



Elite Police Unit Takes

By J. Wesley Washington

Amidst persisting concerns over armed robberies in Monrovia and its environs, an elite special police unit is being trained to deal with violent crimes in Liberia. Recently, the first group of 139 officers of the Emergency Response Unit (ERU) of the Liberia National Police (LNP) graduated after completing eight months of intensive classroom and physical training at the National Police Training Academy.

At the graduation ceremony, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf reiterated her government's determination to build a professional security agency that will respect human rights while enforcing the law. She said those charged with enforcing the law must first obey the law themselves in order to win the trust and confidence of the people. "You are the ones to uphold the law; you are the ones expected to enforce the law; therefore, you yourself must obey the law so that when you stand to tell somebody that they had violated the law, you can say because I know the law and I'm

able to respect the law. I expect you as a citizen to do the same," she reminded the new graduates.

The ERU officers are trained to deal with crimes which may require the use of firearms -- specifically the arrest of armed criminals, violent crimes in progress, hostage situations and armed terrorist activities. They will also deal with riot control, engage in anti-crime patrol in crime prone areas and provide assistance in major disaster situations. By June 2009, the ERU is expected to reach its target of 500 trained personnel.



Newly graduated ERU personnel demonstrate their skills

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Deputy Special Representative Jordan Ryan noted with optimism that every officer of the ERU would be ready, willing and able to provide security in a fair, professional, and just manner. “We urge you to respect the rule of law and uphold human rights,” he reiterated, adding, “You have trained long and hard, you have persevered and your commitment to serve and protect the Liberian people has been demonstrated during the last months of your training.”

Ryan pledged that the UN will work with the donor community to encourage

more support to the ERU and the LNP, noting that the UN understands the importance of training and equipment, but they are not the only ingredients for a successful future. “The successful future of the ERU depends on the success of the entire LNP which will bring a brighter future by improving security.”

The United States Chargé d’Affaires, a.i., Brooks Robinson, on behalf of her government, noted that the US is assisting in the process because security for all Liberians is essential for the country to end the cycle of violence, injustice and poverty, and move forward on the path of development. “Without peace and security, there cannot be development,” she noted.

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of law, their conduct must follow standard operating procedures (SOPs) so that Liberians will not only feel safe and secure but also respect and appreciate them.

UNPOL Commissioner Henrik Stiernblad said he was very pleased with the progress being made by ERU personnel. He underlined that they are expected to live up to the highest professional standards, especially when it comes to use of force. “Very strict SOPs have been developed and agreed between the Justice Ministry, LNP and the UN, and the unit will be held accountable for all its actions as they will be carefully monitored by an UNPOL ERU Advisory Unit,” he said.

“Their weapons will be controlled, every weapon will be accounted for; checked in and out daily and will only be available when they are on duty. All weapons will be kept in our control until such time when we are ready to deploy the men basically only in emergency situa-

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headquarters complete with a command centre and communications capabilities near the James Spriggs Payne Airport which will be completed by July 2009. Robinson affirmed that the US will continue its strong support to rebuild Liberia’s security sector. During this fiscal year, the US will spend over US\$56 million in support of the country’s security agencies.

Also providing support is the Government of the Republic of Ireland which has so far provided 30 vehicles to the ERU and funding for police training related building projects.

Justice Minister Cllr. Philip A.Z. Banks vowed to spare no effort in ensuring that Liberians and foreign residents alike are secure in the country. “We are coming after you,” Banks warned criminals. He reminded the ERU personnel that as the first line to the justice system and the rule

tions,” says Thomas Sears, in charge of the training of the ERU.

At its full strength of 500 trained personnel, the ERU is to have its resources and capabilities available throughout Liberia by dividing the unit into three tactical operations groups - one in Monrovia and two strategically placed in the leeward counties. The exact location and timing of the deployment are yet to be decided by the Government of Liberia.

Training of ERU personnel began on 2 January 2008. Those selected are active LNP officers. Each candidate underwent a vetting process that included another background investigation by the UNPOL staff, medical and psychological screening, physical agility test and an interview process. ♦