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THE ANALYST

Liberia: Female Peacekeepers Providing Hope For Women Victimized By Conflict

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Monrovia — Liberia's Gender and Development Minister, Ms. Vabah Gayflor, says the participation of women in peacekeeping provides new role models and new hope for Liberia's girls and young women who have been victimized by years of conflict. Ms. Gayflor made this statement at a wreath-laying ceremony on 29 May at the UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) Pan African Plaza Headquarters as part of ceremonies marking the observance of International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers in Monrovia.

"The years of conflict were particularly brutal for Liberian women and girls – victims of horrible war crimes and rape, our population of women and girls are still only beginning to recover from the trauma and destruction", Minister Gayflor who represented the President of the Republic of Liberia, Madam Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, said. She stressed the importance of an "inclusive security sector", which will truly secure peace for all members of the Liberian population. In offering security and protection with a female face, the Liberian Gender and Development Minister pointed out that, "these women are opening the door to ensuring that Liberia moves towards a path of inclusive security".

Minister Gayflor acknowledged the critical role that the UN peacekeeping forces are playing in securing Liberia's path out of conflict and into reconstruction and development.

Delivering the message of the UN Secretary-General in commemoration of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj, noted that peacekeepers serve in some of the most difficult and inhospitable areas on earth. The message added that these brave men and women, who sometimes face instability, disease and violence on a daily basis, have shown tremendous dedication, making a tangible difference in the lives of many while showing to the world the caring and committed face of the United Nations. The message paid tribute to the 132 peacekeepers, ten of whom were women, who lost their lives in 2008 in the line of duty – the highest one-year total in the history of UN peacekeeping.

At the wreath-laying ceremony, names of twenty-one UNMIL peacekeepers who died while serving the cause of peace in Liberia within the last 12 months were read. Both the SRSG and the Gender and Development Minister laid wreaths in remembrance of their valuable contributions made towards the restoration of peace and stability to Liberia. Attending the event were senior UNMIL and Liberian Government officials, members of the Diplomatic Corps, UN agencies, funds and programmes, international organizations and other partners.

Other organized activities executed to observe the Day were a special forum held in the auditorium of the University of Liberia on the theme of the Day: "Women in Peacekeeping: the Power to Empower." The forum brought together Commander Annie Abraham of the UNMIL all-female Indian Formed Police Unit; Ms. Melva Crouch, UNMIL Chief of Integrated Support Services; Ms. Carole Doucet, UNMIL Senior Gender Adviser; and 2nd Lt. Venus Dean, Armed Forces of Liberia. Also participating in the forum were the Chief of UNMIL Public Information, Mr. George Somerwill, and Spokesperson Maimouna Mills. UNMIL Public Information and the Military led the school visitation activity to educate young Liberian school children on the significance of UN peacekeeping. Appropriate programmes to observe the International Day of UN Peacekeepers were held in other parts of Liberia where UN civilian, military and police peacekeepers are working to assist Liberians recover from the devastation and trauma of the Liberian conflict.

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