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## **Liberian women articulate priorities for the reconstruction of the country**

**Washington, DC** — The enhancement of national security is a key area of focus in the reconstruction of Liberia alongside the revitalization of the economy, strengthening governance and the rule of law, and the rehabilitation of the infrastructure. In addressing national security, a broader view of security must be embraced, particularly in light of the increasing incidence of gender-based violence, including rape, in communities.

This was one of the key priorities identified by a group of 18 Liberian women who are in Washington, DC, to participate in the Symposium on Gender and Development in Liberia. The symposium was organized by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), in collaboration with the Initiative for Inclusive Security and The World Bank. The symposium was timed to take place in conjunction with the Liberia Partners' Forum scheduled for 13–14 February 2007. The Forum will bring together representatives of the government of Liberia and donor countries and agencies to jointly review progress made by the government in the reconstruction of the country, discuss Liberia's interim poverty reduction strategy (I-PRS), and discuss financial needs for the reconstruction and development agenda.

The Liberian women, led by the Hon. Vabah Gayflor, Minister of Gender and Development, include representatives of women in Parliament, women in advocacy groups, women living with HIV, and women entrepreneurs. The key message from the women is that Liberian women are major stakeholders in the post-conflict reconstruction of their country. Mechanisms must be established, within the framework of implementation of the interim poverty reduction strategy, for women's effective participation in the formulation and reform of policies, including on land tenure reforms, national security, and education.

While commending the government for its commitment to address gender inequality through the adoption of a gender policy, and economic empowerment projects, they called for a more structured approach across all the four pillars of the interim poverty reduction strategy. They urged the government to create an inter-ministerial mechanism for ensuring accountability for gender equality by line ministries, and to significantly enhance the technical and institutional capacity of the Ministry of Gender and Development.

Concerned that 85 per cent of adult women in Liberia are illiterate, the women wish to see greater emphasis on adult literacy to complement the commitment to basic education. The women appreciate the focus on job creation and call for increased investment in the creation of decent work for women and youth across all sectors.

Finally, participants in the symposium noted that under the current leadership, Liberia has the opportunity to produce a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for 2008-2012 that will better address gender equality issues. The Ministry of Gender and Development was mandated to develop a partnership and joint work with the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Finance in preparing for the development of the full PRSP. In addition, various studies will be conducted on gender as well as on various sectors of the economy, and gender expertise in key ministries and non-governmental organizations will be developed in readiness for engagement in the PRSP process.

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