

POLITICAL AND SECURITY DEVELOPMENTS



UNHCR organizes the transport of Liberian returnees

The security situation remains stable throughout Liberia and is encouraging a steady flow of organized and spontaneous return of Liberia refugees and internally displaced persons.

This is indicative of the amount of progress made in the restoration of peace since the intervention of the peacekeepers and successful end of the disarmament of ex combatants. Incidents of demonstrations and criminal activity however continued in the Monrovia area but this have not threatened the peace process.

In a related development, UNMIL Deputy Force Commander General Joseph Owonibi of Nigeria has replaced Kenyan General Daniel Opande as new Force Commander.

Start Date for Voter Education Announced

National Elections Commission (NEC) Chairman Francis Johnson-Morris announced 31 January as the start of voter education for the October 2005 general and presidential elections. A taskforce comprised of NEC, UNMIL and UNDP has been constituted to prepare for the commencement of voter education. The National Elections Commission (NEC) has

adopted the optical mark recognition system for the election. This system captures the photo of the voter and scans it on the registration card. Liberians have in the meantime been urged to take ownership of the process because voter education is critical to the positive outcome of the entire election process. Dozens of civil society organizations have been certificated to participate in the process. A countrywide awareness in the run-up to voter registration is being pursued.

UN Maintains Sanctions on Liberia's diamond, timber

The UN Security Council has renewed sanctions on Liberia's timber and diamond industries as well as on weapons and travel by certain former officials of government. The arms ban renewed for 12 months will be reviewed after six months and export of rough diamonds ban re-imposed for six months will be reviewed after three months.

The sanctions were originally imposed by Resolution 1521 in September 2003. The Security Council also has renewed the mandate of the Panel of Experts on Liberia until June 2005, in order to will carry out a follow-up mission to investigate compliance with the sanctions regime and economic impact of the sanctions.

The Council has also mandated the Panel to assess the effectiveness of the financial assets freeze and progress of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) toward meeting the conditions for lifting the sanctions.

Reconciliation Meeting Ends in Ganta

A reconciliation meeting between the Mano and Mandingo people of Ganta, Nimba County has ended with elders of the two groups agreeing to continue dialoguing to promote peaceful co-existence. The initiative is part of the reconciliation strategy promoted by the Nimba County Superintendent as a way to sensitise communities on the return and reintegration process. A Reconciliation Conference was also held in Sanniquelle, Nimba County. The need for a community confidence building exercise in the area was stressed. The citizens have also agreed to establish a Nimba County peace and reconciliation commission.

RETURN MOVEMENT OF LIBERIANS

In continuation of the UNHCR Organized Voluntary Repatriation of Liberian refugees, the second sea repatriation convoy from Ghana brought home some 349 Liberians on 11 January 2005. The maiden repatriation voyage was on 20 December 2004 with 384 returnees from Ghana. The ship MV Cerano carrying the returnees docked at the Bong Mines Piers, near the Freeport of Monrovia and returnees are given food, water and medical attention plus their returnee package, which consists of two-month initial food ration, non-food items and a local transportation allowance before being trucked to their final drop-off points. Also, on 11 January 2005, the first land convoy from Cote d'Ivoire through the Toe Town border entry point in southeastern Grand Gedeh County brought home 100 Liberian returnees.

UNHCR convoys from Cote D'Ivoire to Liberia are expected to run twice a week, bringing home 200 people at a time. The returnees are aware of the challenges back home and made their own choice to. As of 11 January 2005, UNHCR's land, sea and air repatriation activity has assisted the return of 5,935 Liberian refugees from asylum countries in West Africa.



2nd Repatriation voyage from Ghana, January 2005

SPONTANEOUS RETURNEES

As early as December 2003, Liberian refugees began returning from mainly Sierra Leone, citing improved security conditions. The arrival of large numbers of Liberian returnees prompted UNHCR to begin the organized movement of Liberians who choose to return home at this time. To date, spontaneous returnees continue to be recorded. On 23 December 2004, ten rented trucks with 183 spontaneous Liberians returnees and their personal effects were reported to have crossed the B'hai border in Grand Gedeh. Similar movements are being reported in Lofa, Bong, Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount Counties. In efforts to improve monitoring activities in order to reflect the true picture of the spontaneous movement, UNHCR along with its border-monitoring partner, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) continue to strategize for more improved monitoring mechanism. Meetings have been held with monitors to address specific issues and concerns to improve the project for 2005. A workshop was held by UNHCR for NRC monitors in Bong County. Several motorbikes were given to the monitors at the end of the workshop within the spirit of the partnership. 19 motorbikes were donated to NRC monitors in Grand Gedeh County to enable them have access to most of the countryside. In the meantime, UNHCR organized also a

two-day workshop for monitors of its government partner, the Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC) in Bong County. 17 persons participated in the workshop. The exercise was intended to refresh the legal knowledge and develop monitoring skills of the monitors

IDP RETURN EXERCISE

UNHCR continues to lend support and contribute to the return of IDPs from recognized camps to their places of origin. The return of IDPs is being carried out within the framework of the interagency collaborative approach.

So far, more than 16,000 IDPs have been assisted to return to communities in Bomi, Gbarpolu and Grand Cape Mount counties. A large number of IDPs in camps in Bong County have also spontaneously returned to their places of origin ahead of the farming season. In other parts of the country, similar returns have occurred for the same reasons. The IDP spontaneous returnees said they could not wait for the organized movement while farming activity has commenced in their areas. UNHCR and other actors are encouraging the IDPs to return home spontaneously as movement by organized transport is slow.

UNHCR/UNDP Signed Memorandum of Understanding To Facilitate Liberia's Recovery Program

UNHCR and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) have officially entered into an agreement, Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to collaborate efforts to sustained recovery and development in Liberia.

The UNHCR/UNDP Memorandum of understanding includes collaboration in the formation of District Development Committees (DDCs) and implementation of Community Empowerment Projects. The project will involve joint assessment and evaluation missions, integrated planning, and joint approval of community projects.

The signing of the MOU is one in a series that UNHCR intends to enter into with other sister UN agencies in line with the 4Rs concept, which promotes linkages between the four processes of repatriation, reintegration, rehabilitation and reconstruction in post-conflict situations. It lays the groundwork for medium and longer-term programmes and projects, build up local capacity, mobilize communities, and support processes of good governance.

The joint projects UNHCR/UNDP reintegration program tar-

gets areas of high return to include Lofa, Grand Cape Mount, Bong, Nimba, Maryland and Grand Gedeh Counties. A viable environment for sustained return needs to be created for Liberian returnees to become independent of relief assistance and to become self-sufficient



COLLABORATION WITH OTHER HUMANTARIAN PARTNERS

- Meetings have taken place in Bomi, Bong and Lofa Counties to make the Housing and Property Committees effective in addressing prevailing issues of illegal occupation of houses owned by returnees and IDPs in the areas of return. A specific project to assist communities to address property disputes and ease tensions is being developed with the assistance of Oxfam. UNHCR is concerned about property issues in the face of the current repatriation of refugees and movement of IDPs to their places of origin. Meanwhile, the County Housing and Property Committee has approved the draft guidelines for settlement of housing issues by counties authorities.
- UNHCR is working with the Ministry of Gender of Liberia to compile a comprehensive report on Sexual Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) activities for 2004. UNHCR is also part of an inter-agency collaborative group pressing for the prosecution of those found to be involved in SGBV cases in the country.
- A local non-governmental organization - Zao Development Council - based in Nimba County has begun rehabilitating major highways in the county. This USAID-funded project has provided job opportunities for 825 ex-combatants and war-affected people in Ganta and surrounding areas. UNHCR implementing partner, African Concern International (ACI), organized a training workshop on Community Empowerment Projects (CEPs) for key stakeholders. The workshop took place at the William towards Tubman High School in Monrovia on 27-28 December 04. The forum brought together over 35 participants from local and international organizations, Government Line Ministries, Development Superintendents and UNHCR.
- The Ministry of Rural Development, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), has launched a project intended to provide safe drinking water and sanitation facilities to 20 schools in various districts of Rivercess County.

What you need to know

- **Return to your home country is voluntary**
- **UNHCR only facilitates Liberian refugees who have expressed the desire to return home**
- **UNHCR is only facilitating return to areas declared safe by the Liberian Government.**
- **Return is the first and giant step to rebuilding your life in your home country**
- **You are no longer a refugee when you choose to return to your country**
- **To sustain your return, the humanitarian community in Liberia is engaged in projects meant to increase the absorption capacity in areas of return particularly in education facilities, health facilities, water and sanitation.**
- **UNHCR's assistance package is a start to help you get adjusted to life at home.**

Refugee Statistics

County of Asylum	Pop. In refugee camps	No. Repatriated
Guinea	149,000	1,682
Sierra Leone	67,000	1,603
Ghana	42,400	1,724
Nigeria	6,000	740
Gambia	750	-
Cote d'Ivoire	74,200	180
Others	1,150	6
Total	341,300	5,935

Return and Reintegration NEWS

- The Development Superintendent of Lofa County has declared all school open in the county. Over one thousand pupils filled the doors of the Voinjama Public School, the only school open so far on January 3, 2005. Some 100 students were reported to have registered for the 1st grade. The need for qualified teachers and school supplies has been stressed.
- Improved educational and medical facilities in rural Liberia is considered the pull factor to speed up the resettlement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and returnees in the country and promote sustainable return.
- The UN Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan said US \$60M is urgently needed to carry out the implementation of the rehabilitation and reintegration programme of disarmed and demobilized ex-combatants. In his fifth progress report on Liberia to the Security Council, Secretary-General Kofi Annan reported that from December 2003 to 1 December 2004, the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) disarmed and demobilized 101,449 combatants, including 22,313 women, 8,547 boys and 2,477 girls.
- The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany has pledged US\$14 million to Liberia in support of the country's rehabilitation and reintegration programme of disarmed ex-combatants. This follows the recent visit of the Chairman of the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL), Mr. Gyude Bryant to Europe to raise money for the rehabilitation and reintegration of more than 100,000 ex-combatants disarmed within the framework of the ongoing peace process. The NTGL has also disclosed that Ireland has promised to assist Liberia with US\$3.4million for the country's reconstruction process.
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REINTEGRATION/CEPs UPDATE

Schools/clinics	CEPs/Watsan	Agriculture
<p>With UNHCR funding, a local NGO, Liberia United to Serve Humanity (LUSH) has completed the renovation of the Gorpue Dolo-Boi Elementary and Junior High School in Belefanai in Bong County.</p> <p>The nine-classroom school in Jarmue, Kpai District has been roofed while significant progress has also been made on the community school in Bletanai , Foloblai, Jorquelleh District</p>	<p>In Gbarpolu County, the Christian Children Fund (CCF) has made commendable efforts in the restoration of water and sanitation, and providing child protection services in the area.</p>	<p>In Lofa County, under the CEP, 432 women received the amount of US \$1,800 for income generating activities. A local women’s group with 300 members also received a \$45,000 Liberian Dollar revolving loan under the CEP for the sole purpose of cross-border trade by beneficiaries. In addition, twenty groups received inputs ranging from carpentry, blacksmith, tie-dye, baking and tailoring.</p>
<p>Educational and health facilities in Kolahun and Foya Districts, Lofa County have been assessed. UNHCR along with two of its implementing partner, Peace Winds Japan and International Medical Corps (IMC) jointly conducted the assessment mission. Peace Winds Japan will renovate four schools in Kolahun District</p> <p>The Danish Government through Action Aid has completed renovation work of the Gbarpolu Central High School</p>	<p>UNHCR’s implementing partner, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) has made significant achievements in this water and sanitation sector in western Liberia. NRC is encouraging communities to set up water committees and provide training on water management/maintenance of the pumps</p>	<p>In Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, forty-one (41) out of the seventy-three (73) approved CEPs are under implementation. A standardize table that highlights priority intervention has been developed for all CEP-proposals. This is in efforts to minimize duplication of activities by partners in the area.</p>
<p>Peace winds Japan (PwJ) has released the first consignment of furniture to the Voinjama Public School. PwJ has also completed the construction of 25 institutional latrines at the various schools in Voinjama and Zorzor Districts namely, Voinjama Public School, Barkedu Public school, Lawalazu Public School, Sarkondu Public School and Zorzor Central High School.</p>	<p>Construction of the Palala, Kpai District Administrative Building in Bong County has commenced. African Concern International is implementing the project for UNHCR. The community is lending support to the construction activity.</p>	<p>UNHCR has released agriculture inputs such as 3,000 cutlasses, 1,500 regular hoes and 3,000 files to be distributed to identified and selected beneficiaries. This follows a joint UNHCR/FAO Agriculture Reintegration Project (ARP), assessment in Zorzor and Salayea Districts in Lofa County.</p>
<p>The rehabilitation of the clinic at Lofa Bridge would shortly be completed.</p> <p>The Graie Clinic and Public Market renovated by LUSH is now opened and functioning again.</p>	<p>The renovation of public facilities is progressing in Gbarpolu County. USAID supports the work through its implementing agency, the Liberian Community Infrastructural Program. USAID is also supporting the rehabilitation of roads in the area.</p>	<p>12 tons of swamp rice seeds. 9,000 cassava cuttings were distributed to 30 communities in the five districts. Those in the area of tree crop rehabilitation were also assisted with 10,000 bags of seedlings for the nursing of cocoa and coffee.</p>