

## Liberia

Five years into its postconflict transition, Liberia continues to make progress toward sustained recovery. The government of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is pursuing a comprehensive reform agenda that seeks to build strong systems of governance while simultaneously revitalizing the country's traditional sources of economic growth: rubber, timber, and mining. Efforts are hampered, however, by the lack of basic infrastructure—most roads and all power plants were destroyed during the fourteen-year civil war—as well as persistent patterns of corruption and mismanagement.

During 2008, the overall situation in the country remained stable. The UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) continued to provide security throughout the country, although demonstrations and violent disturbances, including mob-related violence, were widespread. In most cases, UNMIL had to respond to restore calm. In September 2008, the UN Security Council extended UNMIL's mandate for a period of twelve months and authorized the Secretary-General to continue the drawdown that began in October 2007. The Council further endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation to increase the number of UNMIL police officers in response to shortcomings in the Liberian National Police (LNP).

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### Background

Fourteen years of brutal war in Liberia ended in August 2003 with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Accra, Ghana. The war killed an estimated 270,000 people, displaced one-third of the population, and left the country in ruins physically, institutionally, and economically. The costs of the war were felt throughout the region, most notably in neighboring Sierra Leone. The Economic Community of

West African Countries (ECOWAS) brokered the 2003 peace talks and was subsequently authorized by the Security Council to establish a vanguard multinational force, the ECOWAS Mission in Liberia (ECOMIL). This mission paved the way for the deployment in October 2003 of UNMIL.

UNMIL has a multidimensional mandate that authorizes it to provide security while assisting in laying the foundations for lasting peace. UNMIL is mandated to support the implementation of the cease-fire agreement; develop and implement a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration program; protect UN personnel as well as civilians under imminent threat of physical violence; facilitate humanitarian assistance; support security sector reform, in particular police reform; assist in the reestablishment of national authority throughout the country; and assist in national elections, which were held in 2005.

To accommodate this multidimensional mandate, UNMIL was established as an integrated mission, seeking to bring in all the activities of the UN under the common leadership of the Secretary-General's Special Representative (SRSG). In January 2008, Ellen Margrethe Løj replaced Alan Doss as SRSG, the only female to hold this title during 2008.

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### Key Developments

#### *Security Situation*

Liberia is experiencing its longest stretch of stability since the outbreak of war in December 1989. Significant progress has been achieved toward consolidating the economy and ensuring a sustained recovery. During 2008, the government succeeded in securing debt relief from the

### UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)

• Authorization and Start Date	19 September 2003 (UNSC Res. 1509)
• SRSB	Ellen Margrethe Løj (Denmark)
• Force Commander	Lieutenant-General A. T. M. Zahirul Alam (Bangladesh)
• Acting Police Commissioner	Henrik Stiernblad (Sweden)
• Budget	\$603.8 million (1 July 2008–30 June 2009)
• Strength as of 31 October 2008	Troops: 11,436 Military Observers: 210 Police: 1,074 International Civilian Staff: 471 Local Civilian Staff: 968 UN Volunteers: 231

*For detailed mission information see p. 313*

International Monetary Fund and in finalizing its first national poverty reduction strategy, which won substantial donor support at the June 2008 Liberia Poverty Reduction Forum in Berlin, Germany. However, a joint security assessment conducted by the government of Liberia, UNMIL, and the UN Country Team in May 2008 confirmed that the situation in Liberia remains fragile. The main threats to peace and stability are related to the maintenance of law and order, insufficient progress in reintegration of ex-combatants, and the high level of youth unemployment. Violent criminal activities, especially armed robbery and rape, are on the rise, while the police and justice system continue to lack the capacity to respond. As a result, public confidence in the rule of law is lacking and mob justice has become an increasingly common occurrence across the country.

Insecurity, and with it the potential for instability, is also related to the competition over natural resources. Rubber plantations and surrounding communities were theaters for frequent violent clashes between illegal tappers and plantation security units throughout 2008. The high unemployment rate is driving young men into illegal exploitation of natural resources, whose

appeal has only been enhanced by their increased value on the international market. While efforts by the UN and the government of Liberia have made progress in bringing the diamond sector under control, gold mining remains largely unregulated, and the number of ex-combatants engaged in related activities is reportedly growing. In general, ex-combatant groups, which have often maintained command structures established during the war, operate in remote and inaccessible areas, and pose a threat not only to security in Liberia but also to neighboring countries.

#### *UNMIL Drawdown*

A gradual, three-phase drawdown of UNMIL began in 2007, and is scheduled for completion in 2010. The first phase of the drawdown took place in 2008, which saw the repatriation of 2,450 troops. In August, the Secretary-General recommended that the second phase (October 2008–September 2009) should involve the repatriation of 1,460 military personnel, while he envisioned that the third phase (October 2009–December 2010) would entail a further reduction of 2,100 troops. This would bring UNMIL to a strength of 8,131 troops by the end of 2010—almost half its original size, yet still among the larger UN peace operations. During his visit to Liberia in May 2008, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon explicitly linked his drawdown recommendations with the Liberian government's ability to take complete control of its national security. In the face of continued lack of law enforcement capacity by the government, the Secretary-General recommended the deployment of two additional formed police units to supplement the reduction in the mission's military strength.

In September 2008, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNMIL through September 2009 and authorized the Secretary-General to proceed with the planned reduction of the operation's personnel, including the recommended increase in the mission's police strength. The Secretary-General was further requested to report to the Security Council by 15 February 2009 on progress in the core benchmarks for the

#### 4.10.1 HIV-AIDS and United Nations Peacekeeping

In 2007 and 2008, Sopiato Likimani was commissioned by the Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum to examine the medical and public health implications of HIV and AIDS in peacekeeping. In addition to reviewing medical records at UN headquarters in New York, Likimani selected three missions for detailed investigation: the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), and the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC). These three missions comprise over 40,000 peacekeepers, nearly half of the UN's peacekeeping deployment.

Likimani's review of medical records revealed that data were not recorded uniformly across the missions. Additionally, while chief medical officers send monthly reports to the Department of Medical Services at UN headquarters, some repatriation and mortality information for those affected with HIV and AIDS had to be updated during the assessment, indicating that information is not always sent to headquarters in a routine and timely manner.

Field reports indicate that counseling is rare among troop-contributing countries that have mandatory HIV testing policies.

Additionally, while guidelines established by the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) exclude clinical AIDS cases from deployment one limitation is that the clinical case definition for AIDS has a sensitivity of 50 percent, meaning that half of hospitalized HIV-positive patients do not fulfill clinical AIDS-case definition. Between 2003 and 2005, HIV-related repatriations and deaths in UNMIL were quite high, at forty-three and nineteen respectively, with the majority of cases coming from two troop-contributing countries that did not have predeployment HIV testing policies. When these two countries introduced mandatory predeployment testing in 2006, HIV-related repatriations and deaths decreased significantly, leading the principal investigator to conclude that HIV problems experienced in peacekeeping missions can often be related to the deployment of undiagnosed immune deficient HIV-positive personnel.

The risk of peacekeepers acquiring HIV infection through sexual relations depends on their behavior while deployed, including number of partners, HIV status, and consistency of condom use. While it is difficult to determine cases of HIV

transmission during deployment, "knowledge, aptitude, and practices" surveys of two missions (UNMIL in 2005, MINUSTAH in 2007) show that 18 percent of respondents in UNMIL and 6.5 percent of respondents in MINUSTAH reported having sexual relations while deployed. Additionally, 21 percent of those who had sex while deployed in UNMIL reported not always using a condom, which placed them at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Likimani's recommendations included standardizing repatriation and mortality medical records and establishing a centralized medical database at DPKO headquarters; analyzing medical reports to evaluate the burden of HIV repatriations and deaths on DPKO, with administrative debiting of troop-contributing countries to improve compliance with predeployment medical regulations; moving toward universal HIV testing, with counseling; targeting civilian staff for fuller participation in existing mission HIV-awareness programs and advocacy to ensure that condoms are seen as an essential public health prevention tool and not a license for sexual abuse and exploitation.

*Source: Sopiato Likimani, Medical and Public Health Implications of HIV and AIDS in Peacekeeping: Field Evaluation and Analysis (New York: Social Science Research Council, Conflict Prevention and Peace Forum, February 2008).*

drawdown and to recommend any further adjustments needed.

#### Security Sector Reform

Liberia remains far from having a coherent and viable security infrastructure. The postwar security sector is characterized by a number of agencies performing overlapping functions in the face of a deep-seated lack of confidence on the part of the public. In spring 2008, the government presented a national security sector strategy that provides a first attempt at a coherent vision for broad security sector reform. The

bulk of the strategy aims to enhance ongoing efforts to rebuild the army and reform the police. In addition, the strategy provides a plan for the rationalization of the security sector, including the disbandment of several agencies.

As a key provider of assistance to police reform, UNMIL plays a major role in the ongoing security reform efforts. By far the largest international role, however, is played by the United States, which is leading the restructuring of the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL). The US government has pledged \$210 million to the task and has contracted two US private security

companies (DynCorp and Pacific Architects Engineers) to create an effective, 2,000-strong Liberian army and to reestablish three military bases by the end of 2008. Progress has been slow, however. Basic training for the last batch of 500 recruits and 29 officers began in June 2008. By 15 August 2008, 1,631 recruits had completed basic training, with 45 recruits commissioned as officers. Effective operational capacity of the army is lagging. Shortcomings are particularly acute in establishing an effective command structure.

Progress in police reform has been somewhat faster, owing in part to the fact that attempts were not made to rebuild the police from scratch. UNMIL focused on vetting the existing force and providing basic training to 3,500 police officers, including new recruits. These goals were reached in 2007, with 90 percent of the reformed police force deployed countywide by the end of 2008. But serious concerns have been raised that too much attention is being paid to meeting quantitative measures (number of police officers trained) rather than promoting qualitative changes in police performance. Operations are hampered by a lack of basic infrastructure and police equipment, and continued problems of discipline and misconduct indicate systemic weaknesses in command and control.

In December 2007, a new program to train 500 police officers for a specialized anticrime and riot control unit (emergency response unit) was established. In contrast to the ordinary police force, this unit will be armed. Training, equipment, and construction of facilities will primarily be provided by the United States. But as of August 2008, funding gaps and late arrival of equipment, including weapons and uniforms, were causing delays in the implementation of this program.

Meanwhile, the establishment of civilian management and oversight, especially legislative oversight, has yet to be achieved and requires urgent attention. While the national security sector strategy promises to create civilian oversight mechanisms, it does not provide details of how this will be done.

### *Governance and the Rule of Law*

Issues of poor governance were at the heart of the Liberian crisis. The present government has consequently invested considerable effort in building transparent, inclusive, and accountable governance systems. Progress is being made. According to the World Bank's governance indicators, Liberia has shown the largest improvement of any country in the world in controlling corruption, moving up 72 places in the world rankings (from 185th to 113th) in two years. The government's anticorruption efforts are supported by the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Program (GEMAP), which entails the deployment of internationally recruited financial controllers with cosignature authority to key state institutions. While initially seen as controversial due to its intrusive character, GEMAP now seems more widely accepted in Liberia. A midterm evaluation of the program was undertaken in June 2008 and talks are ongoing with regard to its future. Emphasis is likely to shift toward building national capacity to take over from the international controllers.

In her annual message to the national legislature, the president acknowledged that, despite improvements, corruption in Liberia is alive and well, and that the country has fallen short of achieving its governance and rule of law goals. In particular, the justice system suffers from chronic capacity constraints. UNMIL is mandated to assist the government of Liberia in developing a strategy for consolidating a national legal framework, including judicial institutions, and is conscious that—ideally—the administration of justice should be strengthened as an extension of the security sector. The UN Secretary-General, however, is seriously concerned over the limited progress being made on rule of law. The lack of a coherent strategic plan for the justice sector constrains coordination and impedes enhanced donor support.

To facilitate participatory and inclusive governance, Liberia has mandated the Governance Commission to make recommendations for constitutional reform, including a comprehensive

decentralization policy. The commission is also working on land reform—an area considered crucial for sustainable peacebuilding in Liberia. During 2008, land disputes frequently led to violence that claimed several lives.

On 8 January 2008, public hearings began at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Monrovia. But by the end of 2008, few key people have appeared before the commission, and it remains uncertain whether the commission can succeed in fulfilling its mandate of creating a “clear picture of the past” and “facilitating genuine healing and reconciliation.”

Meanwhile, the relationship between the legislative and executive branches showed consistent signs of improvement in 2008. After some initial delays, important bills, including the Liberian Anticorruption Commission Act and the Defense Act, were passed in August. Corruption trials against leading politicians, including the former chairman of the transitional government and the former speaker of the House of Representatives, have continued.

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## Conclusion

Liberia has come a long way since its war ended in 2003. Public and international confidence in the government has grown and the prospects for continued recovery and stabilization appear promising. Yet many of the dynamics that fueled the conflict are still present; the country remains caught in a fragile situation, and even small setbacks could erode the gains that have been registered. UNMIL’s presence and continued international assistance are preconditions not only for maintaining security but also for providing space for the reform and recovery so vital to Liberia’s stability. Developments in 2008 underlined that the peacebuilding challenges in Liberia go far beyond security. Serious efforts by the government and its international partners will need to be maintained to ensure that the peace dividend is translated into tangible improvements, including employment opportunities that may help ensure the youth of Liberia a better future.