



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UNHCR Registers Liberian refugees

The UN Refugee Agency will begin next month registration for Liberian refugees under a three-year program to facilitate the return of those wishing to go back to Liberia.

Relief workers and agency partners are being mobilized for the registration in refugee camps in Guinea, Sierra Leone, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana and Nigeria which host about 320,000 Liberians.

Organized convoys are expected to begin repatriating Liberians on October 1st 2004 in collaboration with other UN agencies, local and international relief organizations, the transitional government of Liberia and countries hosting refugees.

Tripartite agreements between UNHCR, Liberia and countries of asylum are to be signed soon, beginning with Guinea. The agreements will provide the legal framework for the repatriation and spell out the rights and obligations of the parties.

Since the departure of former president Charles Taylor on Aug. 11, 2003, tens of thousands of Liberian refugees have trickled back home in the coun-

try devastated by 14 years of intermittent civil conflict. Estimates provided by authorities and relief workers put the number of spontaneous returnees over 50,000, mainly in Lofa, Nimba and Grand Cape Mount counties. Close to 10,000 spontaneous returnees from Sierra Leone have been unable to proceed to their homes and

side the capital, Monrovia. Many of these IDPs will be returning at the same time and to the same places refugees will be returning to.

UNHCR will work closely with all UN, NGO and government actors to ensure all returnees are treated equally and there is no discrimination upon



UNHCR staff carries out registration of Liberian returnees

are temporarily sheltered in camps as internally displaced people (IDPs).

There are some 400,000 IDPs, including 260,000 in 20 IDP camps mostly in Montserrado county out-

return.

Moses Okello, UNHCR's representative in Liberia, said that in general peace prevails in the country, citing the deployment of 15,000 peacekeepers

LIBERIAN REFUGEES

In January 2004, there were around 350,000 Liberian refugees in the neighboring countries.

The largest number of refugees was in Guinea, which cared for 150,000; Cote d'Ivoire had 74,000; Sierra Leone, 67,200 and Ghana 42,500

Some 100,000 refugees are expected to return spontaneously or with UNHCR convoys this year. Another 150,000 refugees are likely to repatriate in 2005 and 60,000 in 2006.

UNHCR Registers Liberian Refugees for Organized Repatriation

peacekeepers of the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) program for former combatants. Rebel fighters of Liberians United for the Restoration of Democracy (LURD) and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) have joined a transitional government under a peace agreement signed on Aug. 18, 2003. Preparations for elections on 14 October 2005 are on track.

The UN involvement in the peace process is unprecedented in Liberia and is sparking optimism among Liberians, Okello says. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has a robust mandate that includes powers to restore peace, support disarmament, assist the transitional government in restructuring the security sector and re-establish national authority.

But Okello warned that the situation remained "delicate" and that the UN refugee agency was simply

"facilitating" the repatriation of refugees who have voluntarily decided to go back to Liberia and needed assistance.

"The return conditions are not yet there, but as the peace process continues, disarmament continues, we will arrive at a point where we will be able to say to refugees that it is indeed time now to come home," Okello said.

Refugees who have returned to Liberia have found destroyed homes and little or non-existent basic services such as health, education, water and electricity. Although no major confrontations have been reported among various armed groups, insecurity prevails in parts of the country, where there is no UN troop presence. Some returnees are finding their homes occupied by former combatants. Demobilized soldiers awaiting

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implementation of the second phase of the DDRR process – rehabilitation and reintegration – are competing with returnees for scarce jobs and assistance. Some of these ex-fighters are resorting to criminality.

But there are encouraging signs as well. Farms are being cleared and planted. There are chickens and goats in some backyards. Some schools and clinics in scattered towns have been repaired. Standing amid shattered houses are new ones being rebuilt, with a fresh coat of paint and corrugated iron roofs. Cities such as Gbarnga, Voinjama and Ganta which were destroyed in recent fighting are springing back to life.

Many uprooted people who are coming back to practically nothing are simply saying that there is now peace, Liberia is home and it is time to make a fresh start.

Voluntary Repatriation Form



A repatriation convoy en-route to Sierra Leone

On registering, refugees will be given Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF), which will serve as the basic document for UNHCR's assistance and protection in Liberia. The VRF establishes the identity of refugees, serves as a travel document and enables the holder to access assistance and protection.

Returnees will be transported mainly by trucks. UNHCR and its partners are repairing stretches of rutted roads and bridges along repatriation corridors and setting up transit centers and way stations along overland corridors.

Air and sea transport will also be arranged for refugees in such areas as Ghana and Nigeria and those originating from Conakry in Guinea and Freetown in Sierra Leone.

During repatriation, each refugee travelling by land or sea is allowed a maximum of 50 kg of belongings and 30 kgs by air.

Assistance Package

UNHCR and the World Food Programme will provide an assistance package for returning refugees, depending on family size, upon presentation of the Voluntary Repatriation Form (VRF) or a valid refugee card for those who have returned spontaneously.

Each refugee will receive food supply from WFP for at least four months possible in two installments. Supplementary programs, such as "food support to local initiatives," are being drawn up to allow refugees access to food until they have become self-sufficient.

During the return movement, bread, biscuits and cooked meals

will be provided to the travelers at assembly points, way stations and trans-



Returnees will benefit from assistance package

sit centers.

The standard repatriation package includes plastic sheeting, jerry can, kitchen utensils, blanket, mat, soap, water bucket, lamp, sanitary kit, travel

bag.

Returnees going back to rural areas will be given agricultural tools – two hoes, two cutlasses, one axe and one file.

UNHCR will open centers to distribute repatriation packages to returnees, including those who return on their own, at Monrovia, Gbarnga, Zwedru, Toe Town, Ganta, Saclepea, Senequalle, Harper, Pleebo, Voinjama, ZorZor, Vahun, Sinje Tubmanburg and Bopolu.

Reintegration



Renovation of the Sekonodu Public School, Lofa

As part of its reintegration and rehabilitation efforts, UNHCR has signed an agreement with implementing partners amounting to more than US\$10 million. These reintegration projects are targeting the rehabilitation of schools, clinics, water points, community services and sanitation facilities. For start-up reintegration projects UNHCR has set aside close to US\$2 million for utilization in the Community Empowerment Projects (CEPs) that will provide means of livelihood for both local residents and returnees in the rebuilding of basic infrastructure, community skills training centers, rice drying floor,

youth programs, fishing groups, strengthening women groups, adult literacy programs, community schools, maintenance of feeder roads, peace building efforts, community psychosocial programmes, environmental programs and advocacy against HIV/AIDS.

UNHCR is supporting the Liberia Repatriation Reintegration Rehabilitation Commission (LRRRC) open up offices in all the counties to facilitate returnee monitoring and protection follow-up. NRC will be implementing a project to assist UNHCR and LRRRC and other local NGOs to monitor the total number of returnees, both refugees and IDPs, and to assess the specific needs in the return communities and to identify protection problems, including property disputes, ethnic tensions, gender based violence and other human rights violations. LRRRC has already open regional offices in Saclepea, Voinjama, Gbarnga, Harper, Zwedru and Turmanburg.

In Lofa, Bong, Grand Cape, Nimba, Monterrado, Grand Gedeh and Maryland, UNHCR, in collaboration with its partners, has begun repairing and rehabilitating schools, clinics, water points and shelters for the most vulnerable returnees.

In Gborpolu UNHCR has funded the rebuilding of the Totoquelleh village for 150 returnee and host families. The village was razed two years ago during fighting in the area. Although Maryland had been among the last counties in the list of the UN's high security risk, even before the deployment of UN troops, repair and building of clinics, schools and shelters have been going on for some time.

Other agencies are moving forward with their development plans.

Working Environment

The disarmament program started in the Monrovia area on Dec. 7. It then moved on to Gbargna in Bong county; Buchanan in Grand Bassa; Tubmanburg in Gbarpolu; VOA in Montserrado outside the capital; and Zwedru, Tapeta and Kpein covering Grand Gedeh, Nimba, River Cess and Sinoe. So far, some 60,000 combatants have disarmed.

Bad roads under the current monsoon season have delayed the official start of the program in Lofa county, where a cantonment site is being set up in Voinjama, but scores of combatants have been turning in weapons almost daily at the Pakistani battalion headquarters. Demobilization at Harper covering Maryland is due to start in mid-August.

Each disarming combatant receives US\$300 in two installments – the second portion on completion of a two-month orientation course. But in many

areas, payment of the second installment has been delayed. Various projects for the second



UNMIL patrols camps hosting returnees/IDPs

part of the demobilization program – rehabilitation and reintegration – are in various stages of planning and implementation. UNHCR integration projects, for example, also target ex-combatants.

In other developments, UN Police Commissioner Mark Kroeker announced last month the start of a program to train 3,500 offi-

cers for the new Liberian police force with the first group of 150 recruits undergoing both practical and theoretical lessons over a 10-month period.

Kroeker says that US\$1 million is needed to restructure and equip the new Liberia police service. The US government has provided US \$500,000 for the retraining of the new police service and that half of those funds have been used to improve facilities and start the training process.

Also last month, the UN Security Coordinator downgraded the security alert in Sinoe, River Cess, Grand Kru, River Gee and Maryland from phase 5 – the highest state of preparedness – to phase four which now prevails all over Liberia.

The downgrading enables the UN refugee agency to open an office at Harper for its operations in eastern Liberia.

Location of UNHCR Offices in Liberia

UNHCR offices	Counties covered
Branch office	Monrovia, Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa
Sub-office	Saclepea, Nimba, River Cess
Field office Gbarnga	Bong
Field office Harper	Maryland, River Gee, Grand Kru
Field office Zwedru	Grand Gedeh, Sinoe
Field office Zwedru	Grand Gedeh, Sinoe
Sub-office Voinjama	Lofa
Field office Tubmanburg	Gborpolu, Grand Cape Mount, Bomi

Overview of UNHCR Interventions

UNHCR OFFICE	MONROVIA	TUBMANBURG	GBARNGA
COUNTY (IES)	Montserrado, Margibi, Grand Bassa	Gbarpolu, Bomi, Grand Cape Mount	Bong
GENERAL	Activities in these counties are covered by a dedicated field operation team in Monrovia.	The establishment of permanent presence in the strategic town of Tubmanburg has made it possible for UNHCR to access both the main returnee areas and the Bo Waterside border entry point.	The town of Gbarnga serves as an important transit point from Monrovia and other hinterland counties.
SPONTANEOUS RETURNS	Spontaneous returnees from Sierra Leone continue to be transferred to these camp. So far some 7,000 returnee are hosted in the two camps.	Bo Waterside Grand Cape Mount County has been the busiest entry point so far with an estimated that over 15,000 returnees crossing from Sierra Leone. Those who cannot return to their places of origin are transferred to camps in Montserrado County; currently there are 7,000 mostly from Lofa County.	Unconfirmed reports indicate that large numbers of returnees have entered Bong mostly from areas adjacent to the border with Guinea. UNHCR will work with partners to confirm these reports and initiate assistance.
RECEPTION/ TRANSIT	Most of the activities are concentrated in Montserrado County which has three refugee camps, two returnee camps and over 15 IDP camps. A site has been identified in Monrovia for a 500 capacity transit centre to cater for sea and air repatriation and transit overnights.	A 400 capacity transit facility has been established at Bo Waterside for returnees awaiting to be transported inland.	One transit centre has been constructed in Gbarnga and another is to be constructed at Belefennal to cater for returnees proceeding to Lofa County.
HEALTH	UNHCR implementing partner and other agencies continue to support health activities in Perry Town and Seighbeh camps. HCR has provided two ambulances.	UNHCR implementing partner has in consultation with UNICEF and Ministry of Health identified 10 clinics for rehabilitation.	Needs are adequately covered by health agencies. HCR is in discussion with partners on ways to complement these.
WATER AND SANITATION	UNHCR partner has identified 15 wells for rehabilitation in key districts of Montserrado County and will be involved in community training and slab making for individual family latrines.	UNHCR partner has identified 20 wells for rehabilitation/ construction. The programme will also cover schools in Bomi and Grand Cape Mount.	An inter-agency village assessment is ongoing. Rehabilitation of water points and sanitation facilities will be carried out in 5 primary schools.
EDUCATION	UNHCR and UNICEF have established a primary school and kindergarten for returnee children at Perry Town. 270 students have enrolled thus far. UNHCR partner is to rehabilitate 7 schools in populous areas of Montserrado County with community involvement.	UNHCR partner has identified 7 primary schools for rehabilitation including education offices in Tubmanburg and Robertsports. Programme will include supply of school material, rapid education programme and support to parent-teacher associations in collaboration with UNICEF.	Priority is being given to rehabilitation of 5 primary schools with the highest enrolment and support to the Ministry of Education in reorganizing the County education management team.

UNHCR Interventions by county

HARPER	SACLEPEA	VOINJAMA	ZWEDRU
Maryland, Grand Kru, River Gee	Nimba, River Cess	Lofa	Grand Gendeh, Sinoe
This region is still under security phase V thus access by UNHCR staff has been limited.	Most of River Cess County is still not fully accessible; UNHCR continues to undertake monitoring and assessment missions to accessible parts of the County.	The county security phase was down graded to phase IV in May enabling limited presence. However DDDR has not commenced. UNHCR is the only UN agency with a presence in Lofa apart from UNMIL.	UNHCR was among the first agencies to resume presence in Zwedru. Other agencies present include UNMIL and OCHA.
UNHCR partners report increasing numbers of spontaneous returnees into Maryland County.	UNHCR, LRRRC and National Red Cross Society have been registering daily returns in accessible areas. An estimated that over 15,000 returnee have returned to Nimba mostly arriving from Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire.	So far reports indicate more than 20,000 returnees have gone back to Lofa, UNHCR will work with the National Red Cross society to formally register all the returnees in Lofa county and jointly with LRRRC monitor the accessible border entry points.	UNHCR and LRRRC continue to conduct missions in accessible areas to monitor returnee flows..
Two transit centers are to be constructed in Harper and Pleebo to respond to returnee flows.	Construction of one transit centre at Ganta is completed. Four way stations will be constructed to cater for returnees.	Two transit centres are to be constructed in Voinjama and Foya to cater for the large numbers of returnees expected in Lofa County.	The site for the transit center has been identified and a partner engaged to construct and manage it.
5 clinics have been identified for renovation; materials are being mobilized to begin the rehabilitation of Pleebo Health Centre.	Needs are adequately covered by health agencies including support from UNICEF.	5 clinics have been identified for rehabilitation. Intervention will include health outreach activities to support Voinjama Hospital.	Rehabilitation of 9 clinics already in progress. A UNHCR implementing partner also operates one ambulance provided by UNHCR.
A partner has conducted an extensive assessment as a result of which priority needs for water and sanitation have been identified.	In the main areas of return more than 30 priority wells have been identified for rehabilitation or construction.	UNHCR implementing partner has completed an assessment in Lofa for implementation of watsan activities.	More than 54 hand pumps have been identified for rehabilitation in 13 priority villages and schools without facilities plus training of water committees with UNICEF.
UNHCR partner has identified 8 schools for rehabilitation in partnership. HCR will support provision of learning materials for selected schools in consultation with UNICEF.	10 schools have been identified for rehabilitation. UNHCR is supporting a school for refugee and IDP children in Saclepea (150 students/three teachers).	UNHCR has signed an agreement with a partner for rehabilitation of 10 schools in Lofa.	28 schools have been identified by the community and local authorities as priority projects