



Le Roy enjoys traditional welcome



DPKO Head Pleased With Progress in Liberia

Visiting Liberia in June for the first time, the head of the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), Alain Le Roy, expressed satisfaction for the outstanding progress being made by UNMIL and the Government in securing peace and security in this post-conflict West African nation.

“I must say I’m very impressed with what I’ve seen. I was very pleased that all

the interlocutors I met have been praising the work of UNMIL. I was pleased that the work of UNMIL to sustain the peace and security, to help with the rule of law, strengthen the judiciary and police, all that is very much appreciated,” Under-Secretary-General Le Roy said when he briefed journalists at the end of a three-day familiarization visit to Liberia, the first since he assumed office nearly a year ago.

The Under-Secretary-General however reiterated that despite the progress made

so far, there are still numerous challenges. He attributed the fragile security situation in the country to the limited capacity of the security and judicial institutions. He singled out the Liberia National Police (LNP), the Armed Forces of Liberia as well as judicial institutions which have still not developed the capability to function autonomously. He promised to continue to work with government to provide the necessary support to enhance capacity in the Security and Rule of Law pillars.



In a meeting with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Le Roy applauded the cooperation between UNMIL and the Government which has provided a smooth opportunity to align policies for maintaining peace and stability in the country. The President, in response, reiterated the vital role that the Mission has played in stabilizing the country. She expressed appreciation for the partnership, noting that the country would not have made progress without the support of the United Nations.

The Liberian leader repeated the need for more training of the police to enable it to provide security, particularly mentioning the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) which, she noted, is a critical component in Government's response to acts of lawlessness. Though President Johnson Sirleaf spoke of the many challenges facing the country, she assured the Under-Secretary-General that her Government is committed to reforms.

Le Roy, who heads 18 current UN peacekeeping missions around the world, said that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon had presented to the Security Council recommendations and the report of the Technical Assessment Mission (TAM) that visited Liberia from 26 April to 6 May following the end of the second-phase of the UNMIL's drawdown process.

Amongst the several challenges still facing Liberia as stated in the TAM report is the fragile security situation, destabilizing factors like corruption, land disputes and high youth unemployment that are exacerbated by the global economic crisis.

The Technical Team also named the presence of a large number of ex-combatants who have retained their old command structures and are well organized; political tensions likely to increase as presidential and legislative elections in 2011 approach, divisions in the national reconciliation process and the work of the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission, and the situation in the sub-region, in particular the uncertain political situation in some neighboring countries.

Despite all these challenges, Le Roy noted that Secretary-General Ban has recommended to the UN Security Council a reduction in the mission's military strength by 2,029 troops but no change in the police component during the third drawdown phase, which would run from October 2009 to May 2010. This would bring UNMIL's total military strength down to 8,202 (including the 250 for the unit in charge of the Special Court for Sierra Leone) by May 2010 while the police component would remain at 1,375. A reduction in excess combat equipment is expected to result in substantial savings. The report foresees no further reductions before the 2011 presidential and legislative elections.

He noted that the military strength envisaged is capable of dealing with any security situation that may arise. "It's after the 2011 elections that we will assess the situation," the head of DPKO said, reassuring Liberians that though at some point UNMIL will have to leave, it will not be a hasty exit. A decision on the Secretary-General's recommendations will be taken when the extension of UNMIL's mandate comes before the Security Council in September.

During his visit, as part of his four-nation West African tour, besides meeting with President Johnson Sirleaf, the Under-Secretary-General held discussions with government officials including members of the Security Pillar, political party leaders and the International Contact Group on Liberia. He also met with the UN Country Team, the UNMIL's leadership and held a Town Hall meeting with UNMIL staff.

Out in the field, Le Roy visited Liberia's central city, Gbarnga, and met with Bong County Superintendent Ranney Jackson and the Joint County Security Team. He also visited the Circuit Court, interacted with the UN Formed Police Unit and was briefed on the security situation by the Sector Commander. Le Roy also visited the Monrovia Central Prison where he toured the facility. ♦

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