civic/voter education campaign strategy to reach out to every eligible voter inside Liberia, the NEC together with UNMIL Electoral Division launched the election



campaign on 31 January. On that day the NEC commissioned 18 Election Magistrates and another 18 County Coordinators to start the election process at the county level, and accredited 150 community groups and organizations to carry out the voter education campaign.

At the launching ceremony, NEC Chairwoman Frances Johnson-Morris said it is crucial for the campaign operators to reach out to all the electorate, most of whom are illiterate and uninformed. "The outcome of 2005 elections will depend on how effective you can perform the duties you have volunteered for," she told the

accredited campaigners. Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General Steinar Bjornsson said UNMIL's task is to ensure that Liberia will have a good government. "This can only be possible if the civic and voter education campaign is successful."

In the civic education campaign, electoral officials encountered a growing concern over the difficulty to prove Liberian citizenship and age as the great majority of Liberians do not possess official documents due to the prolonged war. In mid-April, the NEC issued new regulations to ease potential voters' burden of proof, no longer requiring a person to present proof of eligibility—a birth certificate, a valid Liberian passport, a certificate of naturalization, or the testimony of two registered witnesses or a traditional leader—unless one's claim is questioned by a registrar at the Registration Centre.

The general elections will be for President, 30-seat Senate and 64-seat House of Representatives. It would cost US\$18 million, or US\$12 per voter

The general elections will be for President, 30-seat Senate and 64-seat House of Representatives. It would cost US\$18 million, or US\$12 per voter, most of which are funded by international donors including UNMIL which pledged US\$8.6 million. The NEC has allocated US\$2.2 million for the voter education campaign.

In addition to those accredited campaigners, UNMIL Public Information teams are also backing up the elections campaign. While UNMIL Radio carries out various programmes on voter education and airs election-related public announcements, the Community Outreach office teamed up with 12 traditional artistic groups to run road shows and street performance to reach out to all the potential voters.

About 30,000 T-shirts with apt messages will have been distributed by the end of voter registration in May in addition to 200,000 posters and 300,000 flyers passed

on to people gathering at events organized by the outreach office. During a Peace Concert in February, when top West African musicians performed for peace and reconciliation, 35,000 people received election messages.

In late March, Community Outreach kicked off the first stage of its quick impact elections sensitization campaign with the performance groups, targeting 24 densely populated communities in Monrovia, Zwedru and Gbarnga and distributing 16,000 flyers and 2,000 T-shirts.

The Musician Union of Liberia and the country's top comedian Georgio Boutini on board a truck made a stop at Matadi estate of Monrovia on 31 March, while another group, Traditional Peace Theatre, conducted a street performance in Monrovia's downtown.

"You should be a Liberian, at least 18 years old," Boutini spoke in his trademark attire of clown hat and huge card-board glasses. "I don't care if you are 200 years old or 300 years old, but you should be 18!" Laughter broke up in the crowd of locals rushing to see the comedian. As he gave educational messages on the election process with a spice of jokes, people became more relaxed and attentive. "Boutini will be our president. I'll vote for him," a woman screamed, smiling.

In the downtown performance, a singer from the Peace Theatre sang an election song in a various local languages while young women danced with upbeat drums. Once the performance was over, the audience joined a quiz on the elections process and received T-shirts when they won the quiz.

"It's a fine drama," said Moses Budu, 43, who won a T-shirt after he correctly answered questions on the election process in his Bassa language. "It's easier for everybody to understand how the elections will be held." Melton Charles agreed with him: "I feel good about it. I will tell everybody to come to register. I want to change the country. That's why I want everybody to go and vote." ♦

With Inputs from J. Wesley Washington

The Road to Election

The road conditions, particularly with the onset of rains, will be a major concern for the smooth conduct of elections.

By Ashim Choudhury

When flying over Liberia's land mass, one cannot miss the orange ribbons occasionally cutting through the green forest cover below. These are Liberia's lifelines, the roads connecting various towns and counties. From the air they look beautiful. But down there, many of them are un-negotiable, literally, even in the dry season when the going is supposed to be good.

With the beginning of voter registration for the elections, the task at hand for the 4000 electoral registration staff, who would be fanning out to the counties, is a huge one. More so, keeping in view the poor road conditions that will only get worse with the onset of rains. Sarwar Ashfaq, an UNMIL County Electoral Advisor, based in Voinjama, reflected some of the anxiety facing the electoral teams travelling to the villages. "In Lofa alone there will be 71 registration teams who would have to be visiting a total of 123 sites for registration of voters," he said. Much of the success of the voter registration and electoral process would depend on the road conditions particularly in October when the elections take place.

To see for ourselves we were on the forest road from Voinjama to the border town of Macenta in Guinea. The occasion: the first group of Liberian refugees returning from Guinea to Lofa County.

After every few hundred meters there were soft wet patches that had been 'bridged' with planks of wood keeping off the surrounding pools of water. The bridges had been recently put in place by the German NGO GTZ, UNHCR's implementing partner. Due to the precarious road conditions it took our seasoned driver over two hours to do the distance. Our fears that the wooden 'bridges' would give way, however, proved unfounded. The

convoy of trucks, on 14 February 2005, trundled past them without any major hiccup even though they had to virtually grind to a halt when negotiating the bridges.

This was the first convoy, of over a dozen trucks, carrying 141 refugees comprising 39 families and their belongings. In the days to come there would be dozens of such convoys taking the same road. Carrying refugees and IDPs to Lofa County. The question on everybody's mind was: Could the roads sustain the weight of such heavy trucks?

Two days later Voinjama's Road Committee, led by UNHCR, met at the Pakbatt II headquarters. A young Engineer from Pakbatt, which held

But then the small puddles gave way to large pools of liquid chocolate through which our car waded. At one point, trying to avoid one such pool, the car nearly skidded off the road into the forest.

responsibility for the 100 km road from Voinjama to Zorzor, briefed the meeting on the several soft patches that needed to be reinforced with gravel. "When the rains come the 'soft spots' will not be able to sustain the weight of big trucks unless reinforced with gravel," he said.

The meeting agreed to farm gravel from the rocky mountain side around Voinjama. UNHCR would supply the hammers and other equipment needed to break the rocks. WFP had already agreed to a 'food for work' arrangement to pay the labourers, 50 of whom would be supplied by Liberia Community Infrastructure Project (LCIP). The latter had already engaged workers in "brushing" either side



of the roads from Voinjama to Zorzor, to allow sunlight penetration and reduce dampening of the road.

When the road committee meeting ended that evening, they had a ready plan to fix the roads, at least the main supply route from Zorzor right up to the Guinea border. Towns like Kolahun or Vahun, close to the border with Sierra Leone, were still inaccessible, the roads probably overrun by forests and shrubs. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) was concentrating on such feeder roads connecting small towns and isolated villages. The IRC representative urged the road committee to undertake a trip to Vahun which she described as "the most backward area in Lofa County."

To get a feel of the main Voinjama - Monrovia road we took to the wheels in a cloud dust. On the way we also saw some of the LCIP workers clearing the bushes on the sides of the roads. The quality of the dirt road was fairly good, hardened by the



STUCK! On the road to Voinjama

LIBERIA'S ROADS

The roads in Liberia constitute the Main Supply Route (MSR), Secondary Supply and other routes. The MSR connects Monrovia to Gbarnga and through to Ganta and Zwedru. Another MSR branches off from Gbarnga to Voinjama. Yet another MSR is a tarred road between Monrovia and Tumanburg. Of the 700 km MSR some 320 km are tarred roads, Monrovia - Ganta and Monrovia -Tumanburg. Of the 600 km secondary supply route some 170 km are tarred. These roads act as life lines not only for the people of Liberia but also for the UNMIL battalions, keeping their supply and operational lines open. In addition to the two supply routes, there are smaller networks, some of which are passable only for small vehicles. There are others which are no more passable having been over run by bushes and shrubs as a result of long disuse during and after the war.

Though roads are basically the responsibility of Liberia's Ministry of Public Works but in practice it is UNMIL's Engineering Section that maintains the repair and upkeep of the roads in

collaboration with the military engineers from Bangladesh, China and Pakistan. The Pakistani engineers look after the section from Zorzor to Voinjama and from Monrovia to Tumanburg, which is tarred. The Bangladeshi engineers take care of the tarred section from Monrovia to Gbarnga and the mud road from Gbarnga to Zorzor, one of the more difficult sections. The Chinese focus on the roads emanating from Zwedru to Tapeta, Greenville, Fish Town and Harper.

Currently major repair and rehabilitation of roads are taking place in preparation for the forthcoming national elections of Liberia. Some of the major works being undertaken are in the sections from Voinjama - Zorzor - Gbarnga, Tumanburg - Bopolu, Zwedru - Tapeta - Ganta in addition to the repair of the tarred road between Monrovia and Gbarnga. In addition there are efforts to open the road between Greenville and Zwedru. "We're undertaking repairs that can be realistically completed before the elections," says Pierre Dourrho of the Roads Unit in UNMIL's Engineering Section. ♦

regular movement of vehicles. That was until we reached Zorzor.

After Zorzor the quality of the road deteriorated fast. The potholes and bumps became more common. What we were not prepared for were sudden patches of wet mud and slush. A few we went past without much difficulty. But then the small puddles gave way to large pools of liquid chocolate through which our car waded. At one point, trying to avoid one such pool, the car nearly skidded off the road into the forest. A more seasoned driver from the car following us had to be called in. After much effort on the four wheel drive we managed to rescue the car. After St. Paul's Bridge, which marked the beginning of Bong County, we were once again on a better surface.

We saw trucks and bulldozers of the Bangladeshi army coming in to repair the roads. Obviously, with their efforts much of the road would become smoother. ♦





Women Campaign for Political Rights

Liberian women, long sidelined from the country's decision-making process, are today determined to rebuild their war-ravaged nation. As the UN-backed national elections approach, they are demanding a fairer share of the political cake and have formed a united front to advocate for their rights.

By Yuko Maeda

Hundreds of women in colourful *lappas* and fancy dresses thronged the conference room in Monrovia's City Hall in late February. They were not there just to sit and listen to messages politicians would deliver, but to challenge politicians' lack of agenda on issues women face day to day, demand that political parties incorporate women's perspectives and vow to elect their own representatives during the forthcoming national elections.

The first National Political Forum on "Women's Participation in the Political Process: Challenges and Opportunities," which invited representatives from the 18 registered political parties to present their agenda, attracted over 600 women from around the country. Attending the three-day forum were not only members of the Parliament, District Commissioners or party members but also farmers from remote villages and single mothers living in camps for internally displaced persons.

"This forum is the first of its kind to train women to be aware of candidates, and to become voters and campaign supporters," said Ruth Caesar, a Parliamentarian who chairs the Forum's ordinating committee. She said many of the participants came with little or no knowledge of politics but all were quick to learn what politics means for them. "We made great progress in the last three days. We now know we have equal rights; we now know who political candidates are;

we now know where they can be reached; and we also know who to elect as our representatives.”

The forum marked the kick-off of a nation-wide campaign on women’s participation in politics. The idea was born out of consultations with UNMIL’s Office of the Gender Advisor, which is also providing technical and material support to the year-long campaign to enhance women’s political rights.

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 figure is far below the world average of 15.9 per cent, making Liberia among the world’s lowest countries ranked by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. The NTLA has apparently failed to comply with UN Resolution 1325 and Article 28 of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which calls for active involvement of women in post-conflict situations and a gender balance in the implementation of the peace agreement.

Liberian women are not keeping quiet about it. With support from UNMIL’s Office of the Gender Advisor, the Ministry of Gender and Development and women’s organizations, they have already succeeded to include in the Electoral Reform Law a provision calling for 30 per cent representation of women in the selection of party candidates. Now they want to go a step further and see that their sisters actually win the seats to represent them in the House of Representatives, the Senate and even the Presidential Office.

Roberta Franklin, a political activist, sees an opportunity has come for Liberian women to speak up to change the course of direction their country has to take. “As far as I can see at the forum, these women are ready to participate in politics,” she said. “These women have suffered very long. Now we have peace, we (women) have to come out to use our own sense to rebuild the country.”

Fannie Quaye, a rank-and-file member of a political party, says a woman like her can build a better nation. Quaye, a single mother of four children, has experienced a hard life, while men were fighting each other during the 14-year civil war. “I’m tired,” she said, explaining that she has to

force herself to carry on without a break to maintain her profession, look after children and do house chores. “Life is hard for a single woman. If we get a chance, we will make Liberia a better, peaceful country where we can enjoy ourselves.”

The forum marked the kick-off of a nation-wide campaign on women’s participation in politics. The idea was born out of consultations with UNMIL’s Office of the Gender Advisor, which is also providing technical and material support to the year-long campaign to enhance women’s political rights.

It was evident women were eager to join the political process to have their voices heard. At the forum no single representative from the invited political parties was spared the participants’ tough questions. Women after women grabbed the microphone to voice their concerns on a number of topics from domestic violence to child abuse to economic hardship, demanding their concerns be incorporated in the political agenda of their country.

“What we are trying to do is to educate women,” said Hawa Bropleh, one of the few female speakers from political parties, after her presentation. “They can express themselves, but we have to train them how to channel their voice to be heard. We want them to speak up on their behalf.”

During the forum, participants developed a first draft of a women’s political manifesto which is now being debated at the county level political forums for adoption. In the 10-point manifesto women demand, among others, that the government include at least 60 per cent women in all peace missions and conflict management teams; the authorities enact and implement various acts to combat violence against women; and affirmative action be taken to reserve at least 50 per cent of seats for women in the Legislature, District Councils and other local government positions.



At the end, all the women approved in unison a resolution seeking a full participation of women in the electoral process by running for office, joining political parties or electing only those candidates who include women’s issues in their platforms.

A middle-aged woman from Bomi County felt liberated after the three-day forum. “We, the women, have suffered a lot,” she said as she departed from the conference room. “We care for children; we care for husbands; we care for our country, but no one listens to us. Now we need more power for ourselves to stand up. We want to be part of the country.” ♦

Crowds Throng Road Show

By Yuko Maeda

Thousands of Monrovia residents in early February thronged a troupe of traditional musicians and dancers carrying messages on the upcoming national elections. It was the first day of a nationwide elections sensitization road show. The troupe, consisting of four local artist groups and Liberia's top comedian Georgio Boutini, travelled around the city educating residents on the eligibility criteria for voter registration.

"It is the way local people like it," said Mohan Raj Sharma, a Community Relations Officer with UNMIL Public Information which organized the caravan. The road show, aimed at raising awareness among the local population, called on citizens 18 years old and above to register so they could vote during the elections.

"This is the time for you to make a decision for your future," shouted Bennie Johnson, another UNMIL Community Outreach Officer, leaning from the truck amidst rhythmic drum beats. "You have the power. Power is in your hands. It's you who will decide Liberia's future," he said. While the music and dance went on, Public Information staff handed out flyers to the cheering audience.

Tiwior Queateh, 45, from Sinoe County, watching the show at B.W. Harris High School on Broad Street, welcomed the campaign message. "This is good for us to receive right information from the right source," he said, adding that people easily get confused with rumours and false information on the elections.

National elections for President, Senators and House of Representatives are scheduled to take place on 11 October with voter registration running from 25 April through 21 May. The elections will be Liberia's first free and fair multi-party elections in more than a decade. As preparations for the UN-backed elections gear up, expectations for a better future among citizens soar. "We are very happy to have elections finally," said Queateh. "We're tired of all kinds of disturbance."



On the roads, voter sensitization

Geeplah Browne, 28, who greeted the troupe in front of the Rally Town Market in town, echoed the same sentiments. "We'll elect real Liberians who will care for the poor people," he said. "A majority of people were afraid of another civil war when the last elections were held in 1997 and voted for wrong persons," he added. "We should know better this time. This is the last chance for us to rebuild our nation."

In the coming months, the caravan will continue travelling to all of Liberia's counties, disseminating messages aimed at educating the local population on the importance of exercising their democratic right to choose their government. ♦



For Fair Election Coverage

By J. Wesley Washington

More than 50 journalists from newspapers, radio and TV, recently participated in a two-day symposium on “Developing the Media in Post-Conflict Liberia: Challenges in the Run-Up to Elections.” The symposium was organized by the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) in conjunction with the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) and the Ministry of Information to develop the local media, which still lacks basic journalism skills and professional ethics to practise objective reporting.

The symposium was organised in view of the forthcoming elections, to help media persons in objective and unbiased reporting in the run-up to the elections. At the end of the symposium the media persons called for the adoption of a code of conduct for journalists covering the elections, and the removal of anti-media laws that hinder freedom of speech.

“The responsibility of the media is huge,” said Information Minister C. William Allen at the symposium held in early March. He noted that the media’s primary role is to inform and educate the people on social and political issues and be a watchdog on wrongdoings while maintaining a high standard of ethics. “To be a watchdog in a post-conflict society, we have to go beyond being traditional media practitioners,” he said.

Guest speakers at the symposium reiterated the importance of media’s role in facilitating free and fair elections to restore sustainable peace in the war-ravaged country. “This election is crucial to put our country together, help reunify and give rebirth to a new Liberia,” said Frances Johnson-Morris, Chairman of the National Elections Commission (NEC).

She said although the media in Liberia is plagued with a “litany of problems,” the coming elections provide an opportunity for them to rise “to new heights of professionalism with balanced and objective reporting.”

The media executives critically examined their current practices and discussed a number of topics on ethics, gender mainstreaming, technical issues and legal matters to prioritize media development needs in the run-up to the elections.

Participants suggested more training workshops for election reporting be conducted both in Monrovia and rural areas where community radios play a vital role in information dissemination. They emphasized on building the capacity of journalists so they could cover all parts of the country without depending on political parties, and recommended increased participation of female journalists at all levels.

“By openly discussing media practice over the past two days, top media managers have shown a willingness to tackle the challenges facing the media in a post-conflict situation,” commented Jacques Paul Klein. Calling upon the media to provide balanced reporting, he said, “In doing so, the media will not only play a historic role in ensuring free and fair election in Liberia, but will also contribute greatly to lasting peace.” He urged the media to develop a plan of action to establish a proper legal framework to guarantee press freedom in Liberia.

Over 200 Liberian journalists have benefited from the “Empowering Liberia’s Media for Sustainable Peace” series of workshops on basic skills and media ethics being conducted by UNMIL in collaboration with the Press Union of Liberia since June last year. In the run-up to the elections, the focus of the workshops has shifted to political and election reporting. ♦



Journalists with UNMIL PI Staff



Liberian Elections 2005

On 17 December 2004, Chairman Bryant signed the Electoral Reform Law adopted by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly. What does this law say, and what impact will it have on the elections in 2005? Below are some key questions and answers.

What kind of elections will be held in 2005?

Nation-wide elections will be held for the offices of the President and the Vice-President, the Senate, and the House of Representatives.

How will elections be held for President and Vice-President?

There will be a two-round system for the offices of President and Vice-President. (The two candidates will run on a single ticket). A candidate needs to get an absolute majority of the votes, meaning at least 50% of all valid votes cast plus one vote. If none of the candidates has an absolute majority, a second round will be held with only the two candidates who had the highest votes. If a second round is held, the candidate with the majority of votes is elected.

How will elections be held for the Senate?

Each of the 15 counties will have two seats in the Senate. Elections will follow a simple majority system: the two candidates who obtain the highest and second highest numbers of valid votes cast shall be elected.

How will elections be held for the House of Representatives?

The House of Representatives will have 64 seats. Each seat will correspond to an electoral district. The candidate who obtains a simple majority in his or her electoral district will be elected to that seat. Voters will vote for a candidate, not for a party.

How will these electoral districts be defined? How will the 64 seats be allocated?

The 64 districts will be defined by the NEC on the basis of voter registration results, by dividing each of the 15 counties into districts that correspond to an approximately equal number of voters. The more voters registered for a county, the more seats that county is likely to receive. However, each county is guaranteed by the law to receive no less than 2 seats/districts.

Are the electoral districts the same as the existing administrative districts?

No. The NEC will define the electoral districts only after the voter registration data has been collected. The NEC will first and foremost ensure that each electoral district is fair and corresponds to an approximately equal number of voters.

Will eligible Liberians be able to vote outside Liberia?

No. Voter registration and polling will take place only within Liberia. Therefore, eligible Liberians who wish to vote have to be in Liberia during voter registration and on polling day.

Where can eligible voters vote on polling day?

A registered voter must vote in the electoral district for which he or she is registered. He or she cannot vote at another location.

Nevertheless, every registered voter will have the option of changing the place of registration some time before elections by providing written notification to the NEC (for example, if a person has moved to another county following the registration period in connection with work).

Who may vote?

Every Liberian who is at least 18 years old at the end of the registration period and who holds a valid registration card may vote. The law makes some exceptions to this provision to exclude those who have been declared by a court to be incompetent, or those who have been disenfranchised as a result of a conviction.

An eligible Liberian citizen needs to be registered by the NEC before he or she can vote, and before being able to run for office.



Hospital Ship Brings Hope, Healing



Mr. Klein greets Mercy Ships Executive Director Daslin Small

Pewee Flomoku

By J. Wesley Washington

A rousing welcome awaited the arrival in Monrovia of *MV Anastasis*, the flagship vessel of Mercy Ships, a global charity operating hospital ships that offer free medical services to the ailing population in developing countries.

Mercy Ships will offer life-changing surgical treatment free of charge to needy Liberians during its initial three-month stay in the country. The medical staff on board the ship correct facial deformities such as cleft-lips, operate on benign tumours and offer a specialized obstetric surgery to repair vesico-vaginal fistula. Nearly 500 patients, who were screened at the John F. Kennedy Medical Hospital in Monrovia and the Ganta United Methodist Hospital in Nimba County, would have undergone medical surgeries in the three on-board operating rooms before the ship departs Liberia on 17 June.

Initiated by Jacques Paul Klein, the outgoing Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General and Coordinator of UN Operations in Liberia, the visit of the ship was made possible by a collaboration of the National Transitional Government of

Liberia and the Liberian Council of Churches. After touring the ship at the Freeport, Klein thanked Mercy Ships' Executive Director Daslin Small and senior officials for their commitment to Liberia. "It sends a message of hope to everyone that people still care about Liberia," he said.

"Against the backdrop of a 14-year civil war and a large population that needs immediate and specialized medical care, the mission of Mercy Ships acquires vital significance to Liberia and its people," said Abou Moussa, Deputy Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, at a ceremony welcoming the arrival of the ship. "It is a fulfilment of a dream that we have had over the last 10 years," said Health Minister Dr. Peter Coleman.

In war-ravaged Liberia, only 72 physicians are currently available to serve a population of 3 million, about two doctors per 100,000 Liberians, according to the

World Health Organization. The figures are far below Africa's average ratio of 12 doctors per 100,000. In the developed world, the average number of doctors for 100,000 persons is around 200, according to WHO.

In addition to medical services, Mercy Ships is also carrying out development projects and educational programmes with local organizations in Bomi County. About 400 volunteers from 30 countries onboard *Anastasis* help build latrines, rehabilitate wells and distribute farming tools in villages in addition to helping train school teachers and run adult literacy programmes.

The international charity, founded by Don and Deyon Stephens, has run a growing fleet of hospital ships in developing nations since 1978. Mobilising people and resources worldwide, Mercy Ships has visited more than 500 ports in over 50 developing countries and 17 developed ones, performing more than two million medical services, valued at US\$250 million, and impacting over 2.5 million lives so far. Its volunteer professionals from around the world have treated 300,000 people in village medical clinics, performed 18,000 surgeries and 110,000 dental treatments, according to the charity. In the last 10 years *Anastasis* visited West African countries including Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire.

Following the initial three-month visit, the hospital ship plans to return in early November for a further eight-month stay in Liberia. ♦



DSRSG Abou Moussa and US Ambassador John Blaney await the arrival of the ship



The Medical Face of Peacekeeping

With hospitals and clinics ruined or destroyed, Liberia's health sector has been in a shambles for many years. The military hospitals, hurriedly set up by various peacekeeping contingents deployed in the country, are a boon to the ailing local population today as tens of thousands of needy patients have benefited from free medical help.

By J. Wesley Washington

Liberia's civil war has had a devastating effect on the country's health sector as hospitals and clinics were looted or destroyed while qualified medical personnel were displaced or fled the country due to insecurity. Today, with a population of some three million, Liberia has only 72 physicians, less than three doctors for every 100,000 people.

No wonder then the deployment of "blue helmets" has been a great relief to the people of Liberia not only because the country has regained peace but also because of the massive medical help they offer the ailing population as part of their humanitarian assistance.

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has set up Level II hospitals in Tubmanburg, Gbarnga, and Zwedru. In addition to serving the military and civilian staff of the Mission, these hospitals provide medical and surgical services to the local population, especially patients

with life threatening conditions. A larger Level III hospital has also been established at the John F. Kennedy Medical Center in Monrovia for referrals.

In Tubmanburg, the Pakistani-run Field Level II hospital which became fully operational in early January 2004 has a 50-bed in-patient capacity. The hospital, with state of the art equipment, has 17 qualified doctors of different medical and surgical specialties. Medicines are provided by the Government of Pakistan.

By early March 2005, over 117,000 patients among the local population have been treated free of charge by Pakistani doctors. Of this, nearly 60,000 have been treated at the hospital, while the rest have benefited from free medical camps conducted by the Pakistani peacekeepers in Sass Town and Gbah Plantations in Bomi; Sinje and Robertsport in Grand Cape Mount; Fassama and Bopolu in Gbarpolu, and Voinjama in Lofa. These camps provide free medical check-ups, food for anaemic patients as well as health and hygiene education. Medicines are provided free.

Later last year, Pakistani medical personnel donated several reference books to University of Liberia's A. M. Dogliotti College of Medicine. They have also offered their specialists to teach some courses at the college free of charge.

In Gbarnga the Level II Hospital is run by the Bangladeshi peacekeepers. Since commencing operations in early 2004, the hospital has provided treatment to over 53,000 local civilians. With a staff of 60, including 12 doctors, this hospital also provides specialized surgical operations.

The Bangladeshi doctors provide free

medical treatment and medicines to about 80 local patients daily. "At present, we are giving anti-helminths drugs to all children through our de-worming programme for children," the acting Medical Commander, Major Kishore Mutsuddy told UNMIL FOCUS recently.



A Liberian patient at the Chinese hospital

People come with acute illnesses and chronic diseases. "We do our best to give them whatever medicines we can afford from our stock provided by our government," Maj. Mutsuddy says.

Lt. Col. Majid Bhuiyan, part of the Bangladeshi medical corps and a specialist in tropical medicine, currently engaged in Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) study on Lassa Fever and HIV/AIDS, spoke of the prevalence of these diseases

in the area. "My focus at the hospital is encouraging people to avoid endemic health risks prevailing in Liberia like malaria, Lassa Fever, HIV/AIDS and meningitis," he says.

The Chinese Level II hospital in Zwedru was a godsend to the local population as most patients in south-eastern Liberia had to travel to Côte d'Ivoire or endure long travel to Monrovia for treatment during the civil war. Since its establishment in May 2004 the Chinese hospital has treated thousands of local patients in addition to regularly conducting free mobile clinics in Pello Zohn, Putu Pelloken and other surrounding villages in Grand Gedeh County.

The Chinese Level II Hospital also supports local hospitals in the Sector including the MSF-Belgium and Merlin-run Martha Tubman Memorial Hospital with its X-ray and laboratory facilities. With the rainy season fast approaching, the hospital is bracing itself for the seasonal malaria outbreak and is now distributing anti-malaria medicines as part of its support to the sector's clinics and hospitals.

The largest and best equipped hospital is the Jordanian Medical Level III hospital situated at the John F. Kennedy Medical Centre Compound in capital Monrovia that began its operations in December 2003. With 115 medical and non-medical staff, including 20 doctors, the Jordanian hospital offers specialized treatment in a host of areas such as internal medicine, surgery, orthopaedics, anaesthesia, ENT, ophthalmology, dermatology, gynaecology, psychiatry, paediatrics and dentistry, among others.

By mid-March 2005, the Jordanian hospital had treated over 10,000 military patients and more than 4,500 civilian

patients. "We have dealt with more than 16,000 local patients on a humanitarian basis since our arrival here," says the Medical Commander, Col. (Dr.) Omar Al Momani. Since its establishment, the

"JorMed III" hospital has treated a number of difficult surgical cases that otherwise would have been referred to Accra, Ghana in addition to three Lassa Fever cases. ♦

Senegalese Doctors Reach Out

A new addition to the peacekeepers' medical assistance to Liberians is the Senegalese Contingent's Level II Hospital in Harper, the capital of Maryland County that opened its doors in late December last year. The hospital now sends its medical team to a local clinic daily to treat hundreds of patients free of charge.

"We can't leave local people out there untreated when we have expertise and means," said Dr. Lt. Col. Modeste Ogoubemi, head of the hospital, who initiated a mobile medical team project when he took over the position in mid-January. Upon arrival, he visited J. J. Dossen, Harper's only public health clinic, to assess its operational conditions and needs only to find that not a single doctor worked in the clinic. That is when he decided to send a part of his medical team to treat the ailing among the local population. "Some of them have serious health problems. If we don't help, people might die," says Dr. Ogoubemi.

J. J. Dossen was once one of the largest hospitals in Liberia but was completely vandalized during the 14-year civil war. All the buildings including operation rooms were ruined and medical equipment destroyed or stolen. The hospital remained dysfunctional until a year ago when a German NGO came forward and rehabilitated part of the building to offer basic medical services. Then another NGO, Merlin, started providing medicines late last year after a cholera outbreak in Harper. Still, the clinic lacked qualified health practitioners to diagnose and treat patients.

Equipped with an intensive care unit, laboratory and X-ray facility, the Level II Senegalese Hospital in mid-January formed a rotating team of a doctor and

three nurses from its 33 staffers including two physicians, two surgeons and an anaesthetist and a dentist. A mobile team now visits the local clinic daily to see an average of 100 patients per week. Among the most common diseases among local population are malaria, sexually transmitted infections and high blood pressure. When patients need a surgical operation or laboratory tests, they are referred to the Senegalese hospital.

According to Dr. Ogoubemi, the hospital treated 123 Liberians in February alone, in addition to a few hundred consulted at the local clinic. As emergency intervention, the hospital conducted six surgical operations including two cases of amputation and another two cases of Caesarean-section.

Senegalese health practitioners were not strangers to Harper residents before the Level II hospital opened. Its Level I Hospital, established last August for the military contingent, started treating local patients free of charge soon after it opened its doors. It treats about 1,000 outpatients every month. "At 6 O'clock in the morning, patients are already lined up outside," says Dr. Capt. Malick Ndiaye, pointing out the hospital's gate. "We can't let them down," he says.

Patients applaud the Senegalese efforts to provide medical services to local population. Evon Wilson, mother of three, who for the first time saw a Senegalese medical team at J. J. Dossen in early March, said she could finally get proper treatment. "We're very happy to have Senegalese doctors helping us," she said after she was diagnosed with a urine infection. "Before they came, I just carried on with it whenever I had a health problem." ♦



Heading for a Polio-Free Liberia

With the launch of the national immunization campaign for 2005, the stage for a polio-free Liberia is set.

By Ashim Choudhury

On the morning of 24 February the tranquil air of Fish Town was broken with the splutter of two helicopters bringing Special Representative Jacques Paul Klein from Monrovia along with the Representatives of UNICEF and WHO. The dust raised by the helicopter had hardly settled when NTGL Chairman Charles Gyude Bryant drove into town along with Health Minister Peter Coleman and a host of senior government officials. The rendezvous

in this remote capital of River Gee County was to kick off Liberia's final polio immunization campaign.

At the large tent put up for the purpose mothers with suckling children had gathered from distant villages, some from even beyond Fish Town, braving the hot sun. After the welcome festivities and speeches, Chairman Bryant and Mr. Klein got down to the most important business of the day -- administering polio drops to the kids. Also joining in were the Representatives of UNICEF and WHO, the two prime movers behind the polio campaign. By the time the day's inaugural polio campaign was over, some 200 of Fish Town's 750 eligible kids were immunized against polio.

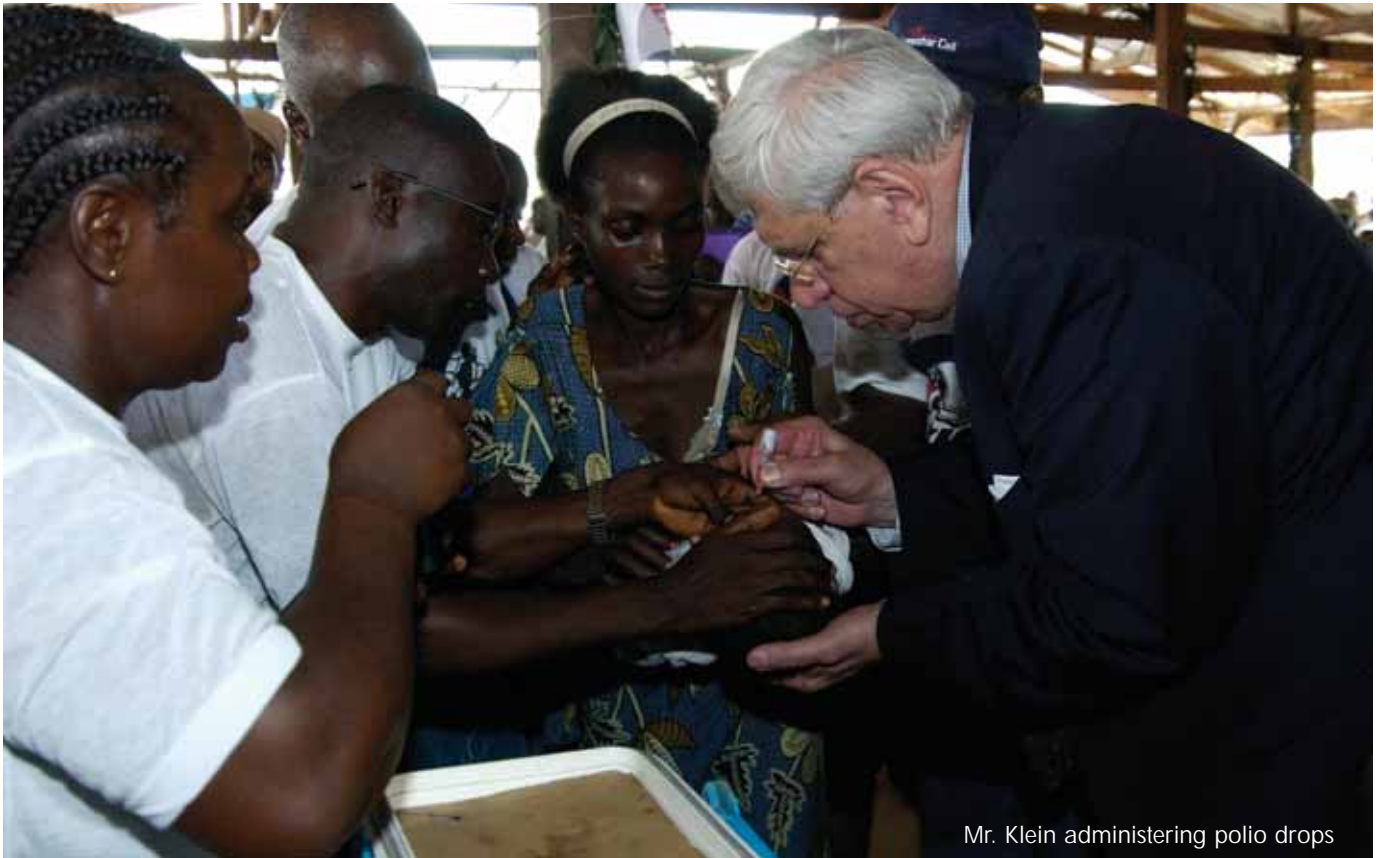
For the next five days some 970,000 Liberian children under five were immunized during the first round of National

Immunization Days. Over 6,000 vaccination teams, 2,100 community social mobilizers, 400 boy scouts and 600 guides and several women groups fanned out to the remotest communities and villages in the country. In River Gee County alone some 12,981 children were targeted.

Launching the campaign, Mr. Klein appealed to parents to ensure that every child under five was immunized. "The UN involvement in the polio eradication initiative is a collaborative effort to ensure that every Liberian child has the opportunity to receive the free and safe polio vaccination drops," he said. The first National Immunization Days (NIDs) were launched in Liberia in 1999. Ever since, the United Nations in Liberia, led by UNICEF and WHO, has remained a close partner of the Government and people of Liberia in their efforts to rid the country of the crippling



Mothers with infants through vaccination centres



Mr. Klein administering polio drops

polio virus.

Speaking to the large gathering of children and parents, Chairman Bryant too urged all parents to ensure that their children were immunized. “Polio is no ‘dragon’ as is widely believed but it is real and can be avoided by taking the polio drops,” he told the mothers who had brought the children for immunization. “If you get the ‘dragon’ even after taking the drops, then come to me,” he challenged the crowd. In Liberia it is popularly believed that polio strikes because of a ‘dragon.’

Why was the remote north eastern town chosen to launch the national polio campaign?

Dr. Coleman, the Health Minister, said the choice was deliberate, to “demonstrate the NTGL’s promise to provide health access in all parts of the country.” Angela Kearney, the UNICEF Representative spoke similarly: “This is an isolated place; the message is the commitment to reach out to the remotest place.”

The County Health Officer Johnson T. Chea was confident that “100 per cent of the children in the target population” would be vaccinated. Some 172 vaccina-

tors backed by 74 social mobilizers would go throughout the county touching every home. “Of these some 72 vaccinators would have to walk four to eight hours to reach remote villages,” Chea said. A team of six district surveillance officers would oversee the operations in each district of the County.

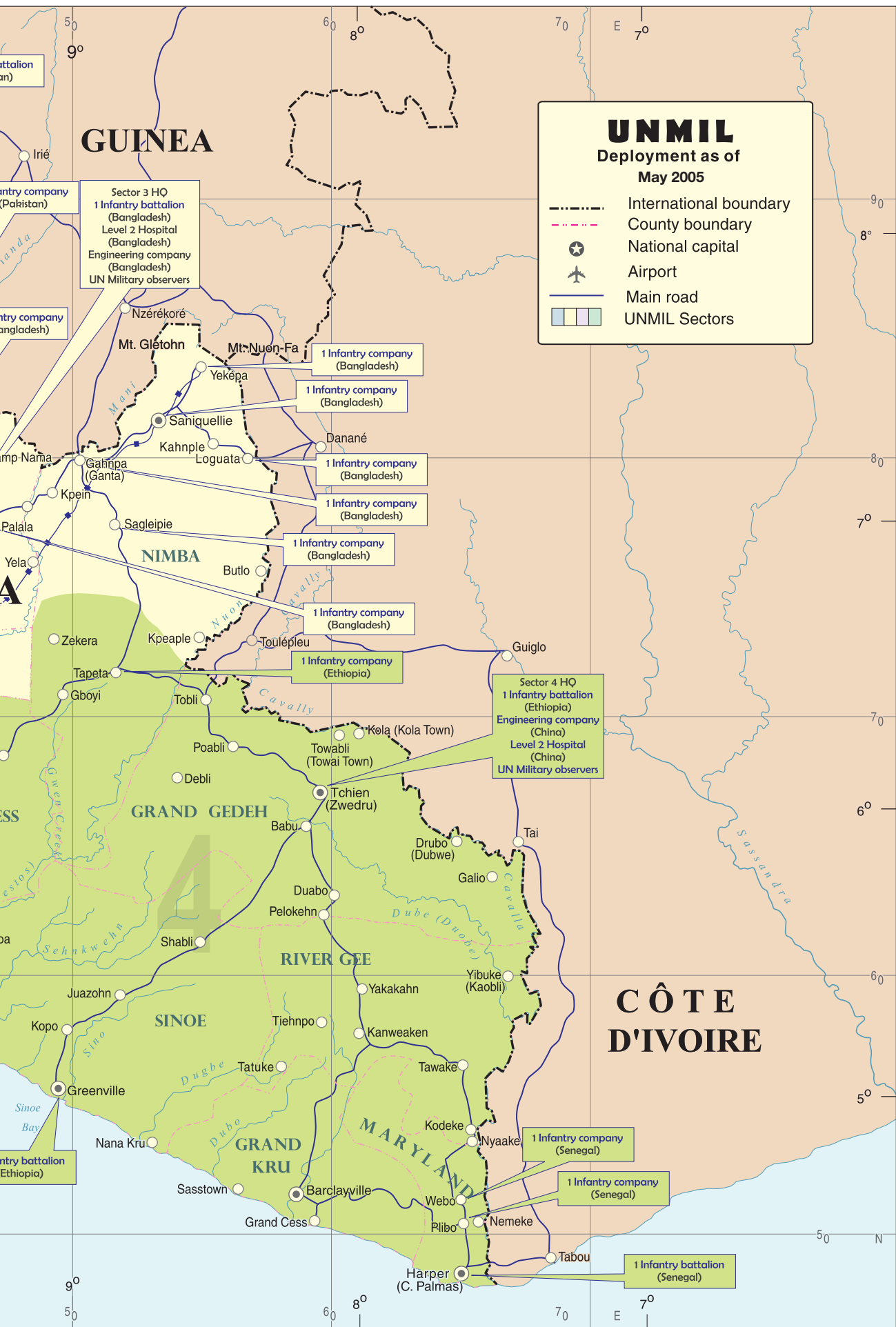
According to UNICEF, the persistent Wild Polio Virus (WPV) transmission in the West and Central Africa region, despite numerous immunization rounds clearly indicates that the vaccinations are not reaching some children.

UNICEF provides support for maintaining the cold chain process and the vaccine procurement, conservation and distribution. WHO monitors the coordination of activities at all levels and supports the training of vaccinators, supervisors

and coordinators. UNMIL provides electricity for powering the cold chain in eight of the 15 counties.

According to UNICEF, the persistent Wild Polio Virus (WPV) transmission in the West and Central Africa region, despite numerous immunization rounds clearly indicates that the vaccinations are not reaching some children. Although no WPV has been found in Liberia in recent times it remains as a priority country due to the fact that polio campaigns were stopped in 2003. With the improvement of the security provided by UNMIL, in 2004, two rounds of polio NIDs were carried out and 970,000 children received their vaccine and Vitamin A.

In the current year, two more rounds of polio NIDs are planned. Monitoring by independent observers during and after the campaign will find the gaps with the door-to-door strategy and would suggest ways to ensure 100 per cent coverage. Based on the previous experience in the fourth quarter of 2004, Liberia, it may be safely assumed, can be declared polio-free by the end of 2005. ♦





Refugees Flock to Liberia's Breadbasket

With most of Liberia declared safe for return and national elections approaching, more people in exile start heading home from neighboring countries. In mid-February, UNHCR began its organized repatriation to Lofa County, the largest area of return in Liberia, Yuko Maeda reports.

“Welcome to Z o r z o r ! Welcome to Liberia!” At the sight of

UNHCR trucks, a woman wrapped in a colorful traditional cloth sang, tapping her feet hard and shaking her body to cheer more than 50 former villagers stepping off the trucks. This was her day of celebration to welcome old friends returning to her Borkeza village on Voinjama-Zorzor Highway. With her song as a cue, many villagers rushed to find familiar faces among the returnees, waving their hands and hugging the new arrivals.

“Thank you for bringing our people

back home,” a middle-aged man approached the staff of the UN refugee agency, beaming happily. Forkpa K. Zaza, principal of Borkeza’s only primary school, couldn’t be happier to see the first group of “official” returnees from neighboring Guinea. For him it signaled more people to follow in the coming months. “We have nothing to farm yet, but we have more people coming home day by day so we can work together,” he said, his eyes smiling at new returnees who will lend their hands to fix houses, repair roads and wells. “We are very happy to work together to rebuild our own community,” Zaza said.

On 14 February, UNHCR organized its first facilitated repatriation to Lofa, the largest refugee producing county accounting for a third of Liberia’s 340,000 refugees in exile. It was a test case for the agency’s planned repatriation to Lofa of 5,400 people this year. In this first six-truck convoy, 39 families -- 140 people including a few-months old baby and an octogenarian woman -- departed Kouankan Camp in Guinea and travelled through Macenta border town to the transit

Refugees’

Visiting top officials of the United States and the European Union acknowledged late February that Liberia faced massive challenges in view of the large number of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) returning to the country. The officials were on a four-day tour to evaluate Liberia’s humanitarian and development situations.

“We have been moved by the surge of Liberians returning home,” said Linda Thomas-Greenfield, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Population, Refugees and Migration who co-led the US-EU delegation. A large number of people are returning spontaneously and voluntarily to their home communities where, in many cases, no schools, hospitals or even roads are available, she said. “We’ve got the message that people are ready to go home” no matter how little their home communities can offer them, she said.

The joint delegation visited



HOMECOMING Refugees disembark at Voinjama

center in Voinjama, the capital of Lofa county, where they received start-up kits including food and blankets before heading home the next day.

Galakpai Gbozee, 40, a father of four children, said he was glad to be back. "It

was very bad to live in the camp," he said while waiting for lunch with a crowd of fellow villagers. There wasn't enough food for his family of six in the camp so he was forced to find work outside the camp to feed his family. "Life was hard there.

That's why I decided to come back because people said it's safe to return." Having done a vocational training in metal work in the camp, Gbozee hopes he can find a job as a blacksmith once he gets back to his hometown.

Lofa County, once the breadbasket of Liberia, became a deserted jungle as result of the civil war. But as UN peacekeepers began disarming former fighters those who had fled the county began returning spontaneously. When Lofa was declared safe for refugees to return early this year, nearly 30,000 people had returned from camps on their own since last October.

"We're encouraging more voluntary repatriation to Lofa," said Theophilus Vodounou, head of UNHCR sub-office in Voinjama which opened last August to help create favourable conditions for the returnees. The office has since provided shelter kits for housing, rebuilt schools and renovated health clinics in collaboration with other UN agencies and humanitarian aid organizations, while ex-combatants are being enrolled in reintegration programmes. "Police are in place. Superintendents are here. There's a job opportunity for skilled returnees with NGOs... We're ready to assist refugees to repatriate to their home communities."

The returnees took off early next morning heading to Zorzor, about 92 km south of Voinjama, on a bumpy dirt road

Light moves delegation

Liberia from February 20 to 24 to evaluate the efforts to improve conditions for the return of refugees and IDPs. Traveling through Grand Cape Mount to Bomi, Lofa, Bong and Nimba counties, the delegation visited UNHCR transit centers, drop-off points, health centers and schools to meet officials of the government, UN agencies and NGOs as well as local people who had returned from neighboring countries and IDP camps in recent months. The delegation also met with the outgoing Special Representative, Jacques Paul Klein.

The US and EU are the largest donors to Liberia, closely working with Liberian authorities, the UN and other international organizations to help rebuild the country. The US has pledged to contribute US\$500 million to support the peace process, humanitarian efforts, disarmament and demobilization, reintegration and other aspects of Liberia's reconstruction for the two-year period of 2004-2005. The EU's contribution totals US\$313 million between 2003 and 2005. Both donors said

they will continue to support Liberia's reconstruction efforts, strengthening social services and development activities for local population.

"This is a very crucial time," said Steffen Stenberg, Head of EC's Head of Humanitarian Aid Unit for Africa, Caribbean and Pacific countries and Head of EU Delegation. He said Liberia is shifting from the process of demobilization to the process of mass-repatriation of refugees and IDPs and the preparation for the upcoming national elections scheduled in October. "We have no time to waste; you have no time to waste, to get the process going on time in order to help Liberia move forward."

After the visit, the delegation travelled by road to Guinea to visit refugee camps where thousands of Liberian refugees still live. ♦

Y.M.



ASSISTANCE At the transit centre

Pewee Ekomoku

vital to take an "inter-agency" approach to create better conditions for returnees to rebuild their lives. The current UN assistance, particularly from the UN Development Programme and the World Food Programme, whose US\$155 million programme for 2005/2006 covering Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea was severely under-funded.

Without sufficient assistance from humanitarian aid organizations, challenges ahead of returnees appear tremendous. However, that did not deter people from returning home.

In the hope of building a foundation for her family and friends, 31-year-old single mother Malay Mulbah moved from an IDP camp back to Konja village where small businesses were popping up along the Voinjama-Zorzor Highway. "We go to bush everyday to get woods and leaves to build our houses," she said, her hands busy turning over a bush meat on an old charcoal stove outside her small mud house which she shares with a dozen women and children. Mulbah said many spontaneous returnees left their relatives behind in camps to prepare for them to follow. "We have nothing here yet, but we're very happy to see more people coming home," she said.

Back in Borkeza, one of the largest villages along the way, Forkpa Nazare, a village elder, said returnees are now united to help each other to restore a strong sense of community. Spontaneous returnees have organized various committees to work on community improvement projects. "Before we had so many conflicts," he said of the 14-year civil war that devastated the entire country. "We're together now because of peace. We're here preparing for others to repatriate to build our community again."

According to UNHCR, more than 341,000 Liberians were in exile in neighboring countries in early 2004 and another 500,000 people internally displaced. About 100,000 refugees returned spontaneously last year while UNHCR facilitated the return of some 7,200 refugees. This year the UN refugee agency plans to facilitate the return of 119,000 refugees. ♦

along dense forests.

On reaching Barzewen, a tiny village with a handful of thatched-roof houses, Frances Zeva, a mother of three small children, was excited. This was her home. "All my friends are here already. I want to help all these families to do good for the community," said Zeva, patting her baby girl's back. However, her village suffers food shortage, lack of job opportunities and scarcity of shelters. Yarkpawok Kolopele, Zeva's old friend who returned late last year by himself, said problems were all over. "Our main concern is food," he said. "We have no axe to farm, no rice seeds to plant, and no shelter to sleep. We want to welcome her home, but we don't have anything to give her."

Barzewen was not alone facing such hardship. Many villages in which the convoy stopped to drop off returnees possess virtually no communal assets. Rich farmlands are now covered with bush, houses are all ruined if they still exist, wells are unusable.

"Police are in place. Superintendents are here. There's a job opportunity for skilled returnees with NGOs... We're ready to assist refugees to repatriate to their home communities."

Although international and local humanitarian aid organizations - all of which are partners to UNHCR - work hard to construct basic infrastructure and provide necessary social services, it is hardly enough to support all the returnees to sustain themselves. This is partly because the money donors pledged to support those activities has yet to come and partly because the massive influx of returnees is beyond the capacity of aid agencies.

"We need more cooperation in a more practical way," said Vodounou, head of UNHCR office in Voinjama. He said it is

Liberia Gets a Human Rights Commission

By Bipin Adhikari

The Independent National Commission on Human Rights (INCHR) of Liberia was created on 23 March 2005 when NTGL Chairman Charles Gyude Bryant signed the INCHR Act 2005, adopted by the National Transitional Legislative Assembly on 1 March.

The establishment of INCHR as the national institution for protection and promotion of human rights in Liberia is a goal of the Transitional Government called for in Article XII 2a of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA provides that the INCHR will monitor Liberia's compliance with international human rights standards, promote human rights education and work with national and international partners to strengthen human rights protection in the country. By passing this law Liberia has created the necessary norms, values, procedures and institutions for the operation of the INCHR.

A national institution such as the INCHR is an important institution in the human rights movement going around the world. The 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in its Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action had reaffirmed the important and constructive role played by national institutions like the INCHR in promoting and protecting human rights. The UN General Assembly and UN Commission on Human Rights have repeatedly called for the establishment of national human rights institutions, in promoting and protecting human rights and enhancing public awareness of those rights.

According to the newly enacted

INCHR Act, the Commission shall have the general competence to protect and promote human rights in the Republic of Liberia. The INCHR is empowered to - (a) to inquire or investigate, suo motu or on a complaint presented to it by a victim or any person on his/her behalf, into a complaint of violation of human rights or abetment thereof or negligence in the prevention of such violation by the State, any of its functionaries, or public servants, or any other related person; and (b) to exercise powers to handle such complaints, investigate human rights violations and conduct hearings consistent with the due process of law. The Commission has been guaranteed with all the powers of a civil court trying a suit under the Civil Procedure Law of Liberia, and also the subpoena powers to bring within its jurisdiction those accused of human rights violations based upon complaints from the aggrieved parties, or on suo motu basis.

However, the Commission is not a substitute for a court of law or the judicial branch of the government. Where an inquiry or investigation under this Act discloses to the Commission a human rights violation, or negligence in the prevention of a human rights violation by the State, or any of its functionaries the Commission can take one or more of the following steps:

(a) recommend to the Government or the concerned authority the initiation of proceedings for prosecution or such other action as the Commission may deem fit against the concerned person or persons;

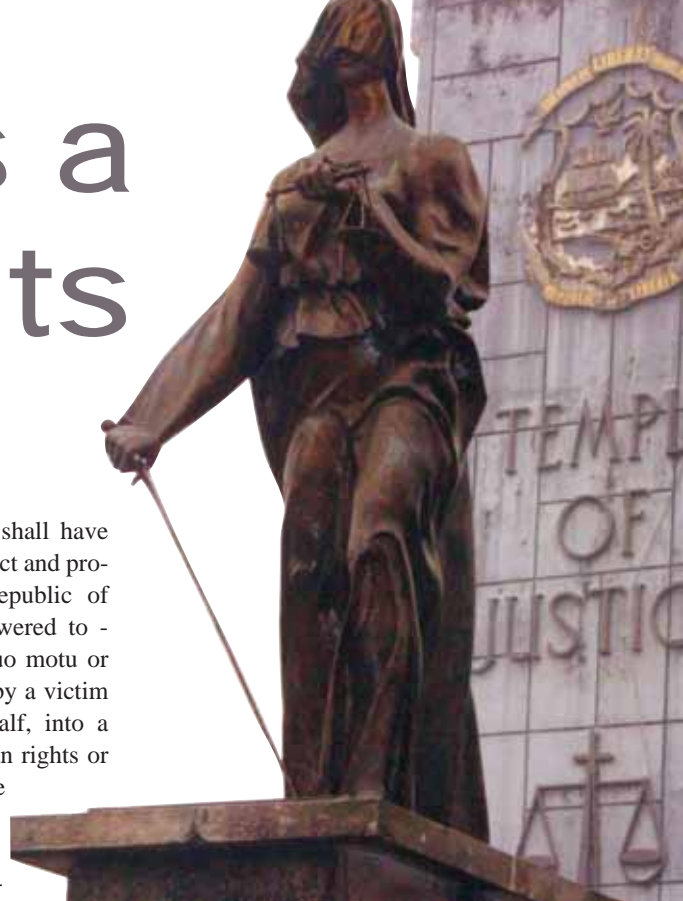
(b) approach, according to the law of the land, the Supreme Court or the Circuit Court concerned for such directions, orders or writs as that Court may deem

necessary; and

(c) recommend to the Government or the concerned authority for the grant of such immediate interim relief to the victim or the members of his/her family as the Commission may consider necessary;

The Commission may make an order for compensation to victims whose rights have been violated by the State, any of its functionaries, public servant, or any other related person. Such compensation shall be paid by the concerned authority of the State as though the victim has been awarded damages by a judge. But where it deems necessary, the Commission may order the concerned violator to bear the cost of the compensation, either in full or in part.

The Act will become enforceable following its publication in the government Handbills, which is expected shortly. The appointment of the Commissioners can then be implemented in accordance with its provisions. UNMIL supported the creation of INHCR by providing expert technical advice and will continue supporting the establishment and effective operation of the Commission. ♦



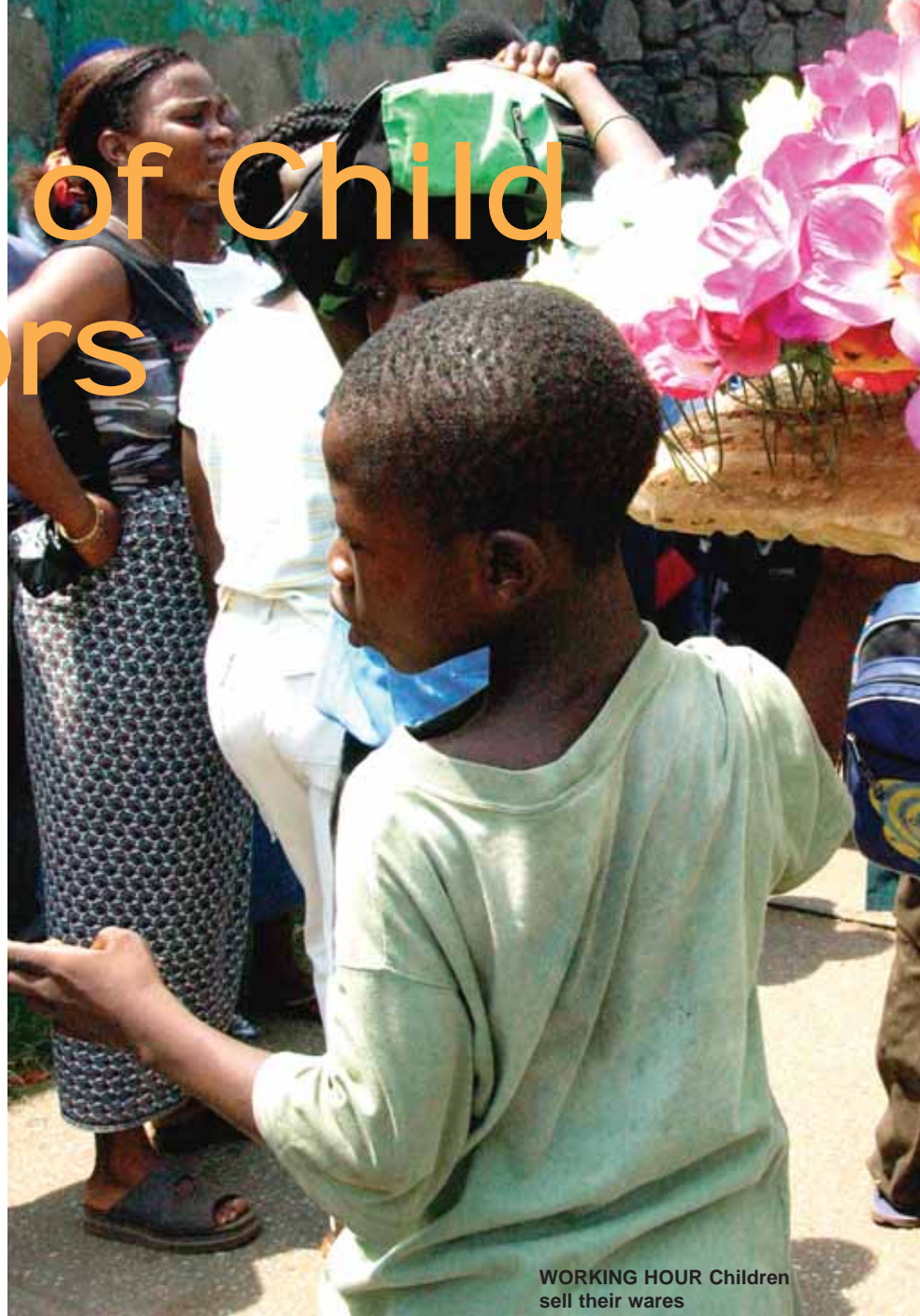
Plight of Child Vendors

By Priscilla Ciesay

Angel (*not real name*) was on the street selling cakes to support her family when her class teacher approached her to buy a piece of cake. Instead of buying the five Liberian Dollars worth cake, the middle-aged man gagged her mouth, put a plastic bag over her head and forced himself on her 12-year-old tiny body. She was left with a sexually transmitted disease, urinary tract infection and other ailments. When the incident was known in her community, she was ostracised, as her peers were discouraged by their mothers to play with her because she was no longer a virgin.

In post-conflict Liberia, the plight of child vendors remains dire. They often become prey to attacks and violations of their human rights. Child vendors suffer all forms of exploitation and abuse and are often denied their right to education and healthy development.

Later, the teacher paid 50 Liberian Dollars to her family to compensate for his act, expecting to walk free, but was eventually caught, tried and convicted for a crime of rape after the intervention by human rights officers from the UN Mission in Liberia. Although the conviction might be a victory for human rights advocates, it means little for Angel who suffers family shame, social stigma and lasting emotional scars. She did not get the



WORKING HOUR Children sell their wares

protection she should have been afforded—neither from her family, members of the community or the government.

Like Angel, second grader Seye Gaflor, 15, works as a cake bread vendor to earn a school registration fee of 65 Liberian Dollars, which he says his family cannot afford. He is on the streets at seven in the morning carrying 150 Liberian Dollars worth of cake bread and walks around until all are sold or night falls. According to UNMIL human rights officers who interviewed him, Seye suffers hunger throughout the day and only eats

late evenings because he doesn't steal from the sales.

Angel and Gaflor are among hundreds of vulnerable child vendors who sell food commodities or household items on the streets of Liberia's capital and townships to support their families financially.

In post-conflict Liberia, the plight of child vendors remains dire. They often become prey to attacks and violations of their human rights. Child vendors suffer all forms of exploitation and abuse and are often denied their right to education and healthy development. In many cases, they



are exposed to myriad dangers, such as sexual violence, street fighting or public disturbances amounting to violation of their basic rights and fundamental freedoms.

Liberia is a signatory to international human rights protocols including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which prohibits the use of children in activities hazardous to their health. The country's Constitution guarantees the right of the child and prohibits forced labour of children. However, these provisions are not enforced. Many cite poverty as a major

cause of child labour.

UNMIL's Human Rights and Protection Section advocates for the protection of Liberian children engaged in economic activities on the streets. It has called on the government to take measures to ensure that children receive the fundamental guarantees as provided in the Constitution and other international treaties Liberia has signed. The Section also plays a proactive role to protect children by taking steps to make sure victims receive proper redress and perpetrators are dealt with appropriately. ♦

UN Expert on Human Rights

Although Liberia has presented many positive developments in the area of human rights, more has to be done to combat gross human rights violations, said a visiting UN expert who was soon to report on Liberia's situation to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva.

Addressing the media in Monrovia early April, Dr. Charlotte Abaka, UN's independent expert on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights in Liberia, said the completion of disarmament and demobilization, the increase in economic activities and the passage of the Act establishing the independent National Human Rights Commission have helped improve the human rights situation in the country. She also welcomed the bill to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, currently awaiting approval by the Transitional Assembly.

"I'm glad to see that lots of positive developments have been made," she said at a press conference held at the UNMIL headquarters. "But there are still many major concerns and challenges in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement."

She said although hundreds of thousands of ex-combatants are disarmed, they still remain idle because of lack of funds to support their Rehabilitation and Reintegration activities. "Every effort should be made for RR to avoid the danger of re-grouping of ex-combatants," which might pose a threat to Liberia's human rights situation, she said. And she noted it is necessary to keep monitoring for the existence of guns and arms to ensure security for people to participate in the upcoming elections.

Dr. Abaka said widespread corruption hinders the disbursement of donor moneys to social services for the local population, and the lack of justice would create instability and lead to more violence and human rights abuses. She said the country must take concrete measures against corruption and develop a better justice system to avoid "perpetuating impunity." ♦



Return of the Internees

By Tammi Sharpe

April 6, 2005 marked the start of return to Liberia for a group of 385 disarmed Liberian fighters who had until now been interned in camps in Sierra Leone. The fighters had fled the conflict in Liberia in 2002 alongside civilian asylum seekers, making it difficult for Sierra Leonean authorities to separate the two groups. Sierra Leone could easily have chosen to close its borders, blocking the entry of armed fighters but at the same time preventing genuine asylum seekers from fleeing conflict in Liberia.

Fortunately, Sierra Leone chose to keep its doors open, allowing tens of thousands of Liberians to seek refuge there. To avoid combatants mixing with refugees, the country's police enhanced their screening abilities along the borders, at refugee reception locations and around refugee camps. Once identified, combatants were separated from refugees and transported to

internment sites located at significant distances from the border and from the refugee camps.

The internees were offered three meals per day and provided with health care, recreational activities and certain non-food items. Training programmes were later implemented to equip them with skills to reintegrate back into society.

This separation of combatants from refugees significantly contributed towards the maintenance of the civilian character of refugee settlements in Sierra Leone. Refugees, in particular children, were not exposed to intensive military conscription pressures, while the survivors of horrific

crimes, including gang rape, were better protected from the perpetrators and shielded from constant reminders of the injustices which were inflicted upon them. As a result, the refugee populations enjoyed greater protection in the camps.

Political and security considerations also played a role in Sierra Leone's decision to disarm and intern the Liberian fighters. For one, the country did not want to be seen as supporting dissident activity against the government of Liberia. Perhaps more importantly, since these armed combatants had arrived in the first half of 2002 -- in the early stages of the peace process in Sierra Leone -- it was essential for the government to neutralize any possible threats to peace, particularly as the country's own Disarmament and Demobilization programme had only recently concluded.

With legal support and advice from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNHCR, a total of two intern-



Internees at the reception centre in Sinje

ment sites were established - one in Mapeh, Port Loko District and the second in Mafanta, Magburaka District. Security was maintained by the Sierra Leone Army, Police and Prisons department. The internees were offered three meals per day and provided with health care, recreational activities and certain non-food items. Training programmes were later implemented to equip them with skills to reintegrate back into society.

Now, almost three years later, these former fighters are finally coming home. Their release and repatriation is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding, which was prepared with the support of UNMIL and signed by the governments of Liberia and Sierra Leone on 24 March 2005. To ensure the voluntary nature of the return, ICRC teams conducted individual interviews with the internees in the internment sites prior to departure. This process has been facilitated through assistance offered by the government of Sierra

Leone, with funding support from the European Union. The returning former

Refugees, in particular children, were not exposed to intensive military conscription pressures, while the survivors of horrific crimes, including gang rape, were better protected from the perpetrators and shielded from constant reminders of the injustices which were inflicted upon them. As a result, the refugee populations enjoyed greater protection in the camps.

fighters receive reintegration packages similar to those given to returning

refugees, along with tool kits relevant to the skills training they undertook while interned. Many of them were previously associated with the Armed Forces of Liberia and will be eligible to receive benefits accruing to them under the current programme of restructuring of the army.

Although the number of internees returning from Sierra Leone is relatively small when compared to the 103,000 ex-combatants who were disarmed and demobilized in Liberia in 2003 and 2004, the establishment and maintenance of internment sites like these has broad implications for peace in the sub-region.

In particular, it offers states a means to address political and security concerns while fulfilling their international humanitarian, refugee and human rights obligations. The successful conclusion of this operation also marks a dramatic step forward in the way countries approach the problem of detention and subsequent repatriation of foreign fighters in West Africa. ♦



Ex-Combatants Return to Farming

By Durudee Sirichanya Prkic

Zuluyee in Liberia's Nimba County is thick with forests. In the heart of the dense dark forest Josiah Dahn, a 25 year old ex-combatant cuts down trees as he hums a popular reggae song –That's the way it goes. The song talks of the ups and downs of life that we have to cope with. Dahn is clearing the forest to make a farm.

"I fought for so many years for Charles Taylor", Dahn says. He was eight years old when he took up arms to follow fighters of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) of former President Taylor who was in the bush as the rebel leader. "My parents were massacred in my presence and I had no choice but to join the revolution," he says as a matter-of-fact.

Josiah has decided to take life positive-

ly and engages in farming. His wife Mamie Konah and three year old son Emmanuel Dahn, also called Papee, are sitting a few yards away, looking at the sole bread-winner of their family manipulating the cutlass.

"I am here every day with Josiah. I cook for him and my presence is an encouragement for him. Maybe if I stay home he will be thinking of me and will not concentrate on his work," says a beaming Mamie.

Josiah says, "My family have been living on the food ration I got from the disarmament camp. I have to help myself because I will not always be fed by WFP. But I have to rely on WFP for farming materials and seeds. WFP is our hope because had it not been for it I wouldn't be here today making farm. I had no money

to buy seeds and tools."

Mike Tiah, another ex-combatant who has decided to go back to the soil, is grateful for the services rendered by WFP. Thirty-five year old Mike is the only child of his aged father and mother, 85 and 76 respectively and he doesn't have a wife yet. "I have these old people to look after so I don't have any intention of having a child now. They are my responsibility, so they are my children," he says.

"My food ration helps me to feed these old people for sometime. Now that gun is no more the way to get food, I have to make farm. In doing that WFP is my only hope for support," he says.

In Liberia, WFP interventions will progressively shift from emergency to recovery activities such as school feeding, Food Support to Local Initiatives (FSLI) and



Food for Training (FFT) in a bid to create basic conditions for the resettlement and reintegration. WFP plans to assist 943,000 beneficiaries in 2005 and 835,000 in 2006 with 156,000 metric tonnes of food valued at US\$ 180 million.

WFP provided food assistance to all ex-combatants under the UNMIL's Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme. Wet feeding rations were served to disarmed ex-combatants at cantonment sites and Interim Care Centres, plus take home rations were given upon completion of the Disarmament/Demobilization exercise.

Over 95,000 former combatants benefited from the WFP Disarmament Demobilization support and they are welcomed to participate in FSLI and FFT activities countrywide. ♦

From Food Emergency to Food Production

After 14 years of unrest that claimed almost 150,000 lives, Liberians finally have a chance for normalcy more so as UNMIL prepares to ensure a credible election to be held on 11 October 2005. Over 100,000 displaced persons and 15,000 Liberian refugees have been assisted to return home so far but more than 500,000 are still living in displaced camps and neighbouring countries. Those returning home are facing lack of basic necessities like shelter, clinics, and schools. But, things are looking up "small, small," as the Liberians say. More than 350,000 children are back in school, and are being fed hot lunches everyday, often their only meal for the day. Communities are able to join hands and build farms, roads, clinics, with basic food support keeping them going.

During the first three months of 2005, the World Food Programme in Liberia focused on the following:

- Providing food rations for an average of nearly 300,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and returnees residing in camps and transit centres every month. Due to pipeline constraints, WFP was only able to distribute 1,300 kcal per person per day (two thirds of the daily recommendation) to the IDPs and refugees living in camps. The repatriated returnees and resettled IDPs are given a full ration at recommended 2,100 kcal.

- The voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees and IDPs to their preferred areas of return is making steady

progress. For each of them WFP provides full food rations for four-months, given in two instalments. The first installment is provided prior to their return, while the second entitlement is distributed two months later at the place where they have resettled. As of mid-April, 110,000 IDPs and 15,000 Liberian refugees have been repatriated and reintegrated. On a daily basis, many more are coming spontaneously.

- WFP Emergency School Feeding programme (ESF) is currently reaching 350,000 school children. The agency aims to increase its reach to 450,000 Liberian school children in 2005.

- WFP also provides food support to an average of 22,000 vulnerable people each month. The support includes supplementary and therapeutic feeding to mothers and children, institutions caring for orphans, the elderly, and the handicapped, as well as people affected with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and leprosy.

- WFP and its partners recently conducted a Vulnerability Assessment, Food Security, and Nutrition Baseline Survey for Lofa, Bomi, and Grand Gedeh counties, recognising the need for accurate and reliable data to guide its programming. To follow up, an independent Emergency Food Security Assessment was held in April 2005 for Lofa, Nimba, Montserrado and Gborpolu to assess the humanitarian food assistance needs in the country during the remaining period of 2005 - 2006. ♦

FARM HANDS Ex-combatants at work



Police Recruits Graduate



By Yuko Maeda

Oretha Farley was just 11 years old when the civil war first began in Liberia. Although she didn't witness any murderous acts during the 14-year civil strife, she heard enough gruesome tales of meaningless killings. For Farley the sound of gunshots was part of her daily life until the international peacekeepers ensured a ceasefire deal among the three warring factions in late 2003. "We were tired of all of that," she says.

It is the lawlessness she grappled with in her formative years that motivated Farley to join the Liberia National Police Service. Farley, now 26, is one of 123 new police officers who graduated in March from the Liberian National Police Training Academy. "I love this profession," she said at the graduation ceremony. "I'd like to stay in the police, working in criminal justice and public administration because there're so many ways I can serve my country."

That dedication and a strong sense of commitment are common features among the new officers. Dressed in neat dark blue uniforms and well shined black boots, 116 men and seven women swore to serve the people of Liberia at the graduation ceremony held on 26 March. After receiving a certificate of completion each, all took an oath in unison to devote themselves to investigate any offences, protect life and property of Liberians and respect human rights in accordance with the law.

The police academy was established in July 2004 by the UN Mission in Liberia and the National Transitional Government of Liberia to create a better-trained police service to protect and promote the constitutional rights of the citizens. With an initial plan to train a 3,500-strong service within two years and to have 1,900 new officers fully operational by the national elections in October, the academy has since trained about 700 new recruits. The 123 new officers were the first group that successfully completed a 10-month training programme.

"One of the highest achievements to date of the United Nations Mission has been the establishment of this National Police Academy," said UNMIL Officer-in-Charge Steinar Bjornsson at the ceremony, noting creating a new police force was essential to sustain the new-found peace in Liberia. From the inception of the academy to the day-to-day operation, UNMIL Civilian Police with more than 1,000 international police officers from 37 countries have been helping Liberian counterparts in such efforts.

Liberia's criminal justice system has long been dysfunctional. The police used to be a source of fear for many citizens as police officers took part in fierce fighting and terrorized people during the war. The Transitional Government, with help from UNMIL, is now trying hard to mend the defaced image of the Liberian police.

"Our people have seen the police as intimidators, fierce people. They have been afraid of you," NTGL Chairman Charles Gyude Bryant told the graduates

at the ceremony. He said the new officers should maintain a high standard of integrity and ethics. "You are the first men and women, internationally trained police officers... I want you to go out as a role model for our society. I want you to respect people when you serve the country."

During the 10-month training, the graduates learned skills in general policing, tactical training, criminal investigations, firearms, Liberian legislation and gender issues, among others. They underwent in-house instruction for the first three months, six month of field training and a one-month training at the academy just before the graduation.

Addressing the new officers, Bjornsson commended their hard work and dedication to succeed. "Your presence shows your persistence and determination. We honour you for your achievement," he said.

Bjornsson noted that interaction with citizens is critical in bringing peace and stability to Liberia as they represent the government and the rule of law. "Performing your duties, maintaining law and order, carrying out investigations, you are the face of a new Liberia to the people of this proud country," he reminded the new graduates. "You are here to protect the citizenry, to prevent violence and to



Mr. Bjornsson congratulates a new graduate

restore law and order to Liberia. Take these responsibilities seriously.”

Sipply Monsue, 27, heard him right. “This is a new world. I’d like to make sure the country is secured by the rule of law, respecting the rights of all people of Liberia,” Monsue said with renewed dedication. He said while in the training he nurtured a great interest in the criminal justice system and human rights. “No matter who you are, everyone has rights that should be respected equally,” he said. “I know it’s not going to be easy, but it’s our duty to make it happen.”

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At the graduation ceremony, the academy recognized three distinguished graduates. Marcus A. Freeman received the Academic Achievement Award for his highest academic marks while the Distinguished Leadership Award was presented to Richard S. Scotland for his leading role. The academy also recognized Vera K.V. Manly as the Most Inspirational Recruit.

“I feel very honoured to receive the award,” Manly said after the ceremony while friends and family surrounded her to celebrate her achievement. She said her achievement was the result of support from her colleagues who encouraged her along the way during the hard training. Manly, who was an experienced police officer before joining the academy, said she would apply new techniques in criminal investigation as soon as she gets to the field.

The first graduation ceremony in March marked a historic day in the country’s law enforcement. In every four weeks until the end of 2006, hundreds of newly trained officers from the academy will join the Liberian National Police Service. ♦

Belgian Weapons for Police Academy



A police cadet undergoes weapons training

On 21 April 2005 the Liberian National Police received another shot in the arm when the Belgian Government and the city of Antwerp donated US\$ 500,000 worth of arms and ammunition for training the police to UNMIL. Among them were 680 Smith & Wesson .38 Cal revolvers, 40 Browning 9mm pistols, 90 shot guns and over 60,000 rounds of assorted ammunition.

The arms and ammunition will be used to train students at the Police Academy in basic firearms shooting skills and the technical workings of the handguns. The weapons will contribute substantially to the reform and development of the Liberian National Police.

Formally handing over the weapons Jacques Paul Klein, the outgoing Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia, urged students to

“embrace the concept that a firearm is not a tool of power; it is a tool of last resort to protect your life or that of another in grave danger.” The CIVPOL Police Commissioner Mohammad Alhassan described the weapons as “very timely and helpful” for development of the Liberian National Police.

“We hope this donation will help the Liberian police to meet future challenges,” Mr. Rob Kuijpers, Executive Chairman of SN Brussels said. The airline had assisted in transporting the weapons. The Government of Belgium also provided the services of two weapons inspectors for one week to assist the police academy training staff in launching the firearms programme.

The donation, facilitated by the Mayor of Antwerp, Mr Janssens and Mr. Paul Van Goethem of UNDP, is not a direct contribution to the Liberian Government. It will only be used by UNMIL for the purpose of training the new Liberian police. After completion of the training, the weapons and surplus ammunitions will be destroyed.

The .38 revolver is ideal as an introductory weapon for firearms training. In use since World War II, until recently it was the weapon of choice by most democratic police forces throughout the world. The .38 revolver is also a very “safe” weapon easily maintained, reliable, and performs in all climates. The weapon also has a limited number of moving parts, making it readily adaptable to first time training initiatives. ♦

Ashim Choudhury

UNMIL Civilian Police contributing Countries					
	Argentina		Jordan (FPU)		Pakistan
	Bangladesh		Kenya		Philippines
	Bosnia-Herzegovina		Kyrgyzstan		Poland
	China		Malawi		Portugal
	Czech Republic		Namibia		Russia
	Fiji		Nepal (FPU)		Samoa
	Gambia		Niger		Senegal
	Germany		Nigeria (FPU)		Serbia-Montenegro
	Ghana		Norway		Sri Lanka
	Jamaica				Sweden
					Turkey
					Uganda
					Ukraine
					Uruguay
					United States
					Yemen
					Zambia
					Zimbabwe

Zero Tolerance!

In recent times the issue of sexual exploitation and the United Nations has consumed more media space than pressing development issues. The focus has been many peacekeepers in various parts of the world including Liberia. The seriousness with which the UN views sexual exploitation and abuse can be gauged from the fact that some 180 peace keepers from seven countries are currently under investigation in the Congo. One French peace keeper has been sent home, disgraced. If found guilty, the others too will be sent home and face charges in their own country as the UN has adopted a “zero tolerance” policy against sexual exploitation and abuse.

The UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette’s recent visit to Liberia was to ensure compliance with the code of conduct by staff. “The Secretary-General is determined that every staff member is aware of and abides by the standards of conduct,” she said, addressing a gathering

of UNMIL staff. Earlier, Special Representative Jacques Paul Klein sent a memo to all UNMIL staff cautioning them. “I want to ensure that all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse are properly investigated,” he said in the memo. “It is the responsibility of managers at all levels and military commanders, to create and maintain an environment that prevents sexual exploitation and abuse,” he added. Adam Abdelmoula, Deputy Chief of the Human Rights and Protection Section, was appointed UNMIL Focal Point on the issue.

What does sexual exploitation and abuse constitute? There could be varying definitions, depending on the scenario. But typically it involves a situation where one uses a position of power to take sexual advantage. The use of force or threat in an unequal relationship to seek sexual favours also constitutes sexual exploitation and abuse. More commonly sexual exploitation takes place in scenarios

where there are large numbers of beneficiaries under one’s authority - like refugees, IDPs, returnees or victims of natural disaster or calamity.

Sexual acts involving children are simply not tolerated. Under Section 3.2 (b) of the Secretary-General’s bulletin ST/SGB/2003/13, sexual activity with anyone under 18, regardless of local age of consent, is strictly prohibited.

Even the Under Secretary-General, DPKO, Jean-Marie Guéhenno, laboured the point when speaking to UNMIL staff on the evening of 22 November 2004. “Everybody is accountable,” he warned, emphasizing that sexual exploitation or inappropriate behavior at a senior level could mean “reason enough to leave the mission.” As the Deputy Secretary-General put it, “It’s extremely important that the United Nations credentials be impeccable. We stand for justice and equity.” ♦



Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette addresses UNMIL staff on the ‘Zero Tolerance’ policy

Ethiopians in the Service of Peace

By Alexactus T. Kaure

Ethiopia, in the forefront of UN peacekeeping today, has responded to successive calls by the UN for troops since early 1950s. The country's participation in peacekeeping began with the deployment of 5,000 soldiers to Korea in 1951.

Between 1951 and 2005, Ethiopia has participated in five peacekeeping missions in Africa and beyond, says Sector IV Commander Brig. Gen. Tsegaye Tesema proudly.

Currently a battalion of 900 Ethiopian soldiers is serving the cause of peace in Burundi since 2003. Other missions have included Congo and Rwanda.

But in Africa the largest contribution to peacekeeping by Ethiopia is in Liberia with 2,534 of its soldiers proudly wearing the blue helmets, six of them women. The Ethiopian Contingent has been in Liberia almost since the beginning of the Mission, having arrived in the country in December 2003. They are currently deployed in Grand Gedeh, River Cess, Lower Nimba, Sinoe, River Gee and Grand Kru. Divided into Headquarter staff and three battalions, they provide both scheduled and unscheduled patrols.

The scheduled patrols are carried out regularly and mainly in the cities and towns both during the day and at night. The unscheduled patrols are conducted in places where there is no permanent presence of UNMIL peacekeepers and could either be aerial or ground patrol.

Deployed in the largest sector of the country, the Ethiopian peacekeepers also share responsibilities with the Senegalese contingent in Maryland and the Bangladeshi contingent in Nimba County. A good example of this collaborative work happened in late January this year during a

riot in Harper following a report of ritual killing, when the Ethiopians were called in to lend a helping hand to contain the situation. During that time, a unit from ETH-BATT V in Zwedru was dispatched to Harper to provide reinforcement to the Senegalese peacekeepers deployed there.

Like the rest of UNMIL contingents, Ethiopian peacekeepers successfully oversaw the formal Disarmament and Demobilization process in their area of operation. Currently they are actively involved in facilitating the return of IDPs and returnees by providing security escorts and transport.

Awarding UN service medals to the Ethiopian peacekeepers recently, Special Representative Jacques Paul Klein praised

But in recent months, they have also been called upon to deal with issues potentially disruptive to the security and stability of the country. In late November they had to respond to the riots that took place in Côte d'Ivoire as Sector IV shares a long stretch of border with the neighbouring country and many Ivorians crossed the border to escape the mayhem. Ethiopian peacekeepers began robust and intensive patrols along the common border, increased troop deployment in critical border areas and instituted a coordinated communication flow with other sectors of the Mission.

In January this year UNMIL authorized a joint military and civilian mission to enter Sapo National Park in Sinoe County.



Donning the blue helmet, Ethiopian Soldiers

the commitment and dedication of the contingent. "You have successfully disarmed thousands of fighters and combatants from the warring factions of Liberia's civil war – and for that, all Liberians are truly grateful. Your work has earned the gratitude not only of the United Nations, but even more importantly, of those for whom your help means the most – the people of Liberia," he said.

Of late, the Ethiopian peacekeepers have turned their attention in another direction – election support. They provide security escorts as well as transport and accommodation for both UNMIL and national electoral personnel involved in preparations for the elections. This support would become even more crucial in the months ahead as the country gets closer to the elections in October.

The Park, home to more than three thousand people engaged in illegal mining and hunting, is one of the most inaccessible terrains in Liberia and had remained outside the reach of peace and security provided by the UN. It was Ethiopian soldiers who escorted the team that entered the Park to demonstrate the resolve of the United Nations in bringing peace and security to all areas of the country, however inaccessible. Tragically, however, during the more than 10 hours of trekking under a scorching sun, one Ethiopian soldier died on the way back.

The loss of one of their own has not dampened the spirit of the Ethiopian peacekeepers in Liberia. Asked how long the Ethiopians are going to stay in the country, the Commander simply answered, "until the mission is complete." ♦

LIBERIANS

“How Do You View the Upcoming Elections?”



Meiway Doe (31) Secretary

“I would like to see free, fair and transparent elections this year.”



Dixon F. Holmes (33)

Inter-Con Security Guard

“I think that as Liberians, we should work together towards free, fair and democratic elections. Having over 18 or more political parties should not be a problem but we as Liberians must make the right decisions this time around. We should not make the same mistakes as was done in the past. We must make sound and informed decisions when we cast our ballots.”



Evangeline Kennedy (40)

Housewife

“I think the elections should be held and it should be held on schedule. I would want to see most of the registered political parties merge to a maximum of maybe three or four parties. On voting day, let all Liberians choose the right person. When casting our votes, cast it not for rice but for rights.”



Ahmed Sheriff (32)

Journalist

“I would like Liberians to go to the polls en masse and elect trusted leaders because that’s the only way we can build a new Liberia.”



Comfort Toe (30)

Businesswoman

“We urge those in authority conducting elections to ensure that these elections are free and fair. Voting Liberians should be reminded that those being voted into office should be able to deliver to the Liberian people. Our children need a future.”



Elijah Dee (39) Manager

“I would like all Liberians to look at people who will put the nation first, above self interest and will make a difference. Liberians should look at the best amongst all the candidates.”



Angeline Boikpah (34)

Security

“I only like to see free and fair elections. This time around let’s open our eyes and elect a leader for Liberia. I don’t want Liberians to repeat the mistakes of the past.”



Waunica Roberts (40)

Christian Leader

“I want to urge politicians to reduce the numerous registered and proposed political parties to only about two or three. Liberians will be confused with too many political parties which will not be good for the country.”



Maleva Marvie (24)

Health Science Student

“What we want is free, fair and democratic elections. I want all Liberians to register and on voting day, vote your conscience and do not follow the crowd.”

SPEAK "Coming National Elections?"



Frank Sainworla (40)
PANA Correspondent

"I'll like to see competitors respect the outcome of the elections. Let personal ambition give way to national interest. People must learn to respect the democratic wishes of the people. There should be no mind-set as to if Mr. X wins, no matter what, the elections is not free and fair."



Fatu Conneh (27) Student

"As we approach the elections this year, I want to urge all Liberians to vote for a qualified and God-fearing leader who wants to see Liberia rise out of the ashes of destruction to one of reconstruction and development."



Flomo Z. Pewu (35)
Returnee/Agriculturalist

"I would like to tell every Liberian to come out and exercise your political franchise because if you sit home and say, 'I am not going to vote', it would have an impact on us. If you come out, your one vote will be able to put into office the right person."



Oretha Juwle (38) HIV/AIDS Counselor/Social Worker

"Liberians should come together; consolidate their forces in voting for prominent and God-fearing people who will steer this nation to success."



Charles M. Harris (22)
Sociology Student

"I hope that this time around, we can have a faithful person who can serve the Liberian people, because Liberians have been going through trying and difficult times over the last 14 years. We hope that whoever is elected will see the need to cater to the Liberian people to the best of their ability. We hope that whoever is elected fears God because it's the beginning of wisdom."



Masu Brown (20) Student,
Bishop Marwiah Institute

"I would like to see Liberians come out and vote in the upcoming elections, put into office the correct person. Though it's my first time voting, I urge all Liberians to take advantage of this opportunity and vote wisely."



Anthony Washington (35)
Unemployed Liberian

"Politicians come to us (voters) with flowery rhetoric. At the end of the day they want to get power and enrich themselves. We should be mindful of such politicians. Another thing, the number of political parties should be reduced to a maximum of two or three because with more than 18 parties the electorate will be confused."



Lawrence Gardiner (45)
Chauffeur

"I hope that Liberians will vote wisely rather than vote for a bag of rice or money. I also want to see political parties reduced to two or three so we don't get confused."



Victoria Bryant (38)
Secretary

"I encourage every Liberian to vote and elect the right people during the elections. I urge both the young and the old to come out on voting day to exercise their franchise. That's the first step to building a new and better Liberia."

New Director of Administration

Ronnie Stokes was appointed Director of Administration of the United Nations Mission in Liberia on 15 February 2005.

Mr. Stokes began his UN career in June 1993 with the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II) where he served in various capacities as Deputy Spokesperson, Chief of Buildings Management, and Chief of Logistics Control Centre. In October 1995 he was assigned to the United Nations Peace Forces (UNPF) located in Zagreb, Croatia, as Chief of Logistics Control Centre and reassigned in April 1996 as Chief of Integrated Support Services of the United Nations Transitional Administration in Eastern Slovenia (UNTAES).

In March 1997 Mr. Stokes was appointed Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Logistics Base (UNLB) in Brindisi, Italy, and became the Chief Administrative Officer of UNLB in June 1998. In January 2000 he was transferred



Ronnie Stokes

to the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) where he served for six months as Chief of Integrated Support Services before being assigned as Chief of General Services at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in August the same year.

Mr. Stokes returned to East Timor in

February 2001 as Director of Administration and continued to serve in the same capacity with the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISSET) as the country gained independence in May 2002. He was once again appointed Chief Administrative Officer of UNLB in September 2002. The following year in June Mr. Stokes was appointed Director of Administration for the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Sergio Vieira de Mello, in Baghdad, Iraq, until 4 September 2003. From July 2004 he served as Interim Director of Administration of the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) until his assignment to UNMIL.

Born in January 1948 in Texas, United States, Mr. Stokes attended the University of Texas where he obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in International Studies. Prior to joining the United Nations, Mr. Stokes served with the U.S. Marine Corps for 26 years.

New Police Commissioner

Born in Accra, Ghana, on 21 January 1954, Mohammed Ahmed Alhassan did his early schooling at St. Martins Secondary School and T.I Ahamadiyya Secondary School. Later he graduated from the University of Ghana, Legon, in 1979 and then obtained his Masters in Police Administration and Criminology from the University College of Cardiff, United Kingdom, in 1984.

Starting his professional career as a high school teacher in 1974, he later joined the Ghana Police Training School as an instructor in 1979. Later he served as Special Assistant to the Regional Minister (Security Affairs) from 1982-1983. The 'teacher' policeman was also a part-time lecturer (Police Administration) at the University of Ghana from 1987-1989 after which he was Visiting Lecturer at the Armed Forces Staff College, Accra from 1998-1999.

Mr. Alhassan held various command positions in the Ghana Police Service,



Mohammed Ahmed Alhassan

starting as an Assistant Staff Officer to Inspector-General of Police from 1981-1982 which was followed by a stint as Staff Instructor at Ghana Police College from 1984 to 1985. In 1985 he became the District Commander of Police, Tesano, followed by two more postings as District

Commander of Police Adbraka and Suame. By 1991 he was Divisional Commander of Police Nkawkaw and then Hohoe. By 1994 he had risen to become Regional Commander of Police, Tema.

His career with the United Nations started in 1989 as Station Commander, UNCIVPOL/Khorixas, Namibia (UNTAG). The same year he became District Commander, UNCIVPOL/Otwijarango, Namibia (UNTAG). In 1997 he joined UNMIBH as Police Monitor, IPTF, and then became IPTF Weapons Inspector at Siroki Brijeg/Mostar. In 1999 he joined the UN headquarters in New York as a Civilian Police Officer. He was the Deputy Commissioner of Civpol at UNMIL from 2003 until March 2005 when he was promoted as the Civilian Police Commissioner. Alhassan specialises in community policing and has also written on the subject. He is married and has three children.

Timeline

1 October 2003

Day One of UNMIL, ECOMIL troops “rehabilitated” as UN peacekeepers.

6 October 2003

First meeting of Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) comprising representatives of all factions under UNMIL auspices.

14 October 2003

National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) takes office.

1 December 2003

UNMIL stages a symbolic destruction of arms and formally launches the DDRR Programme in Liberia at Camp Schieffelin, Monrovia.

7 December 2003

UNMIL begins disarmament at the first cantonment site at Camp Schieffelin, Monrovia.

18 December 2003

Following discussion with Liberian political and military leaders, UNMIL announces the suspension of the disarmament and demobilization process to allow for the creation of more capacity and the upgrading of living conditions at the sites.

23 December 2003

SRSG Jacques Paul Klein addresses the Security Council on the first report of the Secretary General concerning the situation in Liberia.

27 December 2003

UNMIL Pakistani contingent deployed at Clay Junction, marking the first military move into LURD-controlled area.

31 December 2003

UNMIL expands its presence to Buchanan and Gbarnga, deploying over 650 Bangladeshi peacekeepers.

12 January 2004

The Interim Police Training Course (IPTC), designed to provide provisional training to current members of the Liberian Police is launched by the UNMIL Civilian Police with the enrollment of the first class of 24 men and one woman.

5 - 6 February 2004

Liberia's Reconstruction Conference held in New York to address short and mid-term reconstruction and development needs. US\$520 million pledged.

15 April 2004

DDRR programme resumes. Disarmament begins in Gbarnga.

20 April 2004

Disarmament begins in Buchanan.

25 April 2004

Disarmament and demobilization begins in Tubmanburg.

5 May 2004

SRSG Jacques Paul Klein and NTGL Chairman Gyude Bryant formally launch the recruitment campaign for the new Liberian Police Service.

6 May 2004

Disarmament recommences for ex-GoL militias at Kakata.

10 -11 June 2004

Force Commanders of UN peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire meet in Monrovia to enhance regional coordination.

24 - 25 June 2004

UN Security Council mission visits Liberia.

9 July 2004

Disarmament begins in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County.

12 July 2004

NTGL Chairman Gyude Bryant and SRSG Jacques Paul Klein launch the training programme for the new police service of Liberia at the newly reopened Police Service Training Academy in Painesville, Monrovia.

17 August 2004

Disarmament begins in Ganta.

29 September 2004

Disarmament begins in Harper.

01 October 2004

UNHCR launches the voluntary repatriation. 500 refugees make the first trip home from Ghana and Sierra Leone.

20 October 2004

The NTGL declares six counties --Grand Cape Mount, Bomi, Gbarpolu, Margibi, Bong and Rivercess -- ready for the return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

31 October 2004

The Chairman of the NTGL announces the official end to disarmament.

3 November 2004

Liberia's three warring factions officially disband themselves marking an historic milestone in the implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement.

8 November 2004

The first group of 500 internally displaced persons and returnees begin their journey home, marking Liberia's ongoing transition from conflict to recovery and rehabilitation.

20 - 22 November 2004

UN Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guehenno visits Liberia to review UNMIL activities and the peace process.

30 November 2004

The Liberian National Police begins its deployment to all 15 counties of Liberia, signifying rapid improvement in the rule of law in the country.

14 December 2004

The National Transitional Legislative Assembly adopts a revised electoral reform law.

11 January 2005:

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appoints Steinar Bjornsson as his new Deputy Special Representative for Operations in Liberia.

31 January 2005

The National Elections Commission (NEC) launches civic/voter education ahead of the upcoming elections.

7 February 2005

The NEC announces timetable for the presidential and legislative elections.

24 March 2005

First group of 123 police officers graduate following nine months of intensive training.



GET REGISTERED TO VOTE

