



The story of UNMIL



United Nations Mission in Liberia

The story of
UNMIL

Dedication

This book is dedicated, first and foremost, to the people of Liberia, whose resilience and determination have lifted their country from the ashes of war to attain 14 years of peace.

It is also dedicated to all United Nations personnel who have worked in Liberia since 2003, and those colleagues who lost their lives while serving with UNMIL--all of whom made invaluable sacrifices, leaving behind their families and loved ones to help consolidate and support the peace that Liberians enjoy today.



The flags of the United Nations and Liberia fly side by side at the UNMIL Headquarters in Monrovia, Liberia.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 13 May 11

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António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (2016-)



António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations (2016-)

Photo: Mark Garten | UNMIL | 19 Dec 16

The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) deployed in October 2003 to a country which, after 14 years of brutal civil wars, was a failed state being pulled apart by warring factions. The public sector was in total collapse, the country's infrastructure lay in ruins, the economy was destroyed and the national police and army had disintegrated. As a result of the conflict, more than a quarter of a million Liberians were killed, nearly a third of the population was displaced, and an estimated 80 per cent of women and girls experienced conflict-related sexual violence.

Over the course of UNMIL's deployment, the country has made significant progress. More than 100,000 former combatants participated in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programmes, and the armed forces and police have been rebuilt. In that time, Liberia has held three peaceful elections: the first two resulted in victories for President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first woman in Africa to be elected President. President Sirleaf was succeeded by George Weah following his victory in the 2017 election.

The last stretch of UNMIL's mandate has been no less complicated than its first. In a country where there had been no constitutional transfer of power since 1944, and where the political culture features a deeply embedded sense of entitlement by the ruling elite, peaceful transition of authority was a particular challenge. The political good offices mandate entrusted by the Security Council on the Secretary-General's Representative, Farid Zarif, proved critical to facilitating a successful electoral process. Those good offices were usefully complemented by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) – through mediation by former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo.

As the mandate of UNMIL ends on 30 March 2018, Liberia enjoys peace and stability. The country no longer faces threats from war lords or marauding militias, and the Liberian Government has made commendable efforts to strengthen the rule of law and to revive the economy.

However, serious challenges remain. The overwhelming majority of the population has yet to see the anticipated dividends of peace, while many of the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed. The long-term sustainability of the gains achieved thus far will require continued and sustained international engagement and support, especially through joint efforts by the United Nations and international partners. Such involvement will be particularly important for Government programmes aimed at addressing key socio-economic issues such as poverty, youth unemployment, illiteracy and lack of basic infrastructure.

UNMIL leaves behind a country that has great potential to achieve lasting stability, democracy and prosperity. Over the past 14 years, the Mission has forged effective partnerships with the Government, United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, regional organizations, including ECOWAS and the Mano River

Union, the international donor community, and local and international humanitarian and civil society organizations, all of which have helped place Liberia firmly on the path to post-conflict recovery. The human rights situation has improved dramatically, and efforts to promote national reconciliation have achieved some, albeit slow, progress.

The end of the peacekeeping phase of the United Nations engagement marks another turning point for Liberia. It is my hope that Liberia's new leadership, bolstered by continued engagement in the country by ECOWAS and other regional and international partners, in coordination with the UN Country Team in Liberia and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel, will help address the remaining challenges to stability.

The Mission's experience offers a wealth of lessons for current and future peacekeeping operations. I commend all the troop- and police-contributing countries who participated in UNMIL, and I pay tribute to the 201 personnel who lost their lives in the service of peace in Liberia. I also thank my Special Representatives through the years and all the UNMIL staff who have greatly contributed to the success of the Mission and to the cause of peace in Liberia.



Excerpts from the new President’s inaugural address on 22 January 2018

His Excellency Mr. George Manneh Weah, President of the Republic of Liberia (2018-)



**President of the Republic of Liberia,
His Excellency Mr. George Manneh Weah**
Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 5 Feb 18

My fellow citizens, I have spent many years of my life in stadiums, but today is a feeling like no other. Today, we all wear the jersey of Liberia, and the victory belongs to the people, to peace, and to democracy.

I promise to do everything in my power to be the agent of positive change. But I cannot do it alone. First, I call upon the Legislature to work with me to create and pass essential laws that are needed to complete the foundation of this nation.

Together, we owe our citizens clarity on fundamental issues such as the land beneath their feet, freedom of speech, and how national resources and responsibilities are going to shift from this capital to the counties. The people expect better cooperation and more action from their Government.

Many of those who founded this country left the pain and shame of slavery to establish a society where all would be free and equal. But that vision of freedom, equality, and democracy has not yet been fully realized. That human longing for true and lasting freedom has revealed itself in many ways since Liberia’s founding. Sometimes the drive has been divisive and confrontational; and too often violent, bloody, and deadly, as it was in the 14 years of civil conflict, when the absence of equality and unity led us down the path of destroying our own country.

Notwithstanding the harshness and immeasurable cost of the lesson, we have learned that equality and freedom are never just a final destination that a people or a nation reaches. These are fundamental human rights that our people deserve and that must be held up and measured against our actions, our policies, our laws, and our purpose as those elected to serve the people.

Almost 15 years ago, Liberians laid down their arms and renewed their hope for a better and more equal society. With the help of regional partners and the United Nations, we chose democracy as our path, and elected the first post-war Government, which was led by Her Excellency, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf.

But this ceremony signals more than a peaceful transition from one democratic administration to another. It is also a transition from one generation of Liberian leadership to a new generation. We have arrived here neither by violence, nor by force of arms. Not a single life was lost in the process. Blood should never be the price tag for democracy. Rather, this transition was achieved by the free and democratic will of the Liberian people, guaranteed by the rule of law.

This Inaugural gathering also celebrates an important precedent: that we Liberians can, and will, rely on established institutions and the rule of law to resolve our political disagreements.

My fellow Liberians, let not the splendour of these ceremonies, nor the celebration of electoral victory, make us forget how we arrived at this moment. We have arrived here on the blood, sweat, tears, and suffering of so many of our citizens, too many of whom died, longing for real freedom and equality.

So that their deaths would not be in vain, I solemnly pledge today, with the help of all of you, my fellow citizens, to build a Liberia of equality, freedom, dignity, and respect for one another.

My fellow citizens, I want to admonish you, that the foundation of the New Liberia must be reinforced by the steel of integrity. We need men and women, boys and girls, whose integrity provides the foundation of the trust that is required for Liberian society to benefit her people.

We should all strive to put aside our differences and join hands in the task of nation building. We must learn how to celebrate our diversity without drawing lines of divisions in our new Liberia. We belong to Liberia first before we belong to our inherited tribes, or chosen counties. We must not allow political loyalties to prevent us from collaborating in the national interest. We must respect each other and act as neighbours, regardless of religious, social and economic differences.

It is my belief that the most effective way to directly impact the poor, and to narrow the gap between rich and poor, is to ensure that public resources do not end up in the pockets of Government officials. I further believe that the overwhelming mandate I received from the Liberian people is a mandate to end corruption in public service. I promise to deliver on this mandate.

As officials of Government, it is time to put the interest of our people above our own selfish interests. It is time to be honest with our people. Though corruption is a habit amongst our people, we must end it. We must pay civil servants a living wage, so that corruption is not an excuse for taking what is not theirs. (To) those who do not refrain from enriching themselves at the expense of the people, you will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law.

To the private sector, I say to you that Liberia is open for business. We want to be known as a business-friendly government. We will do all that is within our power to provide an environment that will be conducive for the conduct of honest and transparent business. As we open our doors to all foreign direct investments, we will not permit Liberian-owned businesses to be marginalized.

This victory could not have been possible without the support of the youth of this country, the women of this country, especially those who make their living by selling in the markets. This is your government!!!

We could not have arrived at this day without your voices being heard loudly, and all our views, no matter how critical, being freely expressed in an atmosphere void of intimidation and arrest. This was only made possible by the tolerance of my predecessor, Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who protected the right to freedom of speech as enshrined in our Constitution. Now, in my turn, I will go further to encourage and reinforce not only freedom of speech, but also freedom of political assembly.

To change the structure of the Liberian economy will require huge investments in agriculture, infrastructure, in human capital, and in technology. We hope our international development partners will assist us in this transformation. Meanwhile, on behalf of all Liberians, I would like to thank the international community for the invaluable contributions they have made to our peace and economic development.

I thank the Economic Community of West African States for standing with Liberia throughout these years. Many of our West African brothers and sisters shed their blood for Liberians during our conflict. This is a debt Liberians will never be able to repay.

I also thank the United Nations for the important role it has played in Liberia. We stood with the United Nations at its founding when it was just an idea driven by ideals. Then, in our darkest days, the UN stood by us.

The UN peacekeeping Mission has ensured unbroken peace within our borders for more than a decade, and will soon demonstrate its confidence in us, by transitioning UN organizations which will continue in key sectors such as education, health, and agriculture.

Ending a peacekeeping mission successfully is something in which all Liberians and her partners should take great pride. We thank all Member countries of the United Nations for your support, and I promise to continue to build on the success that we have achieved together.

To the Government and people of the United States of America, we thank you for your strong support over the years. To the European Union, I say thanks for your strong partnership. European aid has provided critical support for Liberia’s recovery from war, and this continuous support will be important as we forge a new path of transformation. To the People’s Republic of China, I say “xiexie.” Our administration will continue to support

the “One-China Policy.” It is my hope that Chinese-Liberian relationships will grow stronger during my tenure. To the African Union, I intend to utilize the resources and expertise of the AU for the benefit of our country. To other bilateral and multilateral partners, I say a sincere thank you!

My greatest contribution to this country as President may not lie in the eloquence of my speeches, but in the quality of the decisions that I will make over the next six years to advance the lives of poor Liberians. I intend to construct the greatest machinery of pro-poor governance in the history of this country. I will do more than my fair share to meet your expectations. I ask you to meet mine, for I cannot do it alone. My expectation is that you, fellow citizens, will rise up and take control and responsibility for your destiny and that you will discover a new love for country and each other.



Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 12 Jul 07

Her Excellency Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia (2005-2018)

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's two terms in office were encapsulated within the lifespan of the United Nations Mission in Liberia's (UNMIL), which was deployed from 2003 to early 2018. Her legacy will thus be inextricably linked to that of UNMIL and more broadly the United Nations.

Her challenges were nothing short of daunting: to lead a country exhausted from three decades of civil strife, with destroyed infrastructure, a collapsed economy, a non-existent security sector, and state institutions incapable of providing basic services to its people. More importantly, she inherited a country the social fabric of which was shattered by historical injustices and the many atrocities committed during the conflict. In short, she was burdened with the task of building a nation from scratch. Her many accomplishments must be measured against this hapless background. She introduced her vision for the country in her Agenda for Transformation and Vision 2030, which aimed at strengthening the foundations of peace and stability through justice and reconciliation and spurring economic growth. In that context, President Sirleaf initiated a number of critical legislative and structural reforms, and successfully persuaded bilateral lenders and multilateral financial institutions to write off nearly US\$5 billion in debt accumulated over decades. She embarked on improving the performance of macro-economy, which showed an impressive growth of eight per cent by the beginning of her second term; she heavily invested in addressing the many deficiencies of the health and education sector, building new infrastructure and improving what existed. Under her leadership remarkable progress was achieved in promoting and protecting human rights and free speech.

Regrettably, however, the country's upward trajectory was severely undermined by the impact of the global economic crisis, followed by a steep fall in the prices of Liberia's traditional export commodities, such as iron ore, rubber and palm oil. Operations and production in most of the concessions contracted and thousands of workers were laid off. Liberia's economic development ground to a virtual halt in 2014, when the Ebola virus outbreak hit Liberia harder than any other affected country in West Africa, claiming nearly 5,000 lives and effectively locking down the country.

Despite the significant progress during President Sirleaf's tenure, many challenges still threaten Liberia's fragile stability: over half the population of the population lives in poverty and are still waiting to see their share of the peace dividend. Liberia ranks near the bottom on almost all major social and economic indicators, including education, health and employment, as well as on such major international indexes as corruption or ease of doing business. Little progress has been made on national reconciliation and the constitutional review process, which will have to be taken on by the new government. Similarly, several key laws, such as the Land Rights and Local Governance bills, have yet to be enacted. Finally, the fight against corruption, which President Sirleaf early on declared as "public enemy No 1", fell short of expectations: the Liberia Anti-Corruption Commission, that she set up, launched over twenty high-profile investigations; regrettably only a few of relatively low-level cases have been prosecuted so far.



Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is sworn in as President of the Republic of Liberia in 2006 and as the first elected female leader in Africa.

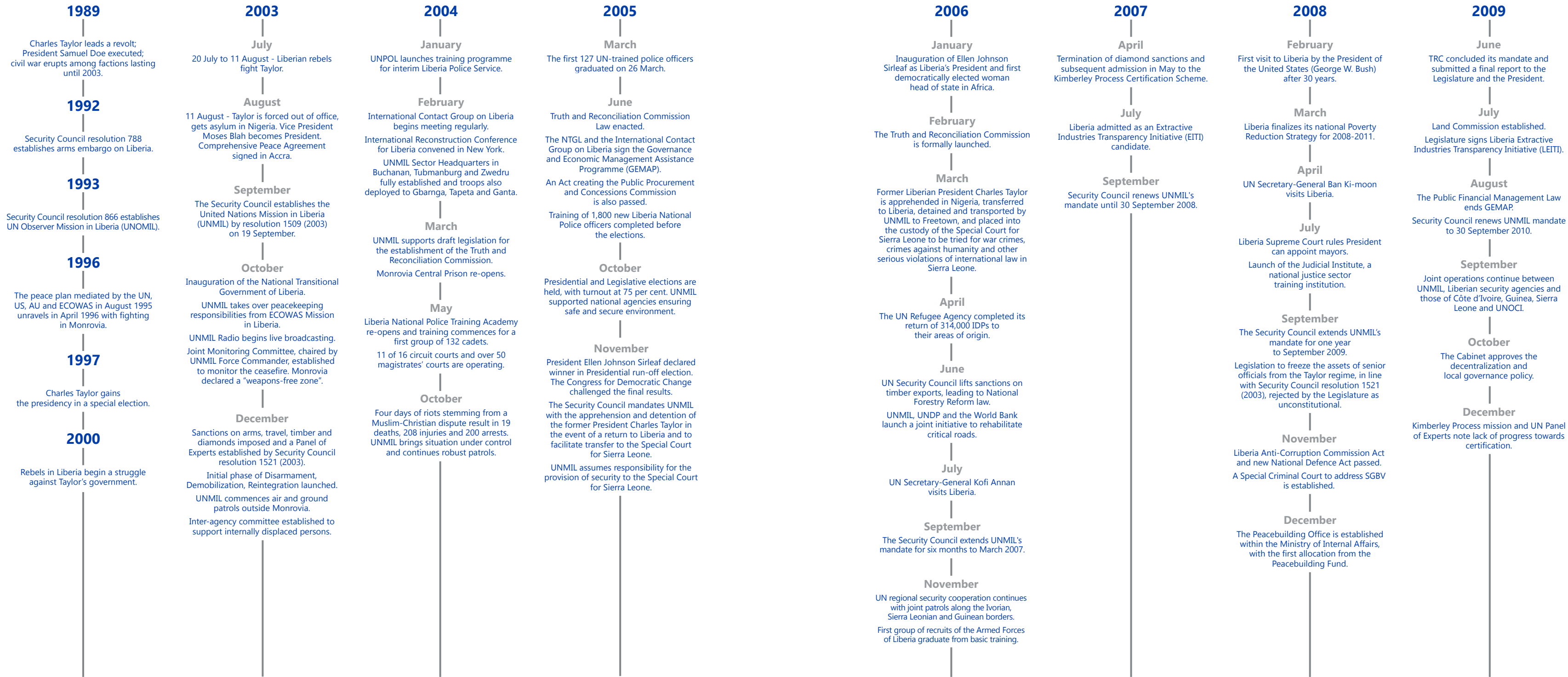
Photo: Eric Kanalstein | UNMIL | 16 Jan 06

Nonetheless, under President Sirleaf, two successive peaceful elections, and a historic transfer of power from one elected leader to another took place on 22 January 2018. The 2017 elections, in particular, showed that Liberia is now firmly on a solid democratic path through the universal exercise of franchise in a transparent, fair and credible manner. In her final address to the nation, President Sirleaf stated that: "Our democracy is irrevocable; it binds every future leader of this country to the will of the people. Liberia today reflects the changing face of the Continent, where rule of law, human rights, good governance, and accountability are demanded by its citizens. This is Africa's future. And Liberia is one of its enviable democracies."

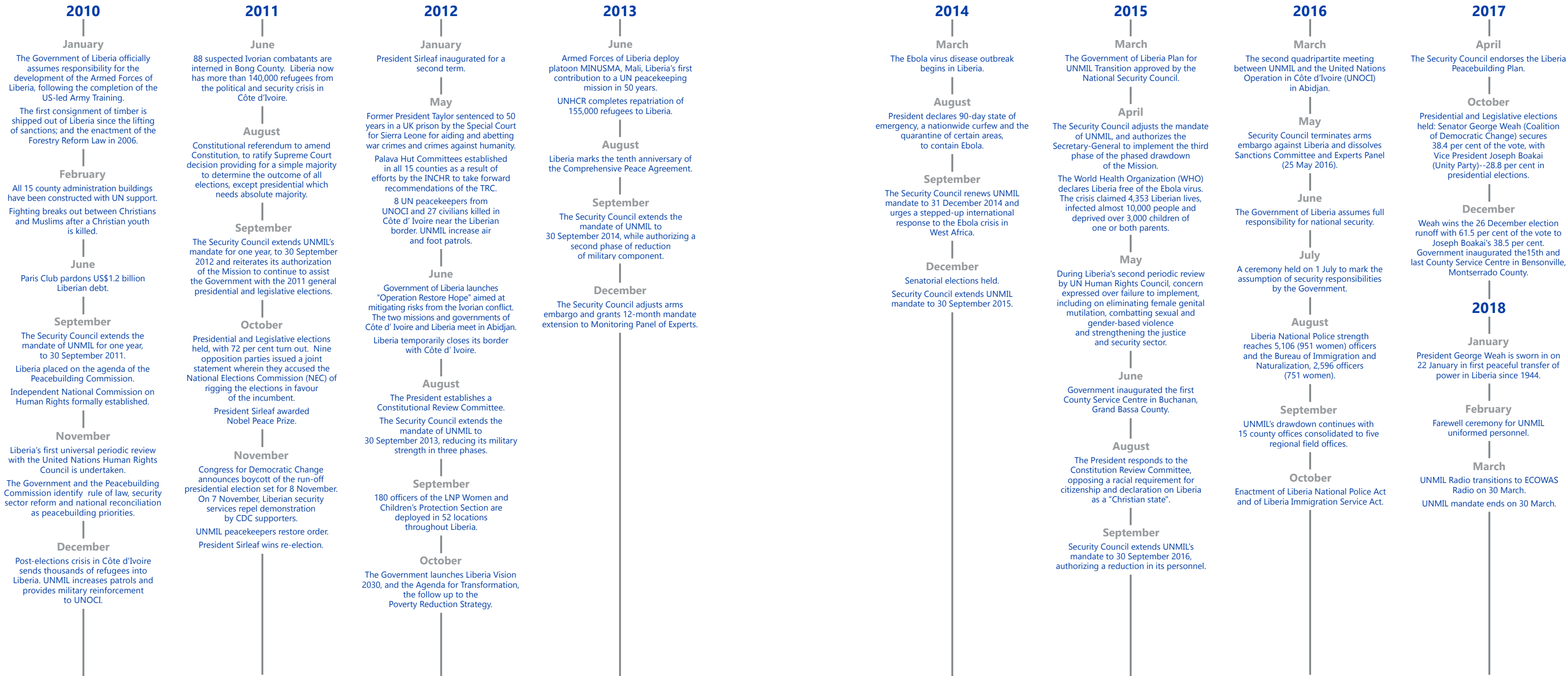
Working closely with the national authorities, UNMIL assisted in consolidating peace and stability in the country, helping to rebuild and create conditions for renewed economic growth. SRSF Farid Zarif has expressed confidence that, despite UNMIL's departure, Liberia "will be in a far better situation to meet the challenges of the future, despite continued fragilities." He stressed that being a country exceptionally rich in natural resources and with a young population, Liberia has great potential. With improved governance and resource management, along with diversification of the current economic model and continued support from the international community, nothing can prevent Liberia from advancing on the path of development and peace consolidation.



Timeline of key events



Timeline of key events



Earning respect at the Mission’s outset

Jacques Paul Klein, Under-Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General (2003-2005)



SRSK Klein with members of the local community during a field visit.

Photo: Eric Kanalstein | UNMIL | 28 Jan 05

Jacques Paul Klein arrived in Monrovia in October 2003 as the Mission’s first Special Representative of the Secretary-General (then, Kofi Annan). With the flight of former president Charles Taylor to Nigeria, the parties in the Liberian civil war were able to come to a ceasefire agreement that paved the way for a UN peacekeeping operation.

A larger than life, cigar-smoking former US State Department official and Air Force major-general who had previously led UN peacekeeping missions in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Croatia. Klein’s tough message to any faction that aspired to violating the Accra agreement was credited with maintaining stability, while tensions remained raw.

“Klein came to earn the respect of Liberians for his no-nonsense ways and his unequivocal refusal to play favorites among the warring factions,” wrote former President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in her autobiography. “When skirmishes in Nimba between former Government soldiers and MODEL endangered both civilians and the peace agreement, Klein sent out patrols to fly over the area and threatened, essentially to shoot anyone caught warmongering. The skirmishes stopped.”

At the time, with 15,000 peacekeepers, 1,115 police officers and nearly 2,000 civilian staff members, UNMIL was the largest peacekeeping operation going, with a budget of US\$800 million. Yet Mr. Klein had to argue at the UN for further funding for the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants when donor funds lagged.

When some said the country wasn’t ready for the first round of DDR, he told a reporter in 2005: “My philosophy has always been lead, follow, or get out of my way. Because my goal was to save Liberia.”

The Mission’s goal was to re-establish the rule of law and hold free and fair elections. During Klein’s tenure as the first SRSK, the Mission disarmed and demobilized some 106,000 fighters. UNMIL helped to extend state authority throughout Liberia and along its borders. The Mission helped the Government to begin to reform and restructure the police, prison system and courts.

Some 350,000 refugees returned home from neighbouring states, and the UN assisted some 450,000 internally displaced persons in returning to their homes. At the same time, under the UN’s purview, 659,000 people received daily food, and 1.4 million children were immunized against measles and polio.

The Mission registered 1.3 million voters who in December 2005 elected Africa’s first woman president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who took office in January 2006.

Mr. Klein continued to lobby after his departure for further restructuring of the security forces, strengthening of the judiciary, decentralization and other constitutional reforms.

“Liberia still has a long way to go,” he said in January 2017. “The Liberia-American versus native Liberian population tensions, illiteracy and the lack of substantial foreign investment continue to undermine Liberia’s future.”

As for UNMIL, which was deployed for another 12 years after his departure, he credits the thousands of personnel who served the UN in Liberia and said that, “With three presidential elections and the re-establishment of the rule of law, the Mission was a success.”

Mr. Klein has continued to speak, write and consult on international affairs.



Supporting Liberia's rebuilding and new President's priorities

**Alan Doss, Under-Secretary-General,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General (2005-2007)**



Alan Doss attending a ceremony to open a new police station in Paynesville, supported by an UNMIL quick-impact project.

Photo: Eric Kanalstein | UNMIL | 11 Aug 06

The second Special Representative of the Secretary-General to lead UNMIL, Alan Doss of the United Kingdom arrived in Monrovia only weeks before the historic October 2005 elections which led to the installation of Africa's first woman president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Of Liberia's population of 4 million, almost one third had registered to vote. UNMIL provided political and security support to the elections that helped to ensure that they were peaceful and did not trigger a relapse into widespread violence.

With the kudos to Liberians and to UNMIL for maintaining peaceful and democratic polls came the realization of the work to be done. While continuing to provide security for the country, UNMIL, under SRSG Doss, began the work of supporting President Sirleaf's agenda and immediate priorities. These included rebuilding infrastructure and the justice system, tackling corruption, restructuring the police and armed forces and reducing poverty. While Liberia received substantial aid, it faced an external debt of US\$3.7 billion and a domestic debt of US\$754 million. Per capita income was a mere US\$163; and 80 per cent of the people were unemployed. The UN Country Team deployed mini-teams to the counties to support the Liberians.

SRSG Doss had extensive UN development, humanitarian and peacekeeping experience before he arrived in Liberia, having worked in Benin, Congo, Vietnam, Thailand, China and as the deputy head of the peacekeeping missions in neighbouring Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.

Doss was a proponent of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP), launched by the Government and International Contact Group on Liberia in September 2005 to help repair and reform the country's economic and financial management. The project succeeded in increasing revenues to the Government and was credited with strengthening accountability. Although GEMAP did not resolve all of the most intractable governance problems facing the country, including corruption, it did aid Liberia to successfully complete the requirements for international debt relief.

Doss also engaged the UN in support of a major programme of security sector reform. Working with the Ministries of Justice and Defense and bilateral donors, in particular the United States and the European Union, the programme focused on the police and the institutions of justice as well as the design of a national security policy for Liberia. This included a major effort to deal with rampant sexual violence.

Upon his departure from Liberia in December 2007, President Sirleaf noted that SRSG Doss has resisted international pressure to reduce the number of UN troops during his tenure, arguing that the country still required a robust and sizeable short-term presence of peacekeepers at the outset of her presidency to ensure stability. She credited him with UNMIL's completion of the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration of more than 100,000 ex-combatants and with overseeing the country's first truly free and fair democratic elections. She announced the Government would establish the Alan Doss Peace Park across from city hall in Paynesville.



Keeping Liberia stable while building the peace

**Ellen Margrethe Løj, Under-Secretary-General,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General (2008-2012)**

The longest serving and third SRSG in Liberia, Ellen Margrethe Løj had previously been Denmark's Permanent Representative to the UN, as well as Ambassador to Israel and the Czech Republic when she arrived in Liberia in early 2008.

She recalled her happiest day in Monrovia was 11 October 2011, when the first round of Liberia's second presidential and legislative elections since the civil war went off without a hitch and with a high voter turnout. Tensions before the second round on 8 November cut the number of voters, but they opted for a second term for President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. Unlike the first post-war election in 2005, which was largely run by the UN, this time the Mission would be coordinating international assistance, using its "good offices" to support an atmosphere for free and fair elections, and providing logistical and technical support to the Liberians.

On another front, the country's fragile stability was challenged when weeks earlier, neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire fell into political crisis, spilling 200,000 refugees into Liberia, just as it was preparing for the polls.

"We were on our toes and tried to monitor as best as we could to avoid any disturbances," Ambassador Løj recalled the following year.

In addition to security worries she also had concerns of a more practical nature: voting forms had to get to polling stations around the country during the rainy season. Many were delivered by UN helicopter, or even by motorbike, canoe and human porters with ballot boxes balanced on their heads. She brought in international actors and observers and used the Mission and her voice of authority to keep tensions at bay when relations between the various Liberian parties grew sharp ahead of the vote.

In fact, keeping the peace over its first nine years was UNMIL's greatest achievement, she said in an interview. UNMIL had not only disarmed more than 100,000 ex-combatants and helped to return hundreds of thousands of refugees and IDPs, but particularly, during her tenure, peacekeepers practiced a sort of active vigilance, monitoring, talking and acting when threats to the fragile peace arose. "Our mere presence (was) a deterrent for anyone who wanted to destroy the peace."

At the same time, UNMIL had been actively involved with the Liberian Government and other national actors to "build the peace," by, for example, revamping the Liberia National Police. (The US Government trained the new armed forces.)

Amb. Løj was a big advocate for the concurrent implementation of peacebuilding along with peacekeeping, and reconciliation:

"If we don't urgently work on building the peace while we keep the peace, then we will not achieve our ultimate goal, namely sustainable peace and prosperity," she said.

Amb. Løj left the mission in early 2012. She went on to become SRSG for South Sudan, heading the UN peacekeeping mission there from 2014 to 2016, during some of that country's' most chaotic times.

But from a distance, she has continued to follow developments in Liberia, and as the last personnel of UNMIL prepare to leave, Ambassador Løj said that "Liberia and a peaceful future for all Liberians are close to my heart."

**Ellen Margrethe Løj addresses UNPOL and
Liberia National Police at
Paynesville in Monrovia.**

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 24 Apr 10



Staying strong during Ebola

**Karin Landgren, Under-Secretary-General,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General (2012-2015)**



**Karin Landgren at a medal parade for a
Ghanaian military contingent in Buchanan,
Grand Bassa County.**

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 16 Nov 12

In 2012, Karin Landgren of Sweden became UNMIL's fourth SRSG, having already led missions in Burundi and Nepal. Less than two years into her job, Ebola arrived to decimate Liberia, and SRSG Landgren was tasked with leading UNMIL's support to the response to the crisis which she called "14 months of a national nightmare." More than 3,000 Liberians died, and the Security Council recognized the extent of the outbreak in Africa as a threat to international peace and security.

Before Ebola struck, the Mission had been concentrating on supporting national institutions, strengthening the rule of law, supporting national reconciliation and building up the country's security sector. The crisis threatened to undo much of the work done by the UN and Liberians since the end of the civil war and exposed the lack of Government authority.

"The UN and other partners recognized quite early on that this was more than a public health crisis," Ms. Landgren said in 2015 as the disease was brought under control. "Certainly, health services collapsed almost immediately. But there were immediate risks to public security. Commodity prices grew and people became restive about that. There was a state of emergency and the army was called out."

There was talk of a coup, she recalled, and the Mission leadership met to plan for the possibility of "catastrophic state collapse."

As the Government had no credibility or presence, communities took the initiative to organize among themselves. UNMIL Radio broadcast life-saving messages across the country. Still, Ms. Landgren said, many Liberians thought Ebola was either a myth or a curse. She ordered the Mission to stay and keep operating.

"I'm convinced that the continued presence of UNMIL was reassuring to the population, and the fact that we had offices all over the country actually contributed to convening the actors who needed to come together," she said.

Ms. Landgren says that Ebola was turned around by three factors: advocacy, removal of suspected cases and robust contact tracing. She credited unsung heroes such as the local grave diggers, Médecins Sans Frontières but also people like Dr. Peter Clement Lugala of Uganda who went to the Ebola epicenter in Lofa county, bought plastic sheeting in the market, and had it sewn into body bags.

Liberia, she noted, had the lowest concentration of doctors in the world, i.e. 1.4 doctors per 100,000 people, or about 50 in total. Widespread poverty, but also corruption was a factor in Ebola as funds destined for public health had been diverted. Liberia's "debilitating patronage network" contributed to the country's inability to confront the disease, as was the concentration of political administration in Monrovia.

Landgren had long stressed the need for Liberia to decentralize government services. "This is a national challenge which will be longer in duration than the life of the peacekeeping mission," she said.

During her tenure, UNMIL continued its drawdown of troops. Among her concerns was helping the Government to strengthen its own security sector, as UNMIL was due to handover responsibility for security in 2016.



Mutual accountability must be fundamental to peacekeeping

Farid Zarif, Under-Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (2015-2018)



Farid Zarif, the Under-Secretary-General, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIL (2015-2018)

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 23 Jan 18

Established in 1847 as the first independent African republic, Liberia went through two successive civil wars that claimed the lives of an estimated 250,000 people and led to a complete collapse of law and order. With international recognition of the need for peacekeeping intervention following a ceasefire agreement, the UN Mission in Liberia, or UNMIL, deployed in October 2003 with an authorized troop strength of 15,000, a police component and hundreds of civilian staff. During the Mission's 14-plus years of operation, Liberia saw the restoration of peace and stability. The country held three, violence-free elections and has undertaken reforms to its governing and security structures, with the constant support of UNMIL.

In an October 2017 interview, Under-Secretary-General Farid Zarif, the UN Secretary-General's fifth and last Special Representative for Liberia and Head of Mission, talked about strategies, tactics and challenges in leading UNMIL during its final phase of operation.

How did the early part of your career, working for your Government at home and in the Foreign Service, map to the challenges and issues you have faced, leading the UN Mission in Liberia?

I started early in human rights activism to help change my country. The series of changes in Afghanistan, accompanied by vast political, security and economic challenges, really put me through an accelerated process of learning in the early part of my life and career. Later on, together with a small number of other Afghan activists, we helped establish the Independent Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan, which is still functioning today, albeit recast in a different form. But at that time, it did important work in conjunction with lawyers committed to taking difficult cases to make sure due process was upheld. These activities, which continued through my early career in the foreign service of Afghanistan, were part of the country's struggle toward a democratic and just society. Those struggles are not unlike Liberia's struggles today.

The early part of my career shaped me as a human being, and some of those early challenges certainly map to the issues I am dealing with here in Liberia.

Later, with the UN, I did elections and political work, then humanitarian work in the field and at Headquarters and then peacekeeping in the field and at Headquarters. As an ambassador and permanent representative to the UN for seven years in the 1980s, I'd also done a lot of work inside the UN system, as well as within the governing bodies of the UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes.

A combination of years working in multilateral diplomacy, and a good mix of diverse experiences in the UN in different settings equipped me to help tackle some of the pressing challenges Liberia continues to face as UNMIL comes to a close.

Have you had a special focus here in Liberia, or a special interest or passion that derives from work in the past?

Indeed. One of them is related to my experience back home, and how a country may gradually drift toward chaos and war through neglecting the anger and frustration that builds up within society, with a government isolated from the people. That can lead to a focus on a military solution rather than addressing the causes of fragilities of a society. Unless we identify and resolve the foundational issues which drive conflicts, society

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will remain susceptible to breakdown and may end up falling into the entrapments of violence and war. In Liberia, unfortunately and notwithstanding lofty visions, I see minimal evidence of serious successful advances to get the country out of that vicious cycle.

My experience in Afghanistan and in several post-conflict settings elsewhere has given me perhaps a unique focus on this challenge: how to use the UN's resources and capabilities to help get beyond the deadlock of a heavily centralized, self-serving government that perpetuates itself, and turn it into a vehicle that delivers services to the neglected population. That can only be done if government becomes more representative, accountable and people-oriented, and that public service does exactly that: serve the public. You can't expect that a government that is heavily concentrated in the capital would be able to deliver all the services the people need all over the country. Although decentralization/de-concentration is only one part of the needed reform, it is certainly one of the priorities where I wanted to focus my attention in support of this Government's own agenda.

Another priority is national reconciliation. Liberia never got close to fully developing the concept of nationhood, because it always remained split across multiple divides; indigenous versus settlers, tribal versus regional marginalization, gender bias, inequitable sharing of national wealth and economic opportunities, monopoly of political space, impunity for war crimes and mass atrocities, etc. How can you overcome these divides and develop a concept of nationhood that brings everybody together around a common vision? That's certainly been a priority for me too.

In addressing the underlying causes of the conflict and on the issue of nationhood, do you see progress?

What President Sirleaf has offered in her Agenda for Transformation and Vision 2030 addresses both these issues directly. But unfortunately, she couldn't make significant progress, partly because of the challenges she inherited from the civil war, meaning the tension between transitional justice and peace. Regrettably, the whole idea of national reconciliation has been put on the back burner, and the Government has been unable to translate its own national agendas into the political will and tangible national capacities for managing processes of structural reform. The UN system and the donor community have not been sufficiently unified or vocal in both supporting and challenging the Government to adequately invest in addressing critical conflict drivers and deep-rooted reconciliation issues.

From the early post-war period, the UN's emphasis on national sovereign ownership, and the systematic alignment of its projects and programmes with national priorities, arguably diluted the political will to hold the Government accountable to a higher standard of social and rights-based responsibilities. Consequently, the reforms required to strengthen social cohesion and human security, e.g. land reform, education, youth employment, local economic development, diversification of the economy, political accountability, inter-tribal relations, constitutional reform, transitional justice, have neither featured strongly nor been pursued vigorously in Liberia's post-war recovery interventions. That is why the peace and stability are so fragile. To be fair, the calamity of Ebola and the drastic fall in prices of Liberia's traditional export commodities dealt a severe blow to the President's ambitious reform plans, some of which appeared to be on the right track until then.

What other priorities have driven your daily work?

I have been very much focused on prevention, particularly in the last two years when we were faced with the challenges of organizing an election that President Sirleaf described as a defining moment for the history of Liberia. This election was the first time ever in the history of Liberia that a sitting, truly representative and democratically-elected Government would be handing over the mantle of authority to another Government, elected under the same system of principles and standards. It is a gigantic leap in the consolidation of democracy and stability – a turning point, in fact. Anything that would challenge that turning point would be something that would invite my attention. I have constantly engaged with all political parties, individually and in groups. We have focused enormous effort on the agendas that mattered to them, to make sure that all the issues that could become a hindrance were discussed with solutions in mind.

These included: How do we minimize the element of suspicion between the Government and the opposition groups? How do we turn the political parties in the opposition into stakeholders for stability, peace and calm? What is their responsibility toward the public, in terms of providing a sense of vision and hope for the future? How to manage emotions and guide them in the right direction? These are questions I asked myself daily and that we thought about pragmatically as we neared the elections. We worked with the opposition as well as with the Government, the media and civil society to make sure there was a parity of sentiment and commitment, a shared understanding and a common respect for the rule of law and peaceful elections.

This is, of course, proactive ‘good offices’ work. When I first arrived, my interest in strongly pushing on these issues frightened some representatives of the international community. Some said to me, “Be gentle.” But look at where we are with national reconciliation, which was one of the first items of the peace accord. Where is the constitutional reform? Still it is not even in draft. Where is the security transition that was spoken about? Still we

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have been working on the final plan. We should have been firmer, right from the beginning, and demanded delivery on the part of Liberians as a pre-requisite for provided support.

I would tell them, very honestly, that you can’t hide behind the concept of sovereignty and tell me that it’s none of my business. If it’s none of our business, why then did the international community bring 15,000 troops here to make peace in this country, spending close to US\$8 billion? That makes us a natural stakeholder. We are sharing in the success, and we are concerned about potential failures. I have been telling the Government and the opposition parties that we, the United Nations, are a part of the effort to maintain the shared accomplishments here. We absolutely cannot be bystanders.

We did things for them instead of helping them do things for themselves. What brought the United Nations here? The breakdown of foundations of this country – the divisions, the marginalization; a lack of equitable opportunity created a situation for the country to collapse. And still, after years of UN work, the country is grappling with massive issues. One of them is education. The latest statistics indicate that 65 per cent of children are out of school, leaving the next generation 65 per cent illiterate. Another example is women’s rights and their participation in government. The statistics are dismal, with 12 per cent in the House of Representatives, 12 per cent in senior Government positions, 8 per cent in the security sector. These are all things we should have helped address years ago.

But first and foremost is turning the Government’s mind-set toward people-orientation and service delivery, where those employed by the Government recognize they’re not there to support themselves but to serve the people. That’s why people across Liberia still look on the security structures as protectors of the Government alone. That mindset should have been addressed right at the beginning of UNMIL when we were helping to build capacity.

The idea now is not for me to sit in judgement. But certainly the UN could have started its work here by helping address the foundational causes of the conflict and by looking to find out why this country went to war.

What would you say are those elements that remain unaddressed?

Among them, land rights are a critical issue.

We did a comprehensive survey, asking people to identify their most important concerns. At the top of the list were land-related disputes. There’s no sense of ownership, so nobody wants to develop the land. They just live from day to day. They just collect whatever nature gives them. They do not invest themselves because they are not sure it is theirs. We must get a better sense of what belongs to whom. And based on that, we must start a land-reform process that will bring agriculture back to what could be a very productive area of the economy that would employ thousands and thousands of people.

If that happens, all these shanty towns around Monrovia will be vacated because people will have land they can call their own and start working on it. Unemployment has really reached phenomenal numbers. How long will a society be able to sustain this level of unemployment? At some point, there must be a breakdown. And that’s why I believe that fragility is very much built into the current system in Liberia. It’s systemic. Unless we change the social contract, we cannot do away with the fragility.

One of the ways of changing the status quo is to find employment opportunities, and where it is available in Liberia is in agriculture. But that won’t create jobs or income unless there is land reform. It’s a sort of domino effect. Start with adoption of the Land Rights act and pave the way for land reform so communities have access. Then people would need assistance to acquire the tools of agriculture work, access to improved seeds, and technical guidance and support. Then the country could gradually move into processing so it could reduce importation and then gradually to export. Liberia could become self-reliant. This could happen with a long-term vision. A draft of the new land rights legislation has moved forward, but despite the best effort of President Sirleaf some legislators are sleeping on it because they have vested interests. They don’t want reform.

At the international level we currently have a structural problem with the manner in which the UN and international donors deliver assistance to countries like Liberia. The UN system still does not work well as a coherent whole, and while UN coordination mechanisms may function effectively in the delivery of time-bound emergency actions, they struggle to sustain the constancy and longevity of consolidated engagement required to embed national capacities capable of assuaging the causes of conflict. This is explained by inter-agency competition for limited funds, individual “sovereign” organizational mandates, misaligned mandate timeframes and budgetary cycles and different governance structures.

Everybody must come together to envision a far more effective process for sustaining peace. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Union and African Development Bank, the Government of Liberia, and all the well-wishers of Liberia – all of them should come together and coordinate to support that long-term strategic perspective, rather than competing over tiny projects here and there – a bridge here, a piece of road there. With vision, the dynamics would play out, and you would see one element supporting the other. But you must have that sense of a larger and more strategic perspective.

I don’t think that my predecessors were given the opportunity to think and operate like that, and the mandate did not give them the authority to talk about developing a strategic long-term agenda for the country. But then again, you don’t have to have a mandate to express these thoughts to the leadership of the country. That’s why I’m having bilateral meetings with the President almost every week, to a very good effect. I occasionally hear the echoes of those discussions from cabinet ministers.

So do you think that the Mission in its early days focused too much on peacekeeping at the expense of other issues?

Nothing really prevented us, in terms of mandate or resources, to engage in other areas. What we did, rightly so, was restore peace and stability, and build capacity within the institutions of the State, building up the police and helping reform many other institutions. These are major undertakings, and the UN’s role should not be diminished. We did help a lot, together with the donor community, because these institutions had virtually collapsed at the end of the civil war.

These are successes that you would attribute to UNMIL’s intervention in the early years?

These are successes of UNMIL in the beginning. Yes. Stabilization, followed by disarmament and demobilization, followed by consolidation of peace, followed by institution-building across the length and breadth of the security sector and in other areas.

Security sector reforms, work with the judiciary, and a strong focus on women’s rights issues were all very worthy contributions of UNMIL over the years. Security is now in the hands of the Liberians, and they’ve done a fantastic job of maintaining law and order. Nobody is scared. Nobody is abused. There were several armed robberies last year, which resulted in the reshuffling of police. We’re talking about a city of two million people.

But Liberia still is vulnerable and fragile. And unfortunately, if there is a trigger, violence will spread like brushfire because there is so much accumulated anger here over the lack of prospect for change. The youth have no perspective of the future, and see no prospect for a better life in the future. In the absence of that, they become easy targets for extremism as pawns in the hands of politicians to be used one way or another. And that scares me.

But Liberia still is vulnerable and fragile. And unfortunately, if there is a trigger, violence will spread like brushfire because there is so much accumulated anger here over the lack of prospect for change.

That issue is compounded by a sense of deprivation and marginalization along ethnic lines. There is a sense that it’s only the elite few who have access to the benefits of the state. They’re the ones that benefit from the sale of iron ore, gold, timber, palm oil and rubber; they’re the ones

who keep fat bank accounts and pay themselves so handsomely it competes with international salaries in Europe and the United States. They are getting so much money in their official entitlements, and on top of that they are dipping into other areas to enrich themselves. All Liberians talk about these things. So how long do we expect people to tolerate it? That's why some think we are sitting on a powder keg, if not a ticking bomb. A trigger could ignite this place. President Sirleaf made genuine efforts to advance the anti-corruption agenda, but it is a battle that should involve everyone, from the ordinary citizen to the highest level of the judiciary.

What are some of the Mission’s achievements that haven’t made headlines but have impressed you?

Wherever I travel, I see signs, small signs that have become faded with time but still indicate that UNMIL has been there. These signs indicate that UNMIL has supported institutions across the country, in security institutions, in courthouses, in medical clinics in remote areas. We didn’t publicize it, but people who live near one of these facilities know who built it.

Each of those small, pervasive signs are indicators of where UNMIL did a lot of work in building the foundations for decentralization and real service delivery to the people who need it most, in the farthest reaches of the country. These projects helped enable the deployment of personnel from Monrovia to those remote places. Coupled with training programmes that we provided to thousands upon thousands of uniformed and civilian personnel of the Government, UNMIL essentially enabled the Government to begin operating country-wide.

Given the small amount that we had under quick-impact projects funding, this is proportionally the most manifest impact that we made, enabling institutions to find a foothold. Together with the training that we provided, the central Government managed to deploy services outside Monrovia and for the first time managed to be available to other counties to deliver traditional services of the state to remote areas. But, of course, enabling a peaceful and violence-free environment for the Liberian people is by far the most important contribution UNMIL has made.

As the Mission prepared to close, what were you concentrating on?

One good example was our regular meetings with the political parties’ leaderships, the civil society leaders and members of the media. We sat and talked about issues of concern to society, to the nation, and to us as a Mission. These served as fora for exchanging views and sharing concerns, and gave a sense of direction over time, spelling out the responsibility of all toward the people and ensuring that elections would be held in a violent-free atmosphere.

Out of the 500-plus events that we had in the context of the electoral campaign, there were only very few altercations, all insignificant: In one case, a couple of bloody noses. In Liberia, in West Africa, this is unprecedented and an accomplishment of Liberians. The people should be complimented. It is a message I have delivered: Liberians should take pride in the fact that they have delivered the most peaceful, participatory, orderly and credible election in the history of this country. It’s a leap forward in consolidating democracy and good governance.

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It is also partly the outcome of our proactive ‘good offices’ work, which we carried out together with national and regional actors, including the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with whom we issued joint messages on key electoral occasions. That strategy maximised the impact of collective efforts, and facilitated greater integration of our common endeavours.

And it’s not just a symbolic act that we are bringing everyone together into what is now the UNMIL headquarters compound – all the UN agencies, funds and programmes, the AU and ECOWAS. We are strengthening the spirit of commonality of purpose and coordination – not just talking about it but doing it. Joint coordinated messaging and sharing the same buildings, including eventually sharing assets and services, is a process that brings us closer to strengthening that spirit of commonality of purpose and effort.

We have also engaged with the diplomatic community, the donors, and of course Liberian groups focused on specific topics in human rights, women’s empowerment, youth and so forth. These engagements are instrumental in helping us resolve contentious issues.

The election of President George Weah



George Manneh Weah is inaugurated as the new President of the Republic of Liberia at the Samuel Kanyon Doe Sports Complex in Monrovia.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 22 Jan 18

On 29 December 2017, the National Elections Commission (NEC) Chair announced the final results of the 26 December presidential run-off, declaring Senator George Weah, of the Coalition for Democratic Change, President of Liberia.

He is the second democratically elected president since the Liberian civil war that ended in 2003. His predecessor, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, had been elected to serve the previous two six-year terms. Term limits meant she could not run again.

Two rounds of voting were held, as the first round on 10 October 2017 failed to produce a majority for any candidate. The two top finishers of the first round competed in the run-off, when Mr. Weah received 732,185 votes (61.5 per cent). Liberia’s sitting Vice President, Joseph Boakai of the ruling Unity Party (UP) came in second with 457,579 votes (38.5 per cent).

The NEC also reported that 1,218,124 people voted in the presidential run-off, representing 55.8 per cent of Liberia’s registered voters.

In the first round, with the turnout of 75.2 per cent, Senator Weah led with 38.4 per cent of the votes, while Vice President Boakai placed second with 28.8 per cent followed by Charles Brumskine of the Liberty Party with 9.6 per cent. Complaints of irregularities led to an NEC investigation and a ruling by the Supreme Court before the second round was scheduled.

On the day Mr. Weah’s victory was announced, he and Vice President-elect Jewel Howard Taylor told the final session of the outgoing Senate that their Government would work together with the Senate and with VP Boakai in the future to move the country forward. The following day, President-elect Weah spoke at his party headquarters, outlining his Government’s focus. He committed to concentrate on grassroots social transformation, inclusiveness, protection of human rights, the elimination of corruption, and the creation of an environment conducive for investment. He thanked Liberia’s development partners for their support and appealed for stronger partnerships, as Liberia grows its economy and revenue base.

President Weah became involved in Liberian politics following his retirement from an excellent football career. He is considered one of the greatest African players of all time, named FIFA World Player of the Year in 1995 and African Player of the Century in 1996. He formed the CDC and ran unsuccessfully for president in the 2005 election, losing to President Sirleaf in the second round of voting. In the 2011 election, he ran as the vice presidential candidate with Winston Tubman, who again lost to President Sirleaf. Mr. Weah was elected to the Liberian Senate for Montserrado County in 2014.

One recent example was the proposal to turn Liberia into a Christian state, which led to the breakup of the Inter-religious Council, and caused massive friction among different groups. Our main argument with all of those with whom we engaged was to be preventive: do not open this country to terrorists who would see this move to a Christian Liberia as creating a legitimate battlefield. In the end, the idea of the Christian state was abandoned, and Liberians sided against anything that could divide the nation further. Tolerance, accommodation, peaceful coexistence – these are the future here.

Another example was the controversy in March 2017 over the code of conduct for public officials. Some members of the Legislature took exception to the opinion of the Supreme Court regarding the eligibility of some presidential candidates, and moved to consider impeachment some of the justices, accusing them of bias. The justices responded in kind. The judges and legislators were at loggerheads; so, we stepped in together with local and regional stakeholders. We spoke to opinion-makers in the House and met with the Supreme Court and others. We finally

managed to get the House to drop the original summons, and convinced the Supreme Court to nullify its own summons to the House. That constitutional crisis was averted. We never sought publicity from these interventions. They were quiet achievements. But we've been working hard, behind the scenes, in many ways like this, to help this country move forward and face its challenges successfully.

These seem examples of preventive diplomacy? What other work have you done along those lines?

It's exactly that: preventive diplomacy. It is what the UN should be doing as part of all peacekeeping operations in addition to what it is tasked to do in special political missions.

Another good example is what happened on the day of elections. One of the opposition parties issued a press release, essentially a statement of complaint, and I picked up the phone and spoke with the party leader and urged him to call on his followers to remain calm, while he referred his complaint to the National Elections Commission. What I didn't know at that point was that they had already decided they would be marching on the Elections Commission to protest. But I learned later that, after having spoken with us, they had second thoughts about doing so. All those who had grievances resorted to due process, instead of going to the streets.

We have done a lot here in terms of prevention, in the current drawdown phase and across the history of this Mission. I'm pleased about the decision of the President recently to do away with a clause in the law that described certain kinds of opinions expressed in the media as sedition, a criminal act. This clause, which was never enforced, ran counter to the freedom of press, and its mere presence in the law forced people expressing certain opinions to go into hiding or into exile in other countries. The provision was deleted from the law.

What other challenges remain in Liberia as you work to bring UNMIL to a close?

There are many challenges, including the inability of the Government to make good on some of its own promises regarding restorative aspects of national reconciliation and on women's participation in at all levels of Government. There are challenges in doing away with harmful traditional practices, including female genital mutilation (FGM).^{*} But not enough is being done to criminalize them.

Overall, there are huge challenges in the justice sector's performance. As just one example, pre-trial detainees make up almost 70 per cent of all detainees, and that's already an injustice, because some of those detainees are spending more time behind bars than they would if they were convicted of their alleged crimes. Recently, we've approved projects to increase the capacity of the judiciary to adjudicate cases of pre-trial detention to help reduce the backlog so they can focus on severe cases, not just traffic violations or fist fights.

Have you seen any marked improvements in these areas in the time you've led UNMIL?

We've initiated programmes by helping the construction of courts, by training judges, by building the capacity of prosecutors so they can make better cases, by helping police investigating a crime to develop a solid case that would stand in court, and we've worked to synchronize the relationship between these elements to deliver quality justice. But these things are coming late in the day. These projects should have started right at the beginning, with the judiciary having adequate resources to do better.

The fight against corruption is another area that should have been addressed long ago. Corruption is endemic and runs across the length and breadth of the system, with almost total impunity.

The number of rapes is also very high in Liberia. Out of all serious crimes, collectively, including murder and armed robbery and smuggling and others, one-third are rape cases. This is way too high. Even though we supported a special court on rape, the performance is horrible because they don't have the basic tools of collecting evidence. Proving a case of murder is of course easier than proving a case of rape.

It's a revolving door. Rapists go free after two rounds of sitting in the court because the case is dropped when there isn't evidence to move it forward or because of the influence of the local chiefs who take bribes and bribe the courts or force a family to relocate and not show up on trial day to push the case. There are lots of evils in this society that really could have been tackled head on, but we didn't prioritize them early enough.

^{*}As one of her last acts in office, President Sirleaf on 19 January 2018 issued an order banning FGM for children under 18.

Does this cause a certain level of personal frustration for you, recognizing that this Mission will shut down with unfinished business?

Yes. Exactly. None of these things should have been our preserve alone, but we should have been an instrument for commencing a process of change by demanding action by the national authorities, demanding their terms of reference in return for all the support that the international community is giving. Unfortunately, the rest of the well-wishers of Liberia, because of their own bilateral interests, did not want to exert too much pressure on the Government, and as a result, the Government has gotten away with a lack of performance, plus it has tolerated corruption, nepotism, incompetence and mediocrity.

For me, this is my last job. I don't have a hidden agenda. It is because of the personal care I have for Liberians on the one hand and the duty of care as part of my mandate on the other hand that I must take these issues seriously.

In the end, the President has done many positive things in Liberia. Unfortunately, Ebola really brought her agenda to a grinding halt and seriously affected the good performance of the economy. The economy is now contracting, in part because of the steep fall in commodity prices globally and in part because of Ebola. Because Liberia is heavily dependent on extractive minerals and other export items, the country is suffering. Had they diversified the economy a little bit earlier, Ebola and other factors would not have taken such a heavy toll.

Would you say that in general, peacekeeping operations fail to prioritize these issues in their early days?

Absolutely it is a problem with peacekeeping itself. There isn't any agreed framework for mutual accountability between the international community and the national actors, when a peacekeeping operation is established. We need to have something different instead of a status of mission agreement, something that goes well beyond the technical issues of freedom of movement and the inviolability of privileges and

For all peacekeeping operations, the UN must create a framework of mutual accountability that would bind the recipient of international assistance to certain terms of behaviour and performance in return for all the generous assistance and help the international community is bringing in.

immunities. We must go far beyond that. For all peacekeeping operations, the UN must create a framework of mutual accountability that would bind the recipient of international assistance to certain terms of behaviour and performance in return for all the generous assistance and help the international community is bringing in. It shouldn't be a one-way highway. Mutual accountability must be central to peacekeeping. After all, peacekeeping operations are deployed with the consent of receiving Member States.

Could you go into a bit more detail about what you envision as the alternative?

I don't like to call it conditions-based, because it means it would be an imposition. When I say 'framework of mutual accountability,' it means that there would be voluntary assumption of certain obligations on the part of both sides. We brought in that element, but very late in the context of this transition, in the peacebuilding plan that the Security Council asked of us last year. We developed it with the help of the Peacebuilding Commission.

Initially, I was pushing for a compact, but that sounds like a treaty. What do you do if the Government doesn't fulfil its obligations? Do you take the Government to court? They dropped the idea of a compact, and I settled for something less, and now we call it a 'framework of mutual accountability.' That means that we agree on a set of priorities that are shared. You and I sit down and agree that these are the priorities on which the government should focus its energy and resources in the short-term, the mid-term and the long-term; and, this is how the UN and the donor community should support the agreed priorities, so the framework of mutual accountability sets obligations for both sides. We help, but then these are the things that you need to do so that we can help you. Quid pro quo!

Would this framework be best positioned in late-stage peacekeeping, especially considering that mutual accountability would be hard to implement in the situation of a failed state where missions may be deployed?

Absolutely no. As you build the institutions, as you help with the stability that leads to the emergence of a political leadership with a semblance of representative legitimacy, mutual accountability should be part of the process from the very start.

For instance, we haven’t waited for the winner of this election to be announced. We were already talking with the front-runners, and getting their commitment to certain critical processes that have not reached a point of maturation, including on the key issue of national reconciliation. We did this to make sure that the winning candidate remains steadfast in their commitments. We are hoping that the candidate who comes to power at the end of this exercise will remain committed to the vision of national reconciliation, to build for the first time a nation that’s united around a single vision, a shared idea that will carry Liberia into the future.

Speaking of hope, are you confident in the future of Liberia? Do you have hope for this country?

Let me put it this way. Hope in Liberia must be harboured by all of us. We cannot afford to be pessimists. Without hope, everything would have been in vain. I am hopeful because Liberia has come a long way since the end of the war. The many initiatives the Sirleaf Government has undertaken, with significant investment from the international community, have had a tremendous impact on bringing Liberia to where it is today. That should be reason enough for us to entertain the hope that this progress can be sustained.

Will it be? That depends on several factors. It depends on the degree of the political commitment of the new leaders to the reform agenda as well as the willingness of the international community to maintain a robust level of engagement so there won’t be a cliff, cutting off assistance soon after our departure. That’s why we’re lobbying for strengthening the UN system after UNMIL’s departure, so that part of our residual responsibilities will be taken over by the Country Team to fill part of the void that we will be leaving behind.

What we hope to leave in place when UNMIL closes is a strengthened set of coordination mechanisms for the UN system as well a strengthening of each of these UN agencies, funds and programmes together with some predictable, sustainable funding for them.



Aerial view of the Pan African Plaza, UNMIL Headquarters in Monrovia.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 23 Jan 18

Leading the Mission to a close



Farid Zarif, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of UNMIL (left), presents the UN flag to UNMIL Police Commissioner Simon Blatchly at UNMIL HQ during a farewell ceremony to honour uniformed personnel.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 5 Feb 18

When Farid Zarif arrived in Liberia in September 2015 to take the helm of UNMIL’s final chapter, he had a long biography of leadership positions in the UN, as well as diplomatic and senior roles in his own country of Afghanistan. He went on to lead the Mission in a critical phase: Liberia would take over responsibility for its own security. Free and fair elections would be held with UNMIL largely in the background. And UNMIL would be closing without leaving significant gaps in capacity among its Liberian hosts.

SRSZ Zarif studied law, political science, international relations and diplomacy at Kabul University, the Afghan Institute of Diplomacy and University of Oxford. He has extensive experience in diplomatic, international and UN affairs. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSZ) and Head of UN Mission in Liberia, with the rank of Under-Secretary-General, he had previously served as SRSZ and Head of the UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) from 2011 to 2015. Prior to that, he served as Director of the Europe and Latin America Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (2010-2011) in the UN Headquarters in New York. In addition, he served in political, humanitarian and peacekeeping operations in Eritrea, Liberia, South Africa, Iraq and Sudan in various senior capacities, including elections coordinator, deputy humanitarian coordinator and chief of staff.

Before he joined the United Nations in 1993, he served in various positions inside and outside Afghanistan, including as Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York (1981-1987), Deputy Foreign Minister (1987-1989) and Presidential Adviser on International Affairs (1989-1991). He served as Secretary-General of the Economic Advisory Council, the think-tank of the Chambers of Commerce and leadership of the corresponding civil society organizations.

SRSZ Zarif not only led the Mission through an important phase, and inserted his “good offices” at critical moments in Liberia’s political developments, but he also created an environment in the Mission of commitment and excellence, according to a 2017 survey of UN staff in the field and at Headquarters.

UNMIL was ranked the best field mission in which to work, according to the first UN Global Staff Survey of 2017. Some 4,000 staff members, or 10 per cent of the Secretariat work force, were asked to rank answers to a number of questions on job satisfaction, empowerment, leadership and ethical practices, as well as their overall feelings on the UN.

UNMIL ranked highest in job satisfaction; highest in leadership and ethical climate; and second highest in empowerment of staff, the Mission ranked fairly low on positive attitudes towards the UN bureaucracy in general, indicating the staff desire for greater reforms in the Organization.

“He has guarded the organization against growing carelessness or arrogant complacency, and also truly appreciates the work of every staff member,” said a staff member.

Proposal for a Christian state risks hard-won calm

During the first half of 2016, UNMIL helped diffuse potential conflict between Liberia’s Christian and Muslim communities which emerged from the country’s constitutional review process. One of the proposals made during this process was to declare Liberia “a Christian nation.” Muslims perceived this as a serious provocation: as a result, the National Muslim Council of Liberia and the Imam Council suspended their participation in the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia.



Liberian traditional and religious leaders working together for peace.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 24 Apr 13

Considering these developments as a serious threat to peace consolidation and national unity, UNMIL’s Political and Civil Affairs officers engaged with Christian and Muslim leaders through a set of bilateral meetings to ascertain the framework for a constructive inter-religious dialogue in an effort to defuse tensions. This followed a series of high-level meetings between the SRSg, senior religious leaders and politicians.

Using his good offices, the SRSg created opportunities for Christian and Muslim leaders to consider possible implications of pursuing this proposal. They then issued public statements, dissociating their respective bodies from the controversial proposal. This allowed both sides to rejoin the Inter-Religious Council and focus on issues such as ensuring a peaceful electoral process, consolidating the hard-earned peace, and addressing the root causes of conflict and the wider development prospects for the country. A wide discussion ensued, involving all concerned stakeholders on a narrative of common interest and on the positive achievements of Liberia.

Ultimately, the SRSg’s robust engagement fostered an even closer engagement than previously between the Christian and Muslim communities, as well as the shelving of the proposal by the Legislature and executive branch of the Government. There was then a tacit agreement among most lawmakers to postpone discussions on this proposal pending future action by the new Government in 2018.

Are you confident the drawdown and completion of UNMIL and handover to the Country Team will be effective in continuing Liberia’s progress?

On the Government side, we completed transition of all security aspects as of June last year. And so far, so good. They are doing a good job. And if they can sustain it, that would be fantastic. However, the reform processes aren’t yet changing mindsets, aren’t yet improving the professional quality of the service personnel in the leeward areas. These are long-term processes that will take a generation to mature. But I hope that this progress will be sustained by the infusion of political commitment and resources.

On other things that are more policy-driven, we heavily depend on the commitment of the new leadership that will emerge as it goes on. They must be committed to promoting the idea of a just society for maintaining peace. Without justice, there cannot be peace. To ensure that there is peace and stability in this country, Liberia must solidify its foundations of justice. And that’s not just through improvement of

Solidifying the foundations of justice also includes opening the political and economic space for the participation of all segments of society to share a future and share resources and opportunities.

the judiciary, adjudicating crimes more quickly, and bringing accountability. Solidifying the foundations of justice also includes opening the political and economic space for the participation of all segments of society to share a future and share resources and opportunities.

I’m not asking for everybody to immediately be given a chair at every school, or free medical insurance for all, or for everybody to have a job. But Liberia needs to begin a process that would gradually lead in that direction. This country is rich enough, with huge resources already available in nature, to start this process with the help of the international community. With so many kids not going to school, you are taking away the future of the country. We must look at both the quantity as well as the quality of education here. And that requires a long-term perspective, visualizing the ideal destination and building the steps toward achieving that objective in a way that one step could contribute toward the next step.

On a final note, what would you say to the people of Liberia and to the internationals working here to help the country move forward into the future?

First to the leadership of Liberia: The position you hold is given to you by the very people you will be leading. The first and most important thing to do is to recognize that this position is for serving the people. You cannot serve the people unless you know who the people are, what they want, and how you can provide them the services.

That’s how they can really, morally and ethically, claim legitimacy for their position in the Government. That’s the only way they can justify their salaries and enjoy the benefits of the job. If they don’t serve the public, then the social contract is off. They cannot enrich themselves with the wealth of the people and keep the people deprived of everything that belongs to them. So that is the message. Fight corruption. Make sure the Government efficiently delivers the services the Government is expected to deliver. Support all segments of society. Give people the space, the opportunity, through legal reform, through structural reform, through well thought-out policies to unleash their potential to the maximum.

Nature has given them so many riches: able-bodied men and women, fertile land, plenty of water and plenty of minerals, along with a diverse culture and a rich history. All those riches of the nation, put together, can make Liberia self-reliant and prosperous. But achieving these takes commitment, accountability and hard work, along with fighting corruption, nepotism and other unethical practices.

And to the international community helping Liberia move forward, what would you say?

Move away from the pet-project approach. Coordinate, so you will have a better bargaining position with the national authorities. Help them get a focus on the top priority areas in terms of diversification of the economy to produce and generate wealth, and delivery of services to the people. Use your collective bargaining capacity to move things in the right direction for the benefit of Liberia. Since you have come here to assist another country, share the knowledge of how you plan your own economy back home, how you diversify and share your resources.

Human rights and gender issues – including having more women in Government positions, eliminating female genital mutilation, eradicating domestic violence – all these issues could be addressed effectively, but not without building a strong foundation on which Liberia can become self-reliant and become a contributor instead of a recipient of foreign assistance.

In the UN, we need to have a good understanding of an operating theatre before we craft the mandate. We must know why we were mandated to come into a country, why that country ended up in conflict in the first place. After identifying the core causes of the conflict, the main drivers of the crisis, the UN steps in and starts to help address those issues in a fundamental way. The structure of peacekeeping mandates should be focused on those priority areas. We must not continue to build the roof first. We must start with the foundations. We will eventually get to the roof, but first we must build the capacity that will contribute to self-reliance. Peacekeeping, peace consolidation and peacebuilding should not be seem as a continuum, but rather as integral parts of an indivisible peace process, with adequate predictable resources for promoting all aspects.

In addition to this, we must constantly look at ourselves and evaluate our own behaviour. The way we are perceived by the host population has a direct impact on the degree of our success in discharging our mandate. Are we all behaving ethically and morally in relations to our duties, and in our relations with local population, particularly women and children? Do we take seriously our responsibility towards our host environment, and are we respectful of the local laws and ethos? Simple things, such as unnecessary use of honks, sirens and lights or disrespect of traffic regulations can have a very damaging impact on the minds our hosts. The UN enjoys a lot of respect in this country. People appreciate us for the fact that we helped bring peace here. So, we should not squander this hard-earned respect by engaging in any unethical, immoral, disrespectful or irresponsible behaviour.

Another important issue is making good choices for mission leadership. Bureaucrats can never be leaders. Those who come to mission leadership with the intention of using the position as a stepping stone to another job should be given something somewhere that is not consequential.

People who are entrusted with the leadership of a mission that has so much impact on a nation – those people should be selected very deliberately according to proven leadership competence befitting the complexities of the tasks they will shoulder.

What’s needed are people with vision to bring about that kind of commitment to turn the minimal resources we have at our disposal into an instrument of change, and to be courageous enough to engage the authorities candidly instead of protecting themselves in order to avoid becoming a persona non-grata. We should remember that we come from an Organization whose charter specifically starts with ‘we the people....’ It doesn’t say ‘we the government....’

It is the people in whose name we are deployed in the United Nations. We must remain true to that core principle. We are the auxiliary forces of an Organization that has been established by the will of the people. Therefore, our loyalty should rest with the people of a nation where we are being deployed to serve. If we keep that in mind, then dealing with the authorities should become easier. We should serve and help those authorities who are representing and serving their nation. That’s why we’re here, working for the same cause.

It is the people in whose name we are deployed in the United Nations. We must remain true to that core principle.

Obasanjo visit promotes acceptance of election results

Just two days after the run-off presidential elections, the former President of Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo, paid a visit to Monrovia as a member of the UN Secretary-General’s High Level Advisory Board on Mediation.* His objective was to help ensure that all concerned parties accepted the outcome of the 2017 run-off elections without recurring litigation or tensions. Mr. Obasanjo, in his interaction with

political stakeholders, encouraged the spirit of conciliation among party leaders and supporters of the candidates. He proposed that the two candidates who contested in the run-off make a public gesture of peace, even before the official results were announced. Vice President Boakai, the runner up, then conceded defeat and congratulated Senator Weah on his victory, prior to the NEC final announcement. Vice President Boakai also called on his constituency “to support peace and join hands by accepting the results in order to continue supporting the country to move forward.”

A significant outcome of Mr. Obasanjo’s mission was that both candidates’ parties (the CDC and UP) vowed to eschew violence, to put the interest of the people of Liberia above any political gain, to accept the election result, and to prevent any delay in the swearing in of Liberia’s new President on 22 January, thus avoiding a potential constitutional crisis.

In a speech, Mr. Obasanjo declared that “In this election, Liberia is the true winner.”

*The High-level Advisory Board on Mediation was formed in September 2017 by UN Secretary-General António Guterres to advise him on mediation initiatives and to back specific mediation efforts around the world. Mr. Obasanjo is one of 18 global leaders, senior officials and experts on the board. He was Nigeria’s President from 1999-2007.



SRSF Farid Zarif (left) receives Olusegun Obasanjo, former president of Nigeria at the airport.

Photo: Carla Feriguetti | UNMIL | 30 Dec 17

Engagements with political parties in advance of 2017 elections

The political atmosphere in Liberia was charged with fear and mistrust during 2016 and 2017 as preparations for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for October 2017 began in earnest. SRSF Farid Zarif led intensified good offices engagements as mandated by Security Council resolution 2333 (2016), with the aim of sustaining an environment conducive to peaceful, transparent and credible elections. He held nine meetings between May 2016 and August 2017 with the leadership of twenty-plus political parties contesting the elections, to encourage dialogue and peaceful campaigning.

With the Liberian Governance Commission, he sponsored a two-day conference in May with all political parties, facilitated by the Inter-Religious Council of Liberia. This led to the parties’ adoption of the Farmington River Declaration in the margins of the ECOWAS Summit on 4 June in Monrovia, by which they committed themselves to peaceful elections and a seamless transition to a new administration in January 2018. At a second meeting he convened, on 28 July, just prior to the formal campaign period, party leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the Declaration.

Then, two days before the 10 October elections, UNMIL held a function for presidential and vice presidential candidates, inviting representatives from ECOWAS, the AU, EU and international election observer missions to encourage the candidates to help ensure that peace prevailed during and after the elections.

Following the first round of voting, the ruling Unity Party (UP), whose candidate had come in second, joined the third-place Liberty Party’s (LP) challenge of the results, charging that fraud had been committed, as well as interference by the sitting President. The Supreme Court put a hold on the second round to hear the complaints.

During the intervening weeks of uncertainty, both SRSF Zarif and his Deputy Waldemar Vrey (DSRSF for Political and Rule of Law) met with the Coalition for Democratic Change (CDC), the UP and the LP, as legal disputes were underway at the National Elections Commission (NEC) and the Supreme Court. SRSF Zarif engaged with candidates to dissuade them from mobilizing their membership to protest the provisional results, and instead seek legal options to address their grievances. All leaders called on their followers to remain peaceful and patient, and a planned march to the NEC headquarters was called off.

The interventions by the UNMIL leadership encouraged the parties to follow the rule of law, to call on their supporters to remain calm as the legal process played out, and to respect the pending Supreme Court decision. Following the Court’s ruling on 8 December that opened the door for the run-off election on 26 December, the SRSF and DSRSF engaged again with the CDC and UP leadership and facilitated a dialogue between the parties and the NEC to ensure transparency and calm. Throughout the process, UNMIL worked on coordinating efforts and messaging with local, international and regional actors, notably ECOWAS and AU. The UN Security Council congratulated the Liberian people, Government, political leaders, civil society, media and expressed appreciation for the good offices of the SRSF and the UNMIL leadership for the peaceful conduct of the run-off election.

Leading the orchestra

Bibi-Masumeh Eng, Chief of Staff

Ms. Bibi Eng, the Mission Chief of Staff, talks about her role in UNMIL, and how she has facilitated Mission activities as an orchestra conductor behind the curtain. A lawyer by training, she also has a degree in international relations and has served on four previous peacekeeping operations, as well as at UN Headquarters and in the UN Environment Programme in Nairobi.

Could you please tell us a bit about your background and how your prior work has shaped your experience in UNMIL?

I have a mixed background, which has played a constructive role in the Mission. I have legal training, and also a bachelor’s degree in international relations from the Johns Hopkins University. I fuse the distinct systems of thought and action together. During my undergraduate and graduate studies, I studied abroad twice, and spent 10 years in the Lycée Français, working with many communities, where I became used to hearing different viewpoints and approaches. In the UN, I have served in legal and political capacities, so I have brought all these experiences to this role. And by the time of my appointment as Chief of Staff, I had worked 10 years in Africa, which provided additional context.

I speak several languages, and come from parents raised in two different cultures and faiths. So I understand situations and perform my functions from a lens that is multi-cultural and multi-dimensional, not just political or legal.

UNMIL is the third peacekeeping mission where I have worked under the direction of Special Representative Zarif, so I know his abilities, values and approach – and I have also been molded by them to some extent. My familiarity with him, his style and his orientation helps facilitate mandate implementation.



Bibi-Masumeh Eng, the UNMIL Chief of Staff

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 7 Feb 18

I also worked previously in order postings with colleagues now in UNMIL, so I was familiar with their strengths and styles. All these factors have contributed to how I perform my functions at UNMIL.

What was your initial impression about Liberia?

I came to the Mission as Senior Political Affairs Officer/Deputy Chief of Political Affairs Service, so I got to know the country first and foremost through its politics. It was my first time working and living in West Africa, as the bulk of my experience had been in East Africa. I also tried to understand Liberia through its connection with American history, which I had learned in school, as well as within the context of the neighbouring countries and region.

Monrovia struck me as having similarities with the inner city of Baltimore, where I studied and lived. At the time, Baltimore had a high crime rate, and low literacy and employment rates. Walking in downtown Monrovia had a similar warm and historical feel, a city that had seen better times and where the stark differences of wealth were evident.

Walking in downtown Monrovia had a similar warm and historical feel, a city that had seen better times and where the stark differences of wealth were evident.

At the Mission, I could see similarities with the UN missions in Kosovo (UNMIK) and Burundi (ONUB). When I joined UNMIL, most of the Mission leadership had changed, so there were new blood and fresh views. I was fortunate in this regard. While I have continued to learn and understand the Mission achievements since 2003, as with everything else, we are learning what hasn’t worked. The SRSG has had the drive to make up to the extent possible for what the Mission has not achieved, meaning that he has not only built on UNMIL’s achievements, but also actively tried to tackle, within our mandate, residual issues where we could do better. This has been very empowering to me and my colleagues.

Your behind-the-scenes position in UNMIL is not glamorous but clearly challenging, because you have been at the nexus of operational and substantive work. Could you give us a sense of what your role has involved here?

My role is to oversee and facilitate the internal management of the Mission on behalf of the SRSG. This oversight and facilitation extend to areas such as senior-level decision-making, mandate implementation by the substantive components, and mainstreaming of cross-cutting considerations, such as gender, youth, protection, environment, civil society, etc., all of which have been subjects of Security Council resolutions and presidential statements. I manage internal issues so that the SRSG can focus on external issues, especially good offices and peace consolidation. So knowing his priorities and style has helped to guide me.

I see the job as akin to that of an orchestra conductor interpreting scores on behalf of composers. Ultimately the UN scores are Security Council resolutions, but also UN leadership guidance, global policies and Member State positions. For this reason, I monitor political, policy and organizational developments, and identify emerging issues that may influence or even enhance our mandate implementation. The Security Council mandate is very political. You need to understand the positions and red lines of the individual Member States on the Security Council, regional organizations and neighbouring states, in order to gauge the areas of maneuverability. I consult and gather information, analyze, and make recommendations to the SRSG or senior management on possible strategies to advance our objectives. Thus, one could say I interpret the scores to ensure an effective performance.

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One example is the Secretary-General’s focus on ‘prevention’ as part of the new peace and security architecture. Our SRSG has also been a big champion of prevention. I actively monitor discussions inside and outside the Mission, to raise opportunities for our good offices function to defuse tensions and prevent conflict.

Another emerging opportunity for peacekeeping is the environment. I am serving on the Environment Strategy Wider Impact Working Group of the UN departments of peacekeeping and field support, which is seeking to increase the level to which peacekeeping missions take into account the wider environmental impact of their deployments and attempt to deliver a positive legacy. We have a variety of people who are engaged

in this working group, such as civil affairs chiefs and administrators from different missions. I am particularly interested in the nexus between environmental degradation, natural resources and conflict, and how to better address these issues as a Mission together with the UN Country Team.

This all led me to identify a cross-cutting opportunity, namely food insecurity and the resulting conflict around fishing in Liberia. Local, artisanal fishermen run into conflict with foreign mega-trawlers that take advantage of weaknesses in enforcement by the Liberian State. The artisanal fishermen are using poor fishing gear; their communities have primitive fish processing techniques; and the limited catch does not reach markets and provide livable wages.

Believe it or not, much of the fish here is imported, although we are sitting right on the water. With background from civil affairs colleagues, I came up with the idea for a programmatic project to assist the relevant local institutions and communities in utilizing their resources. The SRSNG liked the idea.

The UNMIL Peace Consolidation Service reached out to civil society organizations with expertise in fisheries, cooperatives, and regulation, and several were interested in the concept from their different angles. The Office of SRSNG reviewed the concept and guided the development of the project, called ‘Enhancing conflict prevention and peace consolidation through increased food security in the fishery sector,’ which was eventually recommended for approval by UNMIL’s

These activities will be occurring in some of the most disadvantaged communities of Monrovia.

Project Review Committee. The project aims, broadly, to build the capacity of artisanal fisherman and fish processors, who tend to be women, to run their own enterprises; it establishes artisanal fishermen cooperatives to manage landing sites and generate income from the related fees, while also building social cohesion; and it trains Bureau of National Fisheries staff to support these structures. There are also environmental and sustainability aspects that our civil society partners are weaving in. It is a big project of around US\$600,000.

These activities will be occurring in some of the most disadvantaged communities of Monrovia. They are often locations of unrest, such as West Point, where people are losing land to the sea due to erosion. I am very proud of the multi-pronged and cross-cutting nature of this project to the benefit of the Liberian people, thanks to programmatic project funding. These are activities also in line with the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism.

These are the ‘newer’ peacekeeping activities, building peace not only by addressing root causes of conflict, but also by empowering the community to improve its situation. These are broader and deeper prevention activities than traditional military peacekeeping.

UNMIL paves the way for ECOWAS Radio

As UNMIL entered the last phase of its lifespan, the use of programmatic funding became a means of achieving the Mission’s mandated tasks, complementing the work of peacekeeping personnel in activities that should help sustain the peace. The Mission will use such funding to ensure that its popular UNMIL Radio will continue to inform and engage Liberians, and audiences beyond.

The High-Level Panel on Peacekeeping Operations (HIPPO) report of 2015 recognized that many capacity-building activities - such as training, construction and project support - could help a mission achieve its mandate more quickly than by relying upon staff members alone. Such funds could also be used to help countries adjust to the departure of a mission.

Programmatic activities have been crucial for UNMIL to ensure a responsible drawdown, taking into account anticipated gaps in services that the Mission had been delivering to the Liberian population. UNMIL would spend over US\$3 million for 2016-7 and US\$6 million for 2017-8 on programmatic funding projects in reconciliation and social cohesion, conflict prevention, land management, human rights and justice, gender, sexual and gender-based violence, engagement with high-risk youth, and support to media and regional cooperation.

UNMIL is using programmatic funds to facilitate the transition of UNMIL Radio to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which had intended to start a regional broadcaster since a year-2000 Summit. UN Security Council resolution 2333 also requests that UNMIL, as part of its withdrawal from Liberia, transfer UNMIL Radio to an independent entity.

The US\$305,000 radio transition project will help Liberians to address the root causes of conflict and build trust between Liberians and their institutions. The station has also been mandated to dispel misinformation, combat violence and extremism in the region, and broadcast programming on peace and security.

The funds should mean the transfer of UNMIL Radio to ECOWAS will be seamless without any interruption in broadcasting, maintaining popular station’s “brand” and credibility. The project makes use of support by regional experts such as the Media Foundation for West Africa, and enables the transfer of skills and experience to ECOWAS in managing the radio operations.

On 30 March 2018, UNMIL Radio will officially transform into ECOWAS Radio, which will gradually scale back up to broadcasting 24 hours per day, seven days per week. ECOWAS Radio intends to broadcast programmes eventually to the entire sub-region in English, French, Portuguese, Arabic, and indigenous languages.

The transition of a UN radio station to a regional entity is a first, and it is critical that UNMIL Radio’s successor retains the impartiality and credibility which has made such a difference to the lives of Liberians.

These are the ‘newer’ peacekeeping activities, building peace not only by addressing root causes of conflict, but also by empowering the community to improve its situation. These are broader and deeper prevention activities than traditional military peacekeeping.

A parallel area of interest is a mission’s socio-economic impact on the host country and the positive legacy we can leave in this regard. This is not just a matter of the infrastructure that we build for mission activities: it should involve the substantive activities as well. I have combined this interest with my lawyer’s risk management background to integrate socio-economic and environmental risk considerations into our projects, both programmatic and quick-impact/confidence-building. In consultation with the Peace Consolidation, Human Rights and Gender sections of the Mission, the Office of SRSNG developed the Environmental and Socioeconomic Sustainability Review Framework for UNMIL Projects and Activities. This was based on UNEP’s Environmental, Social and Economic Sustainability Framework, established in 2015.

This framework also fulfills the UN peacekeeping requirement, under the Mission Environmental Action Plan 2017-2018, that project proposals include an assessment of potential environmental impact. This plan also emphasizes the need for integration of local cultural awareness and respect as well as protection of cultural rights into our activities. The impetus came from the UN Mission in Mali, which has a mandate to protect cultural heritage. Although Liberia cannot be compared with Mali, with its unique experience in terms of conflict affecting cultural heritage, we can still apply good practices where relevant.

So, the Sustainability Review Framework is a risk management tool which allows the Mission, in particular the substantive components, to identify risks of harmful environmental and socio-economic impacts of our activities on communities, and remedy them in the project design and implementation phases, or turn them into opportunities for positive impact. By its nature, using this framework requires increased consideration of cross-cutting issues, consultation with stakeholders, and a rights-based approach in keeping with the organization’s Human Rights Upfront policy.

The framework also builds in more visibility for our projects, which touches upon another area that I oversee, strategic communications and public information. It enables a nuanced, holistic approach to project implementation. This framework is in its first year of implementation, and I am proud of how far we are able to progress with it, even though more could most certainly be done.

Residents of the urban slum of Westpoint, Monrovia live beside an erosion prone shoreline contained only by sandbags.

Photo: Bibi Eng | Dec 16



What would you identify as most notable achievements you’ve made here that you feel proud of?

A lot of the work I do is internal. Unlike political and civil affairs officers, I am not on the front lines of the Mission interacting with Liberian communities, politicians and Government officials. Instead, I enable those interventions to happen by coordinating the work of the substantive components and facilitating their operational support – and helping direct projects to serve the Mission’s good offices and advisory work.

I have also tried to integrate my planning and legal experience along with cross-cutting considerations toward enhancing our impact by means of effective project review. To do that, we developed the SRS’s Guidance on Developing Programmatic Funding Projects for the FY 17/18, based on our lessons learned. This Guidance requires identifying implementing partners with the greatest comparative advantage, as well as capacity, in executing projects. From my experience in UNEP where I worked with many project-related documents, I have been able to assist the Mission in implementing guidelines to run more effective projects. Developing and implementing programmatic projects is new to peacekeeping. We stipulated the need to show in the project template the link to our mandate budget goals, and the national priority that would be addressed. The sustainability of each project must be detailed: what are the costs over its life cycle, and how can we get the best value for the money received? If we are working with an international civil society partner, we may insist that a national partner also be involved. This is in line with Security Council resolution 2282 (2016) on the peacebuilding architecture, which stressed the role of civil society organizations in advancing efforts to sustain peace, and the need to build close strategic and operational partnerships with them. All these factors serve to maximize the impact and benefit to Liberians.

Thus, we are seeking to effect the recommendations of the report of the High Level Panel on Peacekeeping Operations (HIPPO) of 2015, which set some new directions for peacekeeping. An important element was the acknowledgement of the need for missions to help increase the capacity of civil society as much as possible before they leave.

From the Mission’s inception to the present, while it has been working on security and democratic transitions, what would be the most notable and significant achievements so far?

From my perspective at the end of the Mission, I would point to promoting a culture of dialogue, peace and reconciliation; enabling a degree of decentralization; and strengthening rule of law institutions and community-based initiatives.

That is for those who have been studying peacekeeping and Liberia to answer comprehensively. From my perspective at the end of the Mission, I would point to promoting a culture of dialogue, peace and reconciliation; enabling a degree of decentralization; and strengthening rule of law institutions and community-based initiatives.

There are still areas that need to be tackled by the international community which will remain in Liberia after the departure of UNMIL. While there are always areas where a peacekeeping mission can do more, I would say that UNMIL has achieved a relatively fair amount, particularly in helping rebuild a country after 13 years of civil war that resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths and even more rape, where very little was functioning, as well as help it to turn into a viable state capable of resolving its own problems, most recently an electoral dispute. Liberia’s advances are attributable to the collective efforts of the international community, the Government, local civil society and the Liberians themselves.

One of the key functions of your position is to set standards in staff behaviour, to implement and enforce UN staff policies. Can you talk about your role in these areas?

We try to ‘lead by example.’ I personally don’t like to do anything that I would not approve of in others. I am obviously talking about a broader context of conduct here, and while I do not want to underplay our zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), I believe that there are or should be zero tolerance for some other inappropriate behaviours of international civil servants. I supervise and work closely with the Conduct and Discipline Team on UN guidance on “outside activities,” as some of these activities can serve to compromise the Mission’s impact.

In terms of SEA, I have fostered synergies in support of the Secretary-General’s new approach to victim protection. As a former legal officer, I have advocated for the Organization’s immunities, and I understand their necessity and purpose. At the same time, I am equally convinced that those negatively affected by our operations should be protected. Thus, the theme of the socio-economic impact of the Mission’s activities reappears.

I guided our conduct and discipline colleagues on the development of quick-impact projects in support of communities in which some victims of SEA by Mission personnel live – they are usually located near our camps and bases. Let’s not forget their vulnerabilities, and the background to how they ended up as victims. Many in these vulnerable communities are effectively illiterate, and these projects aimed to provide basic trade and business

skills for the participants to be able to form cooperatives and small businesses in tailoring, baking and soap-making, so that they can sustain their lives with their dependents. These dependents sometimes include children born out of sexual involvement with members of our contingents.

I visited some of these communities and met with SEA survivors. Despite low levels of formal education, the leader of the women affected by SEA was so articulate about their needs. I refer to them as survivors so that they don’t continue to see themselves as victims. The project allows these individuals to build confidence to proceed with their lives, by improving their skills and livelihoods. We also hope to follow it up with a literacy project

I refer to them as survivors so that they don’t continue to see themselves as victims. The project allows these individuals to build confidence to proceed with their lives, by improving their skills and livelihoods.

financed by the recently established Secretary-General’s Trust Fund, which UNESCO will take lead on after UNMIL’s departure. The idea for this project was triggered when one of these women stepped up and asked for skills to be able to help with her child’s homework. I view this project as a positive outcome of a situation resulting from SEA. Horrible situations do not need remain or end horrible.

Do you think that other misconduct issues are somehow ignored because of the attention and strong messaging against SEA by the Secretary-General?

I worked as legal officer with various misconduct issues for many years. I was always guided by thinking about what types of behaviour as an organization we would wish to encourage. Conduct that is pursued in harmony with, or in furtherance of UN policies and mandates, is generally good. As long as one doesn’t get involved in political positioning or an activity that would call into question one’s impartiality or interfere with the performance of one’s functions, pursuit of activities in support of UN global principles and policies should be encouraged.

On the other hand, I try to discourage engagement in activities which do not represent well the conduct of international civil servants and the Mission in general. I tend to be sensitive to the use of power within the organization. I am aware that some people are using power in very subtle ways for their own personal or even private benefit. I don’t tolerate that well. Working closely with the Director of Mission Support, I aim to decrease the opportunities for fraud. As my grandmother used to say, “Lock your doors and put away your knives so your neighbour cannot become a thief.”

I have an open-door policy. As the Chief of Staff of the Mission, I have encouraged personnel to feel comfortable to raise things with me. Thus, I try to project a balanced approach, involving a large amount of confidence and clarity. One cannot abuse trust within the organization and expect to prevail.

There are misconduct-related issues in the Mission beyond SEA to which I like to bring ‘consistency’ in dealing with. Human resources management at Headquarters tends to have a view driven by UN Dispute Tribunal judgments, and not by the need to effectively manage personnel on the ground. It is shaped by risk aversion and not by organizational effectiveness. Ultimately, news of punitive measures or lack thereof go around in the mission, and a great deal of resentment builds up in personnel when they, from their viewpoint, see inconsistency in the treatment of misconduct. People are imaginative, and personnel come up with all manner of reasons to explain outcomes, and the reasons are not always justified. But perception is key, and personnel don’t necessarily want to hear about legal intricacies. They see some bad apples taking advantage of the system and getting away with it. So that demotivates, and in an environment when you need all hands on deck, such a state of affairs is not ideal. Therefore, where we can, we push for consistency and fairness in the treatment of misconduct.



Two youths hang from the side of an artisanal fishing boat in Monrovia.
Photo: Bibi Eng | Dec 16

UNMIL has made headlines with SEA scandals: can you talk about an experience you have faced that has risked the reputation of the Mission and potentially affected its ability to function?

UNMIL has dealt with conduct issues from SEA to financial fraud. Often the absence of ethical conduct in one area is tied to the same in another. I started my work in the Organization dealing with internal justice disputes and misconduct cases. Fortunately I had supervisors who approached matters seeing the big picture in organizational policy and messaging on matters of misconduct – not just seeing each case individually. So, we do our best to hold personnel accountable, and mitigate SEA's negative impact, particularly on those individuals who were directly harmed. As the Mission has been closing, we have reached out in the regions where we have already closed our offices to ensure that we have missed no victims. Some remaining ones do come forward with information, and we provide psycho-social and legal support to them as required. If we are able to link the alleged perpetrator through a name or picture, we notify UN HQ which contacts the Member State whose contingent committed the abuse to request investigation. There are positive outcomes from these efforts. My focus now is to minimize any harmful impact towards the end of the Mission's mandate, which should also feed into the legacy of the Mission.

What sort of other work are you involved in?

Strategic communication and public information can be very beneficial to the perception of an organization. Specifically, I consider UNMIL Radio to have played a very important role as a communication tool and also by building the capacity of local journalists but also the public who have been engaged listeners. In anticipation of UNMIL's closure, we launched the programmatic project 'Operationalization of the ECOWAS Radio' to support the transfer of UNMIL Radio to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) which intends to expand it into a regional radio station, while hopefully enabling our experienced national staff to continue at the station. In the past, UN missions have either closed down their radio station, or turned it over to national governments with mixed results. Building on lessons learned, we are banking on this transfer being sustainable, since a regional radio was mandated by an ECOWAS Summit decision of over 15 years ago, and their Member States have already committed to supply radio frequencies and towers. Long-term funding options are being pursued. I am pleased that the SRSG was able to help support this request by facilitating approval from UN Headquarters and the Liberian President. This is where the SRSG's vision and experience in heading public information also became salient.

In terms of perception of the Mission, I have tried to bring synergies and cross-cutting considerations to my management of strategic communications and public information. I have tried to maximize the use of our communications capacities, including social media in support of our activities and messaging. Social media has been somewhat neglected in our organization, and we should and could do more at the mission level. Many Liberians have smart phones, and many are on Facebook. So I have encouraged our public information staff to increasingly promote our work and messages on various social media. I have also encouraged substantive section heads to provide information on the positive impact of their projects so that we can share it – not just to promote our work, but more importantly to inform of the existence of a service, to diffuse tensions, or to educate on political, civil, social and economic rights.

It is important that the population become familiar with the fruits of advancement, as well as the nature of progress itself, which is not always linear. Communications is also an important element of the Mission's project review. For example when we develop a handbook for a professional practice, we ensure that it is made broadly available, including by uploading a PDF version onto our website and social media.

I learn so much from media, through specialized newsletters, in-depth stories, analytical pieces, blogs, interviews, social media posts, etc. In Liberia, we had to go back to basics, to personal outreach to many communities which had no media as we know it. I think that a lot more can be done at all levels of this society with communications. It is important to have this dialogue and information flow. We are a communicative species, and it is through communication that we can solve differences.

You are closing a 14-year-old Mission, which has been successful. At the same time, there might be areas where the Mission was unable to achieve its goals. What would be some issues that UNMIL could have approached differently from the very beginning?

I have focused on achieving with the score I was given to conduct until the end of the Mission. Everyone had to deal with certain challenges during the time she or he served, including limitations in the mandate, capacity, support, and so on. I was fortunate in this particular role, as I have had the support of many colleagues, and from my boss. In the course of any mission, there are challenges in getting buy-in.

Conduct and discipline team raises awareness, helps victims recover

In November 2005, wracked by allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse among its field personnel, the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations created dedicated conduct and discipline components in its largest peacekeeping missions. UNMIL quickly established a Conduct and Discipline Unit, now a Team, as the Mission's focal point for all categories of peacekeeping personnel.

After years of civil war, Liberia was one of the five poorest countries in the world. Many people were willing to do anything, including engaging in transactional sex or exploitative relationships just to get food on the table and to make ends meet due to lack of alternative livelihoods. Unfortunately, some peacekeeping personnel took advantage of this situation.

For many years, UN rules had prohibited its personnel from engaging in any form of transactional sex, i.e. the exchange of money, food, goods, or favors for any kind of sexual activity, as well as sex with anyone under 18 years of age. But the rules were not widely enforced, and during the peacekeeping missions in the early 1990s-mid 2000s, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) reached a crisis proportion. Secretary-Generals Kofi Annan, Ban Ki-moon and António Guterres have promulgated a zero-tolerance policy; worked with troop-contributing countries and Member States to reduce and punish misconduct; and directed awareness-raising among personnel and policies to curb behaviour and assist victims.

Over the years, the Mission received relatively few allegations that its personnel were engaged in sexual exploitation, with a high probability that many cases went unreported, as individuals who saw transactional sex as their only source of income were unlikely to file complaints. UNMIL has placed a special emphasis on measures against SEA which involved a combination of preventive and enforcement measures, as well as remedial action. Its Conduct and Discipline Team was a pioneer in victims' assistance when it created the first 'Protection from SEA Network,' coordinating anti-SEA activities conducted by UNMIL and the UN Offices, Funds, Programmes and Specialized Agencies in Liberia.

In 2017, after the Security Council had decided the date of UNMIL's closure, and the majority of the peacekeepers had left, complaints increased significantly, including allegations of sexual exploitation that happened years earlier, and in some cases resulting in the birth of a child. Every complaint was taken seriously, and UNMIL's Mission leadership directly engaged with the complainants to assure them of their commitment to have each case investigated in line with UN regulations and rules.

In cooperation with other parts of the Mission, the CDT ensured that medical, legal and psycho-social support was made available to alleged victims of SEA as soon as possible. Further, it launched pioneer vocational training projects in communities where several complainants lived. This helped women learn new livelihood skills like tailoring and bakery combined with basic business skills, aimed at making the women less vulnerable to exploitation. To reduce stigmatization, these training classes were open to all members of these communities, not just those who filed complaints.

Even when it consisted of just three to four staff members, CDT remained committed to promoting an ethical culture throughout UNMIL until its very end. Examples of its initiatives included an anti-corruption campaign, campaigns to increase awareness of sexual harassment, and the launch of its bi-monthly newsletter "Voice of Reason," which received positive feedback for its information on SEA and how the Mission was handling it. During its last months, UNMIL CDT increased its coordination and cooperation with members of the UN Country Team as part of its handover, so that victim's assistance projects could continue even after UNMIL's departure. One such example was the cooperation with UNESCO to provide adult literacy training for communities vulnerable to sexual exploitation and abuse.



A poster designed by the UNMIL Public Information Office to support a campaign about sexual exploitation and abuse in Liberia.
Illustration: Samson Zogbaye | UNMIL

UNMIL uses e-diplomacy for broader reach and longer legacy

With the advent of new communications technologies, peacekeeping missions are using social media to increase their reach and engagement. Whether digital diplomacy, e-diplomacy or cyber diplomacy, UNMIL's Strategic Communications Unit has increasingly used digital communications to provide information and to communicate with both its local and international audiences.

As the conflict in Liberia receded, the important but not necessarily headline grabbing work of the UN was going on at full strength. With the advent of social media, the Mission had tools to reach larger audiences locally and around the world with breaking news and features using radio, video, press and photo. With Twitter and Facebook, for example, some 50,000 people follow UNMIL and often engage dialogues, much as UNMIL Radio has done with its call-in shows.

In addition, during discrete mediation and good offices work, the Mission has used digital diplomacy to send messages out via social media to stress aspects and objectives of the ongoing work.

As the Mission was developing contemporary tools and platforms, however, Liberia's use of them remained low. As of 2017, out of approximately 3.8 million mobile subscribers, about half a million used the internet, while only 7 per cent had Facebook accounts. But as the country's three mobile phone companies compete for a growing market in a now peaceful country, internet and social media usage is growing fast. UNMIL's web audience is mainly outside the country (60 per cent), with 40 per cent of the content being accessed by people in Liberia.

During the 2017 election period, UNMIL used digital outreach more dynamically than usual by producing and webcasting messages by the Head of Mission to young people, voter education, and news of developments. UNMIL used its social media resources to support Liberia's National Elections Commission (NEC) with civic education, targeting in particular women and first-time voters.

In an earlier example of digital diplomacy, UNMIL used webcasts and social media for the Remembering Slavery Global Student Videoconference, which linked high school students in Monrovia with their counterparts in Kingston, Jamaica and with UN Headquarters in New York to learn about the consequences of the transatlantic slave trade.

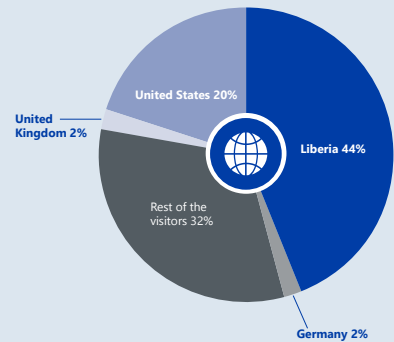
UNMIL Radio's reach was expanded thanks to live streaming of its programme and also by podcasts posted on the Mission's website. The station used metadata to determine what stories the audience was most interested in and where listeners were located (70 per cent were in the US). Facebook and Twitter were used to promote the service, with live broadcasts, and podcasts.

The strategy behind digital diplomacy was focused on message dissemination in support of the Mission's mandate. Content echoed the Mission's work in peace promotion, reconciliation, human rights, rule of law and justice. Mission publications were posted on the web and diffused via the latest platforms. Video clips and stories were posted on YouTube.

Additionally, Strategic Communications' media monitoring service posted and emailed daily analyses of Liberian media reports to some 250 partners.

Digital platforms have also meant that a peacekeeping mission's legacy remains alive and visible well after the mission's closure, on a site archived by UN Headquarters in New York. New technology ensures that researchers and students will have far greater access to information on multiple platforms about Liberia and the work of UNMIL, than missions in the pre-digital era ever imagined.

UNMIL Website 2017
Top five audiences by location for 2017



YouTube 2017
1,908 Subscribers | 283,833 min Watch Time | 174,975 Channel Views
Top five access geolocations: #1 United States (16%) | #2 Liberia (8.3%) | #3 India (7.2%) | #4 Nepal (6.4%) | #5 Saudi Arabia (6.1%)

Facebook 2017
22,436 Followers | 8,286 are from Liberia (36.93%)

Twitter 2017
28,573 Followers
Top five access geolocations: #1 Liberia (41%) | #2 United States (17%) | #3 United Kingdom (4%) | #4 Nigeria (2%) | #5 India (2%)

Due to their coordination and facilitation role, it is important for chiefs of staff to be strong. I consider that my own varied background has helped me perform this function. The Chief of Staff must have the trust of colleagues generally and particularly of the Head of Mission; she or he should have a certain number of years of experience within the Organization so as to know the UN's benefits and limitations. I would also argue that having a vision is advantageous.

In this drawdown mission, the military and police presence has been reduced. What are your main challenges?

Security responsibility was handed over to the Government in 2016, so we see a very low level of our military and police presence. What we have focused on recently is good offices, and capacity-building. We have done our best to ensure a smooth handover process. Within the Mission, I have done a lot of facilitation in this regard. If the chief of staff cannot facilitate, at least in this organizational setting, it would impact mandate implementation.

I must emphasize the facilitation aspect of my role. I endeavour to keep processes oiled, and maintain relationships which will at times require a form of internal 'shuttle diplomacy' between support and substantive or military and civilian components, to explore solutions. Such facilitation may require firmness to allow for flow in certain activities. It's not appreciated by all at all times, but I am not here to be popular but to exercise a particular function.

Any unfinished work you can think of?

There are certainly things unfinished, but I am only able to be realistic about my role. I have facilitated the executive direction and management of different pillars, and provided guidance and support to enable more effective substantive product and service delivery in the sections' respective areas. In short, I facilitate the ability of the organization to maximize impact within the organizational frameworks. I feel I have in a very small way contributed to Liberia's development, which will have to be a long-term endeavour.

You are part of the closing team of one of the largest missions deployed by the UN. What is your sense of confidence in the future of Liberia, do you have hope?

Yes. The outgoing Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, who has led the Mission's peace consolidation work, is expected to be leading the UN Country Team presence, and will accompany the new Administration in Liberia. The Mission left a lot behind. Obviously there is more to do. It is also up to the Liberians to remain engaged, and we will continue to support them in doing this till our departure.

What recommendations do you give to internationals who work here?

In back offices, one might feel disconnected from one's impact on society. But the individual impact we in the Mission have tends to be very positive.

I recommend not to become disconnected or disillusioned. In back offices, one might feel disconnected from one's impact on society. But the individual impact we in the Mission have tends to be very positive. I say so not based only on my experience

in Liberia, but also in other missions. One can talk to local individuals and learn how they view the UN, in terms of the impact on individual or societal levels. It is important to have this interaction to know the various perspectives of the local population. I hope and wish our languages, interactions, and our acts generally are a source of inspiration and learning for our hosts, as we come from so many different backgrounds and provide varying perspectives to approaching things. In my view, this impact tends to be underestimated and undervalued.

I'd like to ask about your personal commitment: what does the work of the UN mean to you?

I feel most comfortable being part of this culture and its end goal. I am not saying all mandates are 100 per cent correct, but I am referring to the motives of the Organization. Ultimately between what the UN Charter provides, what the UN's various purposes are, and what we can do individually in our functions, we collectively in the UN can bring many benefits to the table. I worked as a lawyer in the private sector once. I did not have the same sense at the end of the day going home, that I was contributing to overall benefit of the society.

QIPS: projects for peace



Women bake bread in the mobile oven of a community bakery in Coast Guard, Monrovia. The project was supported by quick-impact project funding.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 26 Jan 18

UNMIL’s quick-impact projects (QIPs) have focused on implementing small-scale, rapidly achievable projects aimed at establishing confidence in the Mission, its mandate, and the peace process. Since the inception of the Mission, UNMIL has implemented QIPs worth over US\$16 million in the country.

QIPs over the years have provided the needed catalyst for mobilizing local community participation in building peace and stability in the country. QIPs interventions supported structural and institutional reforms; national dialogue and confidence-building; social cohesion and inter-religious cooperation; promotion and protection of human rights; decentralization and delivery of services; support to civil society; and strategic communication. During its drawdown, the Mission intensified its interventions in building confidence in the political transition, and focused on promoting good offices and strengthening governance and rule of law, largely by providing facilitation and capacity-building in the form of training and equipment.

UNMIL QIPs have provided a flexible disbursement facility to support financially, at short notice, small-scale projects. In late 2017 and early 2018, QIPs provided a useful framework in support of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General’s mandate of good offices and political support. The implementation of these projects has facilitated UNMIL’s engagement with the stakeholders through the political transition and significantly contributed to the historical peaceful transfer of authority from one president to another.

During the recent presidential and legislative elections, UNMIL devoted some US\$360,000 in QIPS to preparing the ground for participation in the run-up to the election and during voting and its aftermath. Projects included training of young political leaders in campaign planning, messaging and speaking; enhancing the communications flow between elements of the Liberian police in the regions and its headquarters; holding a women leadership convention; and conducting law enforcement and election security exercises.

One example: before the elections, a QIP funded a one-day event at which 240 representatives from the Liberian and international community, political parties, civil society and media came together and discussed elections expectations and conduct, and committed to peaceful campaigning and elections.

Following the second round of the presidential elections in December 2017, UNMIL QIPs supported an event as part of an international mediation hosted by the SRSG, which resulted in the acceptance of the electoral outcome and a statement of concession by one of the contenders issued even before the announcement of final election results. This peaceful recognition of the election results was precipitated by and sealed at the social event that UNMIL organized and funded for key Liberian and international stakeholders.

In the broader context, QIPs helped build the capacity of the rule of law and security sector institutions, including those involved with the elections. Neither would have been possible without UNMIL’s engagement over the years, including through QIPs, which was so effectively put to use during the last months before the Mission’s closure. The lessons learned and best practices from UNMIL QIPs in the above-mentioned areas should inform further work by Liberia’s neighbours and sub-regional mechanisms to strengthen their respective rule of law and electoral systems and, ultimately, peace, stability, and security in the area.



Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 30 Jul 08

Sowing the seeds of change

K. Leigh Robinson, Head of the Public Information Office

Just after the Security Council passed resolution 1509 to establish UNMIL on 19 September 2003, a small team of international public information specialists was deployed to Liberia to support and promote the peacekeeping and peacebuilding initiatives of the new Mission.

Monrovia introduced them to the landscape of destruction they'd been watching unfold in the preceding years. But little could fully prepare them for the post-war realities on the ground: of families torn apart and displaced; utilities and communication lines destroyed; food and water in short supply; education and health systems in disarray. Broken dreams, lost hopes and lawlessness were rife; civility seemed to have been abandoned.

With much of the international community watching to see how the UN might repair the country, the team adopted crisis communication strategies to address challenges of how to assist the Liberians in having faith in the new focus on peace and stability for their country.

Combatting misinformation

In 2003, few means of communication had survived the destruction not only of infrastructure but also of social cohesion. The population had no access to credible news and information and knew little about the Mission descending on them.

Power brokers of the time had abused public communication channels, seeking to manipulate or control the media through threats or financial means. Their goal was to deliver one-sided propaganda that would ultimately sway the public to adopting their personal or factional agendas, while denying access to accurate information. Former President and war lord Charles Taylor had withdrawn short-wave frequencies of privately-owned and community radio stations, further restricting access to information for those living in rural and/or remote Liberia and opening the way for the manipulation of information to an already uninformed population.

Liberians desperately needed trusted channels of communications and a platform for discourse in order to move forward. The immediate and dire need for an interactive communications strategy would be paramount for the Mission to gain their trust, as well as to improve the UN's situational awareness on the ground. Employing diverse types of media, the public information team sought to gain the local population's consent to the Mission by issuing regular reports on developments, promoting dialogue and combatting misinformation.

Liberians desperately needed trusted channels of communications and a platform for discourse in order to move forward

From the first days of its deployment, UNMIL would use its radio station as the instrument of conflict resolution most capable of rapidly reaching all corners of Liberia. Radio had proven useful to the UN to inform and engage large segments of the population in, for example, the Democratic Republic of the Congo--far larger than Liberia--, but it had also been used as a weapon to manipulate beliefs to catastrophic effect in Rwanda in 1994.

The UN public information team set up rapidly: on 1 October 2003, broadcasting from a van parked in a field outside Monrovia the now familiar line: "UNMIL Radio, the official voice of the United Nations Mission in Liberia," was transmitted. Those first words heralded a new era of hope for Liberia.

The station's popularity grew quickly: its 24/7 transmissions soon became the primary source of frank and impartial news and information for people all over Liberia and along the borders with Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire. Groups of men, women and children would gather under the canopy of mango trees or inside thatched Palava huts to listen to the radio's news and education programmes as well as music sometimes from a hand-held solar powered radio, winding it frequently to prolong its battery life and their listening time.

Fifteen years on, the radio station that was established as a result of the Accra peace accord with the help of the Economic Community of West African States ends its existence as UNMIL Radio, to be reborn as ECOWAS Radio on 1 April 2018.

men, women and children would gather under the canopy of mango trees or inside thatched Palava huts to listen to the radio's news and education programmes as well as music

Delivering messages to the grassroots for critical campaigns

At the same time, those first public information officers saw the value of personal outreach particularly in Monrovia where most of the population was concentrated, and in rural hubs. Outreach, in the form of sports and music events, and the contracting of local celebrities was employed at every stage of the Mission's life. These interactions where large groups of onlookers gathered were critical to the Mission, through demobilization and reintegration, the health crisis of Ebola, three rounds of elections and the handover of security to the Liberian Government. Popular local icons were employed to deliver messages to promote understanding and interaction between those of opposing affiliations, break down barriers and disempower hostility and tension.

The Mission's public information office crafted and delivered messages in collaboration with key partners such as the Government of Liberia, stakeholders in the international community, local civil society organizations, local media, celebrity advocates and other national actors. These messages were produced in English, Liberian English and local dialects, conveyed by means of jingles and topical programmes on UNMIL Radio and by billboards mounted across Liberia, street banners, T-shirts and printed materials created with illustrations by Liberian artist, Samson Zogbaye.

UNMIL sensitization campaigns also addressed deeply rooted attitudes about vital topics such as the status of women and girls; traditional practices; health and hygiene customs; refugee rights, voting and civic responsibilities.

One of the Mission's first priorities, the demobilization and reintegration of more than 100,000 ex-combatants showed how strategic communications, or the lack thereof, could affect a critical chapter in the peace process. Launched only four months after the peace agreement was signed, the initial Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programme had not been set up in time to deliver on the expectations of the high number of ex-combatants who showed up expecting large payouts. Misinformation by parties opposed to the plan and insufficient communications with accurate information both to and about the ex-combatants were among the issues that needed to be addressed. The Mission regrouped and a massive public information and sensitization campaign ensued; the Mission restarted its DDR programme in April 2004 and completed it without further incidents in November of that year.

Comedian and UNMIL Peace Messenger, George Tamba (right), celebrated throughout Liberia as *Boutini*, performs in an AIDS awareness campaign.

Photo: UNMIL | 22 Jun 11



Eva Flomo, a passion for reporting on peace



Eva Flomo, UNMIL Radio Producer on-air at the UNMIL studios in Monrovia.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 29 Jan 18

Now one of the most respected household voices in Liberia, UNMIL Radio producer, Eva Flomo had a hint of her destiny when in school she would grab a scroll of paper pretending it was a microphone.

But Ms. Flomo went on to study economics and English in university, until she met someone who suggested that her passionate speaking style would be of better use in media. If she chose journalism, a friend warned: “You’ll be broke for life.”

During her first years at the Liberian state broadcaster, her job was to carry gear for the journalists, all men. One day the team simply disappeared, leaving behind notes for a story. “I was like... Are you kidding me? I was scared like hell.” After two hours, she realized a deadline had to be met and put together a story on the Liberian peace process, that aired and won her promotion to producer.

Her early broadcast career was in Central Liberia, then under the control of Charles Taylor. “It could have been crazy,” she says now. But she learned that “under pressure, I could be at my very best.”

She began covering women’s issues. “We live in a patriarchal society where only a man’s voice matters. It’s still that way today. Only in the urban enclave do you have feminism, emancipation, equality.”

There was a lot of work to do: laws on the books gave women certain rights they were either unaware of or could not access.

Women are to inherit one-third of a couples’ property upon a husband’s death, for example, but “since women are property, there is no way a property can own a property,” Ms. Flomo said. The Women’s Lawyers Association of Liberia ran a campaign on the law, and Ms. Flomo became the public voice behind that and many other stories on social issues.

She was hired by UNMIL Radio as the Mission deployed in 2003 and is now one of fifteen staff remaining as the Mission prepares to transition ownership of the station to ECOWAS.

She believes UNMIL contributed to the media landscape in Liberia by bringing credibility to the profession of journalism. Poverty means that few journalists can resist a manager’s instruction to “hurl insults” or favour friends, she said. UNMIL journalists were paid at an unprecedented level for Liberian media. That caused some resentment, but it also guaranteed their professionalism.

“I want to sound as a critical voice in my country, a voice people can believe, creating an environment of possibility. That’s the distinction of UNMIL Radio. Most journalists have to solicit money for a story. I have to ensure my story is right and balanced and has all the elements a news story requires,” she says.

The coverage won a large audience, and surveys returned comments such as “if it comes from Radio UNMIL, you can trust it.”

Ms. Flomo recalls travelling to a tense region with the first Force Commander when they were confronted with young men brandishing guns. As the UN Commander stood them down, Ms. Flomo asked herself, “What on earth am I doing here? This was amazing, and crazy. Because anything could have gone awry.”

“This job does so much public good, but it’s also dangerous. It’s not just about you, as a media person: it’s about society. As a journalist, you are contributing to the peace process. I came back and wrote that story, and it dawned on me, I’m in this for keeps.”

The DDR experience re-enforced the value of employing “traditional communicators,” and the Mission went on to contract eleven such groups, travelling often for miles by foot or lifted by UN helicopters-- to remote areas across the country delivering the Mission’s core messages, often to huge crowds of enthusiastic onlookers. Using local dialects and traditional modes of entertainment, these groups were able to engage people at the grassroots on issues vital to the stabilization and peace process in the country.

Humour too proved a powerful outreach tool, and UNMIL tapped celebrated local comedian George Tamba, popularly known as Boutini

Group, Harmonizers Entertainment Group Inc, Women in Peacebuilding Network, Flomo Theater Production, Lofa Youth for Progressive Action, Balawala International Foundation, United Youth Movement Against Violence, Liberia Crusaders for Peace, Development Educational Network of Liberia.

Humour too proved a powerful outreach tool, and UNMIL tapped celebrated local comedian George Tamba, popularly known as Boutini, as a Peace Messenger who wove Mission messages into his litany of side-splitting jokes.

Beginning with the DDR campaign in early 2004, Boutini conveyed critical information about the exercise to thousands of armed fighters from three warring factions, among them many youth and children. The campaign, supported by UNMIL Radio, also helped to build public understanding of the role of the entire United Nations system in Liberia in support of DDR. It also encouraged families and communities that would receive demobilized ex-combatants to focus on reconciliation and forgiveness.

Containing Ebola through communications

Another critical period during which UNMIL’s public information became vital was during the Ebola crisis of 2014-15.

At the onset of the outbreak in Liberia, UNMIL--which had been planning its own withdrawal-- found itself and its staff caught up in a public health emergency and the worst threat to Liberia since the civil war ended in 2003. In partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO), the Mission initiated critical media support via radio, community theatre and visual media to raise awareness about the virus and prevention with the aim of protecting both the Liberian population and UN personnel.

Billboards, murals and cartoons in newspapers displayed safety messages. UNMIL field personnel spread the messages as they interacted with communities and local authorities. The traditional communicators performed Ebola shows from moving trucks to dispel myths and suspicions about the disease and about the ‘men in white’ suits who appeared to collect the ill and dead. They educated thousands of onlookers about the prevention methods.

At the peak of the outbreak, when the health system was overwhelmed; and shops, schools and services closed, UNMIL Radio devoted the bulk of its airtime to educating the public about the virus and its prevention. The station issued daily news bulletins about developments, statistics and safety messages; and it hosted call-in questions and interviews with health care workers, and religious and traditional leaders among others.

As education about the disease increased, public knowledge of prevention methods improved, and more people sought early treatment of symptoms

As education about the disease increased, public knowledge of prevention methods improved, and more people sought early treatment of symptoms, it became clear that the peoples’ perceptions and habits had changed, reducing the risk of the disease spreading.

Imparting democratic rights and responsibilities

During the 2005 presidential elections that resulted in Africa’s first democratically elected woman president, UNMIL Public Information managed civic voter education campaigns, using a variety of communications platforms to inform voters about the importance of exercising their democratic right to choose their government. In 2017, the messaging focussed on women and other marginalized groups. UNMIL’s Women o Women campaign, for example, developed in Liberian English, aimed to mobilize women in the voter registration and voting process. Posters

targeted women to inform them about the practical processes of voting, while giving them confidence in knowing that the vote they dropped into the ballot box was theirs alone; it would be counted and was their secret.

The Mission’s platforms--particularly radio and outreach--encouraged exchanges of ideas and opinions, promoted non-violent behaviour and motivated voters to register and vote. During both the 2011 and 2017 presidential and legislative elections, UNMIL’s role concentrated on logistical support, and the National Elections Commission of Liberia adopted its own civic voter education strategy, that UNMIL supported with its media platforms and traditional communicators.

During the campaign and voting periods, UNMIL media teams monitored the collection of election information by other Mission components to understand the atmosphere and potential attempts to intimidate voters, or otherwise interfere with the conduct of the elections. Summaries were posted to the UNMIL website and social media platforms throughout each day to ensure that Liberian and international followers were quickly and accurately informed of developments.

Political debates, press conferences and round-the-clock reports gathered from stringers in the field were aired via UNMIL Radio and streamed live via the UNMIL web site, as well as relayed to community radio stations throughout Liberia. Candidates and civil society groups were offered a platform to discuss the election and related issues on UNMIL Radio’s electoral-specific programmes such as Inside the Legislature, Back to the Ballot Box or the live on-air Hot Seat.

Liberia’s three election exercises and their multiple rounds held over the past 14 years enjoyed both high turnout and were violence-free before, during and after the elections indicating, in part, that the messages were well received. While disagreements arose, they were not taken to the streets and did not escalate to violence. The public information campaigns by UNMIL, the Government and their partners had proven their worth.

Strengthening local media

Like other peacekeeping missions, UNMIL both produced media content over its own platforms, and relied on local and international media to report about the Mission and the peace process. Liberia’s media had suffered from both exploitation and poverty. An article from the UNMIL Focus magazine of September 2007 described Liberia’s media scene at the time as a “raucous, free-for-all...where journalistic ethics and professionalism lay in tatters.” External critics have written that UNMIL’s high salaries for journalists hired locally didn’t help, as local media could not afford to compete for skilled staff. Still, the quality of today’s publications and broadcasters in Liberia-- many operating since that time--has improved markedly. Some credit the high bar set by UNMIL’s level of professionalism. But also UNMIL played a role in channeling substantial funding to capacity-building initiatives in an effort to develop and improve the media landscape in Liberia.

“raucous, free-for-all...where journalistic ethics and professionalism lay in tatters.”

The Mission initiated education programmes to sharpen journalistic skills and to raise awareness of ethical and objective reporting. Journalists and media managers have been trained on the importance of accurate, impartial and reliable journalism to the development of a healthy democracy, and on the other hand, the dangers to it of defamatory or malicious reporting.

To enable local journalists’ capacity to report the news, UNMIL opened a media centre and county information centres where journalists could go to use equipment and telephones, free of charge. The Mission also flew local journalists at no cost to remote and inaccessible locations in the country.

SRSF Farid Zarif engaged actively with local media, promoting journalistic ethics and the participation of women journalists. Media managers and local journalists have attended many round-table gatherings during which he led discussions on issues critical to media and their audiences.

The media landscape in Liberia enjoyed a relatively liberal political space under the Government of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf. The Declaration of Table Mountain made on 21 July 2012 committed Government and media to a free and responsible media. In April 2017, the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) launched the National Media Council of Liberia and the Revised Code of Ethics for Liberian Journalists as part of an effort to enhance the self-regulatory regime of the Liberian Media. The Media Council have committed to identifying and punishing violators that do not uphold the ethics code or practice professional journalism.

Still, gruesome scenes and lewd photographs are de rigueur for some print media. These days, however, the images have shrunk in size and moved from the front-page to inside pages. The motivation to publish more sensitive images, as well-written and researched articles still requires development. Sensationalism, rumour and speculation continue to thrive, providing the daily bread for some media managers.

Women continue to be affected by media bias and insensitivity, often portrayed as objects of sexuality, rather than sources of opinion or intellect. This dismissive attitude remains pervasive in Liberian society where women struggle to be heard on issues affecting their lives and rights.

The few women journalists in Liberia are themselves challenged by discrimination and abuse in the male-dominated media landscape. Reporting on sexual or gender-based crimes still usually ignores protections of the victims and perpetuates their trauma and humiliation. Some graphic photographs that are printed contravene the penal code as well as journalistic standards and best practices. Gender insensitivity in reporting will continue to undermine ongoing efforts to reduce gender-based violence in Liberia.

Against this background, associations such as FeJAL (Female Journalists Association of Liberia) and LIWOMAC (Liberia Women Media Action Committee) are at the front line of a slow cultural shift, advocating for the advancement and empowerment of women in the media, and for the mainstreaming of gender-sensitive reportage on issues such as rape and domestic violence, female genital mutilation, sex slavery, maternal health, access to justice, political participation and gender development.

UNMIL has supported programmes such as national workshops on gender sensitive media coverage, implemented with quick-impact project funds. The remaining UN organizations and other national and international stakeholders will need to continue to assist in equipping journalists with professional knowledge about gender sensitivity.

In summing up the role of UNMIL’s public information efforts in stimulating the positive changes necessary for Liberia’s post-war reconciliation, stability and security, K. Leigh Robinson, Head of the Public Information Office said, “What we did was to start a relationship through conversation, a conversation that has lasted 14 years, one that has been instrumental in reconnecting all Liberians through information sharing and by encouraging their engagement with each other and participation in their own future. Our relationship with the people of Liberia has been built on their consent, consent that we sought to maintain and their trust that we managed to retain. UNMIL’s public information activities have sown seeds of change that will continue to cultivate hope, and build tolerance, trust, integrity and understanding. Now every Liberian citizen must strive to and take responsibility for nurturing the future they envision for themselves.”



Women continue to be affected by media bias and insensitivity, often portrayed as objects of sexuality, rather than sources of opinion or intellect.



UNMIL Radio staff on air at one of the studios at UNMIL HQ in Monrovia.

Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 7 Jan 09

UNMIL Radio first hit the airwaves at the very inception of the UN Mission. The start-up challenges in human and material resources were enormous but these paled in comparison to winning public confidence in a platform from which messages on the peace process would resonate for years to come.

“Expectations were very high,” recalled Torwon Solunteh-Brown, one the first producers. “Coming out of a war in which the local media had been a part, the people of Liberia were desperate for a voice they could trust.”

Seeing the urgency, the new station moved fast to establish a foothold, launching even before the Mission could pitch camp. Early broadcasts from makeshift quarters at Spriggs Payne Airfield announced the deployment of the peacekeeping troops and other personnel.

Since then, the station went on to play a pivotal role in the advocacy for peace, tolerance and national reconciliation in Liberia, broadcasting to all 15 counties in English, Liberian English, the three major local languages (Lorma, Bassa and Kpelleh) and even some French. The radio reaches some 80 per cent of the population of approximately 4.5 million.

From March 2018, the station will continue to broadcast after UNMIL’s departure, under the aegis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Since the year 2000, ECOWAS had envisioned a regional broadcasting service, but couldn’t find the funding. UNMIL’s pending departure enabled that realization.

In May 2017, President Sirleaf welcomed the proposal that UNMIL hand over the station to ECOWAS, to become “a regional instrument for promoting democracy, peace, stability and good governance.”

UN Secretary-General António Guterres welcomed the “transformation of UNMIL Radio into an independent regional radio station.”

Besides technical equipment, ECOWAS will inherit 15 Liberian radio producers and technicians.

At its peak, UNMIL Radio was producing 60 programmes a week in various formats, covering a wide range of issues and areas, including the work of the Mission and of the UN family at large, the Liberian peace process, national reconciliation, humanitarian interventions, current affairs, human rights, the rule of law, security, gender, civic education and human interest stories.

UNMIL Radio has consistently given voice not only to the UN community, but also to public authorities and civil society organizations, largely through on-air debates and panel discussions on social, cultural and economic issues related to post-war reconstruction and development of Liberia.

Panelists have come from Government ministries, the Legislature, academia and advocacy groups. Notable topics in recent years have included women’s empowerment, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, mob justice, conduct during elections, ritual killings, traditional practices, land rights, corruption, the education system, governance, decentralization and the establishment of county service centres. Listeners phone in questions and observations, further enriching the debates. Special series were produced addressing the potential for conflict over Liberia’s natural resources and disputes related to land ownership, as well as corruption and its threat to stability and good governance.

The station has also been vocal on gender mainstreaming, sexual and gender-based violence, and sexual exploitation and abuse, through programmes such as Women’s World and Girl Power, as well as through panel discussions and call-ins. Programming has been produced in collaboration with various stakeholders, including the UN Country Team, the Liberian Ministry of Gender, the Liberia National Police, Ministry of Justice, and UNMIL’s Gender as well as Conduct and Discipline sections.

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In its 2017 election programming, UNMIL Radio conducted panel discussions with stakeholders to push for an inclusive and peaceful process, and to ensure free, fair and transparent elections. Working with various UNMIL offices, the National Elections Commission, the Government of Liberia and other civil society organizations, the station produced several public service announcements (PSAs) and programmes providing guidance on the election process.

During the 2014 outbreak of Ebola, the station was on the frontline of public education on safe health habits and protocols. Complementing and reinforcing public awareness on other communication channels, UNMIL Radio developed and broadcast scores of PSAs, drama skits, panel discussions and talk shows to guide the public, reaching far-flung communities across the country with timely education and information on the epidemic.

To help avert an earlier crisis, following post-election violence in 2012 in neighbouring Côte d’Ivoire, bi-weekly programming in French targeted incoming Ivoirian refugees with information on developments back home and messages on peace and reconciliation.

Over the years the station has produced more than 1,000 jingles, PSAs and dramas to address a broad range of issues including mob violence, peace and reconciliation, child rights, human rights, education, corruption, sexual exploitation and abuse, HIV/AIDS and political developments such as elections.

As the Mission prepared to wind down, panelists and interviewees have urged the Government to maintain well-functioning, accountable and responsive national institutions. In parallel, UNMIL Radio provided both Government and UN officials a platform to explain the transition process.

Liberia has some 100 other private and community radio stations, but most can be heard only in the capital of Monrovia, and have had nowhere near the resources the UN station enjoyed in the past.

UNMIL Radio also developed partnerships with community radios in the counties, with 30 partners at one point. The number fell to nine in 2017 as drawdown progressed. For a token fee, partner stations relayed selected UNMIL Radio programmes to a wide listenership. Phone-ins from across the country bore testimony to this reach.

The drawdown reduced budget and staffing for the station. The closure of field offices and dismantling of Mission communications infrastructure could have greatly impacted the station’s reach.

However, by forging a partnership with the Liberian Broadcasting System (LBS), the station was able to retain much of its coverage, sharing towers that the UN handed over to the LBS, and using sites in the regions receiving the LBS signal.

This arrangement came at a critical time for the Mission, that is, during the election period as well as during the drawdown and eventual closure of UNMIL.

By December 2017, UNMIL Radio still operated eight transmitter sites. Feedback from listeners and observers in both the Government and civil society suggested that the station has remained a bulwark against partisan reporting, rumour and misinformation, providing Liberians with an impartial and reliable source of information and guidance on the affairs of state.

With the transition to ECOWAS management, it is hoped that the station will continue its role helping Liberia with the consolidation of its hard-won peace.

Rule of law involves creating people-focused institutions

Waldemar Vrey, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Political and Rule of Law

In an interview in December 2017, Waldemar Vrey, the DSRSG for Political and Rule of Law in Liberia, talked about the UN's work to develop a functional rule of law environment. A former South African military officer, he had the overarching responsibility for UNMIL's support to the justice sector, the police, other law enforcement and security agencies, and prisons, as well as for the promotion and protection of human rights.



Waldemar Vrey, UNMIL Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Political and Rule of Law

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 29 Jan 18

How would you characterize your prior career as preparing you for the challenges that you've faced here in Liberia?

I've been in UN peacekeeping for more than 13 years, with a security background before that, having served in the South African military for about 25 years. In the UN, I was first stationed in Burundi and worked on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration as well as security sector reform. I also worked in Sudan and South Sudan on issues including civilian and military justice, corrections and security sector development. Then I served in Somalia, with the UN Political Mission, where the focus was on justice, corrections and security sector reform; and police, military and maritime development, as well as demobilization and de-radicalisation of Al-Shabaab defectors. All these experiences prepared me well for the tasks at hand in Liberia.

In your role as UNMIL's senior official in the rule of law area, could you talk a bit about why rule of law is important for the UN and for Liberia?

Rule of law is integral to the work of the United Nations, as it provides the enabling environment necessary for achieving the fundamental goal of the Organization, maintaining international peace and security. The rule of law agenda is not merely providing simple justice to people on issues of disagreement. It deals with the responsibility of government to provide proper governance across all its structures. It deals with the ability of the citizenry to take action against the government should it feel aggrieved. Rule of law involves creating people-focused institutions. Access to justice is a key responsibility of the state to deliver to its people. The UN Security Council has regarded the rule of law as one of the key priority areas for support to Liberia since the beginning of UNMIL.

Access to justice is a key responsibility of the state to deliver to its people

Can you talk a bit about some of the work you've done in the time you've served here focusing on rule of law issues?

The major focus at the time of my arrival in October 2015 was the ongoing preparations for the full assumption of security responsibilities by the Government of Liberia from UNMIL, in accordance with the deadline set by the Security Council. Significant efforts were ongoing across the security sector to implement the Government plan for UNMIL's transition, led by the Ministry of Justice. It was a considerable collective effort, and my role was to lead the UN contribution, working with my fellow Deputy SRSRG in his role as UN Resident Coordinator, to ensure comprehensive and coherent UN support to the process. The successful assumption of security responsibilities by the 30 June 2016 deadline was a huge achievement for Liberia. Since that point, the Government has

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The security transition process was the catalyst for some real progress in the security sector: development and passage of legislation to professionalize the Liberia National Police and the Liberia Immigration Service and to formalize weapons control; a revised National Security Strategy which has people at the core and as the basis for security, not the other way around; the strengthening of county level early warning and security coordination; and the development of an Integrated Border Management Strategy. Another notable achievement has been the change within the Liberia National Police towards a community-oriented approach to policing, focused on creating an enabling environment. This was fundamental to the successful conduct of peaceful elections in Liberia over the last couple of months. I am extremely proud of what the Liberian police achieved and of my team who worked so closely with them.

change within the Liberia National Police towards a community-oriented approach to policing, focused on creating an enabling environment. This was fundamental to the successful conduct of peaceful elections

With respect to the justice sector, one key area for UNMIL has been strengthening capacity for electoral dispute resolution. UNMIL has maintained excellent relationships with the Government at the highest levels, including with the Chief Justice and the Minister of Justice, and this facilitated our support in this sensitive area.

Two other areas of UNMIL's work that have come to fruition over my time here were our support to the establishment of a Gender and Security Sector National Task Force, which now coordinates Liberia's implementation of UN Security Council resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security. The other is the culmination of years of support to the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, when it received full accreditation from the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions.

To what extent was UNMIL directly involved in helping build Liberia's rule of law institutions?

I would like to acknowledge here the forward-looking perspective of previous UNMIL leadership

I would like to acknowledge here the forward-looking perspective of previous UNMIL leadership in seeking to ensure a holistic approach to the rule of law sector. Although the initial period of the Mission was consumed by creating a stable environment, including demobilizing all armed groups, the work to build the judiciary, the Ministry of Justice, the police, and other rule of law institutions started simultaneously. But because this was such a major undertaking, and because there were such limited resources, this work initially proceeded slowly.

From the beginning, UNMIL mentors and advisers were co-located in key institutions - the Ministry of Justice, the Judiciary, and the Liberia National Police, the prisons managed by the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation, and later, the Liberia Immigration Service. They worked with national colleagues each and every day. In this way the UN played a major role in supporting national institutions, from the development of policy and planning capacity, to setting up budget and administrative processes, to the development of legal frameworks. This last area has taken some time, as legal frameworks must move through a drafting, consultation and then validation process, before reaching the legislative process. These are time-intensive activities, and it's always a struggle to have a budget that meets the requirements, so it's a lot of incremental work over a number of years. The UN's role has changed over the years, gradually taking a back seat as national institutions developed capability to fully lead development and reform processes. Today, Liberia is one of those places where you move around and feel the warmth from the people toward the UN. Liberians really appreciate what we have done here. This positivity comes from the way the UN has worked here, not bossing Liberians around but working with them to reach their objectives.

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Widening ownership of the security sector reform process

A key criticism of the security sector reform (SSR) process in Liberia in the period following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2003 was that it was too narrowly focused on international and government interests, and was not sufficiently inclusive. In order to rectify this, UNMIL supported widening the level of participation in the SSR process. This included ensuring that the National Civil Society SSR Working Group took part in consultations for the drafting of the Liberia National Police and Immigration Service Immigration Acts, as well as in the development of the Government of Liberia Plan for UNMIL Transition.

With UNMIL support, that Working Group organized dialogues across the country, raising people's awareness of security legislation passed in the last decade and the new mechanisms for civilian complaints and accountability. During the 2017 presidential and general election, also with UNMIL support, five election security dialogues took place across the country, bringing community leaders together with the police and the NEC to address issues of concern. In 2018, the Working Group produced a compendium of all new security related laws.

UNMIL also supported the creation of the SSR Think Tank at the University of Liberia, which promoted public consultations with diverse groups ranging from motorcycle taxi drivers to students, discussing security priorities with the leadership of security agencies and Government ministers. The Think Tank has organized conferences, published e-books and produced regular newsletters, all on developments in SSR. This process has helped to facilitate dialogue between stakeholders who have often in the past been in conflict with security actors, and helped to generate a wider community of expertise. This example of democratization has been vital in building genuine national ownership of security sector reform.

Gbarnga, we used an integrated approach to strengthen the police, the courts, prosecution and defense, corrections, and human rights monitoring, both in capacity and infrastructure, and sought to improve coordination across these institutions as well as to improve their relationship with their communities.

The Gbarnga Hub did achieve some success in improving service delivery, but its reach into the three counties it was to serve was not sufficiently strong, and most of the population were never able to use it. So the Government led a re-think of the hubs approach, and decided to invest next in a county-level model.

The Liberians and UNMIL have set the scene successfully for a functional rule of law environment.

A functional rule of law environment. This is a big cornerstone for the future. The decentralization approach is by no means finished. It will take much more time, and many more resources to be fully realized, but major effort has gone into this area during UNMIL's time, thanks to the Liberians first but also thanks to international support.

A key factor in UNMIL's support to building Liberia's rule of law institutions has been the use of quick-impact project funding. UNMIL has used this tool over more than a decade to address priority gaps in rule of law infrastructure, particularly in rural areas, and to facilitate capacity-building in critical areas.

Supporting decentralization has been a focus of the UN's work in Liberia. What has been achieved in the justice and security sectors with respect to decentralization?

I would put decentralization high on list of deliverables UNMIL has been working to achieve. The Mission commenced at an early stage to invest in rule of law infrastructure across Liberia - building or rehabilitating courts, prisons, police stations and border depots. And while these are far from perfect facilities, they are functional. This had a positive impact as there was little to nothing in terms of government services at the time that UNMIL was established.

A more comprehensive approach came in 2011 after Liberia was placed on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission and UN Peacebuilding Fund support created a huge surge in the financial resources available to Liberia for the decentralization of justice and security services.

In the design of the peacebuilding plan, we used a 'hubs approach' to enhance access to justice and security at the regional and county

UN Peacebuilding Fund support created a huge surge in financial resources available to Liberia for decentralization of justice and security services.

levels. The hubs were to provide a decentralized and holistic approach to security and justice service delivery and a means by which national agencies could provide effective security across the country in preparation for UNMIL's transition. In launching the first hub, in

As we depart, I can say that justice and security institutions are functioning across the country, albeit at various degrees of efficiency. Could the situation be improved? Sure. The Liberians and UNMIL have set the scene successfully for a

The decentralization approach is by no means finished. It will take much more time, and many more resources to be fully realized, but major effort has gone into this area during UNMIL's time, thanks to the Liberians first, but also thanks to international support.

What would you identify as some of the biggest challenges the Mission has faced in its work to develop the rule of law and human rights in Liberia?

Some of the challenges are what you might expect in any country coming out of an extensive conflict. For example, strengthening rule of law in Liberia has been less about restoring something that existed pre-conflict, and more about contributing to establishing a normative framework. This has related challenges in terms of the political will to undertake reform, as many with decision-making authority are anxious about changing the status quo. Another challenge, which is common to post-conflict environments, is the quite severe limitation in capacity and, of course, resources.

One specific challenge we faced initially, which was a real hindrance to making progress in rule of law development, was an almost total absence of coordination amongst national actors in the sector. The doctrine of the separation of powers was taken so literally that it was almost impossible in the early days to get the different branches of Government talking together in the same room, let alone working together to develop a strategic way forward for the sector. It was not until the national rule of law retreat in 2008 that, with UNMIL support, progress was eventually made in this regard.

There are also challenges created by the UN. My experience in peacekeeping so far, as in Liberia, is that the short-term nature of our mandates can be debilitating. We are given mandates from the Security Council, which is advised by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The Member States advance the political discussion about Liberia's priorities, and that provides us with a framework in which to deliver. However, we are given, at best, annual mandates. In the case of Liberia, some have been even shorter.

My experience in peacekeeping so far, as in Liberia, is that the short-term nature of our mandates can be debilitating.

So you think there is an inherent limitation in peacekeeping mandates?

Limited mandates have a tendency to limit strategic thinking, which compromises our ability to accompany the country to reach longer-term objectives. For example, training some 300 Liberian police for six months is great, and it's an absolute requirement, and we did it and did it well, repeatedly. But did we help stand up an institution with all the administration and legal frameworks to accompany it? Were we successful in

delivering a full package? Probably not as well as we would have hoped. We do tasks according to a results-based budget on a 12-month cycle. We rarely look at longer-term delivery and therefore do not focus on creating sustainable foundations for institutions.

Limited mandates have a tendency to limit strategic thinking, which compromises our ability to accompany the country to reach longer-term objectives.

It's been a pattern, globally, that once peacekeeping missions are deployed, they stay at least four to five years. So an internal discussion needed in peacekeeping is how to think strategically about the country we are working in and not only with resolving the immediate short-term problems. If we want to have the preventative lens on – and the Secretary-General is raising this regularly and putting it in his strategic frame – then we have to think beyond just one-year delivery cycles. We also need to be clearer in our mandates so that host nations can understand what they can realistically expect of us.

If we want to have the preventative lens on – and the Secretary-General is raising this regularly and putting it in his strategic frame – then we have to think beyond just one-year delivery cycles.

Another challenge in peacekeeping is that we sometimes experience political difficulties in delivering across the whole mandate, and when we are unable to create forward movement in an area, we end up marking time and moving forward on politically easier agendas where we have some momentum, hoping to eventually create momentum in the more difficult, stalled areas. As a result, we risk falling into a trap where we put

the difficult bits aside and then find it hard to come back to them. As the Organization with the moral high-ground, the UN should be careful of doing easy things and avoiding the most important and difficult challenges. We should address the hard-core issues as the key and most important parts of our mandate.

What role have regional and international partners played in supporting the development of justice and security institutions here?

Countries torn by war are not necessarily first looking at their immediate region for assistance. It takes time and effort to get them to form these ties and build their networks. Peacekeeping operations can and should do more to support this by asking questions about regional policy from the very beginning and utilizing their good offices role in this regard.

In fact, the presence of a peacekeeping mission can affect the responsibilities and roles of regional bodies, and this can be seen in Liberia, where regional bodies became too comfortable with the presence of the UN and did not step up their intervention in the early post-conflict years. Liberians have designed their institutions with a view to what they have learned from outside of the continent, rather than looking at compatibility in the West Africa region. To some extent, it was the UN which brought examples to Liberia of what happens in Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, and elsewhere in the region. In more recent years, this has turned around. The region has really stepped up. While the leadership of Liberia is firmly in the hands of Librarians, the contribution and interconnected support from ECOWAS, the African Union and the UN has grown substantially. This had a significant impact on Liberia, particularly during the contested 2017 electoral process. Now, we see Liberians are starting to travel and consult in the region, and regional conventions are starting to have an impact on Liberia. On another positive note, UNMIL Radio is going to become an ECOWAS asset. And the administrative hub for the West Africa Standby Force will be based in Liberia. So we will definitely see more regional linkages as the country moves forward.

Liberians are starting to travel and consult in the region, and regional conventions are starting to have an impact on Liberia.



Launch of the James A. A. Pierre Judicial Institute at the Temple of Justice in Monrovia.

Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 17 Jun 08

Generating gender diversity and sensitivity within security sector institutions



Sianneh Passaue, a female Liberian police officer, stands on night patrol along Old Road in Monrovia.

Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 14 May 08

For the security sector to be effective it must not only be sensitive to the needs of the entire population, but should also be representative of the population. While the Liberia National Police and Liberian Immigration Service have a respectable proportion of female personnel (18.6 per cent and 28.8 per cent respectively), only 4 per cent of the Armed Forces of Liberia are women.

Taking its lead from UN Security Council resolution 1325 which requires that women should be part of the security sector and that the sector be gender responsive, UNMIL has worked with the Government of Liberia to establish gender units, or focal points in all security institutions. UNMIL also supported the 2016 Senior Leadership Conference on Gender and Security, where the Ministry of Justice decided to join efforts with the ministries of National Defense and Gender to establish a Gender and Security Sector National Taskforce and commit to creating gender offices in all security sector institutions.

The establishment of the Taskforce was a milestone. It brought together the gender coordinators of security institutions to discuss and coordinate the implementation of UNSC 1325 and find creative solutions for the challenges that women face in the security sector. The Taskforce is developing programmes to increase the participation of women in the reform of security institutions and to mainstream gender in security operations.

A second conference in December 2017 discussed how to increase the participation of women in security sector reform decision-

making, planning, implementation and oversight. Also in 2017, the Government, in collaboration with the University of Liberia, launched an advanced course on Women, Peace and Security Studies for the gender focal points of security institutions and, in early 2018, established the first library in Liberia on Women, Peace and Security Studies.

Although Liberian security institutions have acknowledged that increasing the participation of women will improve operational effectiveness, enhance relationships with the public and promote a non-discriminatory work environment, more needs to be done. Increased attention, resources and political will are still required to fully implement the recommendations of the National Gender Policy (2017-2022) and National Security Strategy, as well as to meet the 30 per cent quota for women in the security sector stated in Liberia’s National Action Plan on resolution 1325.

With respect to support to the justice and security institutions, international and regional partnerships have played critical roles in Liberia. The Peacebuilding Commission’s engagement, for example, had considerable impact in helping to raise justice and security sector development on the national agenda. The US is the major bilateral partner to the rule of law sector. Notably, Sweden, Ireland, Germany, France, Norway and in particular China have proved loyal supporters of the sector over the last decade, both in terms of financial support and political engagement and advocacy. Meanwhile, ECOWAS has invested much time and resources in developing an early warning system in Liberia as part of a broader regional programme.

Looking back, is there anything that you think the Mission could have done differently from the beginning, to have had a different outcome?

I know that all UNMIL staff at the various stages of the Mission had the best intentions for Liberia. I do think, however, that if UNMIL had had the framework to do things strategically, and had not been bound to one-year mandates, we may have followed a different approach. Building self-sustainability and the capacity of national institutions to take every aspect of work forward is an approach we could have considered from

the start. That would have required vision and leadership at the onset to realise these dreams for creating sustainability after our departure. In this context it would have been helpful to be provided with a desired end state of the Mission from the onset, which would have allowed

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Mission leadership in concert with Headquarters to design a comprehensive exit strategy. With that, we also could have more easily managed expectations towards UNMIL by the Liberians.

One area where we could have done things differently, and which is a lesson to be learned by the UN, is in the justice sector. In the Liberian context, much greater focus could have been placed on the customary justice system and on developing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. We have supported these areas, but it could and should have taken more prominence in our engagement. Much has been done to develop policy options for ways in which the customary and formal justice systems could work together to deliver justice; the Ministry of Justice and the Law Reform Commission have both been engaged in this work over the years. It is essential that this work be taken forward, decisions made and the agreed path expeditiously implemented. In doing so, Liberia should retain the informality and local nature of the customary system. Efforts to take forward the formal application of an alternative dispute resolution mechanism must also be actively encouraged to address grievances and enhance access to justice. Efforts are also required to address limitations in the formal justice system. Many trials are outstanding, and Liberia needs to work toward a system where courts are able to turn cases around more quickly. For this to happen, investigations need to be done properly, and prosecutors need to be on top of their job. Defence counsels need to be present and effective. The overall tempo needs to increase significantly within the courts. For both systems, it will be important to focus on adherence to international human rights principles and standards.

In terms of what you are working on now as the Mission comes to a close, what are your priorities?

Principally, we are trying to wrap up UNMIL's work in a way to ensure as smooth a transition as possible to those areas of support where the UN Country Team or other partners will continue or start to engage. We had some experience of this already as UNMIL ended its support to the corrections sector in early 2017. We are leaving behind a corrections system with enhanced management capacity, internal training capacity, a five-year strategic development plan, and numerous policies and standard operating procedures for the effective management of prisons and the humane treatment of prisoners. Again, the reform and development of the corrections sector are not complete, but they are clearly on the right path.

In terms of the transition to UNCT support, when I arrived, I worked with UNDP on developing a joint programme on strengthening the rule of law, including security institutions, particularly the police, the immigration service and so forth. It took time to sell the idea to the Government and to the international partners, but I am extremely proud to say that, together with UNDP and national actors, we finalized this joint programme. It is a realistic programme targeting priorities though the next 36 months with some US\$18 million. We already have more than half of the money raised. While sizeable, it is not enough money to address all justice and security sector needs, but it's going to go a long way. UNDP will work with the incoming Government to refine the priorities of the programme. They will also seek the support of the UN Department of Peacekeeping

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Operation's Standing Police Capacity to bring in advisers to support the national police. This will be coordinated with the US, ECOWAS, Sweden and other partners, to ensure complementarity of our efforts.

A further priority is to provide a useful way for the incoming Government to address the perennial challenge of limited

resources. Does Liberia have an affordable and sustainable security institutions design and structure? For example, Liberia currently has just over 5,000 police officers. The national budget does not allow for more than this, so could we train another 300? Yes, but that's not the long-term solution. You need to be able to pay these officers a salary and deploy them where they can best serve. Could Liberia consider ways to measure efficiency and cost effectiveness? Does it get value for its bucks? How do Liberia's structures compare to the wider ECOWAS region? Can Liberia use its resources to the greater advantage of its people? To this end, UNMIL, working with the Government, UNDP and the World Bank recently launched a Public Expenditure Review to determine minimum financial needs for the effective functioning of the security and justice sectors. The outcomes of this project, due in April 2018, may be a critical start line for such a strategic discussion.

Everybody is in agreement that an ongoing human rights presence through the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) is needed in Liberia, so a big effort was launched, in collaboration with the Government, to take forward the establishment of this office as a priority. The new office will open just as UNMIL closes. The Peacebuilding Support Office has agreed to fund its first year, and we are mobilizing donors to support this further.

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What human rights work remains to be done in Liberia beyond UNMIL's closure?

National reconciliation in Liberia remains an ongoing process. The majority of the recommendations of Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission have not been taken forward. The situation is not that bad: there are not a number of ethnic groups ready to go to war with each other. But there are deep wounds that still exist from the past. And in a society where storytelling is a rich art, the stories tend to get more

There needs to be a forgiveness process in Liberia, where people reach out to each other, listen to each other, at least acknowledge the pain that they collectively brought on each other and to form new alliances, to build again on social cohesion.

colourful as they get carried from generation to generation. There needs to be a forgiveness process in Liberia, where people reach out to each other, listen to each other, at least acknowledge the pain that they collectively brought on each other and to form new alliances, to build again on social cohesion. These are challenges which will be inherited by the incoming Government, and I trust that both the Independent National Commission on Human Rights and the OHCHR can provide support and guidance.

The significant level of sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia is also a human rights issue that will need a whole Government approach to address effectively. From the rule of law perspective, the criminal justice response to addressing crimes involving sexual violence is poor, despite considerable investment in efforts to build specialist capacity within the police, prosecution and courts. Investigations are often compromised; prosecutions are limited, and the cases which do reach court are dealt with much too slowly.

There are also ongoing accountability and human rights issues with respect to justice and security institutions, although concrete efforts and progress have been made.

Overall, there is a lot of work here for the High Commissioner to support and deliver.

Out of all of these parallel issues you're focused on, is there work you look at now and think you just won't have time to get to it?

We have to be objective: we can't stay until everything is perfect. It's good enough for us to go, although ongoing efforts on critical issues still need to be taken forward. This will of course be the responsibility of the incoming Government, to be supported as appropriate by the international community. Let me give you four examples.

While progress has undoubtedly been made with respect to legislative reform, serious gaps remain as many laws are outdated. A specific effort must be launched to review all laws to reflect current realities, such as the Rules and Regulations Governing the Hinterland of Liberia, and laws involving gender. Updating and advancing gender justice by reforming laws that restrict women's rights while promoting progressive, gender-sensitive legislation, particularly in the areas of domestic violence and reproductive rights, must be considered.

Constitutional reform also needs to be taken forward. The past decade has demonstrated the shortcomings and gaps within the Constitution. Many badly needed economic and development reforms envisaged for Liberia, particularly decentralization, local governance and the justice sector, will continue to be delayed in the absence of an updated Constitution.

The reform of the legal and judicial system is not complete, and remaining challenges and recommendations identified as far back as 2008 are still to be implemented. With a new Government taking office, now would be a good time to weigh the performance of the reforms implemented to determine the extent to which they have resulted in greater access to justice and the strengthening of the rule of law. Liberia should consider

Use of quick-impact project funding in the rule of law sector



Handover ceremony of the Foya Magisterial Courthouse, supported by a quick-impact project.
Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 19 Apr 11

helping to strengthen the capacity of the Independent National Commission on Human Rights and developing the human rights monitoring and advocacy role of civil society. QIPs have also been utilized to support a more inclusive approach to security sector reform in Liberia, building the engagement of civil society in the sector, and supporting local security councils. QIPs have been an invaluable tool in UNMIL’s work in developing the rule of law in Liberia.

UNMIL has utilized quick-impact project (QIPs) funding to great effect in Liberia as part of efforts to strengthen the rule of law, undertaking more than 400 projects and investing approximately US\$9 million in infrastructure support and capacity building. This funding stream has been used in the construction and renovation of more than 100 police stations, 65 courts and 55 border posts, with a focus on building rule of law infrastructure across the country. It has supported almost 40 projects at 15 corrections facilities nationwide to not only improve prison infrastructure, but to also support the provision of health services and skills training for prisoners.

Other projects have supplied essential equipment to rule of law institutions such as basic forensics and anti-trafficking equipment and materials to support security agencies in the national response to the Ebola Virus Disease crisis in 2014. Additionally, quick-impact project funding has been used extensively for capacity building across the justice and security sectors, for specialist technical skills training, the development of national training capacities, and to nurture and develop management and leadership capacities. The funds have provided the opportunity for national actors across the criminal justice system to be trained together, developing a common understanding and approach to their work.

Such projects have also been used to support the implementation of UNMIL’s human rights promotion and protections mandate,

engaging in a broad, national conversation on the kind of justice system it needs and can afford, with improved delivery of justice for all as the primary goal. Such a discussion should include the issue of the harmonization of the dual justice systems, and should be guided by the fact that services should be delivered where the people actually are and not on the basis of legislative administrative boundaries. In Liberia, six of the 15 counties have 80 per cent of the population, yet most resources of Liberia are cut in slices of equal value. Until this is addressed, we will continue to see all the sectors struggling to deliver proper services. The planned national census of 2018 provides an ideal opportunity to all sectors to review their service delivery and to align services to where people are concentrated. The Judiciary and the Ministry of Justice could undertake a rationalization of the justice system, reviewing the number and location of courts, to improve access while avoiding unnecessary expense.

The final example of areas where progress has been made but ongoing attention is needed is the corrections sector. The prison population in Liberia is more than 2,000 inmates. There are not hundreds of thousands of people being held, but current prison infrastructure cannot cope with this level of demand, and overcrowding and poor conditions are the norm. Those immediately responsible for the corrections sector within the Ministry of Justice have tried to secure funding to address this, but sadly, as in all the countries where I’ve worked, prisons are at the bottom of the queue when it comes to any financial allocations. However, prisoners need to be fed and cared for in a humane environment. They have rights too. The central prison here in Monrovia is on the beach. It’s prime property. A tourist hotel could be built on that location, so I have been encouraging the Government to offer this property to one of the big hotel groups, but in exchange, they need to build a modern prison in a more appropriate location. People think it’s a good idea, but it hasn’t happened.

These areas and others will be addressed by UNMIL in a set of strategic recommendations we are preparing on our departure for consideration by the Government, the UN Country Team and international partners.

It sounds as if, overall, you have confidence in the future of Liberia. Do you have confidence in where the country is headed?

Liberia is on its way. The train has left the station. It depends now on everybody who is steering and directing the train, how fast or how well it is going to move. Liberians have demonstrated the ability to do it. During the time of Ebola, when help seemed far way, many Liberians worked hard to overcome the tragedy that took hold of this region, and they did so in a fantastic and commendable manner. In a way that did more for nation-building than a few years of our presence. It brought Liberians closer together.

Our departure is one of those key moments on the growth path of Liberia. The UN will remain here, but it’s in the nature of the relationship that we had, and in the size of our peacekeeping Mission, that our departure really puts the responsibility back in the hands of Liberians to do things for themselves now. And in reality, Liberians have been doing it for themselves already. Many haven’t quite realized this. Now it’s time to for all Liberians to build national confidence in their own institutions. They need to see that their institutions are delivering.

We’re not only interested in state-building. We want to see the position of every Liberian improved.

If other institutions follow the example of the police, who have taken a people-centric and community-based approach, that will build confidence and help strengthen Liberia’s position. We’re not only interested in state-building. We want to see the position of every Liberian improved. That takes a lot of effort.

What recommendations do you have for Liberians themselves and for the internationals who will continue here, helping Liberia move forward?

The new Administration should be careful about introducing too much change too soon. Familiarize yourself sufficiently before you start change. People need a bit of stability now with the crossover from one administration to the other, so demonstrate that stability to the people, build their confidence, win their hearts and minds, and then form your own policy guidance to move forward.

To the new leadership of justice and security institutions, I recommend that you see the legislative branch of Government as your partner, not your enemy. The fact they are the principal oversight body does not mean that they aim to prevent you from achieving their aims. They are in many ways an extension of the institutions to ensure that your actions are within the legal and governance frameworks and that you serve Liberia’s people. They are also responsible to ensure that you are fairly treated when resources are allocated. Forge good relations with them.

I would also say to both new and existing leadership that the basis for the effective functioning of rule of law institutions has been sufficiently built. Put your efforts within these frameworks. Not only will that build confidence within Liberian society, but it’s going to create enormous confidence with international partners who may be more open to support Liberia in raising resources. You also need to make sure that all people have access to justice in even the remotest locations. Don’t underestimate the valuable contribution also being made through the informal sector, through the elders, through alternative dispute mechanisms for which a legal framework is being established, and which is a lot less expensive, and an easier way to resolve challenges.

As long as these strategic decisions keep rolling out, placing Liberians at the heart of decision-making, Liberia will be in good stead.

2017 elections and the rule of law



Waldemar Vrey, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General, meets members of the Women's Situation Room in Monrovia.

Photo: Emmanuel Tobey | UNMIL | 14 Mar 17

credit for the peace and stability that exists even after a keenly contested election. Their conduct has sent a clear message to the global community that the rule of law is gaining roots in Liberia, and that although nascent, national institutions are demonstrating their desire and capacity to discharge their mandates according to law. All is not yet well with the rule of law in Liberia: as in all other jurisdictions, this continues to be an evolutionary process that will develop over time.

The fruits of 14 years of support to Liberia by the UN and the international community have had a significant impact on Liberians. Liberian institutions were in the forefront of organizing the entire 2017 election. All election-related disputes, ranging from the application of the Code of Conduct for Public Officers, through contestations of decisions made by the National Elections Commission (NEC) on the eligibility of certain candidates, to the outcome of both elections, were all settled through the established dispute resolution framework.

Of particular significance was the long, drawn-out legal battle by the Unity Party and the Liberty Party over the NEC's declaration of a run-off between the two front runners, Senator George Weah and Vice President Joseph Boakai. The hearing and adjudication of this dispute involved a multiplicity of legal and political activities that delayed its resolution. Liberians, however, did not question their institutions' capacity to satisfactorily resolve the disputes before them. The people remained calm, though anxious, until the Supreme Court decision was announced. The NEC, with support from international partners, adhered to the ruling, and convened the run-off election almost six weeks after it was initially intended to take place.

The good offices engagement and technical advice and assistance by the UN, ECOWAS, the African Union and other members of the international community cannot be discounted. However, Liberians and their institutions must get the most



Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 15 Aug 08

A force for peace in Liberia

Major General Salihu Zaway Uba, Force Commander

The eighth Force Commander of the Mission, Major General Salihu Zaway Uba has been leading the final withdrawal of troops from UNMIL. He had been a sector commander with UNMIL in 2010-2012 and served on the UN Mission in the former Yugoslavia UNPROFOR. Before this post, he was Commander of the Training and Doctrine Command and the Commandant of the Nigerian Army Peacekeeping Center.



Major-General Salihu Zaway Uba, UNMIL
Force Commander

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 18 Jan 18

Can you tell us a bit about your background and how your prior work has given you a unique perspective for working with UNMIL?

I took over command from Major General Leonard Muriuki of Kenya in February 2015. I was excited to be appointed Force Commander, because I had previously served in UNMIL as a sector commander back in 2010-2012. To not only be able to see how Liberia has changed over the years, but to be given the unique opportunity of leading the forces during the drawdown, really made me appreciate this occasion all the more. Back in Nigeria before my appointment, my positions with the Training and Doctrine Command and Nigerian Army Peacekeeping Center enabled me to have an excellent understanding of doctrine and the responsibilities of being a peacekeeper which has influenced my work as the Force Commander. I am glad to be able to show that I can be a peacekeeper as well as run Nigeria's peacekeeping school.

What are the responsibilities of the Force Commander?

My primary responsibility has been the operational well-being of UNMIL military forces. I have attained this by ensuring every unit and soldier has the required resources and capacity to execute the UNMIL mandate. I also interface with the Mission leadership for advice and guidance on the operational, administrative, conduct and training matters of the force. At the same time, I work closely with the Office of Military Affairs in the peacekeeping department in New York to ensure the correct military force flow arrives at the Mission to maintain the right posture.

What is the role of the troops in the UNMIL mandate and what tasks do they perform to fulfill the Mission?

The military roles are subject to the various Security Council resolutions. Per the current resolution 2333, our central role is the protection of UN personnel, facilities, and equipment. Also, the resolution defines the assistance we are to provide for the protection of civilians and provision of logistical support to the 2017 presidential and legislative elections. With our reduced strength as the Mission winds down, for staff officers, military observers and contingents, the tasks have been overwhelming, and we have to prioritize. The Nigerian Company's primary focus has been on the protection of the UN personnel, equipment, and facilities which they have achieved via mobile patrols and exercises to enhance their response capability. The Ukrainian Aviation Unit not only provides airlift to UN personnel and equipment, but also helped support the Government of Liberia's elections through transporting sensitive election material to counties that ground transportation could not reach on time. The Pakistani Medical Unit has been providing medical level 2 services to all of the UN personnel and ensuring the stable health of UNMIL personnel.

Joint Analysis and Operations Centre, keeping the Mission informed

The Joint Analysis & Operations Centre (JAOC) contains both the Joint Mission Analysis Centre (JMAC) and the Joint Operation Centre (JOC), to provide in-depth analysis of security-related issues in Liberia and the surrounding region. JAOC is staffed by police and military officers from several countries including Norway, Germany, Nigeria, Ghana, and the US, which has created a dynamic exchange of ideas and processes. Members of the Liberia National Police and Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) also sit in the centre with links to their respective headquarters.

Through the process of information fusion, the JAOC collects, collates and displays information from all sources within the Mission area, producing short to long-range assessments and information support for crisis management, and Mission and contingency planning. JAOC achieves information fusion through two steps: first, the Joint Operations Centre receives the day to day reporting from Liberian sources, such as the police, armed forces and National Security Agency. That office then transfers the raw information to the JAOC through two daily reports.

JAOC synthesizes the information collected from political, military, police, security, rule of law, human rights and other components of the Mission to produce daily and weekly code cables to the UN Headquarters in New York. These code cables have built the awareness of Headquarters officials at the Department of Peacekeeping Operations of activities that may influence mandate implementation.

The JAOC also produced bi-weekly threat assessments that provided quick references for the Mission leadership while delivering issues and trends and estimates of cross-cutting concerns and risks that may harm implementation of the mandate. JAOC personnel also conducted quarterly visits across Liberia to provide critical environmental context.

As UNMIL drew down, and with the late 2017 election period, JAOC assumed the function of the Joint Mission Analysis Centre, coordinating both national and international situation rooms, monitoring rallies, campaigning and election day incidents. The Joint Operations Centre first collated information on daily activities from national partners, sending it to the JAOC, which was collecting information from non-UN entities such as the Women's Situation Room, Elections Coordinating Committee, Liberia Elections Observation Network, National Democratic Institute, The Carter Center, the European Union, ECOWAS, the African Union, and Electoral Institute for Sustainable Democracy in Africa.

JAOC used this two-step process to review raw information from more than 200 different reports and provided near real-time details through hourly flash reports to senior Mission management and key officials. This gave the Mission continuously updated awareness of activities that could have caused instability. Each flash report was broken down by county and presented the highlights of events during that given hour, enabling the Mission to adapt its security posture.

After the election, JAOC produced a comprehensive assessment which provided Mission leadership with a qualitative and quantitative analysis of events, issues, and trends that took place over the electoral period. This was integrated into the Mission leadership's decision-making process, while contributing to risk assessments and mitigation steps developed by UN Department for Safety and Security, which will inherit the intelligence-gathering role for the UN Country Team once the Mission departs.

What were the operational instructions and directives that you issued in fulfilment of the mandate?

With the issuance of resolution 2333 in December of 2016, most of our operations and directives have been focused on supporting the Government of Liberia with the elections. With this focus, my staff were directed to work with the UN peacekeeping department's Military Advisor as well as with the UN Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) to coordinate and plan the possible deployment of a Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in case of a strategic reversal. The QRF was a contingent based in nearby Côte d'Ivoire since 2014 which was to provide urgent support should the security situation deteriorate in Liberia, a possibility anticipated for the period of the recent elections. The force of Senegalese troops moved to Mali in 2017. We coordinated with MINUSMA to ensure the QRF would arrive fully operational within 72 hours. As the elections went peacefully, the QRF was not needed during the process.

In addition, we have revamped all of our standard operating procedures, directives, fragmentary and operational orders to ensure optimal functioning of the force for the protection of UN personnel, equipment and facilities and to ensure an adequate military footprint for any contingency. We have continued to exercise and rehearse medical evacuation, mass casualty, and search and rescue exercises to ensure all military forces are ready to assist in a coordinated format in a time of need.

The peacekeeping force has seen a systematic drawdown under your watch: What are some of the challenges involved in that?

With any drawdown, there will be challenges. However, it is how you face those challenges that defines the capacity of the force that is left. I have been fortunate with the staff officers assigned to this Mission. Through forward planning and quick adaptation, they have managed to ensure a hitch-free process of drawdown. Some of the key challenges are the loss of operational capability of the force in terms of engineering, medical, air and operational support. For the longest time, we had our own Explosive Ordnance Disposal Team and robust transport and engineering capability of road and airfield maintenance. We had to do away with these due to drawdown. Though the Nigerian Company can still perform some engineering functions when we need to dispose of certain types of expired ammunitions, the main support capability of the force was withdrawn and we had to find an alternate course of action for the residual force. Through our relationship with the AFL, we were able to work together to ensure the use of their engineering assets for safe destruction of the expired ammunition.

Another challenge concerned our information collection once the consolidation of military forces in Monrovia occurred. Having multiple military units spread across the country gave the leadership a better information flow for understanding the environment. We adapted by utilizing our military observers more frequently and for longer trips to gain the information we were no longer receiving from forces in the field because of the drawdown.

The Force undertook a number of development projects to assist the Government of Liberia to meet its challenges. Can you throw light on some of these projects?

The military has always had a hands-on approach to helping develop Liberia. At the beginning of the Mission, the staff officers worked closely with the AFL to train their staff officers on the relevant requirements and planning abilities. Over time the UNMIL force has also helped the AFL develop technical skills such as masonry, welding, and first aid training. From the beginning, peacekeepers at contingent levels have played a pivotal role in undertaking different development projects which helped in alleviating the sufferings of the Liberian people. Such civil-military coordination projects included road construction, the rehabilitation, and renovation of schools, construction of bridges on vital communication arteries and the establishment of water filtration plants. Apart from this, quick-impact projects have been undertaken to assist the AFL in the renovation of the barracks at Voinjama, Buchanan and Zwedru.



Personnel from the Ukranian Aviation Unit load a helicopter into an Antonov cargo plane at Roberts International Airport as the contingent departs the Mission at the end of its mandate on 30 March 18.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 13 Feb 18

Bailey bridge - connecting Liberia



Pakistani troops and Liberian villagers repair a flooded road on the outskirts of Voinjama, Lofa County.

Photo: Eric Kanalstein | UNMIL | 3 May 06

A significant impact which the military forces had on local communities was providing vocational training. The UNMIL force worked closely with Armed Forces of Liberia engineers to train local residents on how to maintain roads and bridges so that they would be able to reconstruct these transportation lines of communication once UNMIL has left the country. All troop contributing countries took part in Liberia's reconstruction either via rebuilding efforts or training. Road reconstruction was a constant battle for the engineering battalions, as after every rainy season, the dirt roads that stretched across the country supplying the villages would be destroyed.

UNMIL military engineers worked tirelessly filling in large holes while smoothing the roadways to ensure they were passable. When travel is blocked, villages cannot receive necessary supplies, and produce from the communities cannot be transported into the cities. After every rainy season, the engineers also worked on bridges, which would collapse due to flooding. Bridges are also essential and play a significant role in uniting communities and enhancing everyday life.

As a quick-impact project, UNMIL force engineers constructed a Bailey bridge in the Sinje community of Grand Cape Mount County. The bridge was the culmination of a joint planning, training and construction project that included the Ministry of Public Works, the AFL, UNMIL and the US Embassy. Bridge building was part of the UNMIL mandate to assist the Government of Liberia in capacity building and infrastructure development.

This bridge now allows around 400 students to study at the University of Liberia. Many of them commute long distances, now shortened by the bridge. This bridge also plays a vital role in the movement of people, agricultural products and commercial goods between the counties of Grand Cape Mount, Gbarpolu and Lofa. The bridge has united communities and contributed to the pursuit of higher education, fundamental buttresses to the sustainability of peace.

The troops that are under your command came from various countries. What has been the challenge of commanding a multinational force?

I feel fortunate to have been the commander of a force that has troops from several different countries providing exceptional diversity and capacity to achieve a common goal of consolidating peace to Liberia. The key challenge was mainly that of understanding the concept of operational peacekeeping by international troops of various nationalities. To put all on the same pedestal, we embarked on training and sensitization visits much more vigorously and regularly. However, the frequency of turnover of contingents became a serious challenge: as soon as contingents settle down for business, they are due for rotation, and you have to start the cycle of training all over again. The force was big on the ground providing specified services. As UNMIL continued to draw down, the reliance on more capacity from specific units and individual officers became a great challenge. The good thing is that troop-contributing countries are maintaining professional armies with excellent training standards, by which before their deployment to a peacekeeping mission, each unit and individual are taken through an intense training schedule to serve as a peacekeeper. These helped to mitigate some of the challenges in the force. But, as we have consolidated in central Monrovia, the capacity of the force has also become limited. Capacity has been a challenge but, more importantly, it was an excellent learning experience.

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The 2017 presidential election has been a success story for Liberia and its partners. What was the peacekeepers’ contribution?

Peacekeepers contributed in many areas that have included capacity building of the defense sector, reforms of the security sector, mentorship and adherence to good practices, transport and election support, the transition of security responsibilities to Liberia’s security forces, and the use of good offices in all facets of the Government of Liberia’s institutions. At this phase of peace consolidation, the use of UNMIL good offices to mitigate perceived threats to peace has been very potent and effective. The efforts of all UNMIL peacekeepers have been enduring, and since the security transfer in June 2016, the Liberian security services have reached a level of maturity indicating they can be a catalyst for positive change in the destiny of Liberia.

My overall theme has been: “A single case of SEA has the potential to undo the work of thousands of soldiers, apart from earning a bad reputation for the UN and the home country.”

What useful lessons do you think future missions can learn from the UNMIL force experience?

Relationships between humanitarian actors and military forces are essential at the beginning of the mission. The need for cross-border coordination was experienced with both Côte d’Ivoire and Sierra Leone to enhance communications between UN missions and the contiguous countries. Inter-mission cooperation and coordination is a key to successful missions. More important, some of the best practices which made this Mission successful were the focused approach of UNMIL leadership, capacity building of Government institutions and the winning-hearts-and-minds strategy of the Mission. Robust use of good offices could solve a lot of security incidents and problems in the field. Adequate force level in a mission to cater for contingencies would serve as deterrence to peace spoilers. The robust use of the mandate and ensuring the capacity to deliver by force should be the emphasis of future peacekeeping.

The conduct of troops in peacekeeping operations regarding sexual exploitation and abuse has become a bane for the UN. What concrete measures did you take to check the incidence of SEA?

SEA is very detrimental to the triangle of support in peacekeeping. It dents the image of the peacekeeping mission and the UN, as well as that of the nation of the peacekeeper. It is very detrimental to the purpose for which peacekeeping is deployed. As commander, I directed a tiered approach where everyone in the chain of command was involved. The prominent activities in this plan included: training of every individual soldier in SEA; constituting a military anti-SEA committee; frequent visits and interaction by the force leadership with troops to sensitize them on SEA; strict adherence to standard operating procedures and directives about SEA; and organizing SEA seminars to create awareness amongst the soldiers. We were never tired of sensitization, and we made it a weekly ritual to discuss the evil of SEA at the force leadership level and to incorporate the

Conduct and Discipline Unit in all anti-SEA programming of the force. We sent clear directives on the accountability and responsibilities of commanders as regards the troop’s conduct and discipline. My overall theme has been: “A single case of SEA has the potential to undo the work of thousands of soldiers, apart from earning a bad reputation for the UN and the home country.” We insisted on continuous training and recreation for the troops to reduce boredom, and over the past year, this approach has resulted in zero cases of SEA in the force.

The efforts of all UNMIL peacekeepers have been enduring, and since the security transfer in June 2016, the Liberian security services have reached a level of maturity indicating they can be a catalyst for positive change in the destiny of Liberia.

What would you like to tell the Liberian people as you look to the future?

Thank you for the opportunity to learn and grow from all the hardworking Liberians, and professional partners who enable an environment for potential economic growth and development. Liberia should shun all forms of violence and tolerate one another for the progress of the country. Interestingly, Liberia has a rich history and culture and is one of the two countries in Africa that was never colonized. Such a rich history can only be sustained by upholding the tenets of democracy, and good and inclusive governance for the future generations of Liberians.

Capacity-building helps community to its feet



Trainees attend a masonry course organized by Pakistani engineers for local residents in Careysburg.
Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 27 May 10

Following the outbreak of the 14-year civil war in Liberia, the economy of the country was in dire straits. The establishment of UNMIL brought relative peace and stability. However, the economy needed a push: within limited resources, and in line with the mandate of the Mission, UNMIL troops conducted several quick-impact projects (QIPs) to alleviate the suffering of the population. One such project was the training of electrical technicians by the Pakistani Battalion in 2009 in Tubmanburg. Participants were to learn to repair electrical appliances, generators and other equipment. The idea was that by having these skills, young people would not have to flee to the capital Monrovia to scramble for jobs that were in short supply. Instead, they could sustain themselves and even flourish in their own community.

On a visit to Tubmanburg nine years later, in January 2018, an UNMIL military observer came across two beneficiaries of the training provided in 2009, Sahr Boston Sundu and Musa Karnley. Both men had set up their workshops with the knowledge they obtained from the training and were pleased to encounter UNMIL officers returning after nine years to appraise their progress.

Mr. Sahr now owns “God’s Time is the Best Workshop,” which he says is the best in Tubmanburg and built most of the doors and windows in the town. He had been trained as a welder/technician by the Pakistani engineers. He said that the training had helped him, his family and the immediate community. He

said the economic and social benefits accrued from the training could not be overemphasized. And since his training with UNMIL, he has also trained several other individuals in the same skills, some of whom relocated to neighbouring towns, as well as Monrovia and opened workshops. Currently, his workshop has six trainees. However, he said that lack of funds, tools and working equipment remain challenges limiting expansion and further training opportunities.

Musa Karnley was also trained by the Pakistanis as a welder and a generator technician and is currently the manager of Nakar Garage in Tubmanburg, specializing in generator repair and welding. He said that the training gave him the knowledge and technical skills to do repairs, and had given him an edge over the competition, especially in getting new jobs. His income increased tremendously, he said. He also noted the UNMIL vocational training had catalyzed a reduction in petty crimes committed within the town.

Inter-mission cooperation



Quadripartite meeting on Liberia with representatives of Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire, UNMIL and ONUCI.

Photo: Patricia Esteve | UN Photo | 13 June 12

the period of political transition in Liberia. The Council also mandated that UNMIL, if and when needed, evacuate its military personnel deployed to Sierra Leone, in the event of a security crisis. The UN Integrated Office for Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) which was established at the conclusion of UNAMSIL, provided logistical support to the UNMIL troops. This arrangement lasted until 2012 when the Court completed the substantive part of its mandate.

Inter-mission cooperation also allowed the missions in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire (UNMIL and ONUCI) to closely cooperate through joint activities, especially in addressing security challenges in the border areas between the two countries, as well as in support of peace consolidation activities by the Mano River Union countries and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This cooperation has since been replicated and developed further in West and Central Africa.

The United Nations peacekeeping presence in West Africa entered a new phase at the end of 2005, when the UN mission UNAMSIL was envisaged to leave peaceful but fragile Sierra Leone. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), deployed from late 2003, was still addressing the initial challenges of stabilization and peace consolidation. At the same time, the UN Mission in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) was facing a divided country in full conflict, which was projecting instability into Liberia and the sub-region.

To deal with this complex situation on the sub-regional scale, Secretary-General Kofi Annan in early 2005 proposed to the Security Council a series of recommendations that would allow the limited use of peacekeeping resources to address challenges in all three countries through an inter-mission cooperation, a significant innovation in UN peacekeeping practice at the time. These recommendations were endorsed by the Security Council in resolution 1609 (2005).

One of the first challenges was the need to continue providing security to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, an ad hoc tribunal that was prosecuting crimes committed during the country's civil war. The Court continued its activities after the departure of the UNAMSIL peacekeepers. A solution was found with the deployment of a small UNMIL contingent to Freetown, Sierra Leone. To achieve this without risk to Liberia, the Security Council increased UNMIL's troop ceiling slightly to ensure that the support provided to the Court didn't reduce UNMIL's capabilities during



Photo: Emmanuel Tobey | UNMIL | 21 Jan 07

Establishing policing to serve communities

Simon Blatchly, Police Commissioner

Simon Blatchly, UNMIL's Police Commissioner, is a senior police officer from the United Kingdom and served as the Chief of the Mission Management and Support Section for the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations Police Division before taking his post in Liberia in late 2016. Previously, he was the Senior Police Advisor in the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq. In this interview, he talks about his priorities in leading the policing component (UNPOL) of the UN Mission in Liberia during its final phase of operations, as well as achievements and challenges in policing since UNMIL's inception.

Can you explain the role of the UN Police (UNPOL) in Liberia?

The role of UNPOL has changed since the first officers arrived in 2003. While never having a full executive mandate (when the UN Police safeguard law and order while facilitating the development of a new domestic police service), the initial focus was on supporting the Liberia National Police (LNP) to manage the fragile security situation. There was a limited policing function in place in Liberia which had to be developed and supported. Vetting and recruitment was a priority. In addition, UNPOL developed training courses and workshops, along with one-to-one mentoring. Initial work was across all levels of the LNP, with UNPOL officers on patrol and working side by side with their Liberian colleagues across the country. Training and development covered all aspects of policing including leadership, management, human rights, professional standards, command and control, communication, crime investigation, community policing, performance and human resources management. We have moved from UNPOL doing the majority of the training at the National Police Training Academy to the last round of recruit training, delivered solely by Liberians.

The other aspect of our work has been related to the security situation. Throughout UNMIL's time in Liberia, we have had a number of Formed Police Units (FPUs). These are contingents of 120-140 police officers from one country, skilled in public order techniques who can support their



Simon Blatchly, UNMIL Police Commissioner

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 17 Jan 18

counterparts in dealing with crowd control and other disturbances. They also carry out high profile public reassurance patrols across the country. As the security situation has improved, the number of FPUs has reduced, and since full responsibility for security was handed to the Government in July 2016, they have not had to be deployed for crowd control.

As the capabilities and capacity of all the Liberian security agencies have improved over 14 years, the role of UNPOL has changed. The latest Security Council resolution directed us to focus on the leadership of the institutions and election security preparation. This resulted in fewer UNPOL working at a tactical level in the counties and greater focus on capacity building with national and regional command level staff.

Could you tell us a bit about your work here and some of your achievements in the time you've served as Police Commissioner?

The policing element of the mandate has had two different aspects: the first is building capacity within the security institutions, primarily the LNP and the Liberia Immigration Service (LIS) and the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency (LDEA). We have supported the reform of these institutions by developing the leadership, internal management, professionalization and accountability mechanisms with a focus on election security, plus promoting human rights, including tackling sexual and gender based violence. The other policing aspect is the protection of civilians and of UN personnel and assets.

Elections security preparation has been our priority leading up to and during both rounds of the presidential and legislative elections. Both passed with no substantive security concerns or allegations of human rights abuse by security agencies, and part of this success can be linked directly to UNPOL capacity-building activity.

Another achievement was the passage of new legislation, the Police and Immigration Acts, in 2016. This legislation was over 10 years in the making and was developed with the support of UNPOL. We are now working with the LNP and LIS on the regulations and administrative instructions required to implement the acts. We are facilitating a series of policy management board workshops for both the LNP and LIS to sanction the new procedures. These include areas such as discipline regulations, recruitment and promotion processes, use of force, conditions of service, standard operating procedures and accountability and oversight mechanisms, so that the agencies are established on a professional and open footing, with the public able to access and understand the rules the police must follow.

Looking back into the history of the Mission, what would you say are some of the Mission's most notable achievements in policing?

Restructuring the LNP was a key component of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement. UNMIL has led the UN support to the LNP since 2003. Initially, a lot of good work was done by establishing a strong foundation for the National Police Training Academy. Donors enabled necessary infrastructure (buildings and equipment) support, and UNPOL focused on the development of training courses for newly recruited and vetted officers. Subsequently, UNPOL turned its focus to the development of a national training capacity, so that the LNP have now taken over complete responsibility for training. This is a clear example of progress within the LNP.

Leadership capacities have been enhanced for senior and mid-level police, immigration and Drug Enforcement Agency officers, by targeted initiatives including collaboration with the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration and the Liberia Institute of Public Administration. Female leadership capacity has also been developed through training and mentoring. We now have a cadre of managers with

UN Police take on Ebola

The protracted 27-month period of the deadly Ebola outbreak in Liberia was a challenging time for the UN Police. The UN Security Council had proclaimed the disease a threat to international peace and stability. Understandably, the immediate priorities of the Liberia National Police and the Liberia Immigration Service changed, and UNPOL's reform and restructuring efforts were put on hold, as they moved to assist Liberia's security agencies charged with supporting the health and humanitarian efforts to stop the spread of the disease. The majority of the 1,428 UN Police officers in Mission at the time did not leave the country, but remained to help their national counterparts to implement the Government's state of emergency and provide security support to the overwhelming health and humanitarian responses required, while simultaneously ensuring that sound risk management strategies were in place for staff safety and well-being. UNPOL supported the establishment of control measures, making sure procedures and processes were followed to stop the spread of the disease. They worked in areas where the disease was present, putting their lives on the line to help with the crisis response. Lessons were learned to enhance response should such a crisis reoccur.

experience of working with international development advisers, who have a good understanding of what a forward thinking police service should be and they appreciate the effectiveness of a community-oriented policing approach rather than a reactive style that can often result in excessive use of force. This maturity of approach was illustrated by the conduct of the security agencies during the 2017 elections period when they used a service style of policing, engaging with political parties and the population and seeking to avoid conflict, such as through the effective management of campaign rallies.

There have been significant developments in community policing across the LNP. Internal management systems such as human resources and fleet management have been strengthened and partially decentralized through the training, equipping and deployment of specialist officers to the counties. Command, control and communication and incident management capacity have been enhanced with the reactivation of the 911 emergency call system and the strengthening of national and regional operations centers and an operational planning unit.

Working with international partners, UNMIL has supported the development of what is now, 14 years later, a more legitimate police service. While there is no question that much still remains to be done to further develop into a truly democratic and accountable police service, there is no question that the LNP has taken significant steps towards improving its relationship with the people of Liberia.

The development of the Liberia Immigration Service and associated border security work has been an achievement for UNMIL. The UN resolution 1885 in 2009 called upon the Government of Liberia, in coordination with the UN and international partners, to redouble efforts to develop national security and rule of law institutions that are fully independently operational. As a result, UNMIL identified as a strategic priority support to the Liberian Government to enhance border security and management.

UN Police safeguard elections



Chinese Formed Police Unit (FPU) with locals on their last community patrol following peaceful elections.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 1 Feb 18

Election security preparation was the priority of UN Police (UNPOL) leading up to, and during, both rounds of the 2017 presidential and legislative elections. UNPOL focused on strengthening command, control, and communication aspects of the Liberian police country-wide, ensuring effective planning with delegation of command authority to the lowest possible level to empower staff and bring efficiencies and timely responses to a crisis. Authority was decentralized away from Monrovia to allow the regions and counties to manage themselves where possible and support coordination amongst national law enforcement actors, including the military, under the leadership of the Liberia National Police, to ensure a coherent approach to the provision of security for the electoral process. UN Police joined the National Election Security Task Force; regular multi-agency meetings were held; and a single operational plan led to the pooling of resources, such as transportation, to ensure nationwide coverage of security personnel for the elections. After-action reviews were held after both rounds of the election, with lessons learned from the first round put in place for the run-off election. Both elections passed with no substantive security concerns or allegations of human rights abuse by security agency personnel.

We now have a cadre of managers with experience of working with international development advisers, who have a good understanding of what a forward thinking police service should be and they appreciate the effectiveness of a community-oriented policing approach rather than a reactive style that can often result in excessive use of force.

Young Liberians in front of the Freeport Police Station in Monrovia promoting civilian/police cooperation during a Liberia National Police awareness campaign.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 30 Apr 10



In response, UNPOL expanded its activities and commenced provision of advisory and capacity-building support to the Bureau of Immigration and Nationality – now the Liberia Immigration Service (LIS) - by deploying specialist immigration advisers to mentor and advise their immigration counterparts, co-located in LIS headquarters. Capacity-building support has been ongoing since and provided at strategic and operational levels including senior officer mentoring, leadership development, human rights training, manpower deployments, project management, community engagement, cross border cooperation, border control, immigration laws, decentralization, conduct and discipline, patrolling, use of force and gender.

In partnership with relevant agencies, UNPOL developed, implemented and supported the Integrated Border Management and Security System and the National Integrated Border Management Security Strategy, which included the provision of essential equipment at key border entry points that strengthened security and improved intelligence gathering.

The border management project integrated all border agencies, enabling the Government to adopt a cohesive response to border issues and challenges. It also improved facilitation of people and goods at the border, making it easier to use official entry points rather than unscheduled routes. The Liberian people and the alien nationals are safer with improved border management and security. The border communities were engaged with the project, helping build a secure environment as well as cooperation with state border security agencies. Lastly, the project has improved regional integration and development through enhanced free movement of people and goods.

With additional funding, the border project has been extended to another 17 points of entry, and 60 community engagement officers have been hired to conduct border community sensitization. The decentralization of these services has further enhanced the professionalism and visibility of the LIS in the counties.

Are there some ‘silent achievements’ on the policing side that haven’t generated much news but have been making an incremental improvement?

The LNP Professional Standards Department has been strengthened and decentralized to the counties, improving accountability mechanisms across the country. The critical importance of accountability and oversight, including human rights observance, is recognized as LNP continues to engage with the Independent Commission of Human Rights and civil society organizations, and integrate human rights training into the LNP Academy.

Liberian security counterparts on contribution of UN Police



Police officers of the United Nations and the Liberia National Police join together in celebration.

Photo: UNMIL | 4 Mar 15

managers) to advise senior managers of the LNP. Despite this, and the cultural and language barriers that impacted on our ability to communicate effectively, the NPTA benefited from a pool of experience of personnel from different cultures, countries and professional backgrounds, and UNMIL helped improve our training curriculum in the areas of human rights, community policing, sexual and gender based violence etc.”

Dao R. Freeman, Jr., Commissioner of Police for Training and Manpower Development, National Police Training Academy (NPTA)

The main role of the UN Police in Liberia has been support to and reform of the Liberian security entities, primarily the Liberia National Police, the Liberia Immigration Service, the Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency and the National Police Training Academy. A few of them shared comments on UNPOL’s contribution over the past 14 years:

“UNMIL has certainly helped to build the foundations that were able to sustain democracy and lasting peace in Liberia. We have welcomed the support that we received from UNPOL, particularly the good practice of the provision of specialist mentoring from skilled and experienced immigration advisers.”

Commissioner General Lemuel Reeves, Liberia Immigration Service

“Training is helpful but the benefit of day-to-day mentoring by experts is what has really helped to improve the ability of the DEA. Where support has worked is when the UN attach officers with direct narcotic investigation experience.”

Anthony Souh, Director, Liberia Drug Enforcement Agency

“Round balls in square holes: We have raised the issue of some of the incompetence, or lack of experience, of some UNMIL personnel, for instance, assigning officers who had never worked before in police operations to serve as advisors in operational units and assigning low ranking officers like sergeants (first line

managers) to advise senior managers of the LNP. Despite this, and the cultural and language barriers that impacted on our ability to communicate effectively, the NPTA benefited from a pool of experience of personnel from different cultures, countries and professional backgrounds, and UNMIL helped improve our training curriculum in the areas of human rights, community policing, sexual and gender based violence etc.”

Dao R. Freeman, Jr., Commissioner of Police for Training and Manpower Development, National Police Training Academy (NPTA)

A less apparent achievement is the use we have made of the Formed Police Units in an innovative way. Normally in peacekeeping missions, FPU’s are self-contained and focus on security patrols. However here they have been engaged in joint patrols across the country, and training, with the LNP. The current rotation of FPU’s, one from Nigeria and one from China, arrived in Liberia in early 2016. They have both assisted in developing the public order capacity of the LNP. This activity has also ensured that we have public order units trained to the same standards, plus a command structure in place, allowing the LNP and the UN FPU’s to work together effectively, should we need to deploy them operationally.

The impact of the day-to-day support and mentoring to our security sector counterparts for 14 years is difficult to quantify, but undoubtedly real. Such contact ensures that issues, such as the release of arrested persons held in police custody beyond the 48-hour constitutional limit, are embedded to the extent that compliance is now accepted custom and practice by the LNP. This is from a position where arbitrary detention and arrest without probable cause, and extended time in custody before being placed before the court, was the norm.

What would you say are the main challenges UNPOL has faced?

As with other sections in UNMIL, there is always the challenge of resources and budgets not being aligned with the demands of the mandate. A review of UNMIL mandates over 14 years indicates UNMIL has been tasked to draw down and prepare for closure a number of times. This does not aid long-term strategic planning. If it was known that the Mission would be in place for 14 years, I am sure a different approach would have

been taken with long-term plans which may have quickened and deepened reform. Budget support has always been limited for UNPOL activity, which has been a challenge.

If it was known that the Mission would be in place for 14 years, I am sure a different approach would have been taken with long-term plans which may have quickened and deepened reform.

The lack of financial support to our counterparts by the Government also hampers their development. However the good use of funds for quick-impact projects and more recently programmatic funding has impacted positively on support to the security agencies. This could, however, also have a detrimental effect as the police and immigration services become dependent on donor support.

The relevance of the skills and experience of UNPOL officers being recruited continues to be a challenge. As our counterparts become better trained and experienced, there is a need to ensure the UNPOLs deployed to mentor them have the necessary skills and credibility. Unfortunately, this is sometimes not the case. The skills required to support a patrol officer on routine duty are different to those required to train and mentor senior managers or specialist officers or to draft and train on regulations and standard operating procedures. Current recruitment practices and minimum standards have not been adapted for the changing role of UNPOL in peacekeeping missions. We are here to build capacity, but sometimes it can feel like we are capacity-building ourselves rather than the people we are here to support. My direct counterparts in the Liberian services are intelligent, well-educated, experienced officers and they know if the UNPOL who are to support their staff do not have the necessary skills to mentor, train or communicate, the result is no value being added by the presence of UN police officers.

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some success by interviewing all UNPOL candidates, in addition to the UN Headquarters recruitment process, to ensure they have the skills required to deliver the mandated tasks. This has worked exceptionally well in the case of immigration officers we have recruited from other West African nations to share their expertise. There is also a need to recruit civilian as well as police experts, especially in the essential support areas such as fleet management and human resource planning. Ideally, we would also retain skilled officers for longer periods, as the regular turnover of staff damages continuity and therefore relationships with counterparts.

What do you think the Mission could have done differently as regards policing and what would you recommend to other police commissioners?

We have to ensure that all our activities are sustainable. We must consider this in everything we do and with all training and projects: how is this training or performance management structure going to be embedded, and will its impact last? We also need to be aware of the unintended consequences of UNPOL deployment and co-location. At its height, there were nearly 2,000 UNPOL across Liberia. We reduced to just over 300, all based in Monrovia. Unfortunately the LNP mobility and communications collapsed behind us. UNPOL in the field, with the best of intentions, were providing logistical support to the LNP, allowing them to move around and work across the counties, supporting investigations and using UNPOL communication for reporting to LNP HQ. Now they do not have this support and are struggling with communication and logistics. LNP had become dependent on UNPOL. There should have been greater focus on this from an early stage to ensure that everything we did was sustainable to avoid the outcome we now have. I would also recommend ensuring accurate records and assessments of all support given are maintained, to measure success and check back on physical assets donated.

LNP had become dependent on UNPOL. There should have been greater focus on this from an early stage to ensure that everything we did was sustainable to avoid the outcome we now have.

I would advise a new Police Commissioner to review what has happened before, look at previous plans to see what has worked and try to achieve sustainable development and outcomes.

If you were to compare the development of a law enforcement agency to building a cathedral, everyone wants to deliver the stain glass windows and ornate architecture. However you need to build the foundations, from the bottom up, with training and some basic equipment. There is no

point providing a complex DNA machine or a CCTV system when the basic policing functions are missing or an effective crime investigation and recording system are not in place.

Coordination of support by all donors to our counterparts is a challenge. I have been fortunate to have good working relationships with the US and Swedish embassies providing bilateral support to the LNP. Ideally all UN activity related to security agencies, including from the UN Country Team (UNCT), should be coordinated by the Police Commissioner to avoid duplication. Working within the UN can be a challenge, given the different approaches between peacekeeping and the UNCT. We have implemented some UNPOL projects independently, rather than using an implementing partner or the UNCT, as this has allowed more funding to be spent directly on counterpart support rather than administration costs. Honest after-action reviews and lessons learned exercises are required for all projects, so mistakes are not replicated.

If you were to compare the development of a law enforcement agency to building a cathedral, everyone wants to deliver the stain glass windows and ornate architecture. However you need to build the foundations, from the bottom-up, with training and some basic equipment. There is no point providing a complex DNA machine or a CCTV system when the basic policing functions are missing or an effective crime investigation and recording system are not in place.

However, the key aspect for any capacity-building activity is the relationship with our counterparts. I have been lucky to build a good rapport with the Inspector General and others, meaning open and honest conversations can be had. It is essential that the host nation lead on all change activity and take ownership of any initiative, so that when the UN leaves, the activity continues.

What are your priorities and your focus as the Mission moves towards closure?

With the successful and peaceful conclusion of the presidential elections, the focus has been on supporting the transition to a new Government. As we draw down, we have been continuing to support the implementation of the Police and Immigration acts. We have been delivering workshops and hope to have the regulations approved and implemented by the Ministry of Justice. The risk is that once UNMIL departs, the acts will not be implemented. The hope is that there are enough managers that genuinely want to change who will drive this forward, even when we are not here.

Some of our activities will be handed over to the UN Development Programme (UNDP) with whom we have worked in close co-operation. We have a joint programme that serves as the key instrument for the transition of support to the police and immigration services from UNMIL to UNDP. In 2017, UNDP's areas of intervention were aligned with UNMIL's mandate and focused on enhancing the institutional capacity of the LNP, strengthening accountability and oversight, and advancing community engagement. In addition the Swedish Government is currently implementing a sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) project aimed at enhancing the SGBV investigative capacity of the LNP. The US Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement has a five-year programme to increase the capacity of the LNP to prevent, detect, and investigate crime, while protecting the rights of all citizens and working in partnership with the communities it serves. Irish Aid, in addition to support for leadership development, has offered to provide funding to UNDP to continue development of the LNP's leadership and management capability. So support will be continuing.

The public confidence in the LNP and other agencies is growing. This needs to be sustained. Corruption at all levels is still present. You only have to observe the unnecessary check points at night taking money from citizens to see that. But the continued training and development in community-oriented policing and human rights across all law enforcement agencies, plus the establishment of accountability mechanisms and oversight, give me hope for the future

A critical area for interventions post-UNMIL relate to the 2017-18 Liberia Gender and Security National Task Force Action Plan which will address several issues by which security sector institutions are to implement the Liberia Action Plan for UN Security Council resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, as well as other relevant gender-related policies and to enhance coordination and information sharing on gender advocacy.

Progress is still needed in key areas for all the security agencies to become independent, professional and accountable and so contribute to the goal of an effective, efficient, accountable and coordinated security architecture. The slow progress of reform is exacerbated by

Women’s police contingent: role models for a decade

In 2007, UNMIL deployed the first all-female Formed Police Unit (FPU) from India and, with annual rotations, they continued to serve the Mission for 10 years, providing critical policing support as well as role models for Liberia.

FPUs are self-contained units consisting of 120 to 140 officers from a single country which are often used for crowd control and security. During their deployments in Liberia, the women's police unit was to provide static, visible security outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. They also conducted joint patrols with the Liberia National Police and VIP protection and escort duties, and they assisted in developing the public order capacity of the LNP. They also provided medical services and training to Liberian security agency personnel and UN staff including training new recruits for the LNP and Liberia Immigration Service on the provision of medical services and other outreach activities to local communities.

Due to their dedication, professionalism and motivation, the all-female FPUs were strong, visible role models, gaining world-wide attention and illustrating the significant contribution that women can make towards the provision of security.

Liberian women were watching: In 2016, women made up 17 per cent of the country's security sector, as compared to 6 per cent before the arrival of the Indian contingent.

“When the local women see the female peacekeepers, they get inspired by them. They see ladies can perform the same role as male counterparts,” Colonel Madhubala Bala, one of the contingent's commanders said. “They’ve served as role models for the local girls, and the effect on Liberian women was very significant.”

Upon the departure of the last contingent in 2016, then Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said in a statement that: “Through their work, they managed criminality, deterred sexual and gender-based violence and helped rebuild safety and confidence among the population.”

“We see you as family,” President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf told the final, outgoing police contingent at a farewell ceremony in 2016.



Medal parade ceremony of the all-female Formed Police Unit from India.
Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 12 Nov 08

inadequate budgetary support, with a reliance on international donors that is not sustainable. There is still an over concentration of police in Monrovia resulting in the inability of citizens living in the counties to access security services, particularly specialist services. There are also communication challenges, including coordination and information sharing, within but also between law enforcement agencies.

Are you confident in the future of Liberia?

The public confidence in the LNP and other agencies is growing. This needs to be sustained. Corruption at all levels is still present. You only have to observe the unnecessary check points at night taking money from citizens to see that. But the continued training and development in community-oriented policing and human rights across all law enforcement agencies, plus the establishment of accountability mechanisms and oversight, give me hope for the future. I have had active debates with senior leadership of the LNP over what a Liberian policing style looks like. They recognize that they need to learn from international partners such as UNPOL, but develop their own vision of policing that fits their country. The self-assessment retreats and now regular after-action reviews all point to agencies that are moving forward. The election process can be seen as a milestone in the development of the Liberian security agencies. They have successfully put into practice their training, skills and experience. They effectively engaged with members of the community and delivered a safe environment for the democratic process to occur. I am proud of the contribution that we have made towards a safer, more secure, stable country. I am confident that Liberia is on the right path.

The outgoing Chief of the Political Affairs Section of UNMIL, Olubukola Akin Arowobusoye began his career as a diplomat with the Nigerian Foreign Service, and amongst other postings, served in Liberia from 1989 to 1991. He later worked with two NGOs, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, a UN Resident Coordinator’s office, a World Bank project and UN peacekeeping missions in other parts of Africa.

Mr. Arowobusoye: it seems you came to UNMIL with a first-hand sense of Liberian history?

I had a little prior knowledge. As a director at ECOWAS, I was part of the technical team that worked on the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement that helped to establish peace in Liberia. That agreement also laid the foundations for the Security Council’s adoption of resolution 1509, which established UNMIL.

I also come from this region, so my background has given me some sort of understanding of the political and cultural dynamics in all of West Africa. It’s not exactly the same culture, but it’s similar.

So, what is the role of the Political Affairs Section here? What have you been working on and what have you hoped to achieve?

Based on UNMIL’s mandate, the Political Affairs Section informs, monitors, facilitates, and intervenes at a ‘technical’ level. Most of the high-level intervention is carried out by the Mission’s leadership, in particular Special Representative of the Secretary-General Zarif. We also implement at a micro level, collect data, report on political variables and issues, and provide advice about what the Mission’s leadership should do and how it should intervene. Sometimes the leadership does not intervene directly and instead deploys the Political Affairs Section on its behalf to implement a particular course of action. When necessary, we can escalate the issue to the Mission’s leadership along with the information and analyses we gained from our engagement.

The section’s work is also informed by the pending closure of the Mission, which moderates everything that we do. At the micro level, we support the good offices of SRSZ Zarif and his deputies through engagement with the Liberian executive, Legislature, the National Election Commission (NEC), political parties, and civil society groups –with a particular focus on women and youth. Also, in coordination with other sections within the Mission, we support national reform processes, the reform of elections laws, the consolidation of the political party system, and the mainstreaming of gender in national processes. Our section also coordinates with the international community, including reaching common positions with ECOWAS and the African Union. All these activities are to support Liberia as it strengthens its democratic systems and attributes, and achieves sustained peace, stability and economic development.

It seems that the political aspect is more in focus as the Mission prepares to close.

If peacekeeping missions are not careful, they can lose sight of the fact that, at the end of the day, it wasn’t the lack of food and water that required the establishment of the mission, but it was because the peace was broken. Peace, whether you like it or not, is a political variable—conflict resolution, peace building, and re-establishing systems after a conflict are all political variables. For better or worse, missions are not deployed to manage the environment or deal with food and water issues, but to restore peace. Thankfully, UNMIL is focused on its core mandates

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Abraham, a resident of Monrovia’s sprawling slum Westpoint, relaxes on Sundays with his treasured book and the sports pages of a local newspaper.

Photo: K. Leigh Robinson | 12 Nov 17

and has seen success with the security transition in 2016 and the more recent political transition from the Government of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf to George Weah because of this attention.

Peace is a political issue, even if human rights and the lack of food and water are part of the challenges a country has faced before, during and after conflicts, especially because government institutions are not fully functional or able to deliver on their mandates to provide for the people. This is especially so on the continuum from when peace is broken, to when peace needs to be reestablished, to when active intervention is required. If we look at the conflict cycle, peacekeeping missions must re-establish political arrangements, and restore public faith in the government, democracy and human rights, so that states and their institutions can go about their business. This necessarily implies that missions should leave at some point.

Obviously a mission that is closing will focus on the sustainability of the efforts made to rearrange the political situation that led to the conflict in the first place, which is the situation UNMIL is in right now. Immediately before the Mission will have departed, Liberia held Presidential and House of Representatives elections in late 2017, followed by the actual transition of power in January 2018. During this last period we were trying to assist the Liberian Government with making political arrangements that will engender long-term peace. There has not been a peaceful and democratic transition between two elected heads of state in Liberia since 1944, and the lack of an inclusive and functional governance system was part of the cause of the civil wars here. As such, our work can be seen as a necessary preventative of future conflict, not just in holding elections but in facilitating a larger political system and discourse that prevents a return to conflict.

At this time in UNMIL’s history, as it withdraws, the focus is on securing the political arrangements in Liberia that will ensure continuous peace and stability, with a heavy focus on politics to ensure that the elections are not just a moment or a blip, but part of a larger trajectory towards political and social stability, cohesion, reconciliation, peace and development.

structure for including other voices in the process before, during and after the elections, as well as within the new dispensation and political arrangement after the elections. These are the kinds of systemic safeguards against conflict. Elections are a necessary part of that larger reform, but

Sometimes it appears that the panacea and end state of an intervention is to facilitate elections and that is it. But in thinking about elections and peace processes, it is important to remember that elections are part of a larger political context: there must be a winner obviously, but there must also be a

UNMIL cooperates with regional organizations

Regional organizations, including the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), have historically played a significant role in maintaining peace and security in Liberia. UNMIL's Political Affairs Section maintained a strong relationship with these organizations. During 2017, the SRSG and Mission leadership met regularly with ECOWAS and AU counterparts to prepare for Liberia's elections. Several joint initiatives and press statements highlighted the collaborative relationship that helped to ensure a peaceful electoral process.

The Political Affairs Section also assisted in setting up the Government-led National Political Forum, which led to the signing by 20 political parties of the "Farmington River Declaration" on 4 June 2017 in the margins of the ECOWAS Summit. The parties committed themselves to holding peaceful elections and seeking judicial resolution of any disputes. It was a major milestone for UNMIL, the AU and ECOWAS, but mostly for the political parties and the Liberian citizenry.

Prior to the beginning of the campaign period, the Political Affairs Section drafted a press statement, issued jointly by the AU, ECOWAS and UNMIL, which called upon all actors to refrain from making "provocative statements that can incite violence." UNMIL Radio broadcast consistent messaging to the political parties on the necessity to remain committed to the Farmington River Declaration. The Political Affairs Section also helped, with those partners, to resolve the Legislature's impeachment attempts against three Supreme Court justices, whom five legislators had accused of bias in clearing for nomination two vice presidential candidates whom the National Elections Commission (NEC) had rejected.

Following the first round of voting, a second a press statement jointly issued by UNMIL, AU and ECOWAS called for patience as the results were pending, and advised parties to address concerns to the NEC before going to the media. On 10 November, the three organizations again called for calm, upholding of the rule of law, and expeditious adjudication of election disputes.

The Section then assisted UNMIL leadership in collaboration with the AU and ECOWAS to bring together youth representatives of political parties in a series of meetings, after which they agreed to strengthen their peaceful participation in the electoral process.

What are some benchmarks of social cohesion, if elections are not a panacea for democracy?

The basic needs of the people must be provided first by any society and any government; then communities can look at the kind of arrangements that are suitable for them. In that sense, elections are representative of what a government is trying to achieve or a choice of the people as to who will best fulfil their desires and needs. It is also important to remember why we have elections: to allow people to be represented in the government, to ensure the provision of services and to provide for the needs of the electorate, and to ensure that there is a space for political voices to be heard and considered.

are not sufficient in and of themselves. At this time in UNMIL's history, as it withdraws, the focus is on securing the political arrangements in Liberia that will ensure continuous peace and stability, with a heavy focus on politics to ensure that the elections are not just a moment or a blip, but part of a larger trajectory towards political and social stability, cohesion, reconciliation, peace and development.

Consequently, peacekeeping missions must consider helping countries in post conflict situations to think about effectively managing divergent and sometimes conflicting interests in order to ultimately provide for the basic needs of the people. It is important to remember that the provision of basic needs is a fundamental function of any political system, and that it is not enough to think of technical electoral matters without making arrangements for the larger political, economic and social contexts that inform policy choices by governments and ballot choices by the electorate. These are often very complicated and difficult choices, and are often the source of conflict, especially where the state and economy are not wealthy enough to provide everything everyone wants.

At the end of the day, while peacekeeping missions are not deployed to provide for the basic needs of the people in a particular country, they are there to help the government do so. Governments must meet the basic needs of the people, whether material, political, economic or social. Ultimately the provision of basic needs, irrespective of the formal system of governance at this time, is the most important

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thing. With that in mind, peacekeeping must be about enabling local governmental systems to provide for those things in order to secure a stable peace. That is quite different from seeing elections as an end in and of themselves, but as a means or a barometer of our intervention. More critically, on this continent, an acknowledgement of this implies that we might need to re-think when we push for elections, so that it does not exacerbate underlying divisions where the state and the relevant actors do not have the means of resolving them effectively.

Residents check for their names on the voter registration rolls placed by the National Elections Commission prior to the presidential election run-off.

Photo: Shpend Berbatovci | UNMIL | 2 Dec 18



What should happen with a mandate in a country that is sometimes unable or incapable of delivering for its people? We can analyze why it is lacking those capabilities, but we cannot think that once the elections are held, that it's done and we can go home. We may know that despite the mere existence of elections, new problems may be generated or old problems brought up again that we had been managing before the electoral cycle.

For instance, Liberia has for the past few years been going through a constitutional review process, which entailed the establishment of a Constitutional Review Committee and extensive consultations with the public and stakeholders to identify particular concerns and generate proposals. As a result of this process, 25 separate propositions were identified, covering topics as diverse as the length of the terms of office of presidents and legislators, to allowing dual citizenship, to local governance and land use, to the rights of women and people with disabilities.

Politically speaking, the most contentious bill, Proposition 24, sought to "recognize" Liberia as a Christian state. However, there is a large Liberian community of Muslims, and many felt threatened by a process that gave them the sense they were being written out of the country's history or relegated to some lesser status. When I arrived in UNMIL, this was a hot button issue and would have created real problems were it put in the Constitution. For various reasons, this tension was partially resolved by pushing the question further down the road to be dealt with by the next Government, which would have to hold a referendum on it. The problem still exists, however, and there is a portion of the Liberian electorate that wishes to adopt Proposition 24 into the Constitution. Unless dealt with, that is the kind of issue that can be a flashpoint for conflict. This is the kind of long-term political assistance and the long-term political engagement that is fundamental to peace building that goes well beyond holding an election or thinking that a voting process will invariably make the situation better.

Can you talk about some of the achievements in political affairs, some of the things you are proud of, from the time that you have worked here?

In support of the SRSG, we have helped the Mission in managing, mitigating and resolving all kinds of crises. These are possible because of the daily work we do to maintain contacts, nurture relationships and collect information. We do not exactly consider achievements as only meetings held or trainings given or equipment transferred, but also we try to ensure that we know what the salient issues are, what the underlying considerations are, whom to speak with, when to speak with the person, and what needs to be said to ensure the effectiveness of the Mission's intervention in order to lead to a sustainable peace. This requires a certain appreciation of the political and cultural dynamics at work, an

appropriate analytical framework, and, perhaps most importantly, hard work to ensure that we are everywhere we need to be and speak with everyone who needs to be spoken with.

Let me give you a concrete example from the recent electoral period. We had an issue between a prominent political party and the National Elections Commission (NEC). This party planned a large meeting during the period before the NEC authorized political rallies to be held. In response, the NEC issued a formal and strongly worded letter to the political party saying that it learned about the plans for a political rally and that it would be contrary to the elections laws and a recipe for chaos. The NEC warned the party not to hold the rally, and made this known in the media. It seemed like the NEC's warning could destabilize the situation because it put into tension the authority of the NEC and its obligation to ensure adherence to the Elections Law, and the party's right to participate in the democratic process and hold a meeting.

We went to see all those concerned and then played a mediation and conciliation role. First, we assessed the situation and informed the Mission's leadership, who then authorized an intervention to facilitate a solution to the impasse, which entailed offering UNMIL's assistance as an impartial 'mediator' between the NEC and the party. The whole situation was playing out in the press, and neither side was going to back down: the party insisted that they would go ahead with the meeting, while the NEC warned that no one would be allowed to break the law and hold a rally. So we went to see the political party, and they argued that they were not breaking the law and that instead that they would have a 'big' meeting inside their office, and that a gathering could be held in the big yard inside their compound, which was not public land. Of course, everyone knew that party supporters would end up in the streets beyond the yard, but we had to deal with two competing interests and rights: first, the party's legitimate interest in hosting a meeting at their headquarters, which conformed to the NEC's existing rules, no matter the size, and, second, the NEC's legal mandate to ensure that parties not actively campaign or hold rallies outside of the officially sanctioned periods. In the end, the party was glad to work with us as a facilitator, and they were agreeable to an arrangement where they would stay within their yard.

With the party's agreement, we went to NEC and asked whether the Commission could have contacted the party directly to discuss the situation rather than making the issue a big deal in the media. This is a small country, and the NEC could have simply advised the party directly that it could meet and host a gathering on its private land as long as it did not spill out into public land. In the end, we mediated the dispute and brokered a resolution, the only difference being that we did it without the media. Ultimately, the rally went on within the compound, and without breaking the law to the satisfaction of the NEC and the party.

Another example is that we regularly speak to all registered political parties to facilitate and arrange meetings with the SRSG, and to ensure their attendance. These meetings provide a safe space for the parties to share ideas and raise concerns. Arranging these meetings requires a lot of intense work to ensure that we have the parties' trust and ear. Sometimes we take on the role of a back channel 'communicator' to ensure that various political stakeholders are fully engaged and are on the same page on a particular matter or a process.

We are also actively involved in the Legislature. We engage intensely with legislators to ensure the passage of bills critical to national reforms or to facilitate amendments to ensure that Liberian laws comply with human rights norms and best practices, and also to make sure that these bills move the peace and reconciliation process forward. Under the direction of Mission leadership, we were able to engage influential legislators on key bills such as the land rights and the local government bills, which required urgent passage. It is widely accepted that ensuring the equitable use and ownership of land and the decentralization and de-concentration of decision-making authority and services are essential to stability and peace in Liberia, and as such the Land Rights and the Local Government bills are essential components of the Mission's political engagement. As

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part of this process, we facilitated several critical meetings between the SRSG and the Speaker of the House Representatives and the Senate President Pro Tempore. The SRSG's good offices culminated in both houses placing the bills on the top of their priority list, and they currently await passage. Their passage will mark a significant step towards supporting Liberia's decentralization and economic development.

Yet another example: Immediately after the 10 October elections, we learned about an electoral complaint by a prominent political party that sought to annul the results of the first round and re-run the entire election. This was a very big deal and potentially hugely divisive in a still fragile country like Liberia. We were probably the first outsider to learn of the complaint because of the continuous background work we do and our persistence in following up with all stakeholders. We immediately sprang into action and, on the direction of the SRSG, facilitated a discussion between the party's standard bearer and the SRSG. Sometimes we participate in these meetings, and sometimes the meeting is held tête-à-tête

UNMIL interacts with the Legislature on critical bills

The House of Representatives and the Senate are responsible for passing laws and reforms in Liberia. Throughout 2017, the UNMIL Political Affairs Section facilitated the SRSG and DSRSGs' regular engagement with members of the Legislature on key legislation including the

Land Rights, Local Government, Code of Conduct and Domestic Violence bills, among others. This included meetings with members of the relevant committees in order to share information and perspectives and seek solutions to delays in the passage of bills. Between 2015 and 2017, UNMIL leadership engagement contributed to the passage of key legislation including the Liberia National Police Act, the Liberia Immigration Service Act and Firearms and Ammunition Control Act of Liberia.

As electoral activities began in early 2017 with parties' conventions and the declaration of candidatures, the debate on the applicability of a code of conduct law for public officials who wished to contest in the forthcoming elections took on major proportions. UNMIL Political Affairs officers provided analysis and context, and facilitated the SRSG to engage with key interlocutors including the Legislature's leadership, as well as the Ministry of Justice and political parties, to discuss fair application of the code of conduct.

The SRSG intervened in disputes involving members of the Legislature to ensure smooth conduct of the electoral process and to assist in the resolution of disputes between the different branches of Government.

On 20 July 2017, the Supreme Court ruled that two vice presidential candidates, who seemed to be disqualified from running due to the code of conduct law, would be allowed to compete, thus setting a precedent for several other candidates. In response, the House of Representatives issued a petition for

impeachment against three Supreme Court justices. UNMIL Political Affairs officers offered technical support to the mediation activities of the SRSG and Mission leadership. Numerous discussions were held with the Legislature and Judiciary, sometimes in the form of shuttle diplomacy, until the matter was amicably resolved.



Bhofal Chambers, newly elected Speaker of the House of Representatives of Liberia is sworn in at the first session of the 54th Legislature in Monrovia.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 16 Jan 18

to allow the principals to have a direct and frank talk about what should be done. But even then, we support the SRSG by preparing background notes, identifying interests, and highlighting points of agreement and disagreement.

This discussion with the SRSG and the leader of this political party was emblematic of the larger engagement we had with political parties, stakeholders, and national and international groups to try to forge consensus about the process. Some said that the elections were not properly executed and that there should have been a re-run, while others thought that the process was accurate and well-done, and that the results must stand. In order to keep everyone "on-side," we facilitated countless meetings with stakeholders on both sides of the divide, which was substantial, as well as with neutral parties and other interlocutors, to calm things down.

More technically, early on during the electoral process, we subtly encouraged the NEC to identify logistical needs and make early formal requests for UNMIL's support. This may seem like a simple thing, but it required advance planning and assessment on our part to predict what those needs would be, and then, to cajole the commissioners to reach out to us in time for UNMIL to offer support. In Liberia, that in itself can be a challenge, to get the NEC to identify what it needed and where and do its own advance planning. That kind of work can only be done if you have been on the ground well in advance and are known to and trusted by the relevant actors; it cannot be done by experts parachuting in at the last minute.

Finally, as Political Affairs officers at our technical level, having had the opportunity to listen to the concerns raised by the NEC and political parties in our everyday engagements, we recognized that the relationship between them was weakening due to a challenge in communication. We informed the SRSg, who through his good offices encouraged them to engage more frequently under their Inter-Party Consultative Committee mechanism. As at the end of the electoral process, that Committee was very effective with a strengthened relationship between the NEC and political parties. Again, this essential engagement was made possible because of our continuous presence on the ground and our familiarity with the parties so that we could recognize small shifts in tone and predict future issues.

In political work, those interventions which avoided crises could then be characterized as achievements.

We encouraged and supported the Government to take up particular issues, for instance to promote good governance and to pass laws. To do that we identified issues and developed engagement strategies, based on a longer process that entails spotting an issue, assessing why the issue is not moving forward, identifying who, potentially, is preventing the situation from moving forward, and how to best address the issue. That requires a lot of advance work and continual engagement with stakeholders, contextual knowledge, analysis, relationship building and familiarity with the situation. Beyond that, we identify to whom the SRSg needs to speak, what buttons we need to press to move things forward, and what is happening with the Legislature and the executive.

One of the critical good offices engagements by the SRSg was diffusing tension between the judiciary and legislative branches of the Government at the peak of the electoral process. In August 2017, the House of Representatives alleged that three associate justices breached their oath of office and usurped the functions of the Legislature in their judgement on the code of conduct law, which allowed public officials to contest in the 2017 elections. Based on this allegation, the House initiated impeachment proceedings against the three justices. In response, the Supreme Court issued a stay on the proceedings. Tensions rose further when the House and the Supreme Court summoned the other to appear before each other, and both parties remained intransigent on how to peacefully resolve the matter, claiming that they were exercising their constitutional prerogative.

The stalemate was only resolved through mediation support from UNMIL's good offices, in collaboration with the African Union, ECOWAS, the Inter-religious Council, the National Traditional Council of Liberia and the National Civil Society Council of Liberia. These tensions between the two branches of Government could have had far-reaching implications for Liberia's peace and security.

Looking at the bigger picture through the lens of political affairs, are there some achievements by the Mission that you have found significant?

I am most proud of the security transition, even though my work is focused on political affairs. When I got here in April 2016, the Mission was still effectively managing Liberian corrections officers and police officers as part of its mandate. By June 2016, we had slowly withdrawn our active engagement in everyday security issues. You would have expected violence to increase in the vacuum that many Liberians suspected would emerge as UNMIL withdrew. But none of that has happened. There have been no major incidents, which is hugely important.

The SRSg's regular face-to-face meetings with the President are also very useful. I have seen missions where the head of mission has very limited access to the executive and the government. At UNMIL, we have a friendly and effective working relationship with the Government, political parties, businesses, and ordinary citizens, the international community and civil society that has propelled a lot of what we have done here.

How confident are you in the future of Liberia?

I am confident in the people of Liberia; I am confident in the regional support structures; and of course I am confident in the UN system's capacity to provide support.

The problem goes back to how we have defined governance, politics and elections, as to whether the people in power would be able to move the nation forward. The fundamental issue is the need to enable a structured and capable Government, and forge national unity and a deep sense of 'Liberian-ness'. To achieve the necessary sense of Liberian-ness, the country may need a ministry of national orientation and 'propaganda' to send out civic messages on patriotism, on being a Liberian first, above anything else.

Liberia has been around long enough and there have been enough generations between the arrival of the first emancipated slaves at Providence Island in 1822 and intermarriage and interactions with those who were already here to create an inclusive environment and Government. Perhaps what Liberia needs is a conscious effort to change the course of the country and forge an inclusive culture that incorporates everyone from all of the different communities here. There has certainly been enough time; there simply has not been enough conscious effort to change the fundamental dynamics.

So what recommendation do you have for the country?

Liberia must make a serious attempt at nation building in all its forms, driven by Liberians and assisted by the international community, to build the country in all aspects, including the civic and social consciousness of the people. I am not talking about building more schools, because you can build as many schools as you want, and people will still want to take their education and leave. Liberians must decide for themselves that this is their country and their nation, and that they must do something about it because they have nowhere else to go. Liberians must fully agree that this is their country and to take pride in it.

In short, Liberia needs to improve its nation building process. The UN system should remain in support with capacity building activities, as required.

UNMIL and the National Elections Commission



Official certification ceremony of the winners of the presidential and representative elections at the National Elections Commission (NEC) in Monrovia.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 4 Jan 18

The National Elections Commission (NEC), the independent body established to administer and enforce all plans, guidelines, policies and laws relative to the conduct of elections, faced a few problems during the electoral period in late 2017.

UNMIL's Political Affairs Section analysed the possible gaps in the work of NEC and made recommendations to Mission leadership on what areas to support. These included encouraging the NEC to submit an early request to UNMIL for logistical support, obtain additional data management expertise, seek donor support, and hold regular meetings with the NEC Chair and Commissioners to boost their morale.

One of the parties filed a legal challenge over the integrity of the final registration roll after the first round of the elections on 10 October. In its 8 December ruling, the Supreme Court called upon the NEC to "clean-up" the roll prior to holding the run-off. Following the Supreme Court's ruling, the Political Affairs Section facilitated multiple meetings between Mission leadership and the NEC Chairman to ensure that the problems encountered during the first round would be addressed prior to the run-off. Political affairs officers also attended several NEC-convened Inter-Party Consultative Committee meetings to assuage the concerns of the parties, and to offer support and a platform for exchange of views, and to obtain information which Mission leadership would require to inform its various interventions.

The logistical and political support offered by UNMIL leadership, facilitated by its Political Affairs officers, helped to override possible challenges within the NEC and ensure that both the political parties and the public maintained trust in the NEC and accepted the final outcome of the elections.

Is there anything else that you would like to add about the United Nations?

One lesson learned from Liberia for future peacekeeping missions could be the need to see legitimate and pressing problems in their larger political, economic and social contexts. Too often we attempt to solve problems along only one axis: pass this law, empower that actor, provide this capacity. Ultimately, in order to resolve the kinds of serious problems confronting post-conflict societies like Liberia, we need to see them as embedded in larger, more complex contexts that defy simple solutions and require multi-faceted and sustained engagement. We need capable hands that understand the context and do not attempt to impose a one-size-fits-all solution, or reduce progress to a single event like an election.

This does not mean that Political Affairs cannot engage with a particular problem with a set deadline, or that incisive action is not needed along any of the axes I mentioned. Rather, the point is that individual interventions are needed to ensure that the inevitable rocks along the road to peace do not become unmovable objects. To do so, missions need to have political officers who understand the intricacies of local contexts and the sensitivities of stakeholders and decision makers, and who can facilitate meetings and identify the fulcrum of an issue to allow the country to move those inevitable obstacles out of the way.

Finally, we must remember, conflicts are the result of a long-term breakdown in national systems. If we want sustainable peace and resilient communities, we must also be willing to make a sustainable commitment that is not limited by any artificial deadline. Fortunately, when UNMIL leaves, the UN Country Team remains to continue to provide support to Liberia.



Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 3 Jan 12

Rule of law in multi-dimensional peacekeeping – lessons for reform

Melanne A. Civic, Principal Rule of Law Officer

The Principal Rule of Law Officer manages the justice, corrections and security sector reform components of the Mission, coordinates across UN police and human rights sectors, and collaborates with other Mission components, and with the UN Country Team and the international community with respect to rule of law in support of the Liberian Government. Melanne Civic is a former Senior Rule of Law Advisor with the United States Department of State, first with the Secretary of State's Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization, and then with the Bureau of Conflict and Stabilization Operations. She gave this interview in October 2017.

What is your background and experience, and how does it bear on the work you've done at UNMIL?

I came to UNMIL with nearly 20 years of experience with the US State Department, following several years with international civil society and nongovernmental organizations. For more than a decade, I coordinated closely with the UN and the international donor community on stability operations, specifically in rule of law and security sector reform related to conflict prevention and civilian-military cooperation. My rule of law and security experience was built on a foundation of diplomacy, international human rights and humanitarian law and policy, as well as expertise in international and transboundary environmental diplomacy (e.g., multi-country water sharing), and natural resources and conflict prevention. I also was a leader in developing civilian and uniformed surge crisis response capabilities in international stability operations and conflict prevention.

I arrived at UNMIL in 2015 as the Mission was taking critical steps to integrate its justice and security activities. In 2012, UNMIL had started the process of reconfiguring its approach to rule of law to achieve greater coherence of support to the Liberian Government. As Principal Rule of Law Officer, I was mandated to coordinate across the justice-security continuum, bringing strategic and operational experience, technical expertise, and a commitment to advance coordination and collaboration.

I undertook the final stage of integration across the justice-security continuum by restructuring the justice, corrections and security sector reform components of the Mission under a single service, the Rule of Law and Security Institutions Support Service. The vision of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was to achieve not only coordination across the justice and security sectors, but also cross-cutting rule of law support capacity, such that justice, corrections and security sector reform technical experts and advisors worked cooperatively. This approach had been particularly needed to achieve greater efficiencies with Mission downsizing and impending closure. This experiment in integrated support to the Liberian justice, corrections and security institutions lasted nine months, and demonstrated its value in providing a mutually-supportive model which also encouraged coordination among the Liberian ministries.

What challenges did you face when seeking to coordinate and ultimately integrate?

When I arrived, I found considerable inertia to making these changes, particularly from within the Mission. Coordination in the abstract is widely extolled. Yet individuals and organizations tend to resist or reject actually being coordinated. Integration has been seen as relinquishing a measure of control, autonomy, authority...and glory. No longer would a specific manager or component head be said to be the singular force behind a given achievement or outcome which was accomplished through teamwork. My task was not only to break down sectoral and subject matter barriers, but also to be mindful of egos and the territorial barriers to coordination and collaboration across the justice-security continuum. It was a learning process in various UN missions, including at UNMIL which necessitated me taking distinct nuanced approaches.

Knowing this, I emphasized complementarity – advancing opportunities for cooperation across rule of law within UNMIL, with the UNCT, and with international partners. With the international donor community, I actively strengthened information exchange in strategic planning, and met with bilateral and multilateral partners to identify specific areas for cooperation through our complementary assets.

What did you hope to achieve and what lessons have you concluded are the distinct comparative advantages of UN peacekeeping?

I sought not only greater efficiencies, but also to capitalize on comparative advantages. Drawing from my previous experience in the donor community, and these three years at UNMIL, I am of the view that the most consequential comparative advantage of UN peacekeeping missions is not just good offices in the context of the politically neutral arbiter, but the UN's convening authority given its political neutrality and gravitas. This role as the neutral convener is essential because missions can facilitate enhanced information sharing and coordination among host nation leadership and its citizenry, and among and between international partners, enabling efficiency and synergies.

I am of the view that the most consequential comparative advantage of UN peacekeeping missions is not just good offices in the context of the politically neutral arbiter, but the UN's convening authority given its political neutrality and gravitas.

I also discerned that the UN enjoys a comparative advantage when working directly with and strengthening civil society, even more than donor countries have, whose focus is predominantly on government-to-government relationships. This was apparent, for example, with respect to supporting the Government in addressing the challenge of prolonged pre-trial detention, which is identified as a driver of conflict. I emphasized support to public defenders, in particular through international civil society organizations best placed to strengthen local civil society and to catalyse public pressure to strengthen public defence. I briefed donor partners who were focusing their programmatic support on the prosecutors and law enforcement elements of the criminal justice chain.

Is it fair to say that rule of law both affects all other peacekeeping and peace building activities, and similarly is affected by such activities?

Yes and no. Rule of law is one lens for peacekeeping. With good argument, human rights could say this as well, as could political affairs, good governance, and security sector reform. If it can be argued that any one sector has the most far reaching, cross-cutting impact, it is human rights support. Without the integration of human rights in rule of law, for example, the result could be despotism – rule *by* law, as justice and security sectors would advance the power of those governing without protecting the rights and needs of the people.



Prison inmates attend a meeting with UNMIL personnel at the Kakata Central Prison, Margibi County.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 14 June 12

The components of multi-dimensional peacekeeping missions operate best as an interconnected whole, visualized as a Venn diagram of interrelationships, without the necessity of determining pre-eminence for any one sector, yet with a critical cross-cutting role for human rights.

Why is rule of law important in peacekeeping and in Liberia?

Rule of law is a foundation for nonviolent dispute resolution, and a mechanism to improve transparency, accountability, and justice through the equal and universal application and enforcement of the law. As such, rule of law promotes sustainable peace and stability.

With the establishment of the modern Liberian state, the country has enjoyed a governance and legal structure that provides democratic justice and institutions, as well as a vast body of legislation that forms the backbone for the rule of law. Yet challenges of enforcement of the laws, justice under the law, equal application of the law, and transparency remain, as do divisions between indigenous peoples and those of African-American descent. Persistent entrenched corruption is the preeminent threat to stability, safety and security in Liberia.

What would you say are some of the Mission’s most notable achievements in the 14 years it has operated in Liberia?

From my perspective in rule of law, UNMIL’s most notable achievement is the building of trust among the public, and between the people of Liberia and the security institutions, and in particular improvements in trust in the police and the de-politicization of security institutions. With the total breakdown of law and order, well more than a decade of civil war, and the politicization of security institutions, trust had been fundamentally destroyed. UNMIL became not only a provider of security, but a symbol of safety and stability for the people of Liberia and the foundation for demanding it of Liberian institutions. Further, UNMIL good offices advocated for transition back to good governance.

Are there other incremental or “silent” improvements in rule of law that might not have made headlines but which have made an impact for sustainable peace in Liberia?

UNMIL’s most notable achievement is the building of trust among the public, and between the people of Liberia and the security institutions, and in particular improvements in trust in the police and de-politicization of security institutions.

Among the “silent achievements” I would include the enhanced representation and role of women in Liberian security institutions, including in the corrections sector, the armed forces, the police and others. This is a Liberian achievement, largely driven by women breaking through the norms of a patriarchal society, which was advanced through UNMIL’s advocacy, facilitation and financial programmatic support.

Liberia has played an auspicious role in advancing gender mainstreaming, having elected the first woman president in Africa. Women now participate professionally across Liberia’s security institutions, and, also, with UNMIL support, gender offices have been established within all security institutions.

When I speak with individuals and groups of women across Liberia’s security institutions, I see great pride and courage as they have entered predominantly male institutions and made an impact on policy and operations.

Another “silent achievement” has been advances specifically in corrections, which have been significant with support by uniformed corrections officers who were contributed by Member States, and civilian UN corrections advisors. In particular, advances in professionalizing prison management personnel, and building capacity in prison intelligence and investigatory skills enable prison officers to interpret early warning signs and to respond to security threats without escalating violence. The training of female corrections officers alongside male counterparts has significantly advanced gender mainstreaming.

UNMIL provided multi-faceted support to gender mainstreaming in Liberia’s security institutions by facilitating the establishment of gender units training for gender coordinators, and providing a platform for discussion on challenges faced by women in this predominantly male sector.

Also highly impactful was UNMIL’s support to improving transparency and accountability of the criminal justice system by introducing data management capacity for the prosecutorial, judicial, and corrections institutions—that is the ability to systematically track each stage of a criminal case, from arrest to detention, indictment, trial and sentencing. As recently as 2016, prison inmate records were kept on chalk boards, allowing pre-trial detainees to slip through the cracks. Poor data management highlighted weaknesses in the system, including excessive delays in

processing cases. I strengthened the adversarial system of justice under the common law model, engaging donors and international civil society organizations through coordinated capacity building and mentoring support.

On the issue of corruption, how have you dealt with it here in your work and what’s your view about the way forward?

I would put corruption as the most significant and impactful area of unfinished business as UNMIL looks towards its drawdown and closure. Resolving entrenched corruption will need to be tackled to ensure the sustainability of reforms. Whether UNMIL was best placed to address corruption or not is another question entirely. Let me cite policy analyst Sarah Chayes. She identifies corruption as basically a virus that will spread and undermine all types of efforts for sustainable peace, and I would be in that school of thought as well.

UNMIL and the international community supported the establishment of the Liberian Anti-Corruption Commission, yet it has been considered to have no “teeth,” with a severely limited role in investigation and prosecution of high profile cases. It has operated under a cloud of corruption from within, as well.

The international donor community has greater leverage to address corruption than the UN, in the sense that the levers of foreign aid and

International donors have the capacity to hold recipients of foreign aid accountable, and potentially to cut the purse-strings. However, this is not often done by the donors, for a myriad of strategic, diplomatic, and national security reasons.

grants create opportunities for enforceable agreements through which corruption can be concretely addressed. I say enforceable because while the UN does make efforts to establish compacts, frameworks for mutual agreement and mutual responsibilities with the weight of Member State backing, the UN does not have enforcement authority, and relies on political persuasion and good offices interventions. International donors have the capacity to hold recipients of foreign aid accountable, and potentially to cut the purse-strings. However, this is not often done

by the donors, for a myriad of strategic, diplomatic, and national security reasons.

Many countries that struggle with stability and are re-emerging from conflict do not have freedom of speech or strong civil society organizations. Yet Liberia does--in particular a bold and vocal press--and this is very much in its favour. Unfortunately, domestic civil society in Liberia tends not to work cooperatively, and this undermines its ability to coalesce support for positive change. The press and civil society in Liberia exert only a limited “watchdog” function. These institutions have genuine potential to hold public officials accountable, and catalyse and organize change movements. I would suggest instituting enhanced mentoring relationships and cooperative engagements between international and Liberian domestic civil society.

What would you say are the main challenges this Mission has faced, and perhaps continues to face as it comes to a close?

The most consequential challenge I have observed is identifying and cultivating national will. It is a well-established tenet for foreign aid and support that national ownership – the active interest and role of national stakeholders in setting priorities in making decisions, and executing programmes supported by foreign aid – is critical to achieve culturally appropriate change and sustainability. In other words, the host country must determine its priorities, have the will to change and to build capacity and to drive the change. I’ve seen examples in other countries where national will is not cultivated, where the high degree of inefficiencies or diffuse national will frustrates the timelines for foreign aid and programme implementation. In those cases, the donor might impose external will, which may not be contextually or culturally appropriate. In extreme instances, a battle of wills may ensue such changes that, most likely, will not be embraced or sustained by the host country. Yet, what should the UN and donor community do where there is such limited political will to cultivate, where complacency appears to prevail, and where elites predominantly prioritize personal gain at the expense of the public good, national stabilization, and development?

The most consequential challenge I have observed is identifying and cultivating national will.

When I came to Liberia, I carried with me the lesson that national ownership is critical for the sustainability of reforms. Yet I found an exceptionally low level of political will, so I provided to UN Headquarters options for enforceable compacts. I proposed that strong Member State support should be sought to generate incentives and cultivate national ownership by holding the Government accountable to its commitments with respect to foreign assistance.

A Liberian judge sits in front of the Liberian flag at the Court of Justice in Careysburg, Montserrado County.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 12 May 11



What lessons would you recommend for the multi-dimensional peacekeeping model? Is there anything that UNMIL could have done differently to achieve greater impact?

Based on my experience in this peacekeeping Mission, from my previous donor perspective, and my experience coordinating with other UN peacekeeping missions when I was with the US Government, I would propose that technical and capacity-building support to rule of law--and to other sectors as appropriate-- need not and should not be placed within the peacekeeping mission itself.

I propose instead taking a modified approach to multidimensionality, of complementarity with UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes and donor development organizations from the get-go as soon as the security environment permits. I propose further that clearer distinctions be drawn between peacekeeping versus transitional, medium and longer-term development support. When I came to UNMIL and saw the full array of rule of law outputs planned for the fiscal year, it read to me largely like a transitional and medium-term development programme. It is clear that development need not and should not be performed by peacekeepers.

A peacekeeping mission should focus on good offices, advocacy, and its convening authority, where it would have the greatest comparative advantages. The mission essentially would be the hub, as the source for good offices and political leadership, with a small cadre of sectoral experts coordinating across the UN Country Team and the international community. The technical sector expertise and capacity-building programmes would be provided by the UN Country Team and bilateral and multilateral partners and development organizations, rather than directly

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by the mission. The multidimensional approach thereby would manifest as a coordination capacity, convening the UNCT and donor community, while retaining a relatively small cadre of sectoral policy experts who are familiar with technical issues and who facilitate consensus and coordination.

What recommendations would you have for Liberians themselves moving forward?

Liberia's peaceful transition of power with the 2017 elections, despite political and procedural disputes, has demonstrated its resilience, stability, and rule of law culture. Even where alleged voting irregularities and disputes arose during the electoral process, they were resolved through the courts, and with protests and petitions, peacefully, not resorting to violence. The Supreme Court decision was respected and acted upon without a backlash of violence erupting. These are highly significant achievements and bode well for the future of Liberia.

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Additionally, I have seen signs of hope at the mid-level of the Liberian Government: I see a new generation of civil servants infused with ideals of professional integrity. But the caution is, will some be corrupted before they become the future leaders? Is the status quo stronger than the forces of change? Support from the international community, for human rights monitoring organizations and sustained anti-corruption programmes will be pivotal.

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So what recommendations would you give to the internationals who are going to continue work here helping Liberia move to the future?

First, I recommend greater concerted efforts at preventing corruption, which the international community is well-placed to do. Second, I recommend focusing on civil society, which resides with international development.

Priorities moving forward include providing capacity-building support for budgeting, resource and financial allocations, within strong anti-corruption programmes as donors are pursuing. Beyond rule of law and human rights, I recommend continued support by the international community in assisting Liberia to responsibly develop its natural resources base, in particular agriculture and animal husbandry, and associated market distribution networks and infrastructure development. Liberia has vast arable land, yet the prevailing culture does not favour local products or local agriculture.

On the Secretary General's goal of 50-50 gender parity among UN staff, do you have any observations about UNMIL's record and lessons for other missions?

Considerable thought at UN Headquarters has gone into the question of achieving 50-50 gender parity, and there is a growing recognition that this will require not only enhanced recruitment efforts, but also a vision for the retention of women at mid-level and senior leadership.

At UNMIL, under the leadership of an SRSG who highly valued the contributions of women, I observed a marked reduction of women in Mission leadership. When I started, half of the director positions were filled by women, as were five of 13 or 38.5 per cent of senior leadership posts overall. During fiscal year 2017-18, only one out of six director posts was held by a woman, and only one member of the senior leadership was female, a reduction to approximately 9 per cent. It would be informative for UN Headquarters to collect data on the retention of women in management and leadership positions, particularly through changing events such as structural reorganizations and downsizing.

The inherently limited term of a peacekeeping mission creates specific challenges for recruitment and retention of UN women and men. The process paradoxically tends to engender an extreme individualism on the one hand, and manipulation of the hiring system by some in management on the other hand. Staff struggle to keep their positions while facing multiple reorganizations and post cuts in downsizing, some which appear anecdotally to disproportionately impact women. I have seen this phenomenon undermine not only the assets of diversity, but also teamwork, morale, and ultimately productivity, outputs and impact.

A greater emphasis on secondments and government-provided personnel, so that staff have an assured job to return to following mission work, would help address some of the negative impacts of the tenuous nature of a peacekeeping career. It would also combat complacency and the manipulation of existing rules and policy.

Expanding the human rights space, building protection resilience

Marcel Akpovo, Chief of Human Rights Protection Service and Representative of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Liberia

Mr. Akpovo is a human rights lawyer and media expert from Benin, having worked for Amnesty International and the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur, Sudan and for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in Mauritania.

Please talk about how your background and experience enabled your work here in human rights.

As a human rights lawyer and a media expert, I had extensive experience working in conflict and post-conflict situations prior to this assignment. For a decade, I was a researcher on armed conflict for Amnesty International, covering much of Africa. I have worked for the UN in very delicate/ difficult situations, in Darfur, for example. Prior to my assignment here, as the Country Representative of the OHCHR in Mauritania, I supported the country's transition from a slavery-dominated context towards human rights-based community engagement. I have worked extensively with national civil society organizations on human rights and in faith-based organizations as well, which has been inspiring and helpful for the responsibilities I have had here in UNMIL.

What were your initial impressions of the challenges you were to face?

I was shocked by the weakness of the national protection system. I was disturbed by the fragile institutional framework to promote and protect human rights. I was also worried by the sense of impunity for the serious human rights abuses committed during the conflict, and the lack of criminal accountability. However, beyond the shock, I was also impressed by how much progress was made since the last time I had been here as a journalist covering the conflict. So I could feel the positive impact of the UNMIL presence and also measure the work the UN had done in support of the national authorities. I was particularly impressed by the fragile, slow, but steady progress achieved in building a new rule of law architecture.

So my challenge was how I manage this bit of hope and success against the huge gaps and human rights concerns.

Which have been your primary areas of focus during these five years?

I built on the work done by my predecessors. Their legacy provided a snapshot of the human rights situation in the country. For example I continued their work on human rights in the concessions, i.e. the exploitation of natural resources, both mineral and agricultural. I was able to establish an important new area of engagement focused on business and human rights.

Since my arrival, we made tremendous progress. One example is our support to the Independent National Commission for Human Rights (INCHR), helping to transform it from an inactive body to a vibrant commission, with a purpose, an action plan, a vision to strengthen its independence and the capacity to provide an oversight role. The last milestone was the accreditation of the Commission to the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions with an A status. This is a major achievement for an institution that, until three years ago, was suffering a serious deficit of professionalism, credibility and vision.

What kind of work did this involve?

We were mentoring the commissioners and co-locating technical staff to help them develop their capacity in project management and oversight, and to develop a human rights agenda. We also had capacity enhancement projects, on how to monitor, report and do assessments. Through our technical cooperation, we accompanied the Commission as it became more independent and effective at providing support to the Government, especially in fulfilling its national and international human rights obligations.

Our work was based on mutual trust. We were a support entity and not a substitute. But more remains to be done. Only by sustaining this progress will they be able to fulfill their obligations and their role in the country. And still that fragility and vulnerability remain. We have tried to get them to understand that while they have made tangible progress, they have more to do to realize a national protection system.

Can you talk about the achievements you and your team accomplished?

The good things that happened in this country were mostly related to human rights, despite the magnitude of the challenges. We helped establish the independent Commission provided for by the Accra Agreement. We wrote the act and developed guidance documents. We supported the truth and reconciliation process, helped develop its legislation, provided technical assistance to the Commission, and supported its recommendations, including those related to redress, impunity and accountability for crimes committed during the conflict. We also helped the country re-engage with the international human rights protection system, and to initiate national human right processes including the four-year action plan.

I am also proud of the role we played in supporting the interventions during the Ebola crisis. When everyone was gone, when going out became so risky, when talking to your neighbour could be fatal and lead to death, the Human Rights Section remained in the country, as part of the Mission, not only to be a key actor in the humanitarian intervention, but also to send a message of the centrality of human rights in such an emergency and humanitarian situation. We took risks to continue monitoring and reporting on human rights and protection challenges in the

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middle of the crisis to ensure that vulnerable people already facing the atrocity of the epidemic were not further victims of human rights abuses including discrimination, police and army brutality, or unequal access to protection, during the humanitarian intervention. We ensured that accountability to the affected populations remained the priority.

We monitored the plight of Ebola survivors and advocated on behalf of the communities who were quarantined and whose rights were restricted during the state of emergency. Through our monitoring, their voices were heard and their conditions reflected in intervention priorities.

Silhouette of a detained soldier in Liberia.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 25 Jan 13



Independent National Human Rights Commission gets recognition



Female students marching on the streets of Monrovia to commemorate International Human Rights Day.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 10 Dec 12

In 2005, in line with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which ended the Liberian civil war, the Independent National Human Rights Commission (INCHR) was established by law as a national institution to promote and protect human rights.

The INCHR was created to ensure the realization of human rights and enhance peace and national reconciliation through the implementation of the recommendations by the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. UNMIL's engagement with the INCHR fell within the Mission's mandates to support the Government of Liberia by strengthening its institutional framework for protection, promotion and monitoring of human rights in Liberia.

However, prior to UNMIL's engagement, the INHCR was largely inactive and suffered a serious deficit of professionalism and credibility, as it was engulfed in malpractice, with redundant roles and a lack of commitment and vision. The Human Rights and Protection Section of UNMIL has since helped it transform into a vibrant commission, with a purpose, an action plan, a vision of greater independence and the capacity to provide the much needed oversight role.

The UNMIL Human Rights section has also fostered INCHR's relationship with the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OHCHR) for provision of technical support; ensured the Liberian Commission's compliance with international human

rights principles; trained monitors in human rights advocacy and on the implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan; and advocated with the national authorities to increase budgetary support. UNMIL has continued monitoring and reporting, and supporting the National Commission, targeting sexual and gender-based violence and within that, rape, domestic violence and female genital mutilation. This has resulted in increased public awareness and enhanced collaboration between the INCHR and civil society on pressing issues in Liberia. The Government has increased resources and political support to the Commission.

In 2017, the INCHR received an "A" Status accreditation with the Global Alliance for National Human Rights Institutions. With this status, the Commission has equal voice, representation and participation with regional and international bodies and human rights mechanisms, which will benefit its promotion and protection of the rights of all persons in Liberia.

Just for the record, a person infected with Ebola and recovers is no longer contagious. But some were stigmatized after they recovered.

Exactly. People still saw a survivor as a sick person, representing potential risk to the community and that's the stigma. People lost their jobs and houses; families were separated; people were ostracized from their communities. During our monitoring, we noticed that access to markets in some villages became so difficult for Ebola survivors, that they were effectively banned from entering. They were not allowed to sell their goods in markets in order to pay their children's school fees because they were associated with Ebola, and the stigmatization continues. They cannot have a normal social life or education. Our office targeted the affected communities, shared information and launched campaigns with support from other international and civil society organizations. We also involved specific government institutions, stressing that these people were human beings, not carriers of Ebola, but victims and survivors who posed no danger to the community, and their rights needed to be respected. Community resilience made the difference during that crisis, but it was supported by our office, and I am proud about that.

How was your team structured and on what areas did it focus?

It was a small team compared to other UN missions. We conducted monitoring and reporting, capacity building and advocacy. We had specific thematic areas of intervention including sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), a major challenges in this country. One cell was dealing with harmful traditional practices that contradict fundamental rights, e.g. ritualistic killings, female genital mutilation, and all those practices that do not conform to the country's national and international human rights obligations.

We had a team working on state engagement with international human rights protection mechanisms, which helped them to engage with human rights mechanisms including the Treaty Body, Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and Special Procedures in Geneva, helping them to build their own capacity. We had a cell that dealt with civil society organizations, among the most reliable entities of the national protection system,

We also supported the adoption of the “decent work bill,” the product of accumulated interventions by us and partners to make sure that people employed in the private sector had a policy and legal framework which recognizes and protects their fundamental rights.

and we supported the establishment of a national human rights-civil society platform. We also had a team involved in mainstreaming human rights in government plans and UN Country Team engagements. We set up a cell which provides support to agencies, funds and programmes, rolling out specific policies such

as protection of civilians, the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy and the Human Rights Up Front Initiative, an initiative of the UN Secretary-General to ensure the UN system takes action to prevent or respond to large-scale human rights violations.

We supported the country in the fulfillment of rights for refugees. We established expertise on business and human rights, focusing of corporations' social and human rights responsibilities, protection of workers' rights, and community rights in context of concessions and exploitation of natural resources. We also supported the adoption of the “decent work bill,” the product of accumulated interventions by us and partners to make sure that people employed in the private sector had a policy and legal framework which recognizes and protects their fundamental rights.

After 14 years, how successful has the Mission's human rights work been?

We have been successful. We have made strategic gains that require strengthening. We have created a national human right protection system, even though it remains weak. We have been part of a broad process that helped restore the state legitimacy, within a rights- based democratic context, and a rule of law culture.

We were able to unlock some very difficult attitudes facing people with different sexual orientation, the LGBT community who remain largely ostracized and discriminated against by law, by culture and by societal beliefs. We were able to raise the fundamental issue of respect to all and the right to be different. We were able to frame the protection of the LGBT community as an issue of rights. While we succeeded in constituting a forum within the police to be sensitive to the protection needs and respect of LGBT Liberians, hostile attitudes persist. Peoples' perceptions and the overall attitude of Liberians, within and outside the Government, towards that particular minority group is still a concern.

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Could you explain the unique dual reporting lines for UN human rights officials in the field—to the Mission and to the High Commissioner’s office in Geneva?

This dual reporting has been a rich experience. At the mission level, most of the time, the political contingency hijacks the human rights brief, and you can sometimes, if not often, step on the toes of the political agenda of the mission just in pursuing independent human rights reporting. It can prevent you from achieving anything. Fortunately, that was not the case with UNMIL.

The dual reporting demands that I report on substantive issues to OHCHR in Geneva, and to New York (UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations) on both substantive and administrative issues. This gives me leverage most Mission colleagues do not have. People would tell me I have one foot in and one foot out. That was OK as long as we were not contradicting each other, and working in the same direction. I see that as an enabling arrangement.

All human rights components in peace operations are governed by a policy signed between the OHCHR and the UN departments of peacekeeping, field support and political affairs—all in New York, which establishes clear guidance on how human rights work should be conducted. I also led the development and implementation of the protection of civilians’ strategy. I represent OHCHR at the UN Country Team. Other colleagues have faced different challenges, and I have also experienced difficult situations when I was torn between two strong forces pulling in many directions. In other missions, public reporting can be seen as counterproductive to the political agenda of the mission.

Here I have served under two different Heads of Mission. SRSG Karen Landgren believed in the human rights agenda and supported my public reporting. The second, SRSG Farid Zarif, also believes in human rights and uses it to support his good offices function. He knows that both are antidotes that mutually reinforce each other. Here we have used good offices to strengthen human rights and vice versa. The effectiveness of dual reporting mostly depends on personalities and the human rights culture of mission leadership.

If human rights informs the political agenda and the political agenda enables human rights work, what are some of the mission’s actions that opened the door to human rights work here?

Whenever there was a situation potentially threatening peace and stability, the office of the SRSG was immediately called to help address it through his good offices function. As part of our protection of civilians’ mandate, we developed an implementation strategy based on prevention, echoing one of the key recommendations of the High Level Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) report, which indicates how good offices and the primacy of politics can prevent a crisis from becoming a fully blown conflict.

There had been a lot of arbitrary arrests and detention cases that led to a kind of stalemate between human rights defenders, civil society organizations and the Liberian Government. We use the SRSG’s good offices to demonstrate that it is in the interest of the Government to respect human rights, to protect human rights defenders rather than suffocating them. It has been very effective and helped us prevent conflicts and protect human rights defenders.

Through the SRSG’s good offices, two social conflicts with potential human right consequences were successfully addressed. In February 2017, UNMIL’s intervention helped avert confrontation between security forces and members of the Patriotic Entrepreneurs of Liberia during protests over the high cost of consumer items. The SRSG helped maintain calm in March 2017 when the Armed Forces attempted to evict by force former members of the Anti-Terrorist Unit and their families from the 72nd Barracks.

Another example was the Government initiative to clean up Monrovia which led to a wave of brutal eviction operations targeting people said to be illegally using public domains. The operation caused massive destruction of property. Schools were affected as well, and the issue was about to create a serious security challenge and then a crisis.

Using good offices, we advocated for the rights of the people under eviction and helped the Government to agree to and develop an exit strategy. This preventive approach to crises using a human rights engagement has been useful and effective in this Mission. The use of good offices to address human rights and protection of civilians’ challenges should be shared with other missions as best practices, adapted to each reality as much as possible.

There are plans for a stand-alone human rights office in Monrovia after UNMIL leaves. What has been your focus at the end of the mission?

Our work has been based on the mandate of the Security Council: first, to ensure protection of civilians and second, to support the national human rights institutions in monitoring and reporting with specific attention to women and children. At the end of the Mission that mandate implementation should continue.

From a strategic point of view, that meant to continue to support the mainstreaming of human rights and building national protections niches, mechanisms and capacities to ensure national ownership and continuity in protection of civilians’ intervention. We have continued monitoring and reporting, and supporting the Independent National Commission on Human Rights, targeting sexual and gender-based violence and within that, rape, domestic violence and female genital mutilation.

We also helped formulate policies and recommendations for a framework that protects women’s rights and those of the victims of certain practices in the country. We just issued a joint OHCHR/UNMIL report on accountability for rape, a critical human rights issue affecting the country. If not addressed, the situation will continue deteriorating, and rape will become a factor for future crisis. Accountability for sexual and gender based violence will help reduce rape incidences and serve as a deterrent.

Even though Liberia’s laws are strong, their application remains flawed, because of the weakness of the judicial institutions, because of corruption and because of the slow processes and lack of resources for the adjudication of cases. So we have been supporting the national institutions to respond more effectively and accountably to SGBV cases. We have supported magistrates, judges, the police and civil society organizations--all part of the process of that accountability. Here, for every 200 cases, 10 are prosecuted. There are so many reasons why the others don’t proceed,



A young female rape victim taking a class at a safe house in Osiwa Village, a camp for displaced people in Monrovia.

Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 25 Mar 09

including the weakness of the investigative processes and of the capacity of people conducting investigations to collect information that can used in court. These are all issues challenging human rights practitioners and have been our core priorities at the Mission's end.

We also supported the domestic violence bill that would have criminalized SGBV. But that specific provision was removed when the bill arrived at the Legislature.

Another initiative has been to help build stronger civil society organizations to play a checks-and-balances role in terms of human rights, by providing technical and financial support.

And we have been implementing a major project review of the situation of lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender people with the aim of helping to develop more human rights protections. We have been building a foundation for the new UN human rights office, which will take up these core issues.

Can you talk about decentralization and the concept of bringing government services to the people at the local level as a human rights approach?

Decentralization in Liberia is a major governance requirement that cannot be achieved only through policies and law. It has to include a fundamental cultural revolution, a paradigm shift which is not just about policy, but a mindset change as well.

Decentralization in Liberia is a major governance requirement that cannot be achieved only through policies and law. It has to include a fundamental cultural revolution, a paradigm shift which is not just about policy, but a mindset change as well. I am very supportive of the service centres now in the counties,

offering basic services to Liberians living in remote areas. This must be supported to help people access specific socio-economic rights.

Civil society organizations are critical in that process, to oversee the centres' functioning. It makes no sense to have service centres in the communities only to add new layers of corruption or discrimination. Those groups can ensure that the decentralization moves are human rights-oriented.

I have spoken to these groups on their role, not only in supporting the process, but in providing oversight, observation, responsibility and analysis. When the decentralization law is passed, only civil society and pressure groups can help ensure effective implementation, for the benefit of the people. There remain a lot of niches of intervention, engagement and responsibility that need to be developed. How do civil society groups measure government compliance with human rights norms? The centralized system disfranchised the community of their fundamental rights. In the platform we created, there is a component on civil society support to decentralized governance. We supported them and sensitized them, to do robust monitoring and oversight of the decentralization processes so they remain people centered.

When the decentralization law is passed, only civil society and pressure groups can help ensure effective implementation, for the benefit of the people.

Regarding harmful traditional practices, referred to by some as a sort of systemic patriarchy that keeps certain groups marginalized. How do you see the role of human rights in addressing these practices?

We issued a public report on the subject, highlighting the conflict between human rights and some of these practices. It is right to expand the concept from practices to attitude. This is what we stressed. Those practices comprise among others, witchcraft, FGM,* ritualistic killings, all forms of beliefs that are contrary to Government's international human rights obligation.

The country is facing another challenge in its patriarchal culture. Women must be submissive; the man's word must be respected—these long-held beliefs prevent integration and equal access to services and national resources.

* As one of her last acts in office, President Sirleaf signed an Executive order on January 19 on domestic violence including a partial criminalization of FGM. The move fell short of fully criminalizing FGM as UNMIL had advocated, and it applied only to girls under 18. A new tougher bill has been drafted by a group of civil society organizations. It is expected to be open for public comment soon then submitted to the Legislature.

Despite the fact that Liberia has had a female President, there are still disparities and discrepancies between the male and female in political participation and access to resources due to the very conservative traditions, including education and cultural beliefs. Unless Liberia reconciles itself with human rights norms and its international obligations, it will not be able to address the harmful practices challenges it faces and draw benefits from its other rich traditions and cultural heritage.

We are not launching a "etat de siege" or an attack on traditions, as we believe that any sustainable development must be rooted in culture and traditions. But when those traditions contradict universal human rights values, they become counterproductive to development. We have told Liberians that we want to help them protect their culture but to fight practices which are in conflict with international norms. We still have a long way to go.

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We took a creative approach to looking into accountability for sexual violence in the country, asking how traditional communities see the whole issue of SGBV. Female genital mutilation, for example: how can you make people understand that ritualistic cutting is a crime! This remains a challenge and we have reached out to all 15 counties, targeting women and traditional leaders to have a conversation. It is important to pursue this. We do not need to impose it, but to be in a conversation with them so that they start realizing that some practices need to be changed.

People must understand that killing can never be a tradition and that trial by ordeal goes against every known criminal justice principle. A ritual killing is homicide, not a tradition. You do not beat someone because he or she is suspected of witchcraft: that may amount to torture or ill-treatment in international human rights law. It is essential that we need to simplify the language and help them understand that some traditions are good and need to be preserved and some others that are not good at all. Beyond laws and policies, I am afraid it will take generations to effect such change, but we have to start somewhere.

I know that we are trading in a very difficult market, but still we have to do it, because in the long-term it is not useful for this country. Liberia must come to terms with that.

Looking at the future, what is the prognosis for human rights in Liberia? Where are we today?

It can seem we are still nowhere given the persisting challenges and daunting tasks ahead. I happy and proud of our contribution, but realistically the remaining field is still immense. The national protection system is still weak. The national Human Rights Commission has made progress but remains a fragile institution whose capacity needs to be strengthened. That is why it is important for the OHCHR to be here. The civil society groups that are usually independent voices, with the role of checks and balances and oversight, are still scattered. They are not present in the counties. They're poorly resourced; they lack vision and they are weak in professional capacity.

Reconciliation is still a major challenge in this country. Human rights abuses and discrimination are some of the root causes of the conflict that have not been fully addressed yet.

Unless we address this, national protections will remain vulnerable and the protection of the people very problematic. Reconciliation is still a major challenge in this country. Human rights abuses and discrimination are some of the root causes of the conflict that have not been fully addressed yet. Accountability as a fundamental component of sustainable peace and reconciliation has not been achieved yet and that is worrying. Too many alleged criminals are enjoying total impunity, and unless this is addressed, no one will feel safe.

Not a single person has been prosecuted in Liberia for crimes committed during the conflict. Charles Taylor is serving a sentence in the United Kingdom, not for the crimes committed in Liberia, but during the conflict in Sierra Leone. There should be a strong message to the people that justice and accountability are key and that people who have committed serious crimes will not get away with it.

Human rights due diligence policy enacted



Detainees inside their cell at Central Prison in Monrovia.

Photo: Eric Kanalstein | UNMIL | 10 Jul 05

The Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), adopted in July 2011, requires all United Nations entities to be diligent in ensuring that support to non-UN security forces is provided in a manner that is in compliant with, and promotes respect for, international human rights and humanitarian laws. This requires UN entities providing support to: a) carry out a risk assessment evaluating the potential risks and benefits involved in the provision or withholding of support; b) engage transparently with the receiving entities about the UN's legal obligations and core principles governing the provision of support; and c) develop an effective implementation framework.

In accordance with UNMIL's various mandates, particularly UN Security Council resolution 2333, the Mission has been supporting the Liberian security agencies to protect civilians in the event of a deterioration of the security situation that could risk a strategic reversal of peace and stability. The Mission has advised and helped the security institutions including the Liberia National Police to develop leadership, internal management, and accountability mechanisms in compliance with the spirit of the policy.

From 2013 to 2017, including the Ebola period, UNMIL Human Rights undertook activities to disseminate the policy, targeting primarily the UN Country Team and embassies in Monrovia, to ensure a common approach to HRDDP. UNMIL conducted further trainings on human rights and the policy for Liberian security forces and civil society organizations.

UNMIL Human Rights developed the first integrated standard operating procedure on the implementation of HRDDP for the Mission and the UNCT. It also created an operational synergy between the protection of civilians and human rights mandates. This approach led to a common understanding and successful implementation of HRDDP and the protection of civilians in Liberia.

Not a single person has been prosecuted in Liberia for crimes committed during the conflict. Charles Taylor is serving a sentence in the United Kingdom, not for the crimes committed in Liberia, but during the conflict in Sierra Leone. There should be a strong message to the people that justice and accountability are key and that people who have committed serious crimes will not get away with it. Unfortunately, we have individuals who allegedly committed crimes during the conflict and who still hold powerful positions in the country, and that is terrifying.

Understanding the conflict between justice and peace and also the fragility of the political context, I still believe that the total absence of criminal accountability in the country is a collective failure.

Do you think that national reconciliation, accountability, some sort of retributive justice should be higher priorities for human rights to be strong in Liberia?

Absolutely. Liberian authorities have created an ambivalent rapport with the notions of restorative and retributive justice. One should not exclude the other. In the communities you find reconciliation formulas like the Palava Hut, a traditional mechanism for settling disputes. This can create a context for reconciliation especially with minor crimes. There is a memorial for those who died during the conflict, a solid sign of reconciliation and a message that restorative and retributive justice are not in conflict. However, criminal accountability has been totally silenced. This country needs a transitional justice agenda. A fair, sound, comprehensive agenda is critical for sustainable peace and reconciliation, and that agenda should include the effective establishment of judicial mechanisms to hold accountable people who have committed crimes. Unless we do that,

we cannot reconcile this country. Post-conflict histories across the world have taught the same story over and over again. When reconciliation is not rooted in justice, it remains weak forever. When people who have suffered abuses do not see any sign of accountability, when they don't see justice, peace may be unlikely and reconciliation fragile and elusive.

The future of this country lies in justice for victims and human rights protection for all.

So I am calling on international partners, on donors, on the UN to realistically, strategically and carefully think about how to bring transitional justice to the table. There are many crimes committed during the Liberia conflict that are not eligible for prescription in international law. We must

build a strong strategy for transitional justice to build a sustainable peace. This has to be the way forward for Liberia, in addition to the huge development agenda that lies ahead. The future of this country lies in justice for victims and human rights protection for all.

The Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, the UNCT and all Liberian friends will help achieve it.

Do you have confidence and hope for the future of this country?

I am a hopeful, positive person. Twenty-five years ago when I was leading human rights and faith initiatives, I traveled around Africa, working with youth and students. I told my peers in Kinshasa, in the middle of the conflict at the time of the Mobutu regime, to be prisoners of hope, let yourself gaoled by hope, be hopeful at any cost, but work for your hope. Hope that something great and good is going to happen and be part of it. I believe that Liberians will get out of this situation, if we support them as they decide to go deep within themselves and find their resilient capacity.

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What message would you give to Liberians?

Believe in yourselves. It is difficult to talk about a Liberian identity as this is a country with inequalities based on origins--the so-called natives and the American Liberians factor. There seems to be no sense of 'Liberianity' and that's why, perhaps, they should believe in togetherness, a shared destiny as one nation.

And what you say to the internationals who are continuing on?

To invest in Liberians, support their efforts. We haven't done enough of that. It is important that partners support and invest in Liberian projects and let them take the lead, with their own capacity to fail and to recover. Liberia is the oldest republic in Africa, yet one of the most fragile. At some point, we need to trust Liberians, especially the youth and women, and invest in them.

I regret that when there was a chance to shape the destiny of Liberia, as UNMIL, we failed to do so. Now that Liberia has a sense of its own sovereignty, it will be difficult to influence its policymaking, without being accused of interference. There was a time when the UNMIL budget was bigger than the Liberian budget. That's when without imposing, we could have helped them move towards sustainable peace and reconciliation, and we did not do it. We were not strong in pursuing the criminal accountability agenda for justice and reconciliation, when we had the political leverage, financial resources, the trust and the mindset of the people. We failed to use those comparative advantages to influence the justice choices.

I am glad for the 14 years of peace, but this peace is still fragile. We could have strengthened it further, made sure there was more robust justice and accountability. It would have been a different story, but all the same it was a successful Mission.

Liberia's future depends on consolidating the gains of peace

Yacoub El Hillo, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Liberia



Yacoub El Hillo, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General and UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative in Liberia, at a farm supported by UNMIL in Paynesville.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 25 Jan 18

When UNMIL began to deploy in 2003, Liberia had been brought to its knees by two civil wars. While the country has been recovering, thanks in part to UNMIL, it continues to face significant development challenges. Yacoub El Hillo, the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for Peace Consolidation, also serves as the UN Resident Coordinator and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Resident Representative. In those roles, he oversees the transition strategy from a peacekeeping mission to the post-UNMIL phase. DSRSG El-Hillo's career with the UN has spanned 28 years, most of those with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In an interview conducted in October 2017, he described plans to continue UN support to Liberia's development.

How has your experience contributed to your understanding of the situation in Liberia and enabled you to make a difference here?

This is my second time working in Liberia, initially I worked here during the war from 1996 to 1999.

I worked in my own country, Sudan, before moving to the Somalia crisis in 1991. Then Tanzania, Liberia and Geneva. While serving in Geneva as UNHCR Chief of Staff, I was deployed to southern Afghanistan - just after the September 11 attacks – in an emergency capacity to open new UNHCR offices across the country. I have also worked at UN Headquarters in New York, in Iraq and in the Gulf countries. Soon after arriving in Geneva as UNHCR Director for the Middle East and North Africa, the so-called Arab Spring erupted: that was three years of madness. Then from 2013 to 2016, I was the UN Resident/Humanitarian Coordinator in Syria. That diversity of exposure and learning opportunities prepared me for this role.

When I was here before, I saw this country at a terrible moment. I have many friends who are Liberians, and many who left and have returned. It was fantastic to come back to a Liberia that is not at war. I believe the UN, and UNMIL in particular, has a lot to be proud of, there is a lot of proof that the UN can make a difference.

What were your first impressions when you returned after 20 years?

Liberia is in recovery mode. I don't think we can say Liberia has left the war behind just because there has been no war for 14 years. The process is ongoing. My background helped prepare me to deal with the humanitarian challenges here, but at the same time the experiences I had at UN headquarters, in Syria and elsewhere, and certainly the experience I gained since coming back to Liberia, have taught me that the bottom line for progress is getting development right.

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It was fantastic to come back to a Liberia that is not at war. I believe the UN, and UNMIL in particular, has a lot to be proud of, and a lot of proof that the UN can make a difference.

Liberia has shown the way. President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was one of the three eminent personalities who oversaw the production of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That global vision needs to be translated into reality in Liberia. That hasn't happened yet, but helping Liberia achieve those goals energizes me and gives me the incentive to

build on what has been happening here in the last 14 years. This is one of the biggest challenges we are gearing up to face.

When UNMIL leaves, how do we continue providing credible support to Liberia in the absence of a peacekeeping mission that has had so much muscle and might? How can we stay the course as the UN and provide the proper push so that Liberia can remain a success story, not just in peacekeeping terms but also in peacebuilding terms? I hope, with our national, regional and international development partners, we'll be able to extend credible support to Liberia, its Government and people.

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Speaking of peacebuilding, you have multiple roles in this Mission, chief among them peace consolidation. What is peace consolidation and what you are working on in this area?

As a concept, peace consolidation has evolved. When you deploy as a mission, you have a lot of civil affairs capacity, and then you begin to look at support to good governance, and that evolution was true in Liberia. The focus on peace consolidation comes with the closing down of a peacekeeping mission. UNMIL's closure has been postponed before for one reason or another, previously the Ebola crisis. But this is the final phase. The focus on peace consolidation is an attempt to ramp up resource allocation to help implement programmes that are not typically found in peacekeeping missions. Liberia's future absolutely depends on consolidating the gains of peace.

As Resident Coordinator, I can tap into the incredible resources, chiefly human, of the UN agencies. The UN Country Team can help offset some of the gaps to be left with UNMIL's departure. It is an incredible source of continuity: Those staying on include the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the African Development Bank, the International Finance Corporation and no less than 18 UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes.

The beauty is being in the centre of all of these possibilities – as part of UNMIL, also as Resident Coordinator for the UN system, and then Resident Representative, leading UNDP's work. Most of the issues that UNMIL has been dealing with --in governance, in growing the economy, in security sector reforms, in legal reforms, in good offices, in working with the Government to fight corruption and in decentralization-- are bread-and-butter priorities for the UN Country Team. They will all be focused on consolidating peace and delivering inclusive development.

We talk about the UN and not just UNMIL. Some of the agencies have been here for as long as UNMIL, others for a lot longer. We have been using the time remaining to prepare ourselves as much as we can for the transition to a post-UNMIL peacebuilding environment. To do that, we embarked on a number of undertakings, some called revolutionary, but all must-do activities in any transition context. I hope some of the things

we are doing here can be replicated, or at least looked at, for future transition contexts so others will save time and resources and not have to reinvent the wheel.

Have you been focusing on long-term strategy or daily tactics, particularly as there are still crises in education, human rights, land use and many other areas?

Because Liberia is recovering, you cannot afford to focus on one and not the other. You have to do both. You have to be strategic and forward-looking, but also know the tactical realities and needed interventions.

For Liberia to have UNMIL – at some point the largest peacekeeping mission in the world, in a very small country – says how huge the problem was. When Liberia went to war with itself, it was on fire, and the entire neighbourhood of surrounding countries was in trouble. Many countries in the sub-region were directly affected by Liberia’s collapse. When UNMIL came, this country was in a desperate situation. The damage was so vast and so deep. And it was not just damage in material and physical terms; it was damage to the social fabric that was already in tatters due to years of neglect by national institutions.

But then Liberians elected a Government that came into office in early 2006, and that was the beginning of the recovery that continues today. It’s fantastic to see now that you can actually get in a soft-skin car and travel anywhere in Liberia without expecting to face security troubles. In the past, you could not drive 25 kilometres without being stopped by three or four different checkpoints run by drug-intoxicated eight-year-olds. It was complete chaos. Liberia is not chaotic today. Liberia is vibrant and upbeat. Liberians are getting a real chance to enjoy their country, which is essentially a rich country. But serious work is still needed.

In the past, you could not drive 25 kilometres without being stopped by three or four different checkpoints run by drug-intoxicated eight-year-olds. It was complete chaos. Liberia is not chaotic today. Liberia is vibrant and upbeat.

Maybe this is a reason why the country was always in trouble. It is such a well-endowed place, but very few were able to benefit from what it has to offer. It would have been difficult for Liberia on its own, or with limited support, to be able to break that vicious cycle of violence in which it found itself.

It is important to stress that while Liberia is recovering, it is still fragile. This is why the UN should be ready. It’s an opportunity to show that we can get the transition right. Liberia has benefited from international attention, and has been on the agenda of the Security Council for 25 years. But now, nobody wants to talk about Liberia, and that’s a recipe for relapse. That is why we must keep pushing. The country has not fully recovered.

The national institutions are still weak as Liberia is still using a highly centralized governance system. Everything is happening in Monrovia, not in remote areas. Many of the root causes of the conflict have not been addressed, and Liberians must agree on how they want to heal the wounds of the past, and with those who committed serious crimes. There is agitation, including by the international community, for justice to be done, and that is important, especially for the victims.

It is important to stress that while Liberia is recovering, it is still fragile. This is why the UN should be ready.

In fact, there’s very little talk about the victims. When you talk about reconciliation, it’s usually about individuals who committed crimes during the war, but it goes way beyond this. Reconciliation is about healing a nation that remains traumatized because of what happened and because of the brutality with which it happened. The barbarity with which the war was conducted in Liberia, I haven’t seen it elsewhere. It was beyond human comprehension how far people went in destroying fellow human beings.

Reconciliation is about healing a nation that remains traumatized because of what happened and because of the brutality with which it happened. The barbarity with which the war was conducted in Liberia, I haven’t seen it elsewhere.

A generation was lost to the war, and Liberia is in the process of losing another generation because 62 per cent of the children are out of school. Liberia is well endowed. It could feed itself and half of the continent. Rainfall here is among the highest in the world. The human power is here. But Liberia has

DDR lets ex-combatants find new lives



Child soldiers carrying ammunition for disposal at a demobilization event conducted by UNMIL in Tubmanburg, Bomi County.

Photo: Eric Kanalstein | UNMIL | 24 Apr 04

The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programme was one of the most important early activities of the Mission, running from 2003 to 2006 and involved more than 100,000 ex-combatants. Apart from being one of the priorities in the Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement, successful DDR would enable many other programmes and initiatives to either commence or continue without the threat of disruption by armed and militarised spoilers. It was a joint programme of UNMIL military and civilian components and the UN Country Team, supporting the Government’s National Commission for DDR.

When Civil Affairs officers arrived in the southeastern part of Liberia in March 2004, the DRR programme had not started actively in that area, so the UNMIL staff lived with ex-combatants in the communities that had not been demobilized or disarmed. Yes, their weapons were kept in caches overseen by UN military observers, and there were sufficient troops to keep the peace, but they still had an impact on community demeanour. Whether the military could actually limit their access to the weapons caches was another question, and on a couple of occasions ex-combatants came into town firing automatic weapons in the air for some celebration, terrifying the local population.

The Civil Affairs officers learned quickly to use their “good offices” and went out into the community to engage with influential warlords and faction commanders to get them to

talk to their followers and get them to calm down. But it was also clear to the UNMIL staff that in order to avoid incidents by under-engaged ex-combatants, they needed to be engaged in productive programmes, working back with their communities.

Vocational training and other livelihood programmes were planned for the demobilization camps, but these were not expected to commence in the southeast until later in 2004. The UNMIL team in Zwedru worked with the faction commanders to involve the ex-combatants in food-for-work projects like clearing roads, working on farms and cleaning up schools to keep them busy. Another goal of this work was to establish rapprochement between the ex-combatants and the communities.

With the arrival of contractors for the demobilization camp, the ex-combatants were taken on as labour, keeping them busy building the very facilities where they would later undergo demobilization, psycho-social counselling and vocational training. According to the Civil Affairs team, this prospect also reinvigorated their morale as they at least knew that the DDR programme that they had been promised would eventually reach them.

relied too heavily on extractives – rubber, iron ore, timber. Agriculture was hardly taken seriously; it was looked down upon, and that is why the country remains an importer of most of its basic food commodities.

In the last couple of years, the prices of Liberia’s key commodities went down on the global market. Couple that with the shock of Ebola. The Liberian economy was doing well until in 2014 with a growth rate of over 7 per cent. Today it is negative growth.

By talking about these challenges, which require a long-term strategy and also daily tactical interventions, I don’t want to take away from the difference made in Liberia by the people and Government, supported by the UN, UNMIL in particular, over the past 14 years.

UNMIL field office helps resolve local dispute

UNMIL field offices included civilian, police, military and support personnel all deployed in each of Liberia’s 15 counties. One example of how they worked together was at a riot in Sinoe County and its aftermath in 2015.

On 26 May 2015, the Liberia National Police (LNP) informed the UN Police commander in Sinoe County that a peaceful protest was ongoing at an oil palm plantation in Butaw District. A group of young people argued that they had not been properly represented in ongoing negotiations with the concession company about community benefits, and they demanded to meet with the company’s chief executive officer. The UNMIL head of the field office and a team of UNMIL military observers went to monitor the situation and help mediate between the parties. They assured the protestors of UNMIL’s impartiality and commitment to help all parties to resolve their grievances peacefully. The team then went to the plantation to meet with the company management and Government officials on how to organize a meeting with the protestors.

Meanwhile, the protest outside the plantation escalated into violence. The protestors overwhelmed the few security officers present and stormed onto the plantation, carrying rocks and machetes. The UNMIL team informed its headquarters, but decided to stay as long as possible. The head of field office, Corinna Vigier, later noted, “While none of us was armed, we strongly felt at that point that we could not just abandon those in danger. Protection of civilians was a key part of UNMIL’s mandate and for me it would have been a betrayal of the mandate if we had just left when the violence started.”

When it became too dangerous for the remaining managers and Government officials to stay, the UNMIL team helped by evacuating them by car. Once out of immediate danger, the UNMIL team recorded the names of the arrested protestors and advocated for their proper treatment in accordance with human rights standards.

Meanwhile, the Chinese UNMIL Formed Police mobilized and together with other UNMIL civilians helped restore order at the plantation. UNMIL civilian and uniformed personnel also cooperated to rescue one of the company staff members, and brought him to an UNMIL clinic for treatment.

Over the following weeks, UNMIL acted as an impartial advocate for peace and human rights, visiting the prison and communities, and facilitating a dialogue with representatives of all parties to introduce participatory tools for conflict transformation. The results of the workshop formed the basis for further, bilateral talks between the company and the community resulting in a new agreement on what community benefits the company would provide.

In those 14 years, are there a few watershed moments that stand out in your mind as notable in enabling your recent work?

One of the main challenges that Liberia has faced is in how to govern itself. Liberia suffered from bad governance for far too long, and this was compounded by the civil war. The significant deployment of peacekeepers helped stop the war and stabilize conditions across the country. That saved lives. And at that time, there were a number of things the UN worked on with national stakeholders to put in place. The two elections held in 2005 and in 2011 were significantly aided by UNMIL, directly. The successful elections in 2017 resulted from investments UNMIL made early on.

This third election was a purely Liberian product. The mandate of UNMIL was specific about what UNMIL could and could not do to support the electoral process. Liberia had come to the point where, for the most part, it conducted the elections by itself.

UNMIL built many physical things, including bridges that otherwise would not have been built. UNMIL also maintained roads in the hinterlands. My focus has been more on the software aspects. Software is indispensable because that is what Liberia needs to be able to extend state authority, decentralize and deliver services in all parts of the country. And that’s always a process, not an event.

I hope the next presidential election, six years forward, will be even better than the one in 2017 in terms of the opportunity for all Liberians to exercise their franchise without any difficulty.

On the roads and bridges, what do you think about peacekeeping operations building basic infrastructure: does it lead to expectations that may not be fulfilled when missions close?

The problem goes back to how the UN is configured, in addition to how the UN deploys in peacekeeping. Any resolutions deploying a peacekeeping mission are compromise documents because there are certain fundamentals that Member States would not want to compromise on, rightly or wrongly. A colleague used to say that these resolutions are a study in ambiguity, and they should be used as platforms, not as ceilings. It depends on the creativity of the people on the ground how to use these resolutions to make a difference.

You come to a country like Liberia where you know that because of governance challenges, there was no will or resources to build infrastructure. And Liberia remains that way, to a large extent, up to now. It remains Monrovia-centric, and that’s why some one third of Liberians live in and around Monrovia.

UNMIL used the resolutions that authorized it as a platform, not as a ceiling, and that’s why the engineers were fixing roads and building bridges. But there were Member States that were not in favour of this approach and would even block passage of the budget, arguing that these activities are not part of peacekeeping. The counter argument, of course, is that you cannot keep the peace if your troops cannot move, so these roads and bridges were enablers to peacekeeping. Yes, they are not core peacekeeping functions, but without a bridge, you cannot get your troops to the other side.

On raising expectations, it’s a systemic problem that goes back to how the UN is configured but also how the UN deploys. On one side, you have these peacekeeping or political missions. On the other, you have the other UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes. Those are two different worlds. We are joined up at the UN Charter, but diverse in our unity.

Let me give you an example about setting up expectations beyond mission closure: UNMIL is leaving and can gift assets, including fleets of cars and equipment, furniture, machinery and spare parts. All of that can go to the Government, which is great because the Government needs it. But UNMIL cannot gift to a UN agency. If you want it, you pay for it. You cannot even redeploy these assets. Yet you cannot pass them to a continuing UN presence to enable work on the very issues that you know Liberia will continue to face, including fixing roads and bridges.

Member States don’t allow this because they say development work’s funding sources must be different. If you gift assets to other UN entities from a peacekeeping operation, that means the UN is “double-dipping.” It’s not a valid argument, in my view. In this moment of transition, when we have high hopes that the UN is going to reform itself with a new Secretary-General, we cannot accept that the UN can be two things, despite all the slogans of delivering as one.

Since UNMIL came to Liberia, some US\$8 billion has been invested in peacekeeping. How come we didn’t think of using some of this to build national capacity so that when the contingents leave or when the engineers are no longer out in the field, then the Ministry of Public Works can take up the responsibility and fix the roads itself every year, every rainy season? With the departure of UNMIL, we are basically back to 2003. This is the story. In 2003, Liberia didn’t have the capability or the machinery to do road rehabilitation. The country’s inability to prioritize its development interventions, coupled with the war, and with the deployment of a peacekeeping mission that at some point was larger than Liberia itself, produced an environment in which Liberia continued to be dependent.

A youth group from Jalay town, the gateway to Sapo National Park, practice a show to educate Liberians on conservation.

Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 15 Jul 07



UNMIL national staff help Liberia wrest control of its resources



A man taps a rubber tree in Gbolokai, Bong County. Most of the residents of the small town who fled during the civil war have, since 2005, returned to rebuild their lives.

Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 15 Mar 07

From his desk as Director of Mining in the Ministry of Land, Mines and Energy, Kofi Ireland was well aware of the dismal situation Liberians faced as the war ended in 2003. International sanctions had halted exports of diamonds, gold and timber, for example, which had been funding various factions in the conflicts. And even after sanctions were lifted, foreign companies shipped out Liberia’s resources with minimal returns to the Government or the communities where they were located.

Later, as a national Civil Affairs Officer with UNMIL, Mr. Ireland contributed to a demonstrable change in the way Liberia does business, giving communities more control over their resources, giving the Government more funds in royalties and taxation and giving the people of Liberia more confidence in their authorities.

Following the removal of sanctions on the new Government in 2006, UNMIL assisted it to reform its natural resources sector and helped draft a new forestry law which closed loopholes and gave the Forestry Development Authority new teeth to control illegal activities. The law also provided for more community involvement in management of the sector and in the granting of concessions, which continue to be held largely by foreign enterprises. Malaysian companies, for example, dominate the lumber and agricultural sector. With the new law, Ministry officials must get the consent from districts (a subset of a county) before granting a concession.

In 2009, Liberia joined the international Extraction Industries Transparency Initiative which set guidelines for companies and governments to report back annually to communities information

on profits and taxes accrued and paid. Meetings held in town halls and schools drew communities together to exert some influence, and expect some compensation, for resources taken from their area. “They began to ask questions,” Mr. Ireland said.

UNMIL also assisted the Government with the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme, to get better control over diamonds and gold, increase royalties and curb smuggling. And the Mission helped draft the 2010 petroleum law which set policies on commercial exploitation.

The Land Rights bill, supported by UNMIL, if enacted, would also help communities earn income from property which is occupied by local people who usually lack titles. The bill has met some resistance in Monrovia. Also, some well-placed people from outside the communities have reportedly been attempting to establish ownership of large tracts of land in anticipation of future income.

Even with these new laws, the Liberian Government has lacked the capacity to enforce them. UNMIL worked with partners to provide training for officials and agencies and assigned staff to technical committees as mentors.

“Most agencies and ministries are stepping up,” Ireland said. “We see the difference. Productivity has increased in most of these ministries. The presence of UNMIL has increased confidence within the Government and between the Government and the people. Before, there was the perception they were all corrupt.....I am very hopeful.”

So hopeful that Mr. Ireland is considering a return to Government following the withdrawal of UNMIL.

We are at the stage in Liberia of better governance, not yet good governance. There are many things that need to happen. And that’s our challenge as the UN. From the very beginning in peacekeeping missions, there must be a clear commitment to balancing investments in those contexts, to avoid bringing in limitless resources and then leaving a country unable to carry itself forward. The goal, from the start, should be to exit without creating a gap that can lead to relapse or a reason to reset the country to conflict.

What’s your vision for peacekeeping that might address some of these challenges from the outset?

Peacekeeping, in the traditional way, means you’re stuck forever or you leave a huge gap when you depart. In Liberia, a fragile country, the departure of UNMIL will leave many things at the point they were in 2003. But we are in the second year of a pilot project where assessed contributions to UNMIL can be made available for programmatic interventions by UN agencies. This is an important shift, and it should continue. But, as an example of the bureaucracy involved, in financial year 2016-2017, it took eight and a half months to negotiate the paperwork for this project. And we were left with three and a half months to do the work. Welcome to these two worlds, which I hope are beginning to discover each other and find ways of working with each other. Going forward, that discovery needs to be done much more quickly and with much greater force, so we are truly one UN. One UN is mandated to do peacekeeping and the creation of the security environment, while the other UN does the things that the country would need when the peacekeepers leave, such as work on building the basic social infrastructure, the economy, education and all of these existential priorities.

Imagine if some of that US\$8 billion had been given to UNICEF at the start. Then maybe 62 per cent of the children of Liberia would not be out of school. It’s very disturbing to see that UN entities get funding when there is a crisis: UNMIL had access to massive resources, while UNICEF, WHO, UNFPA, UNDP and all the other UN entities working here were actually struggling to make ends meet. When Ebola hit, agencies received money they didn’t know what to do with. In fact, Ebola money is still being used up to today.

When there is a crisis, the world is ready to give money. So how about agreeing that when we deploy a peacekeeping operation, we should help the UN act as one?

Peacekeeping and special political missions may be integrated with resident coordinators, but what you’re suggesting is that they’re not truly integrated because of funding sources?

If it was true integration, the UN agencies should have been funded through assessed contributions. You integrate in coordination, but then when it comes to actual delivery, you expect the agencies to rely on voluntary contributions. The merger needs to be all the way down for us to truly start talking about integrated missions. And that will take changing the mind set of Member States and also some of the agencies.

This issue goes to the root of how we are diverse in our unity. Each one of these UN agencies are independently configured, independently mandated and independently governed, and each relies on traditional funding relationships with donors.

Luckily, we don’t have a fractured UN in Liberia. You see that in the way we conduct business, in the way we work together. But there is still a challenge: there are UN entities here that did not receive assessed funding until last year, and what they did receive was not significant, in part because of Member State reluctance over this new way of doing business. They are not convinced. UNMIL’s budget for this year is US\$110 million. Out of that, only US\$5 million was allocated for programmatic interventions by UN agencies.

I would have thought that because UNMIL is leaving, more, if not most of that money, would have gone to help prepare the ground for Liberia so the transition would be truly well-supported, and the massive resources drop that we expect when UNMIL leaves would not be so painful for Liberia, and would not create setbacks from an inability to muster or mobilize resources. This reality gives me sleepless nights. But we have been trying to mitigate the impact of UNMIL’s departure and be as ready as possible.

What does the transition plan entail and what will it lead to?

There were several parts of the UN transition plan aimed at ensuring that it would be as responsible, seamless and smooth as possible. In December 2016, the Security Council passed resolution 2333 that defined the final mandate for UNMIL, with 30 March 2018 as the date of closure.

To prepare, we conducted a capacity-mapping exercise of the UN Country Team and assessed whether the UN in post-UNMIL Liberia would have the ability to continue providing strategic support to Liberia and deliver programmes to consolidate peace. The exercise was not to see whether UNICEF would be able to do vaccinations, or whether WFP could do school feeding, or UNHCR help refugees repatriate. These activities are the bread-and-butter issues of those agencies. They will find the resources. This mapping exercise was focused instead on whether, collectively as the UN presence in Liberia post-UNMIL, we would have the joint resources, capacities and expertise to continue to deliver programmes that would consolidate peace. The result of this exercise helped us identify our institutional weaknesses and ways to address them. It was an important move by the Country Team in preparation for the post-UNMIL phase.

We also conducted a comprehensive review to recalibrate and re-position the UNDP. As a result, UNDP made a number of surge deployments from headquarters and the Regional Center in Addis Ababa to strengthen the Country Office.

We also needed to ensure that, when UNMIL leaves, the UN has a full-fledged human rights capacity in this country, because the human rights team that has been here was part of UNMIL. I am pleased that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) will continue to maintain a full-fledged presence. There are a lot of human rights issues that go to the heart of why this country went to war in the first place, in addition to ongoing challenges, for example, with harmful traditional practices and a justice system still too weak to fully deliver.

The capacity review also allowed us to look at ways to strengthen the Resident Coordinator’s office, the entity that is expected to lead UN efforts in Liberia post-UNMIL. The Secretary-General’s decision of September 2017 to reinforce that office and empower the Country Team is in line with his vision for reforming the UN development system. Hopefully we will benefit from the attention, as we may be among the first test cases for this new approach.

We have looked to see what alternative predictable funding sources we would need to deliver programmes for peace consolidation. Liberia has been on the agenda of the Security Council for 25 years, and was always on the radar. But when UNMIL leaves, there is a risk of Liberia dropping off that radar. We must stop that from happening. So, the establishment of the Liberia Transition Multi-Partner Trust Fund has been another initiative we took to mitigate the impact of the transition in terms of declining resources. This is US\$130 million for three years that will support peace consolidation, human rights and priority development interventions through the joint efforts of the UN and its partners.

We are also planning what we call ‘the Liberia moment,’ an international meeting to take place in March 2018, in Monrovia, when the new Government is in office, and before the departure of UNMIL, to create an opportunity for this Government to share its vision, and for the international community to commit to stay the course and support Liberia as it moves to the next stage. I hope the Secretary-General will attend

The UN flag is going to keep flying at this building, sending a message to the Liberians that the UN is here even after UNMIL has left.

because it would send a powerful message of assurance and affirmation to Liberians that, while UNMIL has completed its mission, the UN is here for the long haul, not fighting a war but fighting to deliver on the sustainable development goals, to consolidate the gains of peace and help this country to the next stage. And the event will be an opportunity to say thank you to UNMIL.

We are also adopting the UNMIL headquarters in Monrovia as the new UN base where all 18 UN Agencies, Funds and Programmes would be co-located. Significant savings will be realized as a result of pooled services, such as security, power generation and maintenance. The UN flag is going to keep flying at this building, sending a message to the Liberians that the UN is here even after UNMIL has left.

These are some aspects of our work to preserve the gains that have been realized in Liberia, thanks chiefly to UNMIL. They should not be taken for granted. We are trying to help Liberia build on them and avoid what otherwise would be a reputational risk for the UN. We are closing a success story in peacekeeping terms, and preparing to continue the journey responsibly. I am confident this transition will work, but it will require sustained support and predictable funding of the joint UN programmes to consolidate peace.

With the unpredictability associated with any new administration, what’s your sense of confidence in the future of this country?

I am more than optimistic because I believe Liberia deserves the optimism of us all. There is a Liberian awakening now, because they are beginning to see the beauty of their country without war, and they have come to the realization that not all the answers are found elsewhere. That’s what gives me hope that this country has a bright future. A lot of work remains to be done, by Liberians chiefly, but also by all of us.

Basic services arrive in the countryside



A convoy of UNMIL vehicles travelling the roads in Bopolu, Gbarpolu County during the rainy season.

Photo: UNMIL | 25 Sep 07

Liberia has been a unitary state, in which all Government officials including those who ran its 15 counties were appointed by the President. The concentration of power in Monrovia underlay peoples’ distrust and ignorance of government.

The Constitution of 1986 had called for local elections of paramount chiefs, clan and town chiefs. However there was never any money, at least at the county level, to hold elections, and some counties had more than 30 towns.

Upon her election in 2005, President Sirleaf was challenged to implement the Constitution on local elections. But the Supreme Court weighed in and ruled that for the time being, she could continue to appoint the chiefs. The Local Government Act that has been before the Legislature should change that.

In the early days of the Mission, UNMIL Civil Affairs officers were engaged in both establishing and restoring state authority to the countryside. Field officers worked with chiefs and elders, women’s groups, and where necessary with ex-warlords, faction commanders and ex-combatants. The objective was to get communities re-engaged and local government working to deliver basic services such as health care and education, as well as water, sanitation and even shelter.

With the help of UNMIL, the President saw ways to address the lack of services at the county level. A development fund of US\$200,000 for each county was set up, as well as a social development fund, tied to resource exploitation in that area.

Three counties, for example, shared a US\$3 million grant from Mittal Steel which extracts iron ore-- US\$1.5 million to Nimba country where the mine sits; US\$1 million to Bong where the freight trains pass through; and US\$400,000 to Grand Bassa which has the port. This grant was to be annual, but a slump in global prices has meant diminished returns recently.

As a national officer in UNMIL’s Peace Consolidation service, James Giahvue helped organize the counties to access the development fund held by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. His office also monitored use of the funds by the counties. Things were going smoothly, he said, “until corruption set in.”

Some national legislators had set up bogus companies to do jobs approved by the counties. Eventually a minister was even dismissed. There were also disputes between county representatives and legislators over who should get contracts. In addition, the Government in Monrovia, facing budget shortfalls, would dip into the social development fund to pay other bills.

The Local Government bill would “de-concentrate, delegate and devolve” power—and presumably money--to the counties.

But to help people access services in the meantime, UNMIL assisted the “de-concentration” of services from Monrovia. That started with the “County-in-a-box,” comprised a vehicle, motorbikes, computers, office furniture and stationery. In some counties, UNMIL constructed the office building and supplied solar panels to power it. Eventually UNMIL helped to establish service centres across the country in partnership with UNDP, Sweden, the EU and USAID.

“All 15 counties now provide 25 different services to the public,” Mr. Giahvue said: “That was our baby and that is our pride.”

The legacies of the past remain problematic, of course. Liberia must tackle them head on, starting with the Constitution. We have been gently urging some course correction to instil a sense of confidence and a belief among Liberians that Liberia is ‘plan A,’ not ‘plan B. There is increasing recognition among Liberians that this is an untapped country. The time has come for Liberians not to look down on agriculture, and to stop relying on extractives.

We are closing a success story in peacekeeping terms, and preparing to continue the journey responsibly.

In the end, Liberia is a small country with massive potential. It is not difficult to manage, like my country Sudan, or like Afghanistan. It can become the food basket for half of Africa, not only the sub-region. You can grow anything here, yet 80 per cent of the rice consumed by Liberians is imported. Why is that? It’s because the cost of doing business in Liberia is still high. We are working with our national and international counterparts to address this, to create opportunities for investors and to fight corruption. It used to take nine months to register a company in Liberia. Now it takes 21 days. In Rwanda it takes six hours, and you can do it online. So we have some work to do still, and I think it can be done.

Recognizing that you have hope for the future, in the context of many challenges, what would you tell Liberians themselves?

Be proud to be Liberian. Work together. Fix and correct course. Address the ills of the past that continue to hold you back. It’s not about better roads only. It’s about a better Constitution. It’s about better services. It’s about decentralization.

Liberia has historically been Monrovia-centric, so for anything you needed from government, you had to come to the ‘big house.’ If you want a birth or a marriage certificate, or a driver’s license, you come to Monrovia. Decentralization is one of the laws stuck in Parliament, and it is work awaiting us in the next phase. The Local Government Act will mean delegation of authority to the regions and, more importantly, fiscal decentralization. The county service centres are an attempt to bypass the legal obstacle of everything happening from the centre. When I arrived in Monrovia in 2016, there were four centres operating. By the end of 2017, all 15 were up and running.

For Liberians, this is not just about services but about reinforcing the sense of belonging, and preserving the unity and territorial integrity of Liberia. Otherwise, the tendency to have a stronger affinity to the country next door – sometimes easier to access for those living along the borders – will become stronger, leading to problems.

What then would you say to the internationals staying to help Liberia move into the future?

Celebrate that Liberia has attained a certain level of stability that no longer requires the presence of a peacekeeping mission. But then keep that thought for five seconds, and move on. Do not treat Liberia as a normal country that can support itself without help from the outside. This will come, but support in the period immediately after the departure of UNMIL will be crucial.

The fragility of Liberia is real, the economy is weak and the systems require strengthening. The national institutions are too centralized and lack basic infrastructure. More roads are needed. Liberia will get there one day, but we’re not there now.

That advice applies to us all, and hence the agitation in the United Nations over whether this is going to be a normal transition. And to the international community, I would add: We know corruption is rampant, but don’t withhold support simply because results have not been delivered on time.

Liberia is a country that is forming, a country that has come from the abyss. We cannot leave it hanging. We must not disengage. There needs to be encouragement and incentive for investors. The real transformation is going to come not from public funding. It’s going to come from private-sector investment. This is where the country’s future lies.

The day we deploy peacekeepers, we should deploy peacebuilders – the very same day.

We are coming to the moment to celebrate UNMIL as it shuts down. I hope this moment of achievement will give us courage and clarity. We may have stabilized Liberia, but we have not empowered the country. We may have stopped the war, but we did not actually bring peace. And now UNMIL is leaving. So the UN of course will have to carry on. But we need to do better next time. The day we deploy peacekeepers, we should deploy peacebuilders – the very same day.



Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 21 Sep 08

Extending and consolidating the peace process

Francis Kai-Kai, Chief of Peace Consolidation Services

Francis Kai Kai, Chief of Peace Consolidation, studied agricultural economics and development and worked for the German Agency for Technical Development (GTZ), for his Government and the World Bank in Sierra Leone, and for the UN in Sudan. He gave this interview in October 2017.

Mr. Kai Kai, tell us a bit about your background that led to your work in the Mission’s Civil Affairs Office.

I ended the Mission as Chief of Peace Consolidation, but I had been recruited as Principal Civil Affairs Officer. The change in title and emphasis over time demonstrates that peacemaking and peacebuilding are part of a continuum.

For 10 years in the 1980s, I worked with GTZ on a regional development project in Sierra Leone (my home country). We started project design from scratch in a region that was relatively poor but had a lot of resources. That taught me a lot about institution building and how to shape objectives clearly while working with the people. And I learned to innovate and develop integrated programming across a broad spectrum of sectors, ranging from agriculture and fisheries to health and community infrastructure and development. Professionally, this is where I cut my teeth.

Civil war broke out Sierra Leone in 1991 and lasted until 2002. The war years introduced new dynamics. I came to understand the reasons for the violence: the politics were not right and created the conditions for the war. The fact was that many youth were unemployed, and the Government was too centralized with no vision for the future. Everything was based in the capital, and people out in the towns and villages never really felt part of that central system. Many people also felt disenfranchised by the one-party state. That was the context as we were trying to deliver the best regional development project we could. It was quite a challenge.

I moved to national level work during the crises when I was appointed director in the newly created National Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement Ministry in 1997, established to deal with the war-affected civilians, refugees and internally displaced persons. We helped them to resettle back home. We put together some quick recovery programmes and tried to do reconstruction here and there.

I was later charged to head a national programme that got over 74,000 ex-combatants of all the warring factions through disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR). We tried to find something for them to do and to see how they would fit into a society that was already dispossessed by civil war. They went back to join a larger army of unemployed youth who shared similar characteristics but who had no experience of war. What do you do with these people? We did many good projects, trained them and so on, but their future was still uncertain in many ways.

After the programme ended, I worked on the first poverty reduction strategy in Sierra Leone, a major undertaking. That gave me the opportunity to bring together all the experiences I had had, and to see how we could put together a strategy that would address economic development. How do you start growth again? How do you bring back productive enterprises? How can you bring back proper education, improve the health sector, and establish overall governance? All these questions we posed and brought together, working with the different line ministries of government, with the international community, the UN, the World Bank and others. It was an eye opener for me and enriched my experience.

To raise funds for the poverty reduction strategy, we did a “road show” to donor capitals in Europe and organized a national conference for Sierra Leone. That led to debt relief and more support. I later led donor coordination for the office of the Vice President.

I left Sierra Leone in 2005 for the UN to head the DDR programme in the Sudan. I had been so excited by the recovery and development work in Sierra Leone that by the time I left, I had a clear picture of the post-conflict challenges and opportunities many countries face.

Sudan was very complex and from the outset, it was clear to me that the two main sides were not ready for peace. It was 2005, and (Vice President) John Garang had just died. Working for the UN and sitting there between the two was also an eye opener. The two seemed to represent two different countries, or one country but two different systems that would never match. Until they separated formally, nothing was

Members of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), carry placards with messages of peace and non-violence during the electoral period.

Photo: Emmanuel Tobey | UNMIL | 18 Oct 11



going to happen. I led the effort to set up DDR commissions in the north and the south

After two years, I got fed up. Nothing was going to happen until the South became independent. So at the end of 2007, I returned to Sierra Leone, then left for Liberia to lead UNMIL’s Civil Affairs Section. That is where I found my niche, working on peace consolidation issues. Because of the things I did in Sierra Leone, and because I had worked in Liberia as a consultant on DDR in 2004, it was easy to hit the ground running. The Mission was new, and the Government was also relatively new, so all the post-conflict issues that I had faced in Sierra Leone were the same here. We built on that experience to set up a civil affairs section, recruit and deploy more staff, and determine how to help the new Government which had been installed in 2006.

So, tell us about peace consolidation and how it evolved from a civil affairs approach.

Peace consolidation started with Civil Affairs, which was probably the largest civilian section in the Mission when I came, with a huge number of staff. The mandate then was very clear. It was about decentralization, extending state authority to the counties, from Monrovia; promoting reconciliation. How do you deepen that? How do you build peace? How do you make sure that you broaden ownership of the peace process? It was not just about the government, but about the people contributing in their own ways to the peace process, and making sure that NGOs and civil society were part of that process.

As UN peacekeeping operations come to a war-torn country at the pleasure of the government, there is a tendency to exclusively focus on the government. As a civil affairs component, we try to broaden the scope beyond government, and bring in civil society as well. There are always cracks in government programme and the people who fill in those cracks are the civil society groups, the faith-based institutions and those dedicated to human rights, human development and justice issues. How do you bring all these together to begin the process so that the ownership of the peace process is not just with the government, but also with the people to make it more sustainable? Civil affairs staff ensure that the government gets out to the counties, facilitates its functionality and establishes links between the central ministries and the county level departments.

It was also important to make sure that the central Government was strong. War weakens all national institutions. You cannot strengthen the counties if the central government is weak. Civil Affairs had to devise a concept of assistance to all line ministries, as well as the agencies and

commissions. We had to work with the new interlocutors in all 27 ministries, agencies and commissions on a daily basis. We co-located in many instances and helped with simple things like developing a new filing system, setting up basic plans and policies, and determining how to implement them. We had to employ qualified staff to deploy to those institutions. We brought in an army of colleagues ready to roll up their sleeves with expertise in various aspects of sector governance to be out in the central ministries and counties. We also served as the eyes and ears of the Mission, to know what is going on and at the same time, to provide professional support and assistance to the authorities. So, we crafted the work of Civil Affairs to address the central and county level activities, and provide critical link between them.

For example, we worked with the Ministry of Finance to rebuild the payroll system to include people based in the counties, because the systems had crashed during the war years. We had to make sure that people got their salaries in the counties. County superintendents used to spend two weeks a month in Monrovia chasing salaries for staff. Departmental staff in the counties used to do the same. How do you address something like that, with awful roads? We had to arrange UNMIL aircraft to take pay-teams back and forth. Uniformed peacekeepers helped to escort the cash, by air and by road, and protect the money, sometimes in Mission compounds until all county staff, including those located in the districts, were paid. Those days of extending and consolidating state authority and having the local civil service function in the counties were exhausting.

Another aspect of our work was helping with planning at the central ministries.

At the same time, peacebuilding activities started with a focus on the land disputes and ownership of property. Returning after 10 to 15 years of displacement, many families and communities found other people occupying their properties and land. To this day, the authorities are still grappling with these disputes.

We facilitated the formation of ad hoc committees chaired by superintendents to ensure that the remnants of rebel groups who still had power out in the counties ceded to the civilian authorities named by the Government. Civil Affairs was involved in mediation activities in every county. Our military colleagues looked to us to settle disputes between chiefs and the new authorities on the one hand and those who illegally occupied properties on the other.

Another area of engagement was the effective management of concessions for the benefit of the people. Liberia's economy has continued to depend on concessions, especially rubber, oil palm plantations and forestry, which were occupied in the early years of UNMIL by the rebels. Since the rebels made money out of them illegally, the challenge was how to wrestle these assets from them and turn them over to the authorities. Our skills in mediation were important in those years, settling disputes and making sure that people understood what was going on. At the same time, we tried to see how the former rebels could find alternative livelihoods, rather than just merely removing them from the plantation. These were all issues that the civilian component of the Mission had to address.

Let's hear more about how the concept of civil affairs in a peacekeeping context evolved into peace consolidation over the past decade

Those early stages of peacekeeping involved putting out fires around the hotspots and gradually building inclusive peace at all levels. Our work evolved over time and varied according to the predominant challenges in each of the 15 counties. According to the mapping we did, the hotspots were in communities where we had land and property disputes, where we had concessions occupied by the rebels, where we had government facilities being used by rebel officials. We decided to focus on these until things became normalized.

Next was to support the county administrations to become functional. UNMIL/Civil Affairs staff worked alongside the UN Country Team to set up county support teams, comprising UNMIL civilian personnel, OCHA, UNDP and UNHCR. Civil Affairs managed this team, which was out in the counties dealing with multiple issues to help the state get established in those counties. Superintendents, commissioners and chieftdom authorities were fully assisted with a special package to enable them take full control of the counties. On the rule of law side, county attorneys and magistrates were also supported, as well as the Liberia National Police.

Next was the facilitation of a coordination mechanism among the various institutions at the county level - the different line ministries, the county administration, security and rule of law agencies. We set up a county development steering committee, co-chaired by the superintendent and civil affairs county coordinator. Civil society/NGO representatives were also invited to participate on the steering committees so that they could

Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP)

Liberia's economic problems began before the first outbreak of conflict in 1989. Between 1987 and 1995, Liberia's gross domestic product (GDP) fell by 90 per cent, and by the 2005 elections, average income in Liberia was one-fourth of what it had been in 1987. Following the 2003 Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement and UNMIL's deployment, the country faced enormous reconstruction needs, and international donors stepped in to help set Liberia on the path to recovery.

The transitional Government (NTGL) took initial steps toward addressing economic governance issues. However, doubts surfaced at the end of 2004 about the NTGL's commitment to improving economic governance and fighting corruption. Audits commissioned by the EC in early 2005 revealed widespread corruption, including under the NTGL. Under intense international pressure, the NTGL was reluctant to follow international partners' recommendations. Only after having realized that threats of halting all international aid were real, the NTGL agreed to accept the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP), which sought to accomplish six objectives: securing Liberia's revenue base, improving budgeting and expenditure management, improving procurement practices and granting of concessions, establishing effective processes to control corruption, supporting key institutions, and capacity building.

A key innovation was the system of internationally recruited financial controllers posted alongside Liberians in key agencies to enable the controllers to help establish transparent financial procedures, train and build local capacity from within the agencies, and report on revenue and spending. The centerpiece of GEMAP design, for which it has become known internationally, was the cosignatory authority these experts wielded, which ensured that no major financial transactions could take place without being scrutinized by both a Liberian manager and an international adviser. Although GEMAP was intended to be an interim plan for the body of international partners involved in post-conflict reconstruction in Liberia, in practice it provided an embedded control system to maintain a transitional economic governance framework. The intention was to ensure that Government and donor resources were secured and channeled through the budget, but the overall setup was one of increased oversight.

At her inauguration in January 2006, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf acknowledged the scale of the challenge of rebuilding the war-torn country. Revitalizing economic activity and strengthening governance through the Liberian Government plans were both closely related to the areas covered by GEMAP. In her inauguration speech, she acknowledged acceptance of and compliance with GEMAP, while undertaking to render it "non-applicable in a reasonable period of time." Thus, the new administration recognized that with scarce Government resources and limited capacity, Liberia's reconstruction and economic governance reform would not be possible without a prominent role by the international community.

Indeed, GEMAP was meant to provide a transitional economic governance system and enable long-term national systems to be put in place. Thus, GEMAP was a groundbreaking development in the practice of post-conflict situations, which in Liberia was also marked by the presence of UNMIL. It became the first prototype of an innovative binding and enforceable compact between the national Government and the international community, which, unlike later attempts to use similar compacts, was effective in ensuring the level of accountability international partners were seeking from the Government – in return for the provision of assistance. In virtue of his mandate providing for the lead in coordination of all United Nations operations in Liberia, the SRSG UNMIL and the Mission as a whole played an essential role in the efforts to develop, coordinate and implement GEMAP.

bring in their own perspectives and share information of their programmes. We did the same in all the counties.

We also set up peace committees in every county to settle disputes, especially land disputes between families that needed a community engagement. The committees were led by opinion leaders, elders, and religious leaders. We encouraged some international NGOs to help them.

Our work was really with the different arms of government, traditional elders, and civil society and community groups, to build up each of the counties. One after the other, we made sure that the peace was kept so that we could start peacebuilding work. Over the last two years of the mission, after the Ebola crisis, our focus has been on consolidating the peace achieved by bringing together our work in reconciliation and governance and supporting the good offices work of senior management. Hence the change of name to "Peace Consolidation."

One of the enduring areas of support has been in the area of decentralization and de-concentration of services to the counties. We supported the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Governance Commission to draft decentralization policies and a local government bill at the central level. Through UNMIL quick-impact projects, we have supported the establishment of county service centres in all 15 counties, providing nearly two dozen basic services previously centralized in Monrovia.

How did you wind up your mission?

There are still outstanding issues which we have been focusing on. For example, education has continued to face many challenges, ranging from teacher strikes for regular pay to university students fighting for scholarships and reduction in tuition. These challenges could disrupt the peace, and we have been weighing in, using the good offices of the SRSG. We have also been proactive in trying to settle land disputes in the agricultural and mining concessions. We used our programmatic funds to address some of these in a systematic way, using mediation. We have worked with UNDP to set up stakeholder groups among the affected communities in at least four concession areas, and a tripartite mechanism involving the government, community and the concessionaires, who had taken virtually all the land. The land grab left the communities with nothing and the concessionaires weren’t employing the local people either. This is one of the outstanding problems UNMIL will leave behind. The tripartite mechanism should work over the long run, and UNDP is now the owner of this portfolio.

Two bills that we have supported over the last two years remain outstanding at the legislature – the land rights and local government bills. The land rights bill will go a long way in addressing many of the problems and uncertainties surrounding land ownership for the citizenry, especially in rural Liberia. The local government bill will help devolve authority, decision-making and services to the counties through systematic decentralization that will guarantee election of local representatives to manage their affairs. Both bills will help address most of the root causes of the conflict and transform Liberia.

In terms of civil affairs and governance, which cut across all the Mission’s work, can you identify some achievements that had a direct impact on the country?

I will mention a few of these. One is the presence of Government officials in the counties which allowed for improved service delivery and coordination of activities. With the presence of Civil Affairs staff at county level, we encouraged local governance to take hold by supporting communication, ensuring superintendents get the support from the UN agencies and other international partners present in the counties. Line ministries were encouraged to deploy staff to the counties; and salaries were paid in the counties. The presence of officials at county level immensely supported the work of our rule of law colleagues, the military and UN Police.



Youths attend the One Day High Level Youth Dialogue organized by NAYMOTE-Partners for Democratic Development in Kakata, Margibi County.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 5 Jan 18

Another landmark area was the freeing up the agricultural/rubber concessions hitherto occupied by the rebels and ex-combatants. These concessions have now been contracted out to international investors, bringing job opportunities to many counties and rural communities. Although the concessions pose a new challenge to affected communities, the Government has the opportunity to address these through dialogue within the tripartite committees and passage of the land rights bill that UNMIL and UNDP have supported.

We contributed to the preparation of the local government bill on decentralization. We assisted in drafting it and developing some of the policies. In collaboration with other international partners, we also introduced the concept of county service centers, so that people would receive services, even if the political decisions had yet to be made on decentralization itself. With quick-impact projects, we were able to build some of the structures for county services, enabling basic services like driving licenses, business registration, marriage certificates, all the things that people would normally come to Monrovia for. This is quite a relief for the population outside Monrovia.

We also introduced “county dialogues,” and now various NGOs have taken that up as part of reconciliation drive at the sub-national level. The larger picture for reconciliation is problematic, and the Government has not really lived up to its own ideals and plans. We kept the focus on the county level, with the dialogues between county authorities and the business sector, the police and security sector, bringing them all together to talk about reconciliation in their own counties, and to identify the residual challenges they are facing.

Will the dialogues continue when UNMIL closes down?

Our hope is that this process will continue and will form the foundation for peace consolidation. Some of the NGOs we worked with to spearhead the dialogues wish to continue, but they would have to be financed somehow. We have been using our assessed contribution and quick-impact funds in eight counties, with NGOs helping, and we hope that the whole practice and the knowledge will stay in Liberia. They should be able to continue with a small amount of money and the involvement of the peacebuilding office in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

One obstacle I foresee is the change of experienced superintendents with the expected change in political administration early 2018. Continuity will be a challenge, but I am sure the NGOs that we have been working with will remain in Liberia and continue that process.

We have also been supporting the land authority, as we don’t have a land reform act yet. We are using part of our resources, about US\$1.3 million through UNDP, for a project to help them build that institution. We are doing the same with the plantations and the natural resources sector. These are lasting legacies that will be attributed to our work.

County reconciliation dialogues

The Government of Liberia has identified national reconciliation as a strategic objective for long- term peace consolidation and economic development. However, 14 years after the signing of the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement there has been limited progress towards addressing the root causes of Liberia’s civil war. Many of the key recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, published in its final report of 2009, remain unrealized. Furthermore, the passage of key bills is critical to addressing the root causes of the fragmented State-society relations, but the slow pace of legislative reform hinders reconciliation. A major deficit in the process of national reconciliation is the inability to effectively engage with local realities. Previously, national consultation processes tended to focus on the macro level and concentrated in Monrovia. Recent studies point to simmering local tensions which cut across inter-group relations, and the UN system and the Government have agreed that establishing a system for sustained and organic county reconciliation dialogue is a key building block for long-term peace consolidation and strengthening the gains of post war recovery.

County reconciliation dialogues were established as a Government commitment in the Liberia Peace Building Plan (2017) and will support the efforts to advance the Strategic Roadmap for national healing, peacebuilding and reconciliation, launched in 2012. In 2017 UNMIL funded eight county dialogues. Each initiative used broad-based structured dialogue to improve communities’ participation in and ownership of the reconciliation process nationwide. Each dialogue produced a vision and five-year plan for reconciliation in the county, which was validated by the respective local authority and representatives of the local community. Thousands of people from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds have been included in the dialogue process which includes local authority figures, civil society leaders, elders, religious leaders, business people, women, youth and representatives of special interest groups such as people living with disabilities.

This outcome of the dialogues will help shape the agenda of a National Reconciliation Conference to be held in Monrovia in March 2018. The results will guide the Government of George Weah in formulating an integrated national policy for reconciliation and peace consolidation.

The Liberia Peacebuilding Plan



A Liberian Women’s Peace Group member performs during celebrations for the 10th Anniversary of the peace agreement at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 19 Aug 13

In 2016, the Security Council, in resolution 2333, requested the Secretary-General to submit a plan to demonstrate how the UN and international partners will assure continued peace and security in Liberia. An intense consultative process led by UNMIL and the Government produced the Peacebuilding Plan. A Reference Group of Government representatives, the National Civil Society Council, UNMIL, the UN Country Team and the donor community guided the formulation of national peacebuilding priority areas and areas of possible ongoing assistance.

The Peacebuilding Plan established a timetable for Liberia’s transition, focusing on two phases and a roadmap for action, while providing guidance to achieve a peaceful, just and inclusive society, based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. Phase I outlines the actions required of the UN system in support of the Government’s commitment to embed durable national capacities before UNMIL’s departure. Phase II, from April 2018, will last for a period to be determined by the new Government, in principle not longer than 2020. During this phase, longer-term peacebuilding priorities will be integrated into development frameworks necessary to ensure ongoing support to national efforts to mitigate, prevent and manage risks of conflict.

The President of the Security Council issued a statement in July 2017 encouraging the Government and all stakeholders to strive to fulfil the Plan’s commitments. The Peacebuilding Commission acknowledged the Plan as an example which could be emulated by other post-conflict countries.

What were some of the challenges facing the Mission in getting to those achievements?

One of the key challenges was getting qualified and experienced counterparts to work with, on the Liberian side. Unfortunately there was high turnover in Government over the years, even in the counties. None of the superintendents we met when I came in 2008 are there now. You always have a new set of people, and they need skills and experience to propel progress in the counties. The Ministry of Internal Affairs, a key ministry, has had five ministers since 2008, with different management styles and priorities. So this is part of the challenge for Liberia, and not only for us working on peace consolidation and civil affairs. Right across the Mission, this has been an obstacle to sustaining progress.

Secondly, the Government’s budgetary allocation to priority reform areas has been less than optimal. Over 80 per cent of Liberia’s national budget has been devoted to operations and payment of staff salaries and emoluments. Only a meagre 10 per cent or less goes to the much needed socio-economic investment in basic service and infrastructure.

Within the Mission, we lacked our own resources. Although we have had a modest annual budget for quick-impact projects, the focus was on rule of law projects for many years, constructing police stations and courts in growing communities. In the last two years, part of the budget had been allocated to soft projects to support capacity building and promote reconciliation and good governance initiatives.

The Mission’s capacity was also gradually reduced over time as we approached the end of our mandate. We could not continue to provide the level of support we provided before, mainly due to staff attrition and the need for more specialist support to the Government to help sustain the peace. Our focus on SRSG’s good offices support was more appropriate in this final phase, while the UN Country Team stepped up support for peacebuilding and improved governance.

Can you speak about the transition plan and what you hope it might lead to?

The transition plan has been an important instrument to guide the handover of important work from one administration to the next. For UNMIL, it is about the critical work we have been doing to keep and sustain the peace and what aspects the UNCT is expected to take forward and which should be the Government’s own responsibility. As the current administration also transitions to a new one after the elections, it is also about ensuring that the reforms undertaken over the years with support of the international community are safeguarded and taken forward. I am hopeful that the key reforms I have referred to above will be handed over to the new administration.

Is there risk of these reforms rolling back?

Well, my experience in Africa has been that once a new government comes in, they take the posture that “the others didn’t do anything: let’s do our own business,” instead of building on what the last government has done. They will try to look for money to start their own processes, which would be very sad and should not be allowed to happen. The good thing is that the transition plan has made provisions for participation of individuals who may play a role in the new Administration. Also most of Liberia’s donors, the EU, USAID, World Bank, many bilateral donors like Sweden, have been supportive of all key reforms that need to be taken forward. It is hoped that the Governance Commission, the main custodian of the reform processes, will play a significant role in the transition. I believe there are chances for these reforms to go forward.

The convening power of the Mission will be lost when UNMIL finally leaves, but the reinforced Resident Coordinator’s Office will be a major force for leadership among the international community.

On the part of the Government, it is expected that part of the transition will be for the outgoing ministers to leave in place handover notes so that the new leaders will have something to work with and that they can see what the different agencies accomplished.

When UNMIL wraps up, will you have a sense of completion, or will you be frustrated by unfinished work that you might not have been able to get to?

To be honest, I will not be frustrated, because we came here as part of the Mission, which accomplished its mandate. In neighbouring Sierra Leone, we had five years of active peacekeeping, and after that the people asked the Mission to leave, so they can take over. In Liberia, for 14 years, they have been pampered in many ways. They should be given a chance to run their country. There’s still a question of capacity as a lot of their capacity is still out of Liberia. Many people returned, but they still have roots outside, mainly in America. They do not really come to stay, but they are professionals and should be encouraged to invest back home.

In Liberia, for 14 years, they have been pampered in many ways. They should be given a chance to run their country.

This has been their problem, and it is not a peacekeeping problem. So in my mind, it is clear that our Mission’s mandate has been accomplished, and the rest are normal governance challenges which the Government should be able to address, with support from international partners.

We cannot define Liberia’s future by peacekeeping. I think we need to move on, and we already have. Ebola set Liberia back in 2014 when the Mission was already in a draw down mode. We had to renew our efforts, and in 2015 and 2016, we had a fresh mandate, and we achieved a transition of security at the end of June last year. Then the civilian aspects were pretty straight forward. It’s unfortunate that so much is coinciding with the transition in Government, with the election of a new President and new House of Representatives. They will all come on board in early 2018, and that coincidence itself will be an opportunity but also a challenge. Liberia should be strong enough to deal with that.

How confident are you in Liberia’s future? Do you have a sense of hope? Do you know where this country is going?

I have qualified confidence, yes. I can see Liberia is ready to move. The people don’t feel very confident in doing a lot of things, without support from outside, and are very worried about what is coming after the Sirleaf administration. But the elections and the change of regime may influence people’s perception positively. After so many years of peace, backed by the UN Mission, one can understand the anxiety they have about moving forward on their own. The people need to be encouraged to stay steadfast. Two critical bills must be addressed – the Land Reform bill that empowers rural Liberians to own and invest in land and the Local Government bill that allows decision making, resource mobilization, planning to devolve to the counties. They need those to go forward as a country. Otherwise some of the root causes of the war will not have been addressed, and the investments made here will be jeopardized.

Supporting decentralization in Liberia



Local residents and Members stand outside the Magistrates Court in Clay Ashland, Montserrado County at its opening ceremony.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 20 Jul 07

The National Policy on Decentralization and Local Governance, launched in January 2012, envisaged the deconcentration, delegation and devolution of functions and resources to local governments over a 10-year period, with the first five years (2012-2017) dedicated to the de-concentration of services to county structures. The High Level Round Table on De-concentration, held on 4 December 2014 and chaired by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, highlighted the need to aggressively implement the strategy, and in February 2015 an inter-ministerial plan was launched.

With the support of UNMIL and other international partners, the Government opened county service centres in all 15 counties. Today these centres provide over 20 different services to the general public, including marriage and business certificates, driving licenses, deeds registrations, zoning and land permits, school operation licenses, ECOWAS work permits and socio-psychological services. At present, nine ministries have a functionally coordinated presence in most counties, and local officials have been trained to provide services to local people. In eight counties, operations were launched with equipment purchased by UNMIL quick-impact projects (QIPs). The equipment included computers, generators, and specialized drivers' license printers. UNMIL also funded the installation of solar panels in four counties, which will support sustainable energy needs in those locations.

UNMIL supported the Governance Commission and the Ministry of Internal Affairs in drafting the Local Governance Bill, which was passed by the House of Representatives in 2016 and has been pending before the Senate. Implementation of the Act will provide the legal framework for the much needed governance reform, which is central to building peace and promoting reconciliation in Liberia. The inadequacies and shortcomings of the country's governance framework historically served as a source of conflict and contributed to enduring divisions in society. The Act will de-centralize political, social and economic power, allowing local governments and local communities to take charge of their socio-economic and political life.

So what do you say to the people of Liberia as you look to the future?

The people of Liberia should hold their elected officials more accountable. The people should make sure that those officials who have received their votes, deliver to them. They should insist that schools and hospitals are working for them and that their children can survive and have a future. The people (especially youth and women) also need empowerment, and they should demand it from their leaders. They should also demand accountability for the public resources entrusted to public officials for effective and efficient management. Finally, they should demand development from their leaders, and work with them on it. The people should be interested in important bills that are currently in the legislature on land reform, decentralization, anti-corruption and gender equality. That's my message.

What would you say to the internationals who are staying to help Liberia move forward?

The internationals should focus on giving a chance to Liberians to provide leadership for their own development processes. It should not be left to the internationals. We should also pay more attention to the needs of the people, not just the Government. We have focused on government, but if the government fails, the people suffer the brunt. The people are increasingly demanding accountability and empowerment from their elected officials. As an international community, we should ask how we can support that process. If these two elements come together, there would be more pressure on the authorities, who seem to be the main beneficiaries from all the investment in Liberia's peace, recovery and development so far.

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UNMIL has gone beyond the call of its mandate, and it has been a successful mission in many respects. I am happy that we are moving out, to give a chance to the Liberians to figure out how to move their country forward. We held their hands for too long. We should just go without looking back. As a Mission, we have done our bit. We have stayed long enough.



Advisor raises consciousness of Mission personnel on gender

Maria Nakabiito, Gender Advisor

The role of a gender advisor is to promote and support gender-sensitive approaches to the implementation of the Mission's mandate, drawing on the provisions of the Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security. The Gender Advisor coordinates gender mainstreaming, analysis and reporting in the substantive work of the Mission, while supporting efforts to promote the participation of women in all of UNMIL's mandated activities. She also works with UNMIL components and the United Nations Country Team to analyze, monitor and report on the integration of gender in critical reform processes and to inform UNMIL's good offices activities to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Gender Advisor Maria Nakabiito had extended experience in gender issues in the Government of Uganda and in UN peacekeeping and humanitarian operations and offices before arriving in UNMIL to head the Gender Advisory Unit.

Could you describe your background and what sort of experience you've had in this area to take on some of the challenges for a gender advisor here in Liberia?

A demographer by training, I have multiple skills required to address gender issues, which are multi-sectoral. You need knowledge of policy analysis and interpretation, training and capacity-building skills, and understanding of issues such as rule of law, protection and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). And you need advocacy skills. In terms of work, I was part of a team that pioneered the first Ministry of Women and Development in Africa, in 1988, in Uganda. Then I worked for the UN around the world including East Timor, Darfur, South Sudan, and Italy (for the Libya mission). In peacekeeping, I was part of the startup team in East Timor, and opened the gender offices in Darfur and South Sudan. I have also served in the World Food Programme, the World Health Organization and the UN Population Fund.

What were your initial impressions when you first got to Liberia and started working for UNMIL?

The concept of gender in peacekeeping missions is about mainstreaming and empowering staff members, before they go out to work in the society and the community.

staff members, before they go out to work in the society and the community. We had a mandate to oversee gender work within the Mission. As it was challenging within the Mission to advise people senior to myself, there was always an escape route going out to the community, because that is easier to do, and there I was just seen as a UN international staff member. Often it is easier to step outside of the mission and do what looks more like civil affairs than the primary work of gender advisor.

My initial impression was that everyone in UNMIL considered themselves gender experts and while they were supportive of gender work, sometimes this confidence clouded the need to listen to the Gender Advisor. The concept of gender in peacekeeping missions is about mainstreaming and empowering

When you arrived how did you find the situation of the Gender Advisor?

At the stage when I came, gender work had been diverted, taking place outside the Mission, because there was less resistance in the Government ministry and by civil society partners. Internally, the Mission and the UN in general needs to walk the talk. The UN is a pacesetter in the countries where we serve, so it would be significant if the Mission would lead by example. It should be 80 per cent of your job, to make sure people in the Mission undertake gender responsibilities. And I will give credit to some sections: The rule of law, and the security sector were very focused on taking up the responsibility of gender mainstreaming. So there was room for improvement had there been more time, to give more focus to what the Mission should do in terms of gender.

The rule of law, and the security sector were very focused on taking up the responsibility of gender mainstreaming.

Is it fair to say that gender is the most cross-cutting issue in the UN?

Gender is cross-cutting yes because it affects and is affected by what other mission components do with the beneficiaries. It also addresses or should address parity issues within the organization. So the primary role of a gender unit should be to ensure that within the mission, every functional unit

has their hand on addressing gender issues within their mandate. It requires a clear understanding of the role of every staff member in the delivery of gender requirements. More important it requires support from mission leadership.

At least for the time that I've been here, we have had the support from the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) and the deputy SRSGs. For every function that we've call them to, for everything that we've called their attention to, they've given their full support.

Is some of your work involved in trying to make those relationships more clear?

Absolutely. The policy guidelines are very clear. It takes skill, resilience, and support to make this work. The Gender Advisory Unit with support from Mission management broadcasts regular flash messages to keep gender on the minds of all staff. This complemented the regular gender training which is given periodically to staff members. For some staff who have been on one mission for years, the training can lead to fatigue with the issue. So you have to find creative ways of making it work. I brought in the issue of HIV-AIDS to liven up the discussion. The factors that affect the transmission of HIV-AIDS are similar to the factors that cause gender disparity. So if you make that part of part of their training, it works.

Are there a few achievements in UNMIL that you thought were significant in impacting your work?

One of the most significant has been the integration of gender in the Liberian rule of law organs and the security sectors: the police, bureau of immigration, and the army. The UNMIL Gender Advisory Unit was able to establish functional gender advisory desks within those units. And because of that, much attention has been given to gender within the security sector. The national gender policy was developed with the support of the Mission, in addition to gender guidelines and codes of conducts for the public officials and employees of the Government.

most significant has been the integration of gender in the Liberian rule of law organs and the security sectors: the police, bureau of immigration, and the army.

When the Mission brought in female police units that also gave great visibility to the gender unit. The fact that peacekeeping can be done by women and men has been proven here as Liberia has been able to send female peacekeepers to other countries. The security sector institutions are one area that has been very successful.



Two young Liberian women participating in UN Day celebrations at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia.

Photo: UNMIL | 24 Oct 18

Human Rights also incorporated gender in its protection work and support to prosecution of sexual and gender based violence (SGVB) crimes. There is a Special Court for prosecuting SGBV cases. That is something different in this country that you may not find elsewhere. They have trained judges and prosecutors for handling SGBV cases. The Government also has a victims support office and an SGBV crimes unit, both in the Ministry of Justice.

On basic issues, what’s your sense of the situation for women’s rights and fundamental freedoms?

In terms of policy legislation, we are half way there. Legislative reform in relation to women’s rights and their fundamental freedoms, and the implementation of existing legislation still face many challenges. Above all, what is really lacking is political commitment to transform policy into action rooted in a society where patriarchal attitudes and harmful gender stereotyping still prevail at all levels.

According to a 2008 survey conducted by UNMIL, 83 per cent of respondents believed that women who were raped had some responsibility in the crime, for instance due to their clothing or social behaviour. And although rape is one the most commonly reported serious crimes in Liberia, arrest and prosecution rates remain very low. There are many reasons, including financial and logistical constraints and capacity gaps in the law enforcement and relevant public institutions.

In addition, the domestic violence law passed in August 2017 omitted a ban on female genital mutilation (FGM). As one of her final acts in office, President Sirleaf issued a presidential executive order on 19 January 2018, banning the practice of FGM, for children under 18. But we will have to see how this is enforced.

Special Court takes on SGBV cases



A young victim of rape at a safe house in Monrovia.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 29 Oct 12

majority of rape cases are dismissed due to the lack of proper evidence gathering by police, corruption, and the lack of will or diligence on the part of police and prosecutors, including those of the special SGBV Crimes Unit.

To address cases of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) related crimes in a speedy manner, a Special Court, with jurisdiction over sexual offences, was established in Monrovia in 2009. The court provides both psychological and legal support, in addition to the deployment of the SGBV Crimes Unit of the Ministry of Justice. The Unit enables a rapid investigative and prosecutorial response to complaints of sexual offences including rape and sexual assault. The SGBV unit also ensures support for the medical, psychological and justice needs of survivors of sexual and gender based violence.

As soon as an incident of SGBV is reported to the police, the victim is referred to the SGBV Crimes Unit for psycho-social counseling to both the victim and family. Other material, educational and medical needs are provided, and in some cases, victims may be relocated during trials to prevent further attack.

But the performance of the Special Court and the reality surrounding SGBV in Liberia remains a serious concern. According to an UNMIL study, the court had 137 rape cases on its docket in August 2015, including rape, sexual assault and corruption of a minor. However, only one case went to trial during that period, and in 2015, only two convictions were obtained. According to court data, between 2009 and 2014, only 38 rape cases went to trial, of which 24 resulted in convictions. During the same period, 286 cases of rape were dismissed by nolle prosequi motions. A

Even if the laws are not perfect, at least they exist. But they don’t seem to function. One reason they are not functioning is that there are no consequences in the communities for breaking them. If am a politician and I am not speaking up against SGVB, and I can still be elected over and over again, that means there are no consequences. No one is asking me, if this kind of bill came to the Senate, why did I not stand on the side of women? There is a need to strengthen the advocacy by civil society, because no one is calling out anybody. The awareness is there; the laws are there; so what is the reason they are not being implemented? The reason is that no one is actually demanding accountability. No one is asking why the Government says this will be done, but it hasn’t been done. Why is it that five years down the road as Government, so many rapes have happened, so many appointments made and nobody has been held to account for the things that have not been delivered. You committed to laws and yet there is no implementation. There needs to be somebody to ask questions, and there is nobody asking.

Why is it that five years down the road as Government, so many rapes have happened, so many appointments made and nobody has been held to account for the things that have not been delivered.

Without a civil society group holding Government accountable, you don’t anticipate that needed changes will happen?

If I promised you something and I am not delivering on it and you are not asking for it, then I am comfortable not delivering it. That is what has happened. In fact, having elected the first female President, there was a lot of expectation for Liberia, but you can see that we have just come through an election with only 9 women out of 73 seats in the House of Representatives. Why is that? The women have not come out as a block to threaten or intimidate or even to lobby. They aren’t saying to political parties, these are our demands as the women of Liberia, and if you promise to deliver on these demands, we will fly your flag, campaign for you and follow you up once you are in office. We will ask the women to vote as a block, and you will have our vote. It is interesting that there is no unified stand as one would have expected. At this point, we would expect women’s voices to be profound and loud. But they are silent.

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What about the issue of nationhood: is there no clear sense belonging together?

The Gender Advisory Unit hosted six consciousness-building gatherings to contribute to strengthening the spirit of “Liberianism,” together with Kvina Till Kvina, a Swedish NGO aiming to strengthen women’s political and economic rights, and the Rural Women of Liberia, a network of women from local communities. The idea is that women and men should stand as one people and one Liberia, and rebuild the nation as a people. The idea of persons aspiring to leave for other countries needs to be discouraged.

Are there silent achievements that haven’t generated headlines in the rule of law or justice institutions?

Back to the elections: for the first time in Liberia, there was a mini situation room during voter registration, to help support the inclusion of marginalized persons like the Mandingos, cross-border people who might have been excluded from registering. So because such issues were raised early enough, more people were able to come out and vote.

The other achievement has been in assisting healing from SGBV. Sexual and gender based violence is profound in this country. A local organization in Monrovia, Duport Road Community HIV/AIDS Care and Support, has been working with communities of survivors. They get them to talk about what they went through, so that they may be able to overcome the stigmatization and move forward. They support survivors further by helping them use village loan schemes and training to start small enterprises. This specific group is making headway peoples’ lives, supporting themselves and managing their livelihoods. UNMIL helped with a quick-impact project.

And what will sustain the project’s funding once UNMIL closes?

The concept for sustainability is interesting. Participants actually practice bottle agriculture. For example if you have land, that is where you plant your crops. Survivors and participants instead plant crops and vegetables in plastic water or coke bottles. People make a living out of it, even here where the cost of living is quite high. In a tiny space, people make US\$20-30 on a weekly basis.

Market women prepare their food products at a produce stall in a local market in Kakata, Margibi County.

Photo: UNMIL | 1 Nov 16



The survivors team up in groups, save money and initiate village loan schemes, which in itself serves as a form of micro-finance. Members then borrow to grow their business. Survivors join up and form small groups in different counties to create more village loan schemes. We have supported their journey to healing so that they can move out of the humiliation phase, and move from feeling victims to survivors.

Then there are the Peace Huts. Liberia has about 16, and UN Women funded the construction. They are instrumental in mitigating conflict in communities. Women of the project liaise with national authorities, sometimes supporting them with evidence gathering in rape cases.

UNMIL also helped facilitate the Talking Bus, a community mobilization tool that contributes to issues pertinent to governance and political participation, with a focus on women. Its intent is to build a critical mass of diverse actors and other citizens and elevate the voices of ordinary Liberian women and men, to promote inclusive public debates. The riders on the bus discuss issues of governance, and accountability.

What are some of the challenges you have faced here?

One of the challenges has been harmful social cultural norms that affect sexual and gender-based violence which is epidemic here. The Mission has tracked it and initiated programmes for prevention and response and collaborated with the Ministry of Gender. But now the Ministry is aware that the Mission is leaving. The challenge is to keep them committed. One of the gaps and the challenges is the referral pathway of SGBV. The Ministry committed itself to a coordination mechanism and also to one-stop centres for responding to SGBV. Some of these are only nascent. They seem to be stuck in a stage that was immediately after the conflict. Once a major donor or player who had demanded responsibility pulls out or relaxes, the Government doesn't really step up. So SGBV seems an unending issue, one step forward and two steps back. At this point, the one-stop centres should be fully functional; the referral pathways should be working, and we should have an inventory of care and support. At this point, if a woman needs psychosocial treatment, she should know where to go at the snap of a finger, but this is not working very well. There is a UN and Government joint programme on SGBV/HTP, but funding has been scarce. Only Sweden has fully committed funds—of at least US\$1 million per year for five years. We are concerned that SGBV will still be a major issue once the Mission leaves. Also, the Mission patrols were a measure of confidence-building which will now have to be done by the community, which becomes difficult.

There is a need for more than lip service here on gender, and most of the organizations do not have real gender capacity. Some just pick any person—usually a woman--and make her responsible for gender, whether she has the skills or not. The Government has what they call county

gender coordinators who have not really trained as gender specialists, so there is a gap in expertise. This could affect the gains that have been made because the level of expertise might go down once the Mission ends. It will be important for them to find skilled gender people. UN Women could fill the gap, but their presence in Liberia is very small.

What do you think the Mission could have done differently to make a greater impact in this area?

From the onset, and through the lifecycle of the Mission, gender needed to be part of the culture. The Mission has had two female Heads, but the UN as an organization needs to move beyond tokenism. To have one woman is not addressing the issue. It is not adequate. They used the excuse that women are not experienced enough. But you would be surprised how many inexperienced men are given a chance to learn on the job. The Mission could also have done more to support the peace consolidation section of Civil Affairs

UN as an organization needs to move beyond tokenism.

society organizations? There is a big gap: something is missing. So maybe efforts should have been made to support the buildup of new and upcoming civil society organizations. And the Mission should have held the feet of the Government more to the fire with regards to gender.

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to build the capacity of civil society, because in Liberian, the same people seem to be recycling through the civil society organizations. Why are there no younger people in the civil

Why are there no younger people in the civil society organizations?

Can you tell me what you mean by that?

When a female President was elected, then everyone seemed to be satisfied that Liberia had moved ahead in terms of gender. But this may have actually worked against the women of Liberia, because women may be told 'Oh you are already holding a high office.' A female executive should have been held to a very high standard to deliver on the gender mandate.

The expectation that a female President would fully serve and deliver on the gender mandate contributed to reducing the attention that should have been given to gender issues.

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There is a long way to go, but also gender issues seem to be cyclic. One issue gets addressed and another crops up. Women's empowerment is a priority, then the issue of violence against women is raised, because empowerment is seen as distorting the social order. I would say there is a long way to go in terms of addressing inequality, patriarchy, access to justice, etc.

With all of these challenges you've identified, how confident are you in the future of this country?

I am confident because there are two transitions taking place, a new Government and a more empowered Country Team. The presence of the Mission may have clouded the functions of the Country Team, which with its development mandate, will be standing on its own with more resources to support planning with the Government. The role of the Mission was advisory. Now the agencies, on the other hand, do things that are agreed upon with the Government. So maybe in that context they will find common ground as to where they want to see the county go, and what should be priorities of funding and areas of concentration. So they can then move forward with that. I am hopeful that Liberia will see a brighter light.

What message then would you send to Liberians?

To the women and men of Liberia, I would urge you to champion issues that affect women because the women are not the other: they are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your wives and above all they are human beings that deserve to be treated with dignity. Gender issues are not women's issues: they are pertinent development issues that affect families, communities and the nation at large. A nation is only as strong as its weakest link. If women are left behind, Liberia is left behind. If your wife, your mother and your sister are empowered, then you are proud. And for the women of Liberia, I would say, the young ones should really stand up and join the advocacy for empowerment. Do not to leave it to

a generation that has done much, but is more a passing generation than a future one. So looking futuristically, I would encourage the younger persons in Liberia who are a big proportion of the population to really stand up to improve the plight of women and do what needs to be done.

And what message would you give to the internationals who will continue beyond UNMIL’s closure?

To be champions of what the United Nations stands for and that is gender equality and empowerment.

Would you have recommendations for other gender advisors in future peacekeeping operations?

They should try as much as possible to integrate the work they are doing with as many players as possible, especially within the mission. Once you gather enough support, there is a ripple effect. Because if every mission unit is interfacing with their interlocutors outside the mission with a gender lens, then the work of the gender advisors would be easier because there will be other players. As gender advisors we need allies. I would also encourage missions to find gender spokespersons, and gender intermediaries, because an advisor alone in the mission speaking on gender becomes kind of monotonous and perhaps irrelevant. Get a higher-level person to lobby and do advocacy on specific issues.

Do you see hope for the UN in making real change to the kind of equality that are promoted by UN policies?

I see hope if the UN would implement its policy guidelines for recruitment and for retention of women. There is a need for affirmative action without compromising standards. I have faith that the Organization can step beyond policy guidelines. Otherwise gender equality just seems to be a moving target, a mirage than can hardly be reached.



Women’s Situation Room prepares ground for calm elections

As tensions simmered in the period between the October 2017 presidential election and the December 26 run-off, networks of influential women gathered in “situation rooms” around the country, working with election officials and police to help keep the situation calm.

The Women’s Situation Room is the creation of Councillor Yvette Chesson-Wureh, a prominent jurist in both Liberia and the US, who leads the Angie Brooks International Centre for women’s empowerment and leadership development.



Counselor Yvette Chesson-Wureh, Coordinator of the Angie Brooks International Centre (ABIC) and the Women Situation Room (WSR), at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Monrovia.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 17 Jan 18

Angie Brooks was Liberia’s first Permanent Representative to the UN, and became Africa’s first President of the UN General Assembly. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, noting that the NGO championed women’s leadership, allocated offices in the Foreign Ministry for the Centre.

The Women’s Situation Room is a series of activities that are deployed for elections, first organized before the 2011 presidential vote, to forestall anticipated violence. The Liberian model has now been replicated for elections in seven other countries, and in Liberia, women are seeking ways to make it a permanent facility.

The Women’s Situation Room functions as a nerve centre, gathering and providing information, producing analyses and calling in intervention by the elections officials or police when incipient tensions or abuses such as ballot box stuffing are detected. The situation room is “manned” by “eminent women leaders” selected for the reach of their influence and credibility in each community. Police officers also take part to ensure a direct link with law enforcement. Call operators are trained on how to respond to questions by legal experts.

In the October 2017 elections, the Room provided 300 elections observers and 73 peace monitors, with personnel in each electoral district. They logged and/or intervened in some 800 incidents. The Government of Norway, UNDP and other partners funded the October Situation Room, and UNMIL funded its deployment for the second round of elections in December.

On the run-off day, the Women’s Situation Room and the Liberia Elections Early Warning & Response Group, another civil society group, shared concerns about the low turnout and reported on the alleged use of duplicated or forged registration cards. Together they conducted a talk show on UNMIL Radio to share lessons learned.

Founder Chesson-Wureh credits the Women’s Situation Room with averting chaos and violence during the 2017 elections, particularly between the two rounds of voting.

“For the first time, after the Women’s Situation Room, the politicians went to court. For the first time, we saw the legal process go from the magistrate’s office to the Supreme Court. In the past, the loser would go to the disadvantaged youth, give them US\$5, and start a demonstration. The Women’s Situation Room ensures there is no violence before, during and after the elections.”

Spin-off activities of the Angie Brooks Centre included a mini-call center during voter registration, a 15,000-women march for peaceful elections, and training for yanna boys (street traders).

Another of Ms. Chesson-Wureh’s proudest ventures, also deployed during the elections period, is the Talking Bus, donated by UNMIL. The Bus took lawyers and others with knowledge of the political process to nine hotspots around the country to engage in conversation with local communities. Ms. Chesson-Wureh recalls lines of hundreds of people waiting in the rain to board the bus and ask questions. The Bus was a critical tool by the Women’s Situation Room particularly during the lull between voting rounds.

“People were confused,” she recalled. “Some people didn’t even know there was a Constitution. It also gives people a sense of being part of the country and part of the process.”

She has more plans for the bus, as her NGO continues to bring the people of Liberia on board.

Mission Support: a key enabler

David Penklis, Director of Mission Support



David Penklis, the Director of Mission Support, speaks to staff at a town hall briefing at UNMIL Starbase, Monrovia.

Photo: Yang Wang | 13 Jul 16

David Penklis, as the Director of Mission Support, a key enabler for implementation of a peacekeeping mandate, has been leading the efforts to close down what was once one of the UN's largest missions. Previously, he served with the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia in the 1990s then in the UN peacekeeping operation in Burundi and at UN Headquarters in New York. From 2011-13 he was the first Chief of the UN Regional Services Centre in Entebbe, a logistical hub for the peacekeeping operations in Africa. In a November 2017 interview, David Penklis talks about the challenges involved in supporting peacekeeping operations, from start-up to drawdown, and from closure to liquidation.

You came to UNMIL with years of peacekeeping operation experience from the field and from HQ. When you arrived, is it fair to say you hit the ground running?

Well, I'm a swimmer not a runner, so I think in terms of swimming against or with the tide. I came to Liberia with a parcel of expertise directly relevant to leading Mission Support, so I was able to immediately swim with the tide when I arrived. At that time, there was some uncertainty about the Mission's lifespan but the general consensus was that it would be shut down. Having closed a couple of missions, I was able to start thinking strategically and practically about preparing for closure and transition.

UNMIL had been here for a long time. The Mission Support team I inherited was cohesive and working well together. It was easy to have conversations about what to do next and also to be challenged as the leader of Mission Support by people who had good knowledge of support procedures and operations. UNMIL staff had been through multiple downsizings already, so they were accustomed to doing things such as staff separation and site closures. However, closure was still a relatively new mind-set for the staff, Government and Liberian community.

When I arrived, I raised the idea of 'lean and clean' as part of the closure plans, and we later added 'green.' We needed to have leaner operations and level of assets, inventory and footprint. By having a leaner Mission, and a cleaner Mission – in terms of making sure our records, archives and any outstanding issues were in order – then I felt that, whatever happened, we would be in a good position to effectively move towards a closure.

When you close a mission, there is a huge amount work that normally must be done in a very short timeframe. You don't have the luxury of spending a few months getting a legal opinion to resolve an issue. You need to have a framework in place that can deal with the volume of work that comes from the mass separation of staff and the surge in transactions. The idea is to prep and set-up the mission properly before entering those final phases.

My message to all Mission Support staff when I arrived was that the staffing size is the largest it will ever be until the point of closure. That was in June 2016. In December 2016, we received Security Council resolution 2333, that told us we were closing, with 30 March 2018 as the end of the mandate, and complete closure by 30 June 2018. Even so, one of the issues that caused uncertainty was the elections. The resolution stated that we should provide logistical support, although the Mission didn't have a specific election mandate.

The goal of every peacekeeping or political mission is, in the end, not to exist. Doing a good job in the field means operations end as a result of achieving peace or political objectives. The elections and the transition of Government coming at the end of the Mission created some uncertainty, and instability was possible.

Before we talk about some of the transition challenges, could you offer a big picture look at what mission support work involves?

Mission support is a key enabler for the mandate. We recruit and deploy personnel and provide facilities, communications, transport, supplies and much more to enable the work of everyone in the Mission, hence its quite complex, and it covers multiple areas.

We facilitate and support many interlinked activities. For example, we have a civilian medical team linked to a military and civilian hospital that provides services from staff health care to medical evacuations. A medical evacuation may consist of patient site stabilization, helicopter pick-up, further stabilization in a military in-country hospital, then air evacuation to a neighbouring country to a higher level civilian hospital. All while continuing to keep the person alive. A different dimension is engineering. Our mixed military and civilian engineering units built bridges and repaired roads to make movement across the country possible. To communicate across the country we built towers, satellite and web connections. We also deliver administrative activities, such as human resources, finance and budget, along with procurement of goods and services.

If it's true that without mission support, there would be no mission, then would it also be accurate to say that a successful mission could be linked directly to its support function?

If you don't have mission support, what you essentially have is maybe an individual turning up with nothing and with nowhere to go. When the military arrives, they can be self-sustaining for a week or two, but where will the fuel for their vehicles come from? Where will the supplies come from? Who locates and negotiates sites for them? Mission support is the backbone. A strong positive mission support team that understands the requirements of the mission mandate, and that works hand-in-hand with the SRSG's vision, makes an enormous difference.

Looking back now, as the final DMS in UNMIL, what do you see as the major milestones or watershed moments over the years?

This Mission has been here for a long time, with a number of really good directors of Mission Support over the years. We are at this point now because of the successes of all of my predecessors: the early days and incredible challenges of the start-up; the hard work establishing remote sites; getting the troops to the right locations; and always working in very difficult conditions. Moving through those early days to supporting a full-blown Mission and its many challenges over the years has been a major undertaking. Across the board, there have been some excellent Mission Support personnel that have taken up the challenge here.

In terms of those watershed moments, I look first of all at the challenge of start-up as a major achievement. There was a short timeline to get complex infrastructure up and running. It's extremely difficult to do so when limited infrastructure exists. You need to rapidly recruit people into the organization and deploy foreign military into conflict-traumatized communities. You're establishing those relationships, not just getting the right equipment and facilities set up. That is an enormous undertaking. I look back at start-up as a huge milestone, bringing UNMIL to a level of operational stability to have the UN flag flying in remote locations around Liberia.



David Penklis, DMS and Lisa Buttenheim, ASG
Department of Field Support visit the regional office in
Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County.
Photo: Yang Wang | 23 Oct 16

The next big milestone for Mission Support was Ebola. It was a challenge across the globe, not just in Liberia. I was in New York when the Ebola situation started to unfold across West Africa. The deployment of UNMEER, the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response, was built on the back of the missions in the region. Dealing with this crisis was one of the watershed moments, one of the milestones. UNMIL did an enormous amount of work during the Ebola crisis. UNMIL staff stayed and delivered in the face of this terrible life threatening disease. The threat was not about people firing bullets; it was about touching someone and possibly dying. The number of cases in Liberia was very high.

As you can imagine, the Mission Support challenges were immense during the Ebola period. Material was being sent here to help, but there were massive logistics challenges in distributing it around the country. Liberian frameworks were overwhelmed, so UNMIL provided support.

UNMIL staff stayed and delivered in the face of this terrible life threatening disease. The threat was not about people firing bullets; it was about touching someone and possibly dying.

One aspect of the Ebola crisis that’s also worth noting is that normally humanitarian operations don’t like working with the military. Here, the military and the humanitarians worked very closely together. There was a good connection. Although UNMEER was the official Ebola Mission, the UNMIL structure enabled what UMEER needed. If UNMIL didn’t deliver, UNMEER could not have delivered. In this connection, the UNMIL’s infrastructure made a huge difference in Liberia.

UNMIL transported huge quantities of incoming cargo from the airport and contracted warehouses to store material. We scheduled special flights, set up medical isolation areas, embedded logistics experts and engineers. The whole Mission had to reset its framework around the crisis. At the time, the troops were going through another downsizing exercise. That was stopped. Instead they were used to support the relief effort. UNMIL couldn’t complete its mandate and leave Liberia while it was dealing with Ebola.

UNMIL was one of many operations and organizations engaged in the crisis, but the Ebola period says a lot about what a mission can do when a country is faced with a completely destabilizing situation. UNMIL did what it needed to do. Those staff who stayed here in UNMIL, and those in Mission Support who dealt directly with the situation, must be congratulated to have stood with Liberia during that time.

What about some of the other challenges now, such as the strategy for the transition to the UN Country Team?

The December 2016 mandate set forth the key timeframe for us, with 30 March 2018 being the end of the mandate; 30 April being all uniformed personnel gone; and 30 June 2018 being the end of liquidation. So we’ve looked at those dates and worked back from there. We submitted a carefully considered budget with a practical drawdown plan. When the budget went through, we unfortunately were cut by about 10 per cent of what we needed, which became quite challenging because we would no longer have funding to complete all that we needed to do.

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With the severe cuts, we conducted a full review across all sections to gauge how we could make it work. We started setting out new parameters, including earlier repatriation of aviation services, earlier closure of sites and earlier repatriation of uniformed personnel. We had to take a much closer look at the logistics side. In remote locations, for example, it might take two months to close a site. We had to deal with the property owners, transport goods, eliminated hazardous waste, donated or gift our materials or equipment to the local community, and so forth. A lot of activities take place in a site closure, including separating personnel.

The UN Country Team will continue to support the Government after UNMIL closes, and some entities have moved to UNMIL headquarters. The UN Development Programme has already moved and is taking over management of the building so we have been working with UNDP as the next lessor, and assisting them to plan for the move of the Country Team into the premises.

In parallel, there are many other processes underway. One is related to the agreement made between the UN and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to take over UNMIL Radio. ECOWAS also intends to move their offices into the Annex compound adjoining One UN House where the UN Country Team and the African Union are already co-located. It really does help for closer collaboration. It’s a good concept.

Peacekeeping missions are required to set up offices in all kinds of locations. They can be remote, high risk and with no infrastructure. One office may consist of a few military observers, while others may be camps or larger hubs with an airfield and military contingent. Setting up a site requires dealing with government authorities, landlords or finding a suitable location. Most of the time, there is little pre-existing infrastructure. All sites need to be secure and have adequate standards of accommodation, power, sewage, water and capacity for storing materials. Each site is unique, and setting one up depends on what’s there already and how quickly items can move through the supply chain.

For buildings, UN missions use a good deal of prefabricated materials as they can be assembled quickly. Any buildings that already exist at the site, are usually in poor condition so require renovation to bring them up to standard. In this country, during the wet season, roads are impassable for six or seven months of the year. The roads to one UNMIL office were blocked for three or four weeks every year so required aviation support. A fixed-wing aircraft, requires a secured runway, and a helipad needs a perimeter area. The landing area must be secured and free of people or animals. An airport service then requires its own infrastructure.

Setting up a site is not a trivial activity. If communications systems fail in a regional office they have to be fixed and maintained. How will they be maintained? Lightning frequently strikes the buildings, frying the communications linkages. Weather has also challenged delivery by air.

UNMIL engineering units have been repairing and sealing roads. And there are areas that become bogs in the rainy season. A heavy truck stuck in the middle of the road means no one else can pass. There are also many supply chain challenges. In those sites, creative contingency plans are needed for just about everything, including medical emergencies.

The radio handover itself is a complex operation with many moving parts. We need to maintain a framework to ensure uninterrupted broadcasting while the Mission is closing its regional offices so are working closely with both the state-owned Liberian Broadcasting System and commercial providers. ECOWAS envision expanding the radio transmission beyond Liberia, to become a regional broadcaster so issues of resources, capacity, expertise, assets and staffing have to be resolved. UNMIL Radio has an excellent reputation as one of the leading radio stations in the country. It is very important that it is set up for its continuing success. Mission Support will do the mechanics, but it will be up to ECOWAS to make sure it continues to be a success.

Are there other complex activities involved in the drawdown toward closure?

Absolutely. For example, we have been downsizing our main logistics compound, Starbase, located on the outskirts of Monrovia, on land owned by the Liberian port authority. The new Government is yet to decide on the purpose of the land upon our departure.

There are all sorts of challenges in the drawdown, with tasks becoming more challenging as you move along because expertise diminishes and the volume of work continues.

The Mission’s personnel capacity too has been diminishing quickly. We’ve been fortunate that UN Headquarters in New York set up COSMOS, a new framework, to identify personnel to go to new missions at short notice. The problem was that we were losing key personnel at a rapid rate early on while we still needed their functions all the way through to June 2018. The result of that situation has placed us in a position of needing to recruit

rapidly for temporary staff. We have been looking for qualified people, but were not a very attractive prospect as a job opportunity because of the imminent shut down.

That’s a challenge, as our capacity continues to shrink. One day you have technicians that can fix radio equipment, for example, and the next day you don’t. There are all sorts of challenges in the drawdown, with tasks becoming more challenging as you move along because expertise diminishes and the volume of work continues.

Amid all these challenges, what is it you find most rewarding about the role you have played here in Mission Support?

In many ways, it’s a thankless job. When things work well on the support side, people are able to focus on their jobs. When things don’t go well, or move too slowly, we hear about it immediately. For example, separating staff consumed 80 per cent of human resources time for two or three months, which meant that when someone came forward to say they needed a replacement recruited, human resources was overwhelmed and simply couldn’t get to it. But from an individual’s perspective, they want service support, they want client-orientation. And that can be very challenging when capacity is diminished or expertise is lost.

I think what’s especially rewarding about working with mission support is that you’re in an enabling role. You can really see results. On the elections, for example, we can see that we successfully delivered, in a very short period, the materials for the elections. If we had not done that, there would have been real problems for the Government. Delays could have led to allegations, political manoeuvring and other serious issues. When I see successes like that, I feel rewarded and full-filled in my role. Mission support is all about timely outputs and the right deliverables. When it’s successful, it’s rewarding.

When you leave Liberia, what will you look back on and be proud of having achieved?

During the staff downsizing, I personally handed-out termination letters to international and national staff. The experience with the national staff stuck in my mind the most. Here we are closing, separating local staff, and I was thinking about their opportunities for future employment even though UNMIL has run job fairs and activities to build qualifications to help them with getting work. We even ran an entrepreneurs’ event so they have skills to start their own businesses. But the economy is not big enough yet. It’s going to be a tough environment for them in the future.

When handing out the letters, I was concerned that our local staff would be unhappy, even angry. Yet, I was surprised on several occasions by what they shared with me. One separated staff member said “I was in the bush. I was living in fear. UNMIL came. Peace came. I now have my family and a home. I put my children through school, and now I’m departing. Thank you.” I’ve had many moments like that, putting things in context for me. The period of employment with UNMIL has stabilized the lives of many local staff members. The situation in the country is now peaceful and normalized. UNMIL has provided a level of employment that has contributed to the economy and helped the country.

So when I look at the whole Mission and the work that has been done in so many different areas, Mission Support has been a behind-the-scenes enabler for all of it, facilitating, working together and collaborating to deliver with so many actors. When I look at what’s been done by UNMIL, I see a country that has enough stability to go forward into the future. It’s still a fragile peace here, certainly, but after the groundwork already in place and with the continued support of the UN Country Team, Liberia will develop and move toward the future without returning to violence.

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What’s your sense of Liberia’s future? Do you have hope for the future of this country?

I have concerns about the economy, certainly, because if Liberia doesn’t have economic development, then the Government won’t have the money to continue to build infrastructure, and there won’t be employment. If the economy can develop and attract investors, and if Liberia can keep money within the country, then there is a lot of hope for the country. If the economy develops, it would help provide a backbone for the future.

We can’t underestimate the importance of the UN Country Team remaining as UNMIL leaves. The work in the area they’re targeting is to maintain peace and security through development. Also, several countries have representation here – the US, the UK and others – that will continue to support the country. China is doing development here too, assisting the Government. Those partnerships provide hope. I think the next step is the right leadership for the country. The new President’s political focus will be critical to consolidating peace and moving the country forward.

Having lived for a decade in peace, Liberians want to keep it. I’m an optimist. I don’t like the idea that so much work may fall apart nor so much investment wasted. But I’m also

optimistic because it’s clear that Liberians don’t want to return to conflict. Demonstrations around political rallies have been peaceful. The police have dealt with things very well. We haven’t seen any mob violence, as such. People seem to want to live a peaceful existence. Having lived for a decade in peace, Liberians want to keep it.

Speaking of peace, what do you think about peacekeeping itself? Looking back, over the Mission’s history, do you think UNMIL should have been configured differently?

During the period of UNMIL’s existence, there has been a change in thinking about peacekeeping. The UN has assessed many different models. The strategy that produced the Regional Service Centre in Entebbe was developed by seeking answers to questions about whether we needed to have certain support elements on the frontlines.

The quicker we can pull the peacekeeping operation out of a country, the better.

The role of peacekeeping in establishing security is of course vital. Countries that we move into need help. We need that peace making framework in place. But I think we need to look more closely at how quickly we can remove a peacekeeping operation. The quicker we can pull the peacekeeping operation out of a country, the better. Peacekeeping should focus on security, not state-building or institution-building and exit as soon as possible leaving institutional building and development to the UN country team.

Aerial view of the UNMIL logistic base in Monrovia, known as Star Base.

Photo: Albert G. Farran | UNMIL | 24 Jan 18



Support to elections



An UNMIL helicopter arrives to deliver ballots for the Liberian Presidential Elections.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 30 Sep 11

UNMIL provided support to three elections and was an important enabler in their success. Liberia is a country with poor road infrastructure so during the wet season when the election is held, it's extremely difficult to move ballot materials around the country. In the 2005 election, UNMIL had a mandate to help organize the elections. The National Electoral Commission and the Government saw UNMIL as a great enabler. In 2011, the Mission's mandate was more limited, but UNMIL again provided logistical support. In 2017, the Liberians ran the elections, with the assistance of logistical support from UNMIL, including air lifting election materials, as the Government has no aviation capacity. We viewed the elections as a key activity. Having a stable Government before the Mission leaves is a must.

So, once again, in 2017 we faced some real challenges. The elections were held in October nearing the end of the wet season. The Chinese military engineers and transport units, key enablers, had been repatriated in February, 2017. Their road repair work stopped as part of the downsizing. So not only did the roads deteriorate through regular use, but the torrential rains and flooding brought on by the wet season further damaged them, making it difficult to move material on the ground. Election material had to be moved as close to the time of the election as possible to avoid possible storage, security or voting irregularity issues, so transport delays were a real risk.

We were delivering ballot material right up to the last day, but to do this we had to stop air military patrols and other mandated activities. The major concern then became that UNMIL was closing and the regional offices were to close by mid-December. Our helicopters were to stop operating in January 2018.

The kind of uncertainty around elections support is typical of the things that peacekeeping operations face. There's always something new, unpredictable and ever-changing. We try and make the best call at the right time, and work the best way we can with the resources, options and capacity available at the time. We knew the elections had to be successful. We knew we needed to support them but the situation changed daily. We had to reorient and adapt. That's why flexibility makes a big difference and why it's important to have a flexible solution-orientated mindset in Mission Support.

The kind of uncertainty around elections support is typical of the things that peacekeeping operations face. It's always something new, unpredictable and ever-changing.

You're talking about breaking out the functions of security from the other functions that have become associated with peacekeeping and political missions?

What I'm looking at is who does what and why. For example, I believe human rights activities should be performed by the Office for the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR). The peacekeeping operation of course needs to comply with human rights, but in my view, OHCHR should take the lead and deliver. If you look at the timelines, the UN Country Team will continue into the future in developing Liberia. Human rights will still be an issue here, and the peacekeeping Mission will be gone. If, at the start of the Mission, the human rights component had been performed by OHCHR, and the peacekeeping Mission dealt with the peacekeeping side, then you would have a natural perpetuation of the human rights programme beyond the closure of UNMIL.

When we start a peacekeeping mission, we need to have more than just a mandate implementation plan. We need a 10-year vision that spells out how and when the peacekeeping mission will leave, and how and when the transition will take place. A 10-year vision, of course, could dynamically change each year, but at least it would mean we're all delivering as one, and with long-term integrated goals.

Peacekeeping today certainly tries to work through the 'One UN' concept but it only works to a certain extent. In the early days of UNMIL, there were working problems between UNMIL and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, and that appears to have been caused by an absence of clearly agreed and understood roles. If those roles were already pre-set, there may have been a better UN partnering in the early days of this Mission.

Today, within the UN, there is also a shift in thinking about programmatic funding. A decade ago, no one would have thought of requesting to use programmatic funding for projects such as capacity building in peacekeeping, which is funded by assessed contributions. Such funds intended for capacity-building were previously only available to the development sector, not to peacekeeping. Now we can partner with the UN Country Team or civil society organizations to complete mandated activities. That door has begun to open, and it's been successful as part of a broader shift in mind-set about how to do peacekeeping today.

What recommendations do you have for the UN entities remaining beyond UNMIL's closure?

The UNMIL and UN Country Team transition plan has identified the problem areas and capacity gaps. However, there is a step required to ensure that there is a more integrated plan at a higher level. We need to get other actors, like USAID, China Aid, etc., to offer more clarity about their undertakings and planning so we can see how that fits into the framework of the UN Country Team and then, in turn, complement each other toward sustainable peace.

A more integrated approach would help. I know that's very challenging. It's also very challenging to have the UN Country Team integrated and working together as one under the Resident Coordinator. The next step would be bringing everyone on board with what we are trying to achieve in Liberia and what areas we should focus on strengthening? That next step is important for the future of this country, recognising that there's already been a capacity-mapping exercise and a full transition plan put in place.

Of course, it's important to point out that whatever is done today may be challenged during the tenure of the new Government, and no matter how positive any change may be, it is change nonetheless. Although we're transitioning UNMIL out, and although we have a great transition plan in place, the entire transition framework will need to be revisited to make it compatible with the vision of the new Government then map that to the next 4 or 5 years of work.

What message would you give to Liberians themselves?

Be positive. Be optimistic. You have achieved relative peace for yourselves. Maintaining peace means that you can build the economy. I would like to see many Liberian entrepreneurs develop micro-businesses, export businesses, all kinds of businesses, and you can only do that in a peaceful environment, working with each other and investing in Liberia. Without investing your time, your effort, your funds and your resources in building Liberia, you can't move up to the next level.

Responsibility to protect - the environment



UN staff and Liberian youth participate in the Clean Liberia campaign at the beach on World Environment Day.

Photo: Clement Atitwa | UNMIL | 3 Jun 17

certificate is endorsed, together with the EPA to ensure compliance has been met to the satisfaction of both the UN and Government. UNMIL has taken its role in ensuring limited environmental impact seriously and although not always as visible as other activities, it is a very important responsibility.

The United Nations has recognised that a peacekeeping operation can have a major impact on its environment, and the Under-Secretary-General for the UN Department Field Support has been championing peacekeeping environmental responsibility and accountability. UNMIL has undertaken reviews of its operations and sites and implemented activities, working with UN Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Government of Liberia Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to ensure environmentally responsible waste disposal and site activities to limit any possible detrimental during its operation and upon its closure. The UNMIL Environment Unit regularly conducts assessments and monitors Mission activities to ensure environmental compliance and also monitors the performance of our waste contractors.

Mission Support engaged EPA-approved waste contractors for collected UN garbage and disposal, and secured approved dumping sites from EPA in Monrovia for our operations. Emergency and incident management procedures were established to contain any fuel spills or hazardous waste. UNMIL established water treatment plants to ensure its effluent is properly cleaned before discharge. Site visits, on-site briefings and training of personnel have been undertaken to ensure any corrective measures or cleanup activities required are implemented.

Prior to the closure of UNMIL sites, joint inspections and assessments are conducted together with the EPA at both privately held and Government-owned sites in order to identify and address any environmental issues. For all sites an environmental clearance



Photo: Christopher Herwig | UNMIL | 10 Nov 08

Stringent measures protect UN personnel from Ebola

Teferi Desta, Chief Medical Officer

In an October 2017 interview, Dr. Teferi Desta, the UNMIL Chief Medical Doctor, talks about challenges and experiences during the Ebola virus disease outbreak in Liberia in 2014-5. Dr. Desta worked previously as Chief Medical Officer for the UN Mission in Sudan. Before then, he was Deputy Chief of the medical clinic at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, in Addis Ababa.

Please provide a bit of your background. How did your prior work give you the perspective to face the medical challenges here in Liberia?

I am from Ethiopia and have worked for the United Nations for the last 17 years. I trained internal medicine, graduating as an internist. I have also studied gastroenterology and endoscopy, as well as management of HIV/AIDS. Before working in Addis Ababa, I worked as a medical doctor in rural Ethiopia. It was challenging to leave my family, and being in a mission takes its toll. But I worked in Sudan for five years despite the environment and general hostility.

After that I was transferred to Liberia, which was very peaceful, compared to other missions, although it has its own challenges. Working as Chief Medical Officer was an opportunity to lead a large group of medical officers and nurses, monitoring the operations of different Mission (military) hospitals, one of which due to my reporting on irregularities, was repatriated for the first time in a peacekeeping mission. This I consider one of my achievements, documenting and reporting irregularities.

In Liberia, operations had been very smooth, including evacuations of critically sick personnel. The challenges, as elsewhere in Africa, were principally malaria and infectious diseases. In this country, which was torn apart by civil war, the situation was very serious and UNMIL's operations were very significant for the country's stability. Our medical operations played a part in that, and even supported non-UN personnel with serious life threatening medical incidents.



Relatives and local residents look on as a medical team removes the dead body of an Ebola victim from a home in Monrovia.

Photo: UNMIL | 19 Aug 14

This is where we were when Ebola affected Liberia in an unprecedented way.

Have you made assessments of Liberian medical clinics to help build Liberian capacity?

When it comes to medical support, Liberia has improved over time, but the capacity of the country's medical sector is still rudimentary due to the civil war, which devastated clinics and hospitals, and caused doctors to leave the country. There was a great brain drain to America and Europe. When I first came to Liberia, there were only a few Liberian doctors and nurses, and the medical facilities were lacking even basic laboratory facilities and supplies. The medical support provided by the Government was very rudimentary. I carried out assessments of national capacity because we had a large number of national staff who had families living here and required medical care. So we made determinations as to whether staff could safely use various facilities. We also kept in contact with national staff whenever they had any family medical problems to assist them.

Ebola came to affect the entire region, Liberia in particular, and the Mission's ability to carry out its mandate. Can you talk about the Mission's achievements during that period?

In February 2014, the first Ebola case was declared in Lofa County. Immediately after the announcement, I traveled there. I received authorization to use a helicopter to carry the Minister of Health, the Director of the World Health Organization (WHO) and myself to inspect the area where the outbreak started. We were at ground zero. We never expected that it would spread like wildfire across the entire country. It moved in phases, but we thought it would eventually stop. It killed so many people and affected so many communities and left so many survivors and orphans. It was devastating and scary.

UNMIL's response was initially to conduct a security assessment. There was a daily Mission leadership meeting, where it was agreed that the Mission needed to stay to support the Government and Liberian people by playing a stabilizing role. This was a remarkable decision by the Mission's leadership (at the time, SRSG Karin Landgren) and counterparts at headquarters.

At the time, there were many organizations and NGOs that were leaving the country because of the uncontrolled situation. People were dying in the streets, and it was scary to go anywhere because you were afraid of people touching you. It was an alarming period. It was around the time that the WHO declared Ebola an emergency situation that affected the entire globe.

What was your role at the logistical level and the strategic level?

I focused on preventing Ebola and protecting our personnel. UNMIL was scattered at camps and sub-stations across the country, and I had to make sure that personnel were protected. The first thing we did was to order the military to stay in their camps. We developed a protocol to ensure that they were protected: they only left when necessary for reconnaissance and did not leave their car. We also established screening procedures for all personnel exiting and entering the camp, which required personnel to wash their hands whenever entering any facility or moving between parts of facilities. They had their temperatures taken regularly to detect fever. We also established screening at all entrances to UNMIL facilities to ensure that individuals with a fever or general symptoms could be held for further assessment.

There were only a few medical staff in Liberia at the time. UNMIL had very few staff at the beginning. We advertised positions but could not attract qualified personnel who wanted to come to the country. We had to search for them. Then our medical officer strength was eventually expanded with eight doctors, and eight nurses working under my supervision. Our morale really improved after their arrival. So it was a very slow process but with more staff our motivation improved. Some medical staff wanted to resign from their positions. For example, one day I was so fatigued that I decided to leave my office for a walk. I saw people lying on the road. One guy was vomiting blood and other people were panicking. I asked myself: should I run or help? I was so scared. Without protective equipment, I was frustrated but had to return back to my office immediately. This was a normal experience for all staff at that time.

Was screening itself difficult, because Ebola has a long gestation period?

One of the major prevention techniques is temperature measurements. If the person was infected a few minutes previously, a continuous fever will develop within 24 hours. There is no Ebola infection without a fever. So, checking for fever and ensuring that there was no direct hand shaking was essential. We screened everyone coming into compounds using a temperature "gun", which eliminated the need for physical contact.

We also adopted a policy to ensure that sick people did not report to work.

If an individual was symptomatic, a doctor would conduct an interview, asking the individual if she or he had been exposed, for instance by going to a funeral. That was a high risk activity for contracting Ebola since, at the time, most funerals were as a result of Ebola infection and due to traditional practice, physical contact was often made with the deceased’s body. We would ask if the individual attended a death ceremony, because in Liberia after a person dies, she or he is laid out, and everyone gives a goodbye kiss on the deceased’s forehead.

It was very difficult to convince community members not to go to funerals. At a funeral, one dead body could infect literally hundreds of people.

How about by air? Can somebody cough and you are contaminated?

It remains controversial. People say one can be contaminated by drops contacting the respiratory system. If your eyes are open it is possible that you can be contaminated.

How many people died of Ebola in Liberia?

The WHO reported that there were nearly 30,000 confirmed, probable and suspected cases in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, of which more than 11,000 died. Liberia was probably the most affected West African country. Even though Liberia had almost the same number of cases as Guinea and Sierra Leone, nearly 5,000 people died here, with a fatality rate of about 45 per cent.

One of the major challenges Liberia faced at that time was the safe burial of dead bodies, which was not possible due to the high number of people dying and access in remote neighbourhoods.

Did UN staff lose their lives to Ebola?

Two UNMIL staff members died. I am sorry to say that it was only two, but it could have been many more. The disaster could have been more serious, were it not for our stringent preventive mechanisms. We were exposed as medical staff because we could not leave our work, as it was our professional obligation. We implemented a protocol to minimize cross transmission. We developed an Ebola Rapid Response Team within the small capacity of our medical team. The team went to individual staff member’s houses with protection equipment and assessed health conditions individually, and checked, for example, diarrhea, fever, and level of exposure to affected persons, including the neighbours. It was important if the neighbour died a few days ago, and if we identified such cases, we transported the person safely without being contaminated, because our staff were wearing full personal protective equipment. We started to follow up with patients over the phone.

Two UNMIL staff members died. I am sorry to say that it was only two, but it could have been many more. The disaster could have been more serious, were it not for our stringent preventive mechanisms.

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) did a wonderful job in Liberia. They were the only entity running Ebola treatment units from Lofa County to Monrovia. With time other entities established treatment units (the African Union, Cuba, China, Germany and the US). You can imagine a picture of an Ebola centre, a fenced compound, where patients were isolated, monitored by video cameras to check the patients’ conditions. Even

Even doctors were scared of infection and transmission. The truth is, we did not know about the Ebola virus before the outbreak.

doctors were scared of infection and transmission. The truth is, we did not know about the Ebola virus before the outbreak. Now it is the fact that Ebola is spread by body fluids such as blood and urine, but also through injections by needles. At the time, we did not really know how to effectively avoid contamination.

Every UNMIL staff had to do their daily work while the country was affected by Ebola.

I was part of the Senior Management Team that met every day. One of the challenges was to ensure that UNMIL personnel knew how our screening process worked. We informed them that they should avoid any possible exposure. Despite the screening activities, there were problems. For example, the last patient we had was a national staff, who despite all advice, had gone a funeral and also visited his girlfriend who was sick. He just took paracetamol and denied his contact history. He also went through all the check-points (without being detected). He came to our 6th floor clinic. I saw him lying on the floor and I asked him what was wrong. A doctor without full protection examined him. Once suspicion of Ebola infection was made, we immediately evacuated him. He was diagnosed positive but he survived for interesting reasons. The Americans had an

A-level laboratory, one of the best, with a blood and also electrolyte analysis done there. We managed to admit this patient to the American unit instead of evacuating him abroad. That was a heaven on earth during the time of Ebola. The patient survived because of available accessories in that unit.

What was the likelihood of survival?

The survival rate is difficult to calculate. It depends on many different factors, such as the presence of other illnesses, chronic conditions and the time the patient was admitted for treatment. If you are late to be admitted, the survival rate goes down. The survival rate changes according to when you started fluid replacement. Normally there is a 50 per cent survival rate for Ebola victims.

I am sure you dealt with psychological problem of staff, people were debilitated by fear.

One particular staff member who is currently alive reminds me of my nightmares of the time. He had an extended family, his wife was a nursing student. She brought Ebola to the family from her practice in public hospital. She was his second wife and he was older than she was. He loved her so much and cared for her selflessly. When she became symptomatic, vomiting and running a fever, other family members were cleaning her with bare hands. He carried his weak wife in a taxi to the unit, and while awaiting being admitted, she died in his arms. He was affected so much, as his kids were also falling sick one after the other, so we quarantined him for a prolonged time to protect his family members.

UNMIL personnel were not to come to the office if they got sick. Another rule was, stay home 21 days, and we would monitor over the phone for symptoms. The above staff member was reporting OK during the quarantine period. After around 15 days, he reported that one of his kids was sick. It was a shock. I reported to the Mission leadership suggesting that we provide him special care. We provided some supplies, leaving detergent and bottles of water in front of his door. Then his kids started to die, except one daughter. He had other kids from the previous marriages who were visiting, raising the suspicion that transmission could occur to the other family members. All this time the staff member remained resilient. However, when his last daughter developed fever he started to break up. The SRSG personally requested MSF for special consideration to help his daughter. We were happy that she tested negative for Ebola, and she was discharged to go home. But before he finished the quarantine cycles, another son became sick, and he went through another 21 days of quarantine.

Relieved residents in Monrovia celebrating the announcement that 42 days had passed without the emergence of any new Ebola cases.

Photo: UNMIL | 9 May 15



One of my nurses also lost her husband, a doctor practicing in public hospital who was exposed to Ebola virus at work. You just saw her and could feel the impact. Every day was a risk. It was a human catastrophe.

Did this experience affect you as a doctor?

I directed all my staff to strictly follow protection measures. I lost a laboratory technician working with me. We think he got infected while he was taking a blood sample. He wanted to believe that he had malaria and treated himself with malaria medication. It was denial. He continued to work in his laboratory. In doing so, he exposed all others to possible contamination. Through the subsequent analysis with Ministry of Health and Social Welfare experts, we found he was infected with Ebola. We had to quarantine many people because he came to the office, even the Mission’s PX, mosque, another camp, etc. Quarantine was challenging, because everyone had to voluntarily report. You needed to trace everybody, even in remote locations.

During the time, there was a videoconference with UN HQ, WHO leadership, medical directors, etc. We appealed to them that the staff should have chances to go to better treatment facilities. For example, an American and an English nurse were evacuated to the US and UK. We were able to evacuate an UNMIL military guy and this laboratory technician to Netherlands and Germany. A few days after arrival in Germany, the lab technician died. Thanks to the German government, the WHO negotiated with Member States so that peacekeepers who were sick could be admitted there. The Netherlands also accepted our request. A medical evacuation plane was provided by a US company. One of my achievements was that I was able to make sure that our peacekeepers were evacuated to better facilities abroad, even though this laboratory technician unfortunately died.

Looking back this period, is there anything you’d recommend the Mission do differently?

The magnitude of the deadly Ebola outbreak is beyond the Mission’s capacity. Generally UN peacekeeping operates temporarily in a country. We are not like other long-staying organizations, such as the UNDP. The country’s level of development really affects a mission’s operations, including the provision of medical care and ability to respond to public health emergencies like Ebola. Liberia’s infrastructure was not able to provide the kind of services needed to effectively respond to the outbreak. UNMIL undertook many logistical operations to assist the Government. Our senior logistics officer was co-chairing the Government logistics coordination meetings for Ebola, helping to address the problem quickly. When support from donors came in, it was erratic, and when support arrived at the airport, no one from the Government was there to receive and distribute it. It was a logistics nightmare. UNMIL was not only developing a system to distribute urgent items, but also constructing Ebola treatment units. We also opened blocked roads. In this country, you cannot go to the regions when it rains because the main transportation arteries of the country become unpassable. Our engineering section worked hard to open roads

UNMIL decided to stay and help the country. This was a strong factor for other NGOs and other entities to have hope and work together. Should UNMIL had been evacuated, they might also have left the country. It was a very important gesture for the Mission to work and support Ebola crisis.

The other issue was that UNMIL decided to stay and help the country. This was a strong factor for other NGOs and other entities to have hope and work together. Should UNMIL had been evacuated, they might also have left the country. It was a very important gesture for the Mission to work and support Ebola crisis. Embassies were operating with a minimum number of staff because no one wanted to stay. Most airlines also stopped flying, and UNMIL started operating an UNMIL flight to Accra twice a week that was also opened to others. This flight supported many people.

If faced with another crisis with similar proportion, do you think the Mission will do differently?

It was a good lesson learned for the international community, including the WHO. No one was prepared for the magnitude of this crisis, of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. It used to be in East Africa. The WHO was responsive, but it received criticism that it failed to respond in a timely manner to the problem. I am sure that they’ve learned lessons, because the basic health infrastructure at that time was lacking. Now things are improving. I was in Voinjama recently, and I was surprised to see that there are health sectors now developing. Before the Ebola outbreak, there was no basic public health infrastructure. In some hospitals there were no gloves, protection suits or other supplies, and they might have one generator that went on and off. Hospitals cannot function without power. Basically what should have had been improved is currently improving.

Ebola in the counties



A Liberian Ministry of Health worker in Monrovia sprays the soles of a colleague’s shoes at an Ebola Isolation Clinic as they leave with blood specimens for testing.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 11 Jul 14

On 16 August 2014, the body of a dead man was found on the streets of Greenville, Sinoe County. It was the first suspected death of the Ebola Virus Disease in the county, which until then was considered Ebola-free. The nearest laboratory that could test samples for Ebola was in Margibi County, seven hours away if the roads were good, but often a two-day trip at that time of the year. It took three days until the county health officer received the confirmation: The man had died of the Ebola.

UNMIL’s field office – at that time the only UN presence in the county – supported the fight against Ebola in various ways. Staff members participated in all Ebola-related meetings to support coordination of local efforts and planning. The team prepared and distributed outreach materials both to the local government and throughout the county via patrols by military observers, with awareness posters attached to each UNMIL vehicle. As Sinoe County had very poor internet access, the field office used its own IT infrastructure to search for latest information and guidance materials on Ebola, and distributed CD copies to local counterparts. County health volunteers received training and equipment through an UNMIL quick-impact project. UNMIL liaised with UN agencies to facilitate the provision of food to isolated individuals suspected of having Ebola and their contacts and served as the main coordinator until the arrival of World Health Organization representatives and the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) at the end of November 2014.

A major challenge for the treatment of patients in Sinoe was the absence of an Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) where Ebola patients and individuals suspected to have been infected with the virus, could be isolated and treated. Instead, both were kept in a makeshift shelter erected out of sticks and tarpaulin as a temporary solution months before then.

An international NGO had been tasked to build an ETU, but struggled with logistical and organizational challenges. With still no completion date in sight by end of November and concerns that Sinoe may become the new hotspot for Ebola in Liberia, the field office supported the initiative of the Swedish MSB in building a temporary ETU that met all minimum standards. UNMIL and UNICEF contributed additional tents and water tanks.

Sinoe County’s last Ebola victim died in that ETU on 29 December 2014. The county was declared Ebola-free 42 days later.

Ebola’s impact on UN staff



UNMIL Security guards
checking the body
temperature of UNMIL
staff entering the UNMIL
Headquarters.

Photo: UNMIL | 9 Apr 14

During the Ebola crisis, four UNMIL staff members were infected, of whom two eventually succumbed to the disease.

The infection of an UNMIL member required three actions: first, ensuring that the individual received the best possible care; second, ensuring that other personnel were not infected and third; protecting the public in Liberia and beyond.

Here is one example: late on 23 December 2014, UNMIL was informed that one of its staff members was unwell and being treated at a local hospital. The UNMIL Chief Medical Officer ordered the staff member transported to the Mission’s holding facility, where he tested positive for Ebola. He was then admitted to an Ebola treatment unit run by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Monrovia.

The Mission tried to get him transferred to the Monrovia Medical Unit (MMU), most advanced Ebola treatment unit in the country, established by the US Government to treat Liberian medical personnel and international staff. The Mission also began investigating how to send him out of the country for treatment, which entailed securing suitable aircraft that could transport a highly infectious person.

In parallel, the Mission began identifying all of the individuals with whom the staff member had had contact over the past week. He had visited an UNMIL medical clinic seeking treatment for malaria, which had effectively masked his Ebola symptoms. He had also visited several offices. The Mission tracked everyone with whom he may have had contact, including passengers on the same shuttle bus. UNMIL quarantined 22 individuals. To ensure that the disease was not spread outside Liberia, the Medical Section worked with the Travel Unit identified 27 individuals who did not require immediate quarantine, but should not be allowed to travel. Finally, UNMIL arranged for the staff member’s residence to be disinfected and to ensure proper coordination with national counterparts to prevent the spread of the disease. As a result, no other UNMIL personnel were infected, nor it appeared, was anyone else in his community.

But the story did not end there, as the staff member was not improving. The US MMU was dedicated to medical personnel only. To send him outside the country was also problematic because he had taken his passport with him to the MSF unit, where it would be destroyed along with all of his possessions. Numerous phone calls from the UNMIL Chief of Staff’s office eventually convinced MSF to agree to locate and treat the passport and, if possible, return it.

When the passport arrived in a sealed Ziploc bag, recalled Douglass Hansen, now special assistant to the UNMIL Head of Mission, “It was impossible to avoid the natural, if irrational, fear that opening the bag and processing the passport would have drastic consequences for me. Handling a passport from an Ebola unit awakened a primal apprehension that MSF’s assurances of decontamination could only partially appease. I will never forget the moment I sat and flipped through an object

that had been potentially contaminated with Ebola, to hold in my hands something that people across the world were in abject fear of. In addition, I knew that the staff member had been in the room next to my office a few days earlier. The stigma of Ebola became clear in that moment. And despite my explanations, several family members refused to see me for months after that.”

Eventually, the staff member was admitted to the US MMU through the Mission’s good offices intervention, where he received intravenous treatment and survived.

Taking this lesson into account, these infrastructural improvements are very important. UNMIL is now leaving, and we need to leave our legacy to the UNCT who should continue to work on development in Liberia. They should look at the development of health sector infrastructure, and preventive and preparative measures to avert such disastrous medical emergency situations in a timely manner in the future

Infrastructure is the main issue, contingency planning, and any other issues to prepare for any future crisis?

Historically, the Ebola global response, though there was delay, saw a record level of global support and coordination. The US, Chinese and German militaries were deployed, and the US in particular came with new models of helicopters and armored vehicles, as if there was major war. They were not civilians; it was support provided by the army, and it was like the country was invaded by various nations who were actually helping out with a global threat. Following this military-like response, Ebola was contained. There are now adequate treatment units. You won’t return to an outbreak situation the way it was, where a patient was contaminated, waiting for his/her turn to be checked in, told that the facilities are full, and to return to the communities where they then caused the virus to continue to spread. It was a disastrous situation, not only in Liberia but also in neighbouring countries.

There would be a different response as infrastructure is in place.

I’d say the infrastructure continues to improve. There is now capacity: treatment units, laboratories, and also one referral hospital that was renovated and equipped with new supplies. Experts are also coming to work here. We know that things are in better shape now.

So, moving on to the closure of the Mission itself, is there work you will leave unfinished?

In my view, peacekeeping is a temporary operation; it is not directly involved in developing infrastructure of the country. Other Agencies, Funds and Programmes, such as the WHO or the UNDP, should take up a good practice based on our experiences and best practices. They should not ignore our experiences. For example, with the help of Pakistani doctors at our Level II hospital, we developed an Ebola contingency plan that did not exist in UN missions before. We were having VTCs with stakeholders like WHO and sharing our experience, challenges and recommendations. This forum was very important to keep our spirits high. Here in the Mission we developed a comprehensive Ebola response contingency plan which was appreciated and later on distributed to other peacekeeping missions. This plan is now updated in many areas of Ebola planning, detection, methods for protection, treatments, quarantine process, contact tracing, de-contamination process, etc. There are methods explained on how to de-contaminate yourself. This plan will be used for future outbreaks. In addition to this, the names, addresses and profiles of medical personnel are kept so that if a similar crisis occurs in the future, someone can pick up a phone and identify such professionals.

You’ve worked in Liberia for many years and in other countries. What is your sense of medical care of Liberia for its own people?

This is an area of concern. Post-war Liberia is still struggling with development of basic infrastructure like electric power, road and health facilities. In my view, the establishment of new hospitals and health accessories depends on financial capability. When we talk about Liberia, most development indices are still in a rudimentary state; development and improvement are very slow. Education is low. Most youth are not going to school. They are losing another generation. One cannot separate medical infrastructure development from the general development of the country.

Do you see the sense of hope?

Yes the medical sector has developed hugely over the last few years. Doctors with varied specialties have been hired. There are visiting medical professionals, from the US, Uganda, or hired by special contracts. For ultimate sustainable development, the country should improve school enrollment. Though there is a sign of improving development, the road ahead is very long.

UNVs do vital work for the Mission and the Community

Mar Brusola Valls, Programme Manager, UN Volunteers

The United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme promotes volunteerism to support peace and development worldwide. UNV became operational in UNMIL when it first deployed on 1 October 2003. Since then, more than 1,200 UN Volunteers from more than 80 nationalities have supported the Mission in substantive, administrative and technical areas.

UNV's ability to rapidly deploy highly qualified volunteers in large numbers made a difference for UNMIL in the early days. UNV participated in a DPKO Technical Assessment Survey before the Mission deployed. Closely involved in the Mission's planning, UNV was able to deploy 48 volunteers in January 2004 alone, sending in 225 UNVs by the end of the year. In the initial months, UN Volunteers operated under very difficult circumstances, with minor supervision, as line managers had not been appointed yet. For instance, the gender and quick-impact project units were run for many months solely by UN Volunteers, while other sections relied extensively on UN Volunteers. UNV reintegration officers and camp managers were vital to the successful demobilization and reintegration of more than 100,000 combatants by October 2004. Amongst the UN Volunteers, during those times were a CNN journalist, a former judge, two former diplomats, a former fighter jet pilot, as well as published writers.

By the 11 October 2005 election, which led to the presidency of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, 550 UN Volunteers had been recruited. Almost 200 provided electoral assistance to the National Elections Commission.

During the Ebola epidemic between 2014 and 2016, 220 UN Volunteers were deployed with UNMIL. More than 80 per cent of them stayed on the ground, at the peak of transmission, playing an essential role at a time when many staff members had left. They served in all areas, including in challenging positions in the field with the UNMIL medical section. They were also instrumental in the set-up and operations of the UN Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER), on the ground in 2014-2015.



UN Volunteer Germana Dalberto plays with community members in Virginia, Monrovia.

Photo: Carla Feriguetti | UNMIL | 2 Dec 17

Aquilla applies paint to the walls of a school during a UNV activity to freshen-up its interiors.

Photo: Staton Winter | UNMIL | 8 Feb 12



Throughout the Mission years, UN Volunteers have contributed to national capacity development by facilitating the transfer of skills to national staff; supporting institutional strengthening to enhance good governance; increasing civic participation and assisting with analyses of the political environment. Some 30 UN Volunteers supported the 2017 elections. UNV also mobilized volunteers to teach at national universities.

UN Volunteers have always served at the community level, often in remote locations. For many Liberians, especially those in the countryside, UN Volunteers have been the day-to-day face of UNMIL on the ground.

UNMIL has been a creative mission from a staffing perspective. Like other missions, most of the volunteers came from outside Liberia. However, as of July 2016, 16 national UN Volunteers (NUNVs) were included in UNMIL's budget for the first time, 11 as field liaison officers in counties where the Mission had already withdrawn, usually supporting the superintendents' offices. During the last two years of its mandate, UNMIL began recruiting Online Volunteers to provide assistance in areas vacated by retrenched staff. An online editor has been completing the One UN Annual Report, and two online UN Volunteers have been designing outreach material on sexual exploitation and abuse.

Since its inception, UNV has been supporting vulnerable populations in local communities, such as the students of the schools for the blind and deaf, through feeding programmes, water repairs, fence construction, etc. Recently, the UNV field unit mobilized funds to donate school materials, clothing and construction materials to five schools in Liberia. Other projects aimed to reduce poverty and provide livelihood opportunities for people with physical challenges.

UN Volunteers catalyzed volunteerism in Liberia by supporting the National Youth Volunteer Service, the Volunteers for Peace Programme, the ECOWAS Volunteers Programme, as well as a platform for volunteerism at the community level. Their support has ensured that more and more Liberians embrace the idea of volunteerism as a tool for the maintenance of sustainable peace and development.

In addition, for almost 10 years, UNMIL Radio has aired "Volunteers' Voices," showcasing the role of volunteers in Liberia. UNMIL has been unceasingly relying on UN Volunteers: By the end of the Mission's mandate in March 2018, 1 out of 3 international civilian personnel in UNMIL will be a UN Volunteer. And during the transition from UNMIL to the UN Country Team, UNV has become a strategic partner, assisting the UN agencies, funds, and programmes to implement their mandates.

Letters of Gratitude



“Since 2003 ...your humanitarian and national development agenda has immensely impacted every sector of our society...Moreover, your tireless efforts in harnessing peace and promoting peaceful co-existence in the world cannot be overlooked and is worth commendation. We have to join you to be responsible for stones remaining unturned.” Brilliant Professional Cooperative Services, Monrovia

“Heart-felt thanks to UNMIL for the level of peacekeeping and support in the fight against Ebola and helping Liberia’s health, agriculture and development effort.” Community of Hope Agricultural Project, Paynesville.

“Thanks and appreciation... for not only playing an active, stabilizing role in the promotion and subsistence of peace, security, and good governance in Liberia, but also for serving as a key contributor and partner in the country’s socioeconomic development, especially in the area of education.” Grand Bassa Community College

“We appreciate the long-standing support and cordial relationship we continue to enjoy in collaboration with UNMIL.” Independent National Commission on Human Rights, Monrovia

“I wish to commend UNMIL for the support in the implementation of the UN Joint Program Initiatives to prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based violence in Liberia.” Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection, Monrovia

“I am pleased to express the Ministry’s gratitude for UNMIL’s continuous and unwavering support to the Liberian health sector. We value our strong collaborative relationship and look forward to its long continuance.” Ministry of Health, Monrovia

“I....extend thanks and appreciation for numerous supports UNMIL is rendering to the Government of Liberia and its people.” Ministry of Internal Affairs, Monrovia.

“You (SRSG Zarif) recently spoke at our National Youth Peace-Building Conference. It was a huge success. Thank you for the support and for your inspiring remarks which the participants took very much to heart. We are now working hard in terms of follow-up to ensure the ideas that came out of the conference are carried forwards.” Accountability Lab Liberia, Monrovia

“We appreciate the UN Head of Field Office, Rivercess County, who has been the brain of development especially when it comes to police issues. The (loss) of UNMIL will create a setback to police of our County.” Liberia National Police, River Cess County

“We are exceedingly grateful for the level of cooperation and support between the umbrella organization of journalists and media practitioners in Liberia and UNMIL. We are particularly appreciative of our friends at the Public Information Office who have assisted in giving a good image and attaching value to the work of the Liberia media.” Press Union of Liberia, Monrovia

“With assistance from you, the Liberian Legislature combined the departments of research, archives and library in 2011 under the Legislative Information Service. Consequently, the 45-man department provides services to 103 lawmakers, 60 statutory and standing committees, 26 departments and members of the public.” Legislative Information Service, Monrovia.

“(We) recognize your immense support in the first post-war census of 2007-2008, in which UNMIL played a key role through training and provision of data and logistics that resulted in acquiring the comprehensive social-economic and infrastructure data which today guides policymakers in the equitable distribution of national developmental packages.” The Institute of Statistics and Geo-Information Services, Monrovia

“We extend our thanks and appreciation to the UNMIL fraternity for a great work done in the area of capacity building. The office building we currently occupy was built by an UNMIL quick-impact project. We also received various trainings from UNPOL, and we conducted numerous patrols alongside them. During the Ebola crisis, UNMIL was able to sensitize and provide Ebola preventive materials to all our personnel. UNMIL’s

departure will leave a great challenge to us in a good number of things. It leaves us with no choice but to say we shall miss your services.” Ministry of Justice, Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization, Cestos City

“We appreciate that through UNMIL’s withdrawal from duty stations throughout the country, you have generously gifted the Liberian people with a number of infrastructure, equipment and mobility.” Ministry of Justice, Gbarnga Regional Hub

“Many thanks to the UN for the timely support from 2003 up to present. Fortunately, we are proud of two successful Elections. The biggest joy will be the live transition of her Excellency, Madame Sirleaf, which was last seen in our history in 1944.” Inclusive Development Initiative, Monrovia

“Your efforts to restoring peace and tranquility to the Government and People of Liberia are appreciated beyond measure.” University of Liberia

“The Council acknowledges...the changes that have taken place within the Mission under your (SRSG Zarif) leadership and guidance...These include the focus of strengthening civil society in Liberia and the promotion of women as well as human rights.” National Civil Society Council of Liberia

“We appreciate all of the support given...over the years...Your support has helped shape and strengthen the Rule of Law program, especially the training of prosecutors, judiciary, civil society actors and others to make our systems accessible.” Prison Fellowship of Liberia, Monrovia

“We recognize and commend you for your numerous supports to the people of Liberia, and especially for the promotion of gender integration, peace and stability.” The Liberian Women National Political Forum, Monrovia

“Praising God for your great work in keeping the peace in our beloved country, Liberia,” Monrovia Christian Fellowship

“profound gratitude for your immerse support to the Liberia security sector, especially the Liberia National Police and your efforts in trying to build the capacity of the Community Watch Forum ...” National Executive Committee of the Community Watch Forum of Liberia

“The post war history of Liberia and the EBOLA crisis will be incomplete were your strong roles played not mentioned. We are grateful.” ECOWAS Women’s Organization, Monrovia

“I would like to thank UNMIL for their unswerving support to Tubman University. Of particular importance is UNMIL’s help in facilitating the transport of TU’s personnel and cargo...over the years. We thank UNMIL for all that you have done for the University; for without your many contributions, TU would not have accomplished so much.” William V. S. Tubman University

“We extend our appreciation to you for your numerous contributions to peace, security and development in Liberia.” YMCA Liberia

“We as Liberians are grateful for UNMIL’s presence for these many years as well as its efforts in sustaining our peace.” General Auditing Commission, Monrovia

“Your efforts to restoring peace and tranquility to the Government and People of Liberia are appreciated beyond measure.” University of Liberia



- Population 4.5 million (2017)
- Official language: English, with some 20 ethnic group languages
- Religions: Christian (86%), Muslim (12%), traditional, other and none (2%)
- Ethnic groups: Kpelle (20.3%), Bassa (13.4%), Grebo (10%), Gio (8%), Mano (7.9%), Kru (6%), Lorma (5%) Other (30%)
- GDP per capita: US\$353
- Deficit: 26 per cent of GDP in 2017; -5.34 of GDP in 2016
- Economic growth: -1.6% in 2016; expected to be 2.6% in 2017, 3.6% by 2019
- Unemployment: 85% (2015)
- Exports: iron ore, rubber, gold, timber
- Labor force: 70% agricultural
- Liberia ranked 177 of 188 countries surveyed for the UNDP Human Development Index (2016), but its score increased 10% between 1990 and 2015
- Infant/child mortality under 5 years-old: 10 in 1,000 in 2016; reduced 70% since 1990, highest reduction rate in Africa.
- Life expectancy: 63, increasing by 14 years between 1990 and 2015; or 59 years for both sexes in 2017
- Fertility rate: 5 births per woman
- Median age: 18 years. More than 60% of the population is under 25
- High maternal mortality rate (725/100,000) (Female genital mutilation affects more than 2/3 women and girls)
- Happiness: ranked 38th of 44 African countries surveyed between 2014-2016 (for the UN World Happiness Report of 2017)

* Sources: World Bank, UNDP, US CIA, 2008 Liberian census, Liberia Demographic & Health Survey(2015), Index Mundi, Trading Economics, World Population Review

UNMIL Facts

- UNMIL was established on 1 June 2003 by the Security Council Resolution 1509 after a peace agreement in 2003 that ended the two civil wars spanning over 14 years, but had left the country with a complete breakdown of law and order. The civil war claimed the lives of almost 250,000 people - mostly civilians - and left the rest deeply traumatized.
- Since 2003, the Security Council renewed UNMIL mandates for 16 times.
- UNMIL 26,523 refugees have been assisted by UNHCR to return to Côte d’Ivoire.
- UNMIL deployed more than 180,000 peacekeepers over 14 years—including some130,000 troops; 16,000 police officers; and some 24,000 civilian staff.
- UNMIL assisted three democratic presidential and legislative elections in 2005, 2011 and 2017.
- UNMIL disarmed more than 100,000 ex-combatants, and collected more than 20,000 weapons and more than 5 million rounds of ammunition.
- UNMIL supported the strengthening of Liberian security forces, including women, and turned over full security responsibility to the Liberians in 2016.
- Liberia has made overall progress toward the restoration of peace, security and stability. The period of peacekeeping is over, and the UN Country Team and other partners will assist as the country builds a sustainable peace.
- UNMIL spent US\$7.5 billion for 14 years, including US\$16.4 million in Quick-Impact Projects.

It would not have been possible to tell the story of UNMIL through the in-depth interviews contained in this book without the tireless contributions of current and previous UNMIL staff, both national and international, including the mission's former leadership and many other people working inside and outside the UN system. Their contributions, too numerous to mention here, enabled UNMIL to make a positive difference in Liberia.

THE STORY OF UNMIL

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Youths wave Liberian flags during the 2014 UN Day celebrations at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia.

Photo: UNMIL | 24 Oct 14

The story of UNMIL

United Nations Mission in Liberia

The United Nations Mission in Liberia, established in 2003, was critical to restoring peace and security and re-establishing the democratic institutions of governance in the country, following two brutal civil wars that had destroyed Liberian lives and dreams. Considered as one of the most successful of UN peacekeeping missions, UNMIL ended its mandate on 30 March 2018.

This book is an in-depth look at the multi-faceted interactions that the Mission leadership and both uniformed and civilian members of the Mission conducted with Liberian leaders, government officials, political parties, civil society organizations, media, military and police, and ordinary Liberians to build the foundations of a sustainable peace.



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