



Liberia Coast Guard Unit Commander receives "Guide-on" from AFL Command Officer-in-Charge, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Alao Abdurrahman

Liberia Activates Coast Guard

Amidst the spectacle and pageantry that characterized the celebration of the Armed Forces Day in February, Liberia also marked another key milestone in its ongoing security sector reform with the activation of the Coast Guard Unit.

Neatly dressed in their white uniforms and caps, 40 newly trained soldiers of the reorganized Liberia Coast Guard Unit stood "at ease" on the green turf of the Barclay Training Center (BTC), attentively watching the formalities of the "Guide-on" being presented to the unit's Commander by the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) Command Officer-in-Charge, Maj.-Gen. Suraj Alao Abdurrahman.

The activation with the initial 40 offi-

cers chosen from within the ranks of the AFL and trained in the United States fulfills in part the 2008 National Defense Act which obliged the Liberian Government to develop and re-establish its capacity to man its territorial waters.

Liberia's vast maritime resources along its 300-mile coastline are being pilaged daily due to the country's inability to oversee its waters. The country loses over US\$12 million annually due to illegal fishing. Maritime control is a continuing challenge in the sub-region with drug smugglers using West Africa as a trans-shipment point for illegal narcotics and counterfeit drugs worth a staggering US\$1.8 billion.

Addressing the occasion, United States Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said her government is proud to assist

Liberia in the activation of its Coast Guard and to counter the maritime threats. The US government has agreed to provide over US\$5 million worth of training, equipment, and infrastructure to the nascent Coast Guard.

"When the Coast Guard moves to their base on Bushrod Island, the US Seabees will welcome them home by beginning three major infrastructure construction projects at the base – a pier, a boat ramp and perimeter wall that will be valued at US\$1.3 million," the US envoy said. Besides, the US Government has provided the embryonic Coast Guard with eight zodiac boats and outboard motors to ensure that they get off to a successful start.

Already, a US Coast Guard mobile training team has begun a series of training



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ard Unit

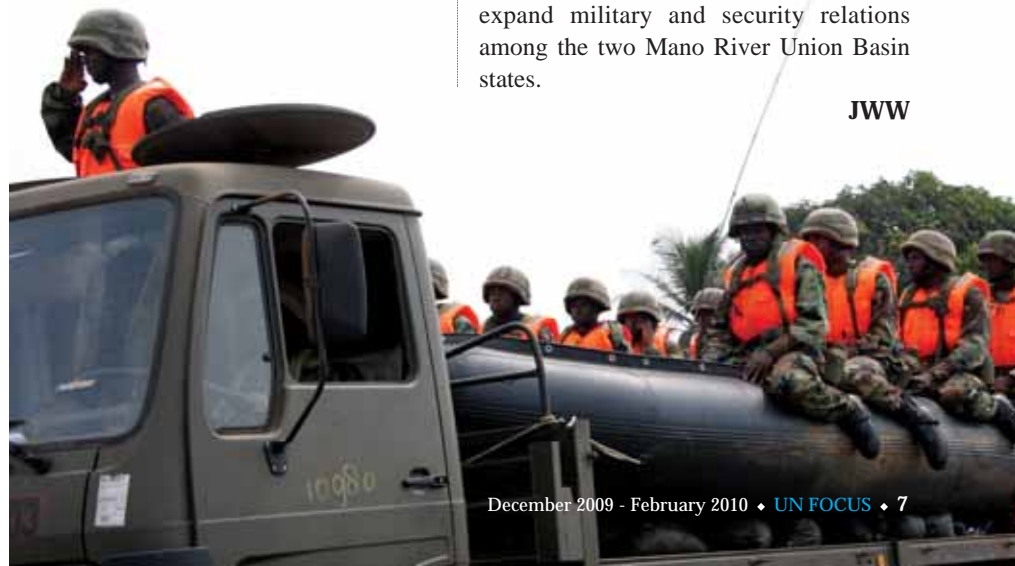
courses to help build the Coast Guard's technical capacity. Additional training courses in areas including boat maintenance, small boat operation, and maritime law enforcement are scheduled for later this year.

The US Government also provides the Unit with scholarships and opportunities to study abroad. Four of its personnel are currently studying in the United States. Two are in Coast Guard Machinery-Technician School while the others are in the Officers' Indoctrination School at the US Coast Guard Academy. Three others returned recently - one from the US Army Engineering Basic Officers' Leadership Course and two from the US Coast Guard Boatswain Mate School.

Commander Jennifer Kethum has been appointed as maritime advisor in the

Office of Security Cooperation within the US Embassy here. She's also coordinating activities of the newly restructured Unit.

Speaking at the activation, Defense Minister Brownie J. Samukai, Jr. assured the AFL Commander-in-Chief, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, that the re-activated Coast Guard Unit would work with the line ministries and agencies of government through the inter-ministerial committee to coordinate and collaborate in protecting Liberia's maritime shores. Samukai



sounded a strong warning to intruders violating Liberia's territorial waters. "All of those illegal fishermen and others engaged in illegal activities out there, we want you to be on notice that the Coast Guard is up and ready for the task and will chase you out of our waters."

In her remarks, President Johnson Sirleaf congratulated the Coast Guard for its activation while reminding them of the daunting task ahead which is to improve the security of the country's coastline, and control smuggling and illegal fishing. Commenting on the Armed Forces Day 2010 theme, "Building a Force for Good," the Liberian leader noted that this year's theme was most appropriate, given the achievements of the armed forces so far.

"We are acutely aware of our Government's responsibility to sustain a professional armed forces, including Coast Guard personnel. We commit to the continuous development of the AFL to a professional standard through training and other capacity-building programmes both at home and abroad," President Sirleaf stressed. The Liberian Government assumed full responsibility for the growth, maintenance and sustenance of AFL on 1 January when the contractual arrangement with the US Government contractors expired on 31 December 2009.

President Sirleaf challenged AFL personnel to continue to live up to the motto of the institution, "Dare to Protect and Defend," and to go forward and be a force for the good of the nation.

At the Armed Forces Day programme, the ministers of defense of Liberia and Sierra Leone signed a Memorandum of Understanding to collaborate in different spheres of responsibilities to improve and expand military and security relations among the two Mano River Union Basin states.

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