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# Liberia a powerful exam

**D**espite pouring rain, hundreds of Liberians lined up along the main streets of Monrovia to welcome US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton who was on a whistle-stop visit to Liberia in the second week of August. And her key message of unstinting support for the country's efforts to consolidate peace and reconciliation was unequivocal and inspiring. "I am very supportive of actions that will lead to the peace, reconciliation and unity of Liberia," she said, and urged the people of Liberia to continue to speak out against corruption.

Emerging from 14 years of civil conflict, security issues are very close to the heart of Liberians. Speaking at the National Police Training Academy on the outskirts of Monrovia, where members of the new Liberia National Police (LNP) are

being trained with financial and technical support from the United States, the UN Police and other partners as part of the country's security sector reform, Clinton thanked Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Ellen Margrethe Løj for "her outstanding work as head of the UN Mission in Liberia."

Since its deployment in 2003, the UN Mission has been assisting to restructure the Liberian police force. While acknowledging that training professional police officers was one of the hardest jobs to do in post-conflict situations, Clinton described maintaining law and order as "a critical element in sustaining peace and stability" and emphasized that Liberians, particularly the women and children, need the LNP not only to protect them but to heal the wounds left by years of conflict.

Clinton encouraged the recruits to rec-

ognize the investment that has been made in them but pointed out that there are greater challenges the LNP is facing as some elements of the Liberian police force had betrayed the public trust in the past. She quoted President Barack Obama's recent address in the Ghanaian capital Accra that urged Africans to take control of their destiny and strive for the peace and security necessary for progress. "For too long in Liberia, the police instilled fear. Today, you must fight fear. For too long, the police undermined the rule of law. Today, you must uphold it," she urged the LNP personnel. She lauded women who have joined the force, stressing that it has been found around the world that women police officers are essential, along with their male counterparts, to provide the stability of peace and security.

U.S. police officers and advisors have



Clinton with President Sirleaf and Løj at the Police Academy

the challenges facing the LNP, the UN envoy said: “Even the best trained police officer needs means of transportation; means of communication; a police station to work from; a place to live -- just to name a few of the logistical needs. Without that they will not be able to function. Without that they will not be able to respond to crime incidents and thus be able to gain the trust and confidence of the community they serve.”

Since the restructuring of LNP began in 2004, over 3,700 officers have been trained so far. Currently 14 per cent of all LNP officers are female. For the ERU, a fourth class of 80 recruits is currently undergoing training.

Prior to visiting the police academy, Clinton addressed the media following a meeting with President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and her cabinet, and later addressed a joint session of the Liberian National Legislature. “We think Liberia is on the right track, as difficult as that might be,” she told the media. She referred to Liberia as a model of a successful transition from lawlessness to democracy, and despair to hope. “Liberia has adopted sound fiscal

policies and is seeing strong economic growth. It’s impressive the way that Liberia has decreased its debt which had run up during years of conflict and has had a high rate of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in the last few years,” she noted, praising Africa’s first elected female President for her accomplishments since coming to power in 2006. “I look at what President Sirleaf has done over the past three years and I see a very accomplished leader,” she said.

Alluding to the 2011 Presidential election, Clinton urged lawmakers that while hard fought elections are part of a democracy, opponents must close ranks when the election is over. She stressed that democracy depended on good governance, adherence to the rule of law, and sound economic policies, and announced that the US will be contributing US\$17.5 million for programmes to help Liberia ensure that the 2011 elections are free and fair. Earlier, welcoming Secretary Clinton to Liberia, President Johnson Sirleaf expressed gratitude for the partnership and friendship that Liberia enjoys with the US.

Liberia has very strong historical links with America. Clinton, who was visiting Liberia for the first time, left for Cape Verde the same day on the last leg of her seven-nation African tour. ♦

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been collaborating closely with the LNP but much of the US Government’s focus has been on LNP’s Emergency Response Unit. “Our investment in the ERU, including the new headquarters that will be opening soon, is a down payment on Liberia’s future security. And I am pleased to announce today that in next year’s budget, the United States will increase its financial support for training the LNP,” she said to loud applause.

Special Representative Løj said the United States has been a “crucial partner” in the efforts to shape a national police force “that serves the people of Liberia with professionalism and dignity.” She noted that the United States has contributed over 100 UN police advisors including a Senior Advisory Team, which has brought expertise to the LNP’s development at the strategic level. Highlighting

Clinton addresses joint session of Legislature

