

Business and Politics in the Muslim World
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Details of the News

China-African Relations:

China congratulates Ghana on Independence

President Hu Jintao has on behalf of the Government and People of the People's Republic of China extended warm congratulations and best wishes to the President, Government and People of Ghana on the occasion of the 53rd anniversary of their independence.

President Hu in a release from the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Accra on Friday said, over the years Ghana has made remarkable achievements in various fields in pursuit of her national development agenda; enjoyed political stability; sustainable

economic development for many years and played a positive role in safeguarding peace in Africa.

He commended Ghana for properly addressing the challenges of the international financial crisis last year and achieving positive results in stabilizing the economy, maintaining social stability and improving the livelihood of the people.

It said China cherished its traditional friendship with Ghana, which "is currently in good momentum", adding that this year also marked the 50th anniversary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries, and "China is willing, in joint effort with Ghana to vigorously put new impetus to the China-Ghana friendship.

Pan-African issues:

- AFRICA: Finding the food crops of the future

(IRIN) - Temperatures seem set to soar to perilously high levels because of climate change. In another 40 years, would maize still be the staple food in Kenya, already hit by five failed rainy seasons? If not, what could people grow and eat? And if you could grow maize, how much water and fertilizer would it need?

If you live in the remote semi-arid Karamoja region of northeastern Uganda - beset by 14 droughts in 25 years - you might also want to know what your options are for continued food security.

For the first time, a customized regional climate model linked to crop growing and water models, run on a supercomputer at Michigan State University (MSU), will help provide crop breeders in three East African countries - Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania - with detailed answers on crop yields.

Many research institutions have been working on models to predict the impact of climate change on food production in Africa, but in a few months the MSU model will help scientists and breeders to zoom in at a regional level on the possible impact of climate change on a wide variety of crops in these countries.

The research could help produce climate-resilient varieties of food crops, said Jennifer Olson, lead researcher and associate professor at MSU's College of Communication Arts and Sciences.

"In a few months the MSU model will help scientists and breeders to zoom in at a regional level on the possible impact of climate change on a wide variety of crops in these countries"

"East Africa is already experiencing the impact of climate change - food crops are experiencing extreme water stress," she commented. People living in Kenya's highlands, who have traditionally grown tea and coffee, have begun experimenting with maize and beans as the climate has grown warmer.

Work on the model began 10 years ago with the recording of relevant data, such as the impact of nutrients on a certain food crop, or the impact of water stress on another, which were subsequently fed into the model. "The model is still being perfected," said Olson.

The model can experiment with the impact of climate change, such as high temperature and water stress on a certain crop variety, saving the time that would have been spent on field trials, "which will help speed up the agricultural research cycle", she noted.

The researchers intend to launch the model at a workshop in June. Concern about increasing food insecurity in East Africa has prompted two institutions to set up a research grants to encourage innovative solutions.

The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), based in South Africa, and the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), in Nairobi, Kenya, announced a US\$10.67 million grant from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) to support the establishment of a multidisciplinary competitive funding mechanism for biosciences in Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda.

ILRI's Bruce Scott said they would be looking for innovative solutions using bioscience to improve crop resilience to climate change, or perhaps to improve the shelf-life of a food product.

- UN condemns Gaddafi jihad call

The United Nations and European Union have condemned a call from Libya's leader for Muslims to carry out jihad against Switzerland over a recent vote to ban the construction of minarets in the European country.

Sergei Ordzhonikidze, the UN director-general in Geneva, said the call by Muammar Gaddafi on Friday was "inadmissible".

"I believe that such declarations on the part of the head of state are inadmissible in international relations," the AFP news agency quoted him as saying.

"I'm not even talking about actions," he said.

Meanwhile in Brussels, a spokesman for the European Union's foreign affairs chief described Gaddafi's call for jihad as "unfortunate".

"If these reports are correct ... [they] come at an unfortunate moment when the European Union is working closely with Switzerland trying to reach a diplomatic solution" to a dispute between the two countries, Lutz Guellner, spokesman for Catherine Ashton, said.

'Unacceptable' remarks

France also condemned the comments, saying "such statements are unacceptable".

"The differences between Libya and Switzerland should be resolved by negotiation and we support the European Union presidency's efforts in this direction," Bernard Valero, a French foreign ministry spokesman, said.

Gaddafi made the remarks at a ceremony to mark the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad in Libya's Benghazi square on Friday.

"It is against unbelieving and apostate Switzerland that jihad ought to be proclaimed by all means," he said, calling Switzerland an "infidel, obscene state which is destroying mosques".

His comments come nearly three months after Switzerland voted in a referendum to adopt a ban on the construction of minarets, the towers that are a signature part of mosques.

'Fight against Switzerland'

Switzerland - with a population of 400,000 Muslims, mainly of Balkan and Turkish origin - has around 200 mosques, with just four minarets among them.

The ban drew condemnation from religious quarters around the world, including the Vatican.

Gaddafi said: "Any Muslim around the world who has dealings with Switzerland is an infidel [and is] against Islam, against Mohammed, against God, against the Quran."

"Let us fight against Switzerland, Zionism and foreign aggression," he said in a speech broadcast live on television.

"There is a big difference between terrorism and jihad which is a right to armed struggle."

Gaddafi also urged Muslims everywhere to boycott Swiss products and to bar Swiss aircraft and ships from the airports or sea ports of Muslim nations.

Swiss-Libyan row

The Swiss foreign ministry said it had no comment on Gaddafi's remarks.

Relations between Libya and Switzerland have been strained since July 2008 when Gaddafi's son Hannibal and his wife were arrested and briefly held in Geneva after two domestic workers complained he had mistreated them.

The row deepened when Libya swiftly detained and confiscated the passports of two Swiss businessmen, Rashid Hamdani and Max Goeldi.

Both men were convicted of overstaying their visas and of engaging in illegal business activities.

Hamdani's conviction was overturned in January, and he has now returned home, while Goeldi surrendered to authorities this week and is now serving a reduced jail term of four months.

- West Africa: National Forum On Ecowas Cross-Border Cooperation Held

A two day national workshop on ECOWAS Cross-Border Cooperation opened on Monday 1st March 2010 at the Baobab Holiday Resort in Bijilo.

The National Forum which is the first of its kind is jointly organized by ECOWAS and the Government of the Gambia through the Ministry of Local Government and Lands as coordinator of cross-border issues.

It aims at sensitizing National and Local Actors and Stakeholders on efforts being pursued by the ECOWAS Commission and its development partners in promoting and strengthening Cross-Border Cooperation in West Africa under the framework of the ECOWAS Cross-Border Cooperation Programme.

The Representative of the ECOWAS Commission Mrs. Kinza Jawara-Njie said in June 2007, ECOWAS Head of States and Government adopted a strategic vision with a view to transform West Africa into a "Borderless Region". According to her, the implementation of this new vision's strategic plan focuses on bringing citizens of West Africa and the regional institution, ECOWAS, closer together.

The aim of the plan she went on is to move from an ECOWAS of State to an ECOWAS of people thereby ensuring a "People-Centered ECOWAS" by the year 2010.

Mrs. Jawara-Njie explained that the concept of Cross-Border Cooperation was introduced and officially adopted into the integration Agenda of ECOWAS following a decision by the Authority of Heads of States and Government of ECOWAS taken in Niamey , Niger in January 2006.

The Decision, A/Dec. 2/01/06 called for the development of cross border cooperation within the West Africa Sub-Region she said.

She further explained that the concept which focuses on the benefits of cross-border area dynamics has since been developed by ECOWAS,as a new pillar of Sub-Regional Cooperation and development. This she added has been transformed into a concrete

programme which serves as a tool to promote regional integration as well as contribute to efforts aimed at accelerating the integration process in West Africa.

She expressed hope that by the end of the meeting participants will come up with specific support actions to implement the ECOWAS Cross-Border cooperation Plan for the period 2013.

Officially opening the forum, the Minister of Local Government and Lands Pierre B. Tamba said the forum takes place at a time when sub regional integration preoccupies the national agenda of the respective member states.

He said that cross-border programmes are "sin qua non" to sub-regional development and integration as states often fulfill issues relating to cross-border through enforcement of protocols and other bilateral and multilateral agreements.

Minister Tamba noted that the basic conditions for cross border cooperation already exist; that programmes should focus assistance on actions that bring added value to cross border activities such as increasing competitiveness through innovation, research and development amongst others.

He said his ministry and partners will work tirelessly with line ministers and all other stakeholders towards the realization of the objectives of cross border programmes and initiatives.

He added that in order to achieve the desired results, the various stakeholders need to develop a more strategic, proactive approach to programme preparation and implementation. He said that there is strong need for the adoption and sustenance of the bottom-up approach for the generation of projects.

In his welcoming remarks, the Minister of Trade and Employment Baboucarr Jallow, described the ECOWAS Protocol on free movement of people and goods as one of the critical instruments of integration. He therefore called on all in the region to do their utmost for its implementation.

Minister Jallow called on the participants to take the meeting seriously and work as a team and come up with substantive action plans. He assured them of his Ministry's support to facilitate the realization of the goals of cross-border programmes and initiatives. He expressed optimism that with consultation and coordination, they can realize their goals and overcome obstacles without much difficulty.

- Africa polio eradication scheme launched

A campaign has been launched to eradicate polio in west and central Africa, targeting 85 million children.

Some 400,000 health workers and volunteers will go from door-to-door in 19 countries, giving oral polio vaccine to children under the age of five.

Africa has made significant progress in the fight against polio, which attacks the nervous system, but the virus has still not been stamped out.

Previous efforts at eradication failed as too few children were vaccinated.

The effort is a joint campaign by the Red Cross and United Nations.

Many analysts believe the key to its success lies with Nigeria.

In the past, campaigns in the north of the country were met with suspicion by religious leaders, some of whom even suggested the vaccinations were an attempt to spread sterility and HIV.

But religious groups are now showing support for vaccination drives, and correspondents say there is optimism that the debilitating, sometimes fatal, virus can be eradicated.

- Door to door polio eradication campaign in Africa

400,000 health workers and volunteers are going to people's houses in west and central Africa to ensure children are being immunized against polio.

A campaign, targeting 85 million children, will strive to provide children under the age of five with an oral polio vaccine.

The program is being started in Sierra Leone, where polio was once thought to have been all but eradicated.

Ten years after the last reported case, new cases of the most contagious type of polio have surfaced in the country.

Sierra Leone is only part of a larger effort to control polio in 19 West African countries, including Guinea, Liberia and Nigeria.

Polio, which attacks the nervous system has not been stamped out in the region, with eradication failing when children are unprotected against the disease.

The joint effort by the Red Cross and United Nations has been stymied in the past by religious reasons, with some leaders suggesting the vaccinations were an attempt to spread HIV and would cause sterility.

- Africa: Pressure Forces IMF to Review Lending Terms

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is ditching its prescriptive fund disbursement method for a quicker, country-specific process.

The new programme dubbed the Rapid Credit Line, is expected to provide less conditionalities and ease access to funds at lower interest rates, giving African economies a shot in the arm and strengthening their resilience against economic crises.

"The new rapid credit lines will allow less developed countries to access stabilisation funds which have fewer intrusive conditionality terms, a zero interest rate and tailor made for a specific country's needs to ensure immediate access to the fund", said Dominique Strauss-Kahn, the managing director of the IMF, while addressing a public forum at the University of Nairobi.

The IMF's change of tack is meant to ensure African countries which have been the victims of the global crisis do not suffer unnecessarily. This is done by giving them a window to cushion their economies from the adverse effects of the crisis.

Under the new rapid credit line, the IMF has disbursed a total of \$3.6 billion which is three times its previous disbursement.

Mr Strauss-Kahn reckoned that Africa economies have suffered disproportionately despite not being directly responsible for the global crisis.

The effects exposed Africa's highly vulnerable economies to dislocation through collapse of commodity prices, demand and dependency on remittances.

Mr Strauss-Kahn pointed out that remittances have declined, trade receipts dropped and tourist traffic plunged as markets in the West cut back on spending to conserve the little cash available.

However, he noted that African economies are on their way to recovery and are expected to rejuvenate faster than Europe and the US.

"African economies are expected to show strong recovery from the global crisis by registering an estimated 4.5 per cent growth as commodity prices rise and the effect of the crisis wears out", said Mr Strauss-Kahn.

He singled out African economies for having managed the global crisis much better due to stable inflation, a pro-longed period of growth prior to the crisis and appropriate fiscal policies.

The IMF has been criticized for the delay in release of funds already pledged by use of stiffer conditionalities.

In addition, the use of uniform conditionalities across various economies is seen as a failure to appreciate economic differences and the need for tailor made solutions.

"The use of one-fit-all conditionalities is a major failure by IMF to appreciate the differences between economies which then leads to a failure of its programme", said Prime Minister Raila Odinga.

- Africa: From Crisis to Opportunity through Clean Technology

Calestous Juma is professor of the Practice of International Development and director of the Science, Technology and Globalization Project at the Harvard Kennedy School. He also directs the Agricultural Innovation in Africa Project funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Juma currently is writing a book, tentatively titled, "Going for Green Growth: Low-Carbon Innovation Strategies for Africa." He spoke in an email exchange with AllAfrica's Cindy Shiner about climate change and Africa.

How have Africans responded to the threat of climate change?

Developing countries are taking climate change very seriously. This is mainly because they regularly experience the impacts of natural disasters such as droughts, hurricanes, floods and earthquakes. Many of them experience persistent famines. They are therefore quite aware of how vulnerable their societies are and the challenges associated with responding to natural calamities. They know that their economic systems are not robust enough to cope with many of the predicted impacts of climate change. This knowledge informs their perception of the risks associated with climate change. African countries have been particularly sensitized to climate change from their experience with drought. They pushed for a UN treaty of drought and desertification. Their concerns about drought and climate are now conflated.

Climate change has been called a crosscutting issue, one that should be treated like Aids, for example. How do you see climate change as being a crosscutting issue in Africa and how should this influence the way it is handled?

The term "crosscutting" does not adequately capture the projected impact of climate change. This is a global phenomenon of Biblical proportions. It is the stuff that legends are made of - but our children will experience it. Climate change will have far-reaching implications for Africa's ability to foster human welfare. The most dramatic impacts will be felt in areas such as the availability of freshwater, food production and tourism (due to impacts on wildlife whose habitats are fragile ecosystems).

One way to respond to the challenge is to build resilient economic systems based on decentralized energy sources, distributed populations and modern agriculture which involve the diversification of crops. In some areas African countries might have to switch

from growing cereals to growing more climate-resilient tree-crops such as breadfruit (*Artocarpus allitis*).

What are some workable solutions coming out of Africa to deal with the consequences of climate change?

African countries have the least capacity to respond to climate change because of their weak economic systems and low levels of technological competence. Because of this they have also contributed the least to aggregate greenhouse emissions. Yet they are likely to be disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. They are already experiencing some of the impacts.

Africa is starting to respond to the challenge by forging common political positions through the Africa Union. Some of the solutions will come from creating more robust economic systems. The second response is coming from institutions that are working on low-carbon growth strategies. The African Development Bank, for example, is exploring new ways to promote low-carbon growth strategies as well clean energy sources for rural development.

The way forward will entail intensified identification of existing and emerging technologies that can be used to design more resilient economic systems. Experience from adaptation to drought, especially in the Sahel region, will be another important source of ideas. On the whole, Africa will need its next generations to be smarter than the current ones, especially on technical matters. Training in ecology and engineering will be essential investments.

What are your perceptions of carbon trading and how this might benefit Africa?

Carbon trading must be accompanied by serious mitigation and adaptation measures. Otherwise it could create a dangerous level of complacency. It is not in the interest of those who benefit from carbon emissions to want to reduce them. Many of the schemes, such as paying other people to plant trees in lieu of reducing emissions, are like paying others to go to jail on your behalf. They will keep some individuals out of prison but they will not reduce crime. In fact, they may increase it.

What must African governments do?

African governments have a unique opportunity to turn the climate crisis into an opportunity. The starting point is for them to start creating domestic markets in clean technologies, many of which are now widely available. They need to define themselves as leaders in "green innovation" since they have not committed themselves too excessively to polluting technologies. They should be vigilant against import of polluting technologies. It is a chance for them to build a new image around their moral standing of being the lowest polluters.

Africa is also the home of the United Nations Environment Programme and the UN Centre for Human Settlements. They should use these institutions to brand themselves as custodians of the living planet and start to define their relations with the rest of the world in those terms. They can do it because most of the technologies needed to get started are already available.

But ... they will need to build strong intellectual property protection institutions. This will help to position them as future innovators themselves. There is a lot more they can do and I would strongly recommend that they build on the Copenhagen Accord. Most of the elements needed to transition toward a more sustainable world are contained in that seemingly modest document. To start from scratch would set the clock even further back and slow down the prospects of technological leapfrogging.

Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?

We are now facing a new phenomenon in the climate debate: the attack on science. We would not have come this far in our understanding of the threat without the concerted effects of the scientific community to grapple with one of the most complex issues that humanity has ever faced. But it may also be a time to shift our attention from "climate science" to "climate technology". Engineers and business people around the world are coming up with a wide range of solutions to address the problem. Some of these are regularly featured by the World Economic Forum's Technology Pioneers programme (of which I serve on the selection committee).

Climate science has helped us to understand better the character and scale of the problem; the emerging field of "climate technology" offers us the tools needed to start solving the problem. It is also human nature to deny the existence of a problem unless a solution is available. We have asked science to provide answers to some fundamental questions. Science has delivered on this. We now need to complement this by turning to engineers and the business community with different questions: What solutions are available that can be used to solve the problem? How can we leverage all fields of knowledge (especially the social sciences) to ensure that emerging technologies can be fully deployed to solve climate change challenges? How do we reduce the risks associated with the use of new technologies?

- **West Africa: Women Seek Role in Climate Change Campaign**

Women in West Africa have called for integration of women in the global effort to arrest the adverse effect of climate change on humanity.

Arising from a two- day workshop on the effect of climate change and global warming on women, the West Africa Women Association (WAWA) Nigeria said the health of women and children are adversely affected owing to the high rate of heat waves, food scarcity, malnutrition, cancer among others.

The workshop became necessary as a major vehicle for sensitization, mobilization and collaboration with Governments and Non-Governmental Organizations to check the health and socio-economic impacts of global warming and climate change.

The objectives of the workshop are to create awareness about the risk of disempowering women in agriculture as a result of environmental factors such as excessive flood.

Ghana:

1. Political News:

- **NAGRAT confirms receipt of approval letter but strike continues**

The National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) has confirmed receipt of a copy of the approval letter by the Ministry of Finance authorizing the payment of all outstanding arrears that government owes its members.

It, however, said its strike action, which took effect from Monday March 1, 2010 over demands for payment of vehicle maintenance allowance arrears and supervision, among others, would continue until its members confirmed receipt of payment of such arrears.

Mr Stanislaus Napome, General Secretary of NAGRAT, who confirmed this to the Ghana News Agency in an interview on Tuesday, said NAGRAT had had to resort to this position because previous assurances by government to the effect that the money had been released turned out to be false.

Government last Friday released GH¢10 million to the Ghana Education Service (GES) for the payment of all outstanding arrears due members of the Service nationwide.

Mr Napome said contrary to reports, members of NAGRAT had complied with the industrial action.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has scheduled a meeting with Executives of NAGRAT for Tuesday to convince them to urge members to go back to the classroom as the GES finalizes administrative procedures, paving way for the payment of the arrears.

Mr Paul Kofi Krampa, Head of Public Relations at the MOE, who announced this to the GNA, said the Ministry would issue a public statement as soon as the meeting was over.

2. Economy:

- **Farmers express disappointment at MPs**

Farmers from the three northern regions have expressed disappointment at their Members of Parliament for their lack of interest to promote the interest of farmers and pressing the government to revamp the cotton industry.

This was contained in a statement issued in Tamale on Tuesday and signed by the Chairman of the Concern Farmers Association, Chief Alhaji Abudulair Ibrahim.

They said they had come to realize that the MPs had done nothing to draw the attention of government to the perennial problems and difficulties facing farmers and cotton farming in particular neither had they shown any concern about their plight over the years towards cotton cultivation.

It said what was most disheartening was the fact that most of these MPs trace their background to agricultural upbringing yet they had forgotten their roots.

"Indeed, they have shown us that politicians must not be trusted though it is only elections that the farmer can have any pride" it stated.

The farmers said it was sad to that cultivation of cotton begins 70 days away but government's promise of providing ploughing services, farm inputs for the cultivation of the crop as well as steps to revamp the sector as promised had not yet yielded any desired results.

"All our machineries numbering 13 ginneries which are used for processing cotton have been laid idle for about eight years without any operational work due to government's neglect of the sector leaving about 1.3 million cotton farmers jobless all due to the laxity of the MPs while their counterparts of the south are pressing for the needs and interest of their constituents."

The statement said cotton was the only crop that could alleviate the sufferings and poverty in the three northern regions and that the MPs' failure to draw government's attention to their plight meant they do not have their interest at heart.

"We just want to make it clear to them that it is we who voted them and we would vote them out if they fail to take action and appeal to government to revamp cotton production," it said.

3. Energy:

- **Ghana discovers more oil**

Ghana on Tuesday announced the discovery of a significant accumulation of oil and gas on the Cape Three Points Deep Water Block located offshore the West African nation.

The Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) and its partners, LUKOIL Overseas Ghana Ltd (LUKOIL) (56.6%), and Vanco Ghana Ltd (Vanco) (28.34%), announced that the discovery was in the Dzata-1 exploration well.

A statement from GNPC said the well was drilled in water depths of 1,878 meters (6,161 feet), and is therefore the well with the deepest water depth ever drilled in Ghana.

It said the well was drilled to a total depth of 4,433 meters and is located about 75 km (45 miles) south of Cape Three Points.

The Dzata-1 well is some 100 km southeast of the Jubilee Field, which is in the Tano/Cape Three Points basin in Ghana.

"Based on drilling results, wire line logs and samples of reservoir fluids, it has been determined that the well encountered a gross oil and gas column of 94 meters and a net stacked oil and gas pay of 25 meters.

"The primary reservoir sandstone between 3,663 and 3,690 meters contains a 21-meter gas condensate zone. Light oil was recovered from a 4-meter zone between 3,701 and 3,709 meters. The well has since been plugged and temporarily abandoned pending further evaluation."

Nana Boakye Asafu-Adjaye, Managing Director of GNPC, said the Dzata-1 discovery had confirmed the existence of an extensive deepwater petroleum province offshore Ghana.

"It has proven a new Geological play concept different from the Jubilee discovery as this find is in older aged rocks. This indicates the breadth of the hydrocarbon potential within the basin."

He added: "GNPC is happy to continue its partnership with the Oil industry to establish fully the hydrocarbon potential of Ghana and to ensure the efficient development of these resources for the benefit of the people of Ghana, as well as our partners".

On April 1, 2009, the Government of Ghana, the Ghana National Petroleum Corporation, Vanco Ghana Limited and LUKOIL Overseas Ghana Limited signed a new Petroleum Agreement covering the Cape Three Points Deep Water Block and the new Agreement was ratified by Parliament on June 30, 2009.

GNPC holds an initial carried interest of 15% with an option to acquire an additional interest of 5% on commercial discovery. The new agreement replaced an earlier agreement with Vanco in which GNPC held a 10% carried interest.

The Vanco-LUKOIL partnership, is currently acquiring a new 1,664 sq km of 3D seismic data in pursuit of other leads and prospects in the north and western parts of their block.

4. Environment:

- **NADMO intensifies anti-bushfire campaign in schools**

The National Disaster Management Organization, (NADMO) has intensified the anti-bushfire campaign in schools to create the necessary awareness among school children on the dangers of setting fires indiscriminately.

In furtherance of this, NADMO has started a programme on Disaster Management in schools, Mr Kofi Portuphy, National Co-ordinator of NADMO, announced this at the Eastern Regional launch of the anti-bushfire campaign at Fintey in the Asuogyaman District, at the weekend.

He further disclosed that NADMO in conjunction with GIMPA had established a University for disaster management studies.

Mr Portuphy said schools were being encouraged to have disaster educational clubs to know how to prevent disasters in their areas.

He said because bush fires contribute to Climate Change it is important that, "We look at every aspect of it, especially the causes and control systems to enable stakeholders to package effective messages that will engender very good responses from our target

population in our anti-bushfire campaign drive."

Baba Jamal, Deputy Eastern Regional Minister, advised farmers and hunters to go about their activities in a manner that would not cause bush fires.

He reminded them that the forest is for posterity and called for steps to be taken to protect it, adding that destroying it would mean that "we are jeopardizing the future of generations yet unborn".

Mr Jamal said bush fires destroy the ecosystem, engendering hunger and eliminating growth opportunities.

"It is, therefore, important that we strengthen the institutions like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to put environmental issues on the priority agenda."

Mr James Eric Manu, Eastern Regional Manager of the Forestry Services Division, (FSD) said at the beginning of the 20th Century, the country's forest covered an approximate area of 8.2 million hectares.

By the end of the century, he said, the figure stood at 1.6 million hectares and attributed the causes to clearance for agriculture, unsuitable timber logging, urbanization and industrial expansion, surface mining, illegal lumber chain saw activities and wildfire, among other things.

Mr Manu called for concerted efforts from non-governmental organizations, stool land owners, traditional rulers, the FSD, District Assemblies and schools to fight against the menace of bushfires.

He announced that the Forestry Commission (FC) with funding from the Royal Netherlands Government is currently undertaking a Wildfire Management Project aimed at suppressing wildfires in some fire-prone districts.

Source: GNA - Ghana News Agency

5. Health:

- **Children urged to be agents of societal change**

Children have been urged to act as agents of societal change by keeping their environment and homes clean.

The Executive Director of the Northern Accelerated International for Development (NAID), an NGO, Mr. Mohammed Saani Iddrisu, said children form the largest segment of the society and are energetic, enthusiastic, and open to new ideas, and as such could positively act as agent of change in their communities in environmental cleanliness.

Mr. Iddrisu was addressing some children at Lamasehgu, a suburb of Tamale to change

their behaviours towards washing hands with soap after toilet and before eating to prevent contracting germ-infected diseases.

The programme which was financed by the Regional Advisory Information and Network Systems (RAINS) with technical support from UNICEF is aimed at motivating children to embrace and share proper hand washing practices.

Mr. Iddrisu said when people especially children do not wash their hands properly; they could contract diarrhea and other infections.

He said the situation where about 26,000 Ghanaian children die as a result of dirty lifestyle was unacceptable and the trend needed to be change by attitudinal means.

The Northern Regional Director for the Ghana Red Cross Society, Mr. Gayoni Solomon, urged the people to have good ventilations at their homes and drink a lot of water and fruits, to avoid contracting cerebra-spinal meningitis (CSM) which had already claimed some lives in the region.

He said the Ghana Health Service would soon start immunization against the disease and called on the people to come out when is due to reduce the risk of people contracting CSM.

Source: GNA - Ghana News Agency

6. Human rights/Gender/Social Issues:

- **Ghana commended for fight against drugs**

GNA - The US has commended the Ghana government for its determination to intercept arrest and prosecute drug couriers and traffickers irrespective of who is involved.

Miss Constance Ross, a Counter Narcotics Officer of the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) in Stuttgart, Germany, said the strong political will by Ghanaian officials relating to the fight against drugs showed that the country was preventing the consequence that is usually associated with "drug user communities".

Briefing Ghanaian journalists who are on a tour of AFRICOM Headquarters in Stuttgart, she said the existence of a vibrant judiciary and a strong political will in Ghana had contributed significantly to the fight against drug trafficking as compared to many African countries.

Miss Ross said governments in these countries lacked the political will to arrest their own officers and individuals who either carried drugs or became distributors.

Ms. Ross said execution adopted by other countries for dug couriers does not solve the increasing distribution of the drugs by barons.

She said the poor, unemployed and innocent victims are induced with financial rewards to become couriers and the main architects of the distribution channels escape arrest and prosecution.

"Imprisonment is more potent and serves as a deterrent for the drug barons and their agents," she said.

Ms. Ross suggested that African countries should step up their education on the effects of drugs on the social, economic and political life of each country and the consequences for being a distributor or courier.

She commended the Ghanaian media for reporting more on drug related cases in the courts and other sources.

"Most foreign countries are able to monitor and adopt better surveillance systems to combat the activities of the drug barons and their distribution channels".

Mr Garnard W. Burnside II, West Africa and Gulf of Guinea Region Counter Narcotics, Terrorism and Law Enforcement Officer, said training programmes had been organised by the Strategy, Plans and Programmes Directorate of the Africa Command for Ghanaian Police, Immigration officers and other institutions in Ghana.

He said drugs were a threat not only to Ghana but also the world as a whole and all efforts must be made to prevent its spread and use in any country.

From: George Naykene, GNA Special Correspondent, Stuttgart Germany, Courtesy of the US Government

Source: GNA - Ghana News Agency

- **Two girls drown during Independence Day picnic**

Two girls drowned in the via river in the Bongo District of the Upper East Region when a canoe in which they were riding in capsized on Saturday.

The two, Jennifer Ayariga, 15, and Blessing Agariba, 13, were part of holiday makers who thronged the river side for a picnic to mark Ghana's 53rd Independence Anniversary.

Joy News' Upper East Regional correspondent Joseph Osei reports the two bodies were yet to be retrieved.

The river according to Osei covers a six kilometer land area and serves useful economic activities in the Upper Regions of the country.

Apart from its recreational facility, the river also serves as a source of water supply and used for purposes of irrigation during the rainy seasons.

Meanwhile, owners of the facility say they will perform some sacrifices which will see the bodies back afloat.

The Upper East region crime office says they will dispatch a team to the area to help retrieve the two bodies for burial.

- **Germany congratulates Ghana on Independence Day**
The President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr Horst Koehler, has congratulated the government and people of Ghana on the 53rd Independence Day, which falls on Saturday.

A statement issued from Germany on Thursday said: "On the occasion of Independence Day in the Republic of Ghana, allow me to offer you and the Ghanaian people my sincere congratulations and those of my fellow Germans.

"This year the anticipated start of oil production will present your country with welcome economic opportunities. In common with all friends of Ghana, Germany is relying on the Republic to set the same standards in the use of this valuable resource as it has already established with respect to issues of politics and democracy.

"I trust that Germany and Ghana will continue to work together closely in a spirit of trust on all political and economic issues."

Nigeria:

1. Political News:

- **Yar'Adua goes into extra time**

The reappearance of the President has worsened the political paralysis – and the splits in the PDP government

On 3 March, the state governors decided to block a vote that could have set in motion President **Umaru Musa Yar'Adua**'s enforced resignation on medical grounds. This has won his supporters in Abuja more time but does nothing to resolve the crisis caused by the power vacuum at the centre of government. Three days earlier, Acting President **Goodluck Jonathan** had tried to address the crisis by appointing a 26-member Presidential Advisory Council to speed up the implementation of government policy on key issues: the amnesty in the Niger Delta, rehabilitation of the electric power grid, electoral reform and stronger anti-corruption measures.

Chaired by the former Defence Minister, Lieutenant General **Theophilus Danjuma**, the Advisory Council's members include **Ben Nwanbueze** as Deputy Chairman, banker **Fola**

Adeola, oil expert **Basil Omiyi**, former Inspector General of Police **Muhammadu Yusufu**, former Commonwealth Secretary General **Emeka Anyaoku**, businessman **Kase Lawal**, **Mohammed Hayatudden**, Justice **Salihu Modibo Alfa Belgore**, businessman **Bamanga Tukur** and **Ismaila Isa**.

Nigerians welcomed the initiative in the hope that it would speed up government machinery and tackle some pressing problems. One of the biggest concerns in Abuja was that the amnesty deal in the Delta would come apart if the government did not accelerate the release of funds to the agreed projects there. In the last few weeks, militants have resumed attacks against oil installations and warned of further escalation. There were also hopes that the Council would help to steer through the reforms recommended by Justice **Mohammed Uwais**'s Commission to give the coming national elections some credibility. Jonathan tells his allies he is determined to boost electricity output to the 6,000 megawatts he had promised to deliver by the end of 2009.

However, all these measures depend heavily on the will of the National Assembly and the 36 governors who have been flapping in the wind during the crisis over President Yar'Adua's medical leave. After months of inaction, the Chairman of the Governors' Forum and Kwara State Governor **Abubakar Bukola Saraki** in February backed a formal transfer of authority from the ailing Yar'Adua to Jonathan. Given that Saraki is regarded as one of the frontrunners in the 2011 presidential election, this move hugely strengthened Jonathan's camp.

A clandestine return

It may have also prompted First Lady **Turai Yar'Adua**'s decision to bring her husband back to Nigeria, to step up the fight against those seeking his forced resignation. It seems that the Yar'Adua camp (see Box) has influenced several state governors to try to limit Jonathan's authority as Acting President. Some governors were critical of the choice of Danjuma, a northern Christian, to chair the Advisory Council. Others said Danjuma has his own constituency in the military and is independent of groups backed by General **Ibrahim Babangida** and former President **Olusegun Obasanjo**.

The governors may also fear that the Council could diminish the importance of their role and that of the ministers that they appointed to the cabinet. Yet their decision not to proceed with a detailed medical assessment of Yar'Adua, a preliminary step to forcing him out, solves nothing. The danger is now that both they and ministers are divided over how to resolve the crisis. No one is predicting Yar'Adua's early return to full-time politics. The stasis suits some ambitious politicians.

The governing People's Democratic Party will hold its national conference in November and will choose its presidential candidate then. Suddenly, veterans of past military regimes – such as Gens. **Aliyu Mohammed Gusau** and Babangida – have become extremely active within the PDP caucus. In the shorter term, the stand-off between the Jonathan and Yar'Adua camps will have to be resolved. Yar'Adua's clandestine return, accompanied by a retinue from the Brigade of Guards in the small hours of 23 February, jangled nerves. We hear Governors **Isa Yuguda** (Bauchi State), Bukola Saraki (Kwara),

Usman Sa'idu Dakingari (Kebbi), **Ibrahim Shema** (Katsina) and **Mohammed Danjuma Goje** (Gombe) met Yar'Adua's group to warn of the heightening political tension over the power vacuum.

Popular sentiment has moved against the Yar'Adua group and Turai faces vilification in the press and from civil society. Yet these groups also criticise Jonathan's lack of determination to wield power in his new role. Steeled by the Secretary to the Government, Mahmud Yayale Ahmed, Jonathan had been pushing ahead with more political plans, such as forming the Advisory Council.

Jonathan will need the combined experience of that panel to make progress with the state governors. Statements from **Britain** and the **United States** backing him may cut both ways: adding to his authority in some quarters (there was talk of visa bans on some of Yar'Adua's officials) but also allowing his opponents to cast him as a Western puppet.

More importantly, he has been unable to meet Yar'Adua and plan a coordinated government which could include appointees from both camps. The next step will be a cabinet reshuffle but it will be difficult to coordinate that with the governors, who demand influence over appointees from their states. **Dora Nkem Akunyili**, the outspoken Communications Minister, accused Yar'Adua's camp of 'gaining from the confusion'.

Signed on Yar'Adua's sickbed, the supplementary budget expires this month. Without agreement on a new budget, state spending could grind to a halt, jeopardising political plans. The need to cooperate may prompt a wider political deal.

The PDP is in poor shape and the crisis has damaged it further. The weak leadership of National Chairman **Vincent Eze Ogbulafor** has not helped: the party has fissured and new alliances have emerged. In the north, young reform-minded professionals are vying with the veteran clique, mainly in their 60s and 70s, now in charge. They are calling on former anti-corruption czar **Nasir El-Rufai**, ex-Federal Capital Minister **Nuhu Ribadu** and former Bauchi Governor **Ahmed Adamu Muazu** to reform the party. They also support a full transfer of power to Jonathan. That might be why Turai Yar'Adua has been accused of sending plaintive e-mails to El-Rufai, seeking his support for her husband and his determined retinue.

- **Soyinka Seeks Criminal Proceedings against Turai**

Nobel Laureate, Prof. Wole Soyinka has called for criminal proceedings against First Lady Turai Yar'Adua just as he said that the Inspector General of Police (IGP) and security chiefs in the country should be held responsible for the renewed Jos crisis which claimed no fewer than 200 persons.

Soyinka made the call at a rally 'Women Arise for Change Initiative organised to mark International Women Day held in Lagos and the world over, alleging the first lady of keeping President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua unduly and illegally under false imprisonment. The rally, which kicked off from Allen Avenue in Ikeja and ended at the Lagos State

Governor's Office in Alausa, were attended by political and human rights activists including African Democratic Congress (ADC) presidential candidate, Prof. Pat Utomi, Presiding Pastor of Latter Rain Assembly, Pastor Tunde Bakare and Dr. Joe Okei. Odumakin among others.

During his address in Allen Avenue Roundabout, Soyinka said Turai had allegedly kidnapped President Yar'Adua "under false imprisonment. If it were in a civilized society, Turai should be in court by now for kidnapping and false imprisonment. This is far more than abusing her spouse.

"Turai is also abusing a sovereign nation. She is abusing and insulting the intelligence of a nation. Release President Yar'Adua now. Stop insulting and belittling his family. Even his mother is not allowed to see him. This is sacrilege. I think we should begin criminal proceeding against Turai for kidnapping and false imprisonment of President Yar'Adua," Soyinka said.

He therefore asked the first lady to release President Yar'Adua to enable him address his countrymen about his health condition, stating that Nigerians "are no longer happy about the manner the first lady is insulting Nigeria.

On Jos crisis, the Nobel Laureate said described the renewed Jos massacre that killed more than 200 persons last Sunday as absolutely pathetic, extremely inhuman and totally sad.

He said Inspector-General of Police (IGP), Mr. Ogbonna Onovo and other security chiefs in Plateau State and the country should be held responsible for the recent Jos carnage and massacre.

He also berated lawmakers at the State and National Assemblies for their failing to do what is expected of them while they "are busy collecting Ghana Must Go" bags filled with state funds that could have been used to promote public welfares and well-being in the country.

According to him, IG and security forces were asleep while gun men unleashed mayhem on the innocent Nigerians in Jos. They should be held responsible. Worst still, the legislatures instead of doing what is expected of them, they are busy collecting Ghana Must Go. Women should rise up because women and children are the major culprit of the crisis.

- **Jonathan Seeks End to Strikes in Varsities**

Irked by what he described as the intermittent disruption of academic activities in the nation's tertiary institutions through worker's strikes and other forms of unrests, Acting President, Goodluck Jonathan has expressed concern over the development, noting that urgent steps must be taken to forestall further closure of the nation's citadels of learning.

He said the development has continued to rob the country of the chance to achieve its principal objectives in the education sector as well as the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs).

Speaking through the Minister of Education, Dr. Sam Egwu at the convocation ceremony of the Federal University of Technology Owerri (FUTO), last weekend during which the National Chairman of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Prince Vincent Ogbulafor, Governor Sullivan Chime of Enugu State and three other prominent Nigerians were awarded Honorary Doctorate Degrees for their efforts at bringing about rapid development in their areas of operation, Jonathan noted that the Federal Government was worried by the development.

He said that the Federal Government has started implementing measures to ensure lasting peace and ensure sustainability of the nation's tertiary institutions and urged all the industrial unions in the sector to make complimentary efforts towards that end. He reiterated the commitment of the government towards ensuring qualitative education through the provision of adequate funds as well as infrastructural development and Information Communication Technology (ICT) to institutions, adding that the government has already set aside the sum of N6 billion for each of the universities selected as centres of excellence in each of the six geo political zones.

The Acting President further urged the tertiary institutions in the country to pay special attention to vocational and entrepreneurial training so that their graduates would easily secure employment opportunities once they leave school. He commended the leadership of FUTO for its dedication to maintenance of peace and harmony on campus and provision of necessary infrastructure and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) which according to him were crucial to the attainment of the desired quality in tertiary education in the country.

Other beneficiaries of the award are the chairman of the PDP National Reconciliation Committee, Senator Ike Nwachukwu, former Minister for Education, Mrs Chinwe Obaji and Sir Victor Onuorah Ijeh.

Chime was awarded a Honorary Doctor of Laws (LLD) for what the university called his exemplary leadership and the rapid economic and infrastructural development of Enugu State within a short period in office.

A total of 4110 graduates were awarded various degrees at the ceremony which was attended by many important dignitaries including the Deputy Senate President Ike Ekweremadu, Governor Ikedi Ohakim of Imo State, Senator Jim Nwobodo and top functionaries of the Peoples Democratic Party.

2. Economy:

3. Energy:

- **Nigerians Lack Knowledge of Energy Efficiency - Nerc Boss**

The Administrator of the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), Mallam Imamudeen Talba has blamed the collapsed state of the

nation's energy sector on the lack of discipline and inefficiency in the usage of electricity.

According to him, Nigerians need to learn to conserve energy and build greater efficiency in their consumption of energy, even as the nation awaits improvements in the energy situation.

Talba, who was speaking to journalists on Thursday at the background of a Power Consumer Assembly, organized by the Commission in Gwagwalada area of Abuja, noted that poor energy management was compounding the nation's power situation.

He said, "There is a great need for more education in the proper uses of energy, on energy conservation in the country because we need to conserve the little supply currently available while the sector is being improved upon."

He added that, "The need to conserve energy cannot be overemphasized because for a country whose requirement of electricity is estimated at above 20,000MW but which presently has an average generation of 3,000MW, electricity consumers must be able to properly utilize available supply efficiently and effectively."

The NERC boss explained that the driving force and focus of establishing the Power Consumer Assembly was to ensure efficiency and quality of service delivery to all electricity consumers.

"The Assembly is an established platform to educate electricity consumers and bring all stakeholders together to exchange ideas on how to ensure safe, adequate, reliable and affordable power in Nigeria," he said.

Talba, who explained that the assembly would be used to also educate Nigerians on health and safety issues due to the growing spate of electrocutions across the country, disclosed that last year alone, the commission recorded more than 45 deaths and 141 people injured from electricity accidents.

According to him, most of the reported accidents and cases of electrocutions were as a result of the operators' disregard for safety regulations and procedures or the public's disregard for safety regulations including encroachment on PHCN's right of way.

He noted that in furtherance of its regulatory mandate, the commission was introducing another system of monitoring the quality of service and ensuring enhanced responsibilities between service providers and consumers.

Talba further noted that the commission was "not unmindful of the numerous billing and metering related complaints by electricity consumers," adding that it has established a committee to investigate such complaints.

"However, we would like to categorically state that customers are not pay for the replacement of meters. Replacement of the analogue meters with prepaid meters or any other is free, and customers should refuse to yield to blackmail by unscrupulous power officials," he said.

The NERC boss added that the committee so established would look into all issues relating to corruption by officials, as well as issues of estimated and direct billings, and purchases of transformers by customers. "Very soon, the committee is expected to address all these problems and present its report to the government. Our intention is to make the power sector efficient better positioned to serve Nigerians as well as help ensure growth and development of the country," he added.

- **NNPC Running at over N200 Billion Losses - Federal Gov't**

Abuja — The Minister of Petroleum Resources, Dr. Rilwanu Lukman, has disclosed that the nation's oil and gas behemoth, the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) was currently running at a loss of more than N200 billion, with contingent liabilities of more than N146 billion and \$277 million.

He noted that only a drastic and comprehensive transformation of the corporation could save the corporation from an impending demise.

Lukman stated that, "The corporation is currently running at a loss of more than N200 billion, with contingent liabilities of more than N146 billion and \$277 million. If this trend is not reversed, the corporation as we know it today will cease to exist."

Lukman, who made this disclosure on Friday at the second NNPC Transformation Town hall meeting, and the launch of the Transformation Agenda, in Abuja, noted that the country could not afford a failure in the transformation programme of the corporation as that would spell doom for the energy sector reforms.

According to him, "The PIB when passed into law will remain just a piece of legislation if its intent is not well executed. NNPC is the delivery engine for the execution of the PIB when passed into law and the NNPC transformation programme lies at the heart of the energy sector reform. I cannot fathom the costs of your failure.

"Without NNPC's transformation, the vision and aspirations behind the PIB will remain a theoretical construct. More broadly, without NNPC's transformation, there can be no energy sector reform. Therefore, failure of the transformation programme is not an option."

The minister stated that the NNPC and the entire Nigerian petroleum industry country is at a critical juncture in its history, adding that transforming the corporation would positively impact the company, the nation's economy and the people.

He noted, however, that, "A transformation programme of this magnitude requires tough decisions to be made. Therefore, be prepared for a tough ride ahead as will not be and has never been easy." He said the corporation was faced with some key challenges including providing reliable product supply within the country and to the world, being good stewards of the national resources and building a commercially viable petroleum sector.

"The recent fuel crisis has been a case in point and has been a trying ordeal for all our fellow citizens. The inconvenience, the long queues at filling stations and the frequent shortages are unacceptable in a country like ours.

"These challenges are harsh reminders that the oil and gas sector in Nigeria is not working well. A reliable fuel supply across the nation is essential to ensuring national security and continued economic growth. NNPC has the clear responsibility in making this work," the minister added.

Lukman noted that the NNPC is ahead of the curve in thinking through the implications of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), and putting in place the building blocks under the new regulatory regime.

He said, "I have taken very keen interest in your transformation, not just because you are the country's National Oil Company (NOC), but also because you will blaze a trail for other institutions. In fact, I have asked other institutions to look up to you and learn from your experience in this regard."

The minister urged the corporation not to relent in its efforts or get complacent. It is not yet time for you to rest on your laurels. The transformation journey has only just begun. With significant work ahead of us, the next 18 months will be critical and indeed the most challenging period in the history of this corporation and Nigeria's oil and gas industry," he added.

While making a case for the transformation agenda, the Group Managing Director of the NNPC, Dr. Mohammed Sanusi Barkindo, explained that the vision of the corporation was to become a world-class national oil and gas company as well as to become a major international player in the next ten years.

He noted that the NNPC currently contributes more than 80 percent of the Federal Government's revenues and 95 percent of its foreign exchange.

"NNPC's transformation is a crucial element of the government's overall reform agenda for the energy sector. The corporation's retail target, for instance, is to grow into the nation's largest petroleum retailer by December 2011.

Barkindo pointed out that the first phase of the transformation would require the corporation to stabilize its financial systems and its operations.

He added that, "Stabilizing the financials and operations of the company will require tough decisions and in some instances drastic measures may be necessary. We will make our decisions carefully and as humanely as possible.

"However, this does not require that we skirt around the difficult issues. Where required, we must be prepared to confront and make decisions that could bring short term pain but lasting benefits and make us better off as employees, as consumers and most importantly as citizens of this country."

Barkindo further explained that NNPC was not alone in this transformation bid, adding that other national oil companies (NOCs) and even International Oil Companies (IOCs) have also had to undertake difficult decisions to stay lean and efficient.

"Most recently, Shell and British Petroleum (BP) radically restructured their organizations and streamlined their staff by up to five percent of their workforce to reduce up to \$5 billion in annual cost. A lean and efficient organisation is the ticket to be competitive in the industry today," he stressed.

4. Environment:

- **The sabotage**

No fewer than 350 illegal settlements where cocoa are being planted in defiance to the orders of the Ogun State have been identified at the Omo Forest Reserve area of the state government with the active connivance of some Obas, who are ordinarily supposed to be partners in progress with the government to preserve the ecosystem.

The saboteur Obas, whose names are still being kept by the government, installed illegal Baales and other village chiefs to superintend over the settlements, thereby frustrating efforts at improving internally generated revenue.

They also encourage gaming to deplete the wildlife, thereby denying the state of one of its tourist attractions, Commissioner for Forestry in the state, Alhaji Adelani Ali Ajibode, has said.

Ajibode, however, commended the Olowu of Owu-Ijebu, Oba Olusegun Adesina, for always advising and encouraging the illegal settlers to desist from planting cocoa amidst the plantation, and the need to avoid illegal felling, flitching and cocoa plantation establishment.

Addressing a news conference in Abeokuta, the state capital, on Wednesday, the Commissioner disclosed that only 50 out of the 400 enclaves were recognised, while the balance was being encouraged by "some Obas, Baales and other prominent citizens of the area."

The commissioner, who reviewed the activities of the Otunba Gbenga Daniel led activities since assumption of office in 2003, said government has opted for the civil resolution of the matter only for the illegal cocoa farmers to resort to killing, maiming and blackmailing, recalling that six vigilante who were on contract to protect the reserves on behalf of government were killed last week.

"There are evidence to show that some of them have amassed arms and ammunitions to fight government and its agencies; members of our staff posted to some of these enclaves for patrol and protection duties were chased out despite being in government uniform, particularly at Oloko Alli and Laagan; four directors, who paid a working visit to some of the illegal settlements were not allowed to enter the reserve but were turned back at gun point, still at Oloke Alli," the commissioner said.

He added that six members of the vigilante groups engaged by the government to ensure orderliness were last week killed while one person is still missing, just as he bemoaned the situation whereby the standing OPC army put on stand-by by the illegal settlers, especially at Likosi and Laagan poisoned Muniru Kazeem (who himself equally showed signs of bullet wounds), among the people that were attacked.

Supported by his Permanent Secretary, Mr. Seyi Banjoko, the Director of Regularization and utilization, Mr. Owolabi Adekoya, as well other management staff of the Forestry, Ajibode assured that sanity would soon return to the endangered illegal settlements, saying the new approach would be the engagement of consultants by the government to collect revenue at the Omo Forest Reserve, which occupies 136,000 square metres (about 50 per cent) of the total 2,700 square metres occupied by the nine forest reserves in the state.

Meanwhile, government has seized gaming guns of various makes and sizes from a group of hunters from Zuru council of Kebbi State, who had gamed at the forest reserves. Permanent Secretary in the ministry, Seyi Banjoko, gave the hint, with the parade of a head of a large Buffalo seized from the hunters by directors of the ministry, who were on working visit to the Omo Reserve.

Banjoko also showed copies of letter of intervention written by the hunters' local government soliciting the release of the seized guns, even as he added that Kebbi State once sent delegation to seek how to release the items used by their citizens to deplete the ecosystem in Ogun State.

5. Immigration/Refugee/Idps:

6. Health:

- **Nigeria, key to wiping out polio in Africa, makes gains**

Only 1 polio case in Nigeria so far this year, WHO says * If can be wiped out in Nigeria, rest of Africa to follow. Nigeria, seen as the key to wiping out polio in Africa, has made impressive gains against the disease in the year since religious leaders backed vaccination, the World Health Organisation (WHO) said on Friday.

A mass immunisation campaign targeting 85 million children in west and central Africa will be launched this weekend to halt the virus which spread out from northern Nigeria and sparked outbreaks in 17 African countries since 2008.

Only one polio case has been recorded so far this year in Nigeria, against 42 cases at this time a year ago in Africa's most populous nation, according to the United Nations agency.

"Nigeria's success is Africa's success. If we can eradicate polio in Nigeria we should be able to have Africa polio-free very quickly," WHO spokesman Rod Curtis told Reuters. "It is looking incredible."

Polio, which spreads in areas with poor sanitation, attacks the nervous system and can cause irreversible paralysis within hours of infection. Children under the age of 3 are most vulnerable to the disease that until the 1950s crippled thousands of people every year in rich nations.

Nigeria has struggled to contain polio since some northern states imposed a year-long vaccine ban in mid-2003. Some state governors and religious leaders in the predominantly Muslim north alleged the vaccines were contaminated by Western powers to spread sterility and HIV/AIDS among Muslims. But traditional leaders throughout the country pledged in January 2009 to support immunisation campaigns and are pushing parents to have their children vaccinated, the WHO says.

"Traditional and religious leadership has facilitated us reaching more children. The number of cases has collapsed," Curtis said, noting there was a total of 388 cases last year.

More than 80 percent of children under five have been vaccinated against polio in most Nigerian states, he said.

But gaps remain, with somewhat lower immunisation rates reported in Kano, long considered the epicentre of polio in the country, and other northern urban areas, he added.

"If we can reach 80 percent of children for three campaigns in a row, then we can eradicate polio from Nigeria," Curtis told a news briefing.

The first wave of infection in countries surrounding Nigeria has petered out, with no new cases reported in the last six months, Curtis said.

"However, the second wave spread west as far as Mauritania and that is where we are focusing our most intense efforts at the moment," he stressed.

The synchronised campaign starts this weekend in 16 countries, followed by Ivory Coast, Niger and Togo which postponed immunisation due to political unrest or elections.

Some 400,000 volunteers will take part in the door-to-door campaign to administer two drops of oral polio vaccine to every child under five years old.

Polio is also endemic in Afghanistan, India and Pakistan, according to the WHO which has spearheaded the Global Polio Eradication Initiative since 1988. Polio paralysed nearly 1,000 children every day at the time and was endemic in 125 countries.

Worldwide there have been 34 cases so far this year, against 91 at this time in 2009. In 2009 there were 1,606 cases in all. (Editing by Myra MacDonald)

- **Chime, Italians to Build N7 Billion Hospital in Enugu**

To curtail Nigerians traveling abroad to seek medical attention, Enugu State Governor, Sullivan Chime, has entered into a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with an Italian firm, Valore Limited, to construct a 200-bed High Specialist Hospital in the capital city, Enugu, at the cost of N7 billion.

Commissioner for Health, Dr. Uche Uzochukwu, disclosed this on Thursday at a press briefing to mark the commencement of the Second Phase of the 2010 National Immunization Plus Day (NIPD) in the state.

Uzochukwu who described Chime as "health-friendly" said that it was expected that the hospital would be completed in 24 months, adding that the intention was to have a hospital that would meet international standards.

Recalling that the state government has already embarked on the construction of a state-of-the-art diagnostic centre at old Trade Fair Complex in Enugu, the commissioner explained that the proposed hospital would reduce the expenses of people flying abroad for medical attention, when they have adequate diagnosis and treatment at their door steps.

Uzochukwu said: "We are going to partner with Valore Limited, which is a representative of an Italian Hospital Group, to construct a 200-bedded High Specialized Hospital in Enugu.

"It is expected to be completed within 24 months at an estimated cost of about N7 billion. Our intention is to have a hospital that will meet up with international standard. Our equipment will be of international rating. We expect that at completion, it will serve Sub-Saharan Africa. We expect people to visit this hospital from Accra, Dakar, Abidjan and

other cities in West Africa. We don't expect our people to go outside Nigeria to seek medical attention," he said.

Uzochukwu disclosed that Chime led a delegation to Italy recently to meet the international partners in pursuit of the dream, adding that both parties would formally sign a contract soon.

On the funding of the hospital project, he said that the state government would contribute 30 per cent of the total cost, while the outstanding 70 per cent would come from the international partners from Italy.

He also said that as soon as the diagnosis centre was completed by August this year, most of the diagnosis in the country would be done in Enugu, just as he pointed out that the state was untiring in its efforts to see that Enugu State University Teaching Hospital gets final accreditation by April this year to graduate the first set of medical doctors.

On the national immunization, Uzochukwu said that the second round of the exercise has been scheduled between 6th and 9th of this month (March), adding that 180 health workers have been trained and deployed to district health facilities for the exercise.

Noting that Enugu State recorded 104 percent success in the first round of the exercise last December, he assured that the state would perform better in the second phase, saying "our focus is primary health care delivery since healthcare for all is 4th in the Millennium Development Goals, which we are expected to meet by 2015".

7. Human rights/Gender/social issues:

- **Central Nigeria on red alert after over 100 killed**

JOS, Nigeria: Nigeria on Sunday put security forces on red alert after a new outburst of sectarian violence left at least 100 people dead, mainly women and children, as machete wielding gangs burned down villages, officials said.

Much of the violence in the early hours of Sunday was centred around the village of Dogo Nahawa, near the northern city of Jos, where a journalist counted a total of 103 bodies amid the smouldering embers.

Another 18 bodies were counted at the morgue in Jos - the scene of inter-religious riots in January which left several hundreds dead.

"Over a hundred people have been killed - most of them women and children," said a government official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

"Some of the children are less than one year old," he added. Acting President Goodluck Jonathan immediately placed security agencies in the region on a red alert, an official statement said in Abuja.

Jonathan "has placed all the security services in Plateau (State) and neighbouring states on red alert so as to stem any cross border dimensions to this latest conflict," his office said in a statement.

"He has also directed that the security services undertake strategic initiatives to confront and defeat these roving bands of killers," it added.

Dan Manjang, an advisor to the Plateau state government confirmed the deployment of troops in the area.

Dozens of houses were also set ablaze in similar raids on the nearby villages of Ratsat and Zot, all less than 10 kilometres from Jos and home to members of the Berom ethnic group.

Traumatized residents accused the local authorities of turning a blind eye to the bloodshed blamed on members of the rival Fulani nomadic cattle rearing clan.

Peter Gyang, who lost a wife and two children, told reporters in Dogo Nahawa that the killing spree carried on uninterrupted for several hours.

"The operation started around 3:00am (0200 GMT) and lasted till 6:00am and there were gunshots, but we did not see a single policeman," he said.

"We no longer have confidence in the security agencies," he added.

Parts of Jos and its environs are still under a dusk-to-dawn curfew since the January religious clashes.

Gyang said that many of the victims had been hacked to death as they tried to run for their lives.

"Gunshots were fired just to scare people out of their houses only to be macheted as they fled into the bush," he said.

Residents and local rights activists blamed the attacks on Fulani members who they said were taking revenge after a deadly attack by the Berom last month.

"It seems the attacks were well coordinated as the attackers launched ... (them) simultaneously," Shamaki Gad Peter, head of League for Human Rights in Jos, told AFP as he toured Ratsat village.

"At the moment, there are about 100 dead bodies. From what I see, the scale of destruction is enormous."

Houses and food granaries were still smouldering more than 12 hours after the attacks.

Shehu Sani, a local rights activist said some fleeing residents were caught in animal traps and fishing nets set by the suspected Fulanis.

Ratsat resident David Daniel laid the blame firmly at the feet of the Fulani.

"These villages were attacked by Fulani herdsmen killing scores of people and burning houses," Daniel told AFP.

And a Fulani resident in Jos, Yusuf Alkali, said he believed the attacks were a reprisal for the killings of four herdsmen two weeks ago when a Fulani settlement was attacked by ethnic Berom youths.

Pam Dantong, the chief medical director at Plateau State hospital in Jos, showed reporters 18 corpses in the morgue saying others were taken to Jos Teaching Hospital.

Ethno-religious violence claimed 326 lives in January in Jos, according to police although other observers put the overall toll at more than 550 in Jos.

- **Jos - Another Massacre**

Abuja — Over 200 people, mostly women and children, were murdered in the early hours of yesterday following attacks on Dogo-Na-Hawa, Ratsat and Jeji villages in Foron district, Jos South Local Government Area, Plateau State.

The attacks were visited on the Berom villages by men suspected to be Hausa-Fulani fighters who had descended from the hills from where they launched into the villages at about 2am.

Going by the dusk-to-dawn curfew imposed in the aftermath of the January riots in which over 350 died, there was supposed to be military presence in the area at that time.

Some of the fighters were said to have positioned themselves at strategic entrances to the villages, while others went in and began to set houses on fire. Those who made to escape were butchered while others were shot.

Mr. Dalyop Gyang, who escaped the carnage, said: "We were caught unawares. We were alarmed by gun shots at about 2 am, and as we tried to escape, the Fulani who were already waiting slaughtered many of us."

Commissioner for Information, Mr. Greg Yenlong, who was also at the scene of the incident, told journalists that the casualty figure could not be ascertained because more bodies were still being brought out from the burnt houses. He described the incident as "unfortunate".

Our reporter counted over 180 bodies at the scene. At the Plateau State Specialist Hospital, 18 other bodies were also deposited at the mortuary.

The Chief Medical Director (CMD) of the hospital, Dr. Pam Dantong, who took the journalists to the mortuary, said he learnt that more bodies had been deposited at the Jos University Teaching Hospital (JUTH).

The Gbong Gwom Jos, Buba Gyang, who was also at the scene, described it as "man's inhumanity to man". He however pacified the irate youths who expressed disappointment with the security agents that could not protect them in spite of the dusk-to-down curfew.

"We shall no longer observe the curfew because we have lost confidence in the security agents," one of them lamented.

The Chairman of Jos South Local Government, Hon. Moses Dalyop, said the unfortunate incident was a terrible blow to the council and the entire state, at a time the state was already recovering from the shock of the January crisis.

The Chairman said the information at his disposal revealed that the Fulanis gained access into the villages from the neighbouring Jos East and Barakin Ladi Local government areas of the state. Dalyop said the cause of that attack was yet to be ascertained but said that investigation had commenced.

The Counselor of Zabot ward under which the villages fall, Mr. Ayuba Dung Hywere, who shed tears at the mortuary, told THISDAY that he got a distress call at about 2.30am.

"Immediately I called my Chairman, being the chief security officer of the local government. We quickly contacted the Permanent Secretary. The chairman asked me to wait, that security agents would come and meet me so that I could direct them to the scene, but till 5 am I didn't see any security person. At about 5.30am I left Foron, where I live, to go to the villages.

"On getting to Rwat, I met some soldiers with two armoured tanks, and I told them that the killing was not there but in Dogon-Na-Hawa, but they said they were not sent to Dogon-Na-Hawa, and that moreover their armoured tanks had no fuel and they were over-heating. It was obvious that they were not willing to go with me. So I left them and got to the villages. Later on they arrived with the same armoured tank, but then the Fulanis had escaped," he said.

It was an uncontrolled wailing and weeping, as the entire villages were littered with corpses. No fewer than 70 houses were burnt and many vehicles set ablaze.

Many of the villagers have described the attack as reprisal. They said it could be an aftermath of the attack on the Fulanis in Kuru in which several lives were lost and corpses dumped in the wells.

When contacted on phone, the Police Public Relations Office Mohammed Lerama, said the police were aware of the incident and cut off the call.

However, some soldiers have been drafted to the area on the orders of Acting President Goodluck Jonathan.

He expressed shock at the renewed violence and ordered all the security services in Plateau and neighbouring states to be on red alert to stem any cross border dimensions to the latest conflict.

Speaking through his spokesman, Mr. Ima Niboro, the Acting President also called on all Nigerians to remain peaceful and law abiding, since according to him, violence only begets further violence.

The five-paragraph statement read, "The country awoke this morning to news of renewed crisis in Plateau State. Reports reaching us indicate that marauding bands launched a flurry of attacks on certain communities in the state, causing considerable death and injury.

"While it is too early to state categorically what is responsible for this renewed wave of violence, we want to inform Nigerians that the security services are on top of the situation.

"This afternoon, the Inspector General of Police, Mr. Ogbonnaya (Ogbonna) Onovo, briefed the Acting President, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, on the situation in Plateau. Dr. Jonathan is also billed to meet with the leadership of the country's security services on urgent strategies to rein in the violence.

"In the meantime, the Acting President has placed all the security services in Plateau and neighbouring states on red alert so as to stem any cross border dimensions to this latest conflict. He has also directed that the security services undertake strategic initiatives to confront and defeat these roving bands of killers.

"He calls on all Nigerians to remain peaceful and law abiding, since violence only begets further violence. He also sympathises with those who have lost relatives and friends in these attacks, asking the Almighty to grant them the fortitude to bear the loss."

Other West African States

Benin:

Burkina Faso:

Cameroon:

- **Organizational Lapses Mar Tour**

The problems revolved around the non payment of bonuses to cyclists, inefficient communication and long transportation of the race caravan.

One would expect that with the International Cycling Tour of Cameroon in its 8th edition, officials of the cycling federation would by now have gained experience and avoid the organizational hitches of the past which used to hamper the smooth unfolding of the race. But the same problems keep coming up every year and things even seem to be moving from bad to worse.

Prominent among them is the eternal issue of payment of Olympic bonuses to athletes usually clamoured for by Cameroonian clubs. The problem went one step further this year as it resulted in the boycott of the second criterium which was to take place in Douala by some Cameroonian cyclists. Coupled with this is the disparity between bonuses paid to athletes and those paid to hostesses. While some hostesses bag home the colossal sum of FCFA 300.000, the cyclists who are the main actors of the event have seen their Olympic bonuses dwindling from FCFA 250.000 in 2008 to 150.000 in 2009. In 2010 they received 250.000 after a hard struggle though not completing the race.

Closely linked to this is the lack of incentive to spur Cameroonian cyclists to victory. Cyclists who featured among the first ten of the competition received the derisory sum of FCFA8.000. This lack of incentive, coupled with insufficient preparation and lack of competition to keep the cyclists competitive resulted in the dismal performance of Cameroonian cyclists in the 8th edition of the race which came to an end last Friday. Cameroon won no lap victory and the first Cameroonian in the race came more than one minute after the winner. True the poor performance is partly due to the absence of two flag bearers, Joseph Sanda and Tegumaha Sadrack but this raises the question about the future of Cameroonian cycling which knew its hay days with the likes of Joseph Nkono and Simon Ngopang.

The age-old problem of long transportation of the race caravan also raised its ugly head this year. The transfers done by plane or car, wears out the athlete and despite multiple complains from the cyclists, this practice still prevails. According to federation officials, it is out of the wish to have the race cover the whole national territory. But as was once suggested, by a member of the French delegation, the race course could alternate from one part of the country to another as in the Tour de France, to enable citizens from all over the national territory to be able to witness the event.

The last but not the least is the circulation of information on the race. The press has to wait at times for three hours to be able to know the official results of a lap or the performance of some individual athletes or teams. The same holds for the publication of the official classification of the race.

Cape Verde:

Chad:

- **UN Boosts Efforts to Tackle Food Insecurity.....H7**

United Nations agencies are ramping up efforts to assist around 2 million Chadian who will require food aid this year because of poor rainfall and lean harvests, the world body said today.

Last November the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) had reported that Chad was one of 31 countries worldwide that are facing critical food insecurity due to a number of factors including prolonged drought, ongoing high food prices and conflict.

In its Crop Prospects and Food Situation report at the time, the agency stated that cereal production was set to decline in West Africa compared to previous years because below average rainfall forced farmers to re-plant crops in many parts of the region and led to livestock losses in several countries, among them Chad.

As part of its assistance efforts, FAO, in coordination with the Government, has put in a place a project to distribute 615 tonnes of animal food. It is also planning another project to distribute seeds for 33,000 vulnerable households.

Meanwhile, the World Food Programme (WFP) has begun a scheme to provide 47,000 tons of food for 750,000 people affected by drought in the regions of Kanem, Bahr-el-Ghazal, Guera, Batha, Lac and Hadjer Lamis.

According to WFP, these regions are among the most food insecure in the country due to cyclic exposure to weather hazards, a situation further exacerbated by last year's poor agricultural production.

A joint assessment carried out in December 2009 by FAO, WFP and the Government found estimated that 80,000 tons of cereals are required to cover the needs of the affected population across Chad.

The UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) has also been involved in alleviating the plight of the hungry in Chad by allocating \$3,751,801 to the country so far this year, most of which is focused on the health and nutrition sectors.

Cote d'Ivoire:

Gambia:

- **Firdaus Remains Justice Minister, as Pa Harry Declines Offer.....H1**

A highly placed source close to the Department of Justice says Marie Saine Firdaus, the nation's Attorney General and Justice minister, has not been dismissed from her post.

According to the source, Ms Firdaus was taken ill last Monday and has since not return to office after her travel to Geneva, Switzerland, where she attended a UNICEF conference.

"What triggered the speculation of her dismissal was the fact that president Jammeh had asked magistrate Pa Harry Jammeh if he was interested in the attorney general's post. But Pa Harry declined the officer, because he told the president that he was too inexperienced after serving only a year as a magistrate", the source said.

Our source however, hinted that Ms Firdaus is merely buying time because president Jammeh was not pleased with her efforts to defend his government at the Geneva conference.

"Quite frankly, president Jammeh is soul-searching for her replacement, which could come in anytime. But until then, Marie Saine Firdaus remains the attorney general and minister of Justice - she was never fired as reported by the online media", the source concluded.

Guinea- Conakry:

- **Child malnutrition - moving beyond stop-gaps.....H6**

Nutrition experts in Guinea are studying options for treating moderately malnourished children, as funding shortages disrupt normal programmes using fortified flour.

In recent months local health centres ran out of supplies and had to refer families to remote facilities for corn-soya blend (CSB), used for the treatment of moderate acute malnutrition and provided by donors through the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

WFP is seeking funds to maintain CSB stocks in Guinea. "We recently received some CSB but needs still outweigh supply," WFP-Guinea head of programme Foday Turay told IRIN. While recent unrest in the country led some donors to pull back, a lack of funding for WFP nutritional programmes pre-dates the latest instability.

Humanitarian workers told IRIN the current situation reflects the overall difficulty of attracting aid funding for Guinea and underlines the need to find alternative and long-

term solutions.

“The break in WFP’s pipeline is representative of the problem everyone has finding [aid] funding for Guinea,” Reza Kasraï, head of Action contre la Faim (ACF) in Guinea, told IRIN.

“We’re in a no-man’s land between a politically stable country where donors would like to give development funds and a full-on emergency where humanitarian donors contribute regardless of the political situation.”

Stop-gap measures

The funding and supply breaks are forcing aid agencies and the Health Ministry to turn to temporary solutions – like using therapeutic foods designed for severe acute malnutrition – but a more sustainable strategy is needed, nutrition experts say. When CSB stocks ran out, ACF used Plumpy’nut for some moderate malnutrition cases, Kasraï said.

“These are stop-gap measures... Using Plumpy’nut for moderate acute malnutrition is not in the national [malnutrition treatment] protocol, and just because the product is on hand does not mean it’s a long-term solution.” The product is more expensive than foods used to treat moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), he said.

Nutrition workers in Guinea are debating the viability of using Plumpy’nut for moderate cases if the need arises; another option being discussed is using local foods, prepared specially for children’s nutritional needs.

“Stop-gap measures may be better than nothing but a plan is needed to assure adequate funding for the CSB supply and access to contingency funds to mitigate the impact of CSB shortages,” Sheryl Martin of Helen Keller International in Guinea told IRIN.

“We are all frustrated by the lack of funding and are doing the best we can in the short term.”

Integrated

ACF’s Kasraï said it is important to use an integrated approach – not only therapeutic feeding but also programmes to address the principal causes of undernutrition in Guinea, by boosting people’s livelihoods, ensuring proper breastfeeding and weaning practices and improving home hygiene and access to health services, sanitation and safe water.

He said there is a growing movement towards community- and even household-based management of MAM, which would also reduce the strain on health centres. “The challenge is in finding a reliable way of ensuring that moderately malnourished children receive fortified [with vitamins and other micronutrients] and high-caloric diets in the home.”

A January 2010 ACF nutritional survey in Conakry's Matoto commune shows a global acute malnutrition rate of 7.3 percent, with 1.6 percent severe acute malnutrition, he said.

"While these percentages are not alarming, if you look at absolute numbers you're talking about some 10,000 children suffering acute malnutrition – and that is in just one of five Conakry communes."

Mamady Daffé, Health Ministry head of nutrition, said the combination of poverty and a lack of knowledge of children's nutritional needs contributes to child malnutrition. He said even if families understand children's nutritional needs, many do not have the means to meet them.

"People's living conditions must improve. Without this we will not be able to tackle malnutrition," he told IRIN. "The cost of living is up; people cannot buy what they need to eat properly."

In the Dixinn commune of Conakry, health workers conducting a nutritional survey in January saw a malnourished four-year-old girl. Her father is unemployed and her mother barely makes ends meet doing petty commerce.

"Sometimes I go for days without preparing a proper meal," the mother, Fatoumata Keita, told IRIN. She said she often gives her daughter quinine to ease stomach pain.

The latest monthly nutritional survey in Conakry – carried out by HKI and the Health Ministry – showed a rise in moderate acute malnutrition among under-five children from 3.8 percent in January to 5.5 percent in February.

Guinea- Bissau:

Liberia:

- **Nobody is lying", Witness says, as Prosecutors Suggest That His Account Is Different from Charles Taylor's.....H7**

A defense witness for Charles Taylor has dismissed prosecution assertions that his testimony is contradicting that of the former Liberian president, telling the court that neither him, nor Mr. Taylor, is lying to the judges.

Between July 2009 and February 2010, Mr. Taylor, who stands accused of supporting Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, testified as a witness in his own defense. After the completing his testimony, Mr. Taylor's first witness has been Yanks Smythe — a Gambian national who became a Liberian citizen and was appointed by Mr. Taylor as Liberian charge d'affaires to Libya and Tunisia in the late 1990s. Mr. Smythe has been rebutting prosecution evidence that the former Liberian president provided support to RUF rebels through the supply of arms and ammunition to the rebels in return

for Sierra Leone's blood diamonds. The witness has also been responding to questions about Mr. Taylor's activities as leader of his rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), and as president of Liberia.

During today's cross-examination, prosecution counsel Nicholas Koumjian questioned the witness about Mr. Taylor's presence in the former NPFL headquarter town of Gbangha. According to Mr. Koumjian, the witness seemed to be contradicting what the former president said in his own testimony. Mr. Koumjian suggested to the witness that in October 1996, Mr. Taylor moved to Gbangha and instructed RUF leader Foday Sankoh via a radio message to go and acquire arms for the RUF. After agreeing with Mr. Koumjian that Mr. Taylor did indeed go to Gbangha in October 1996, the prosecutor read a portion of Mr. Taylor's previous testimony in which the former president had denied ever going to Gbangha during that period. Upon hearing what Mr. Taylor said about the same incident in his testimony, Mr. Smythe sought to clarify his response, saying that he was in agreement with Mr. Taylor's account.

"You just told us Charles Taylor moved to Gbangha after the 31st of October 1996, was that correct?" Mr. Koumjian asked the witness.

The witness responded that "when there was an attack on his life, he left Monrovia during that period and he went to Gbangha but he never stayed there, he came back to Monrovia, this is what I am saying."

"Sir, who is lying when we talk about Charles Taylor being in Gbangha in 1996, you or Charles Taylor," Mr. Koumjian again asked the witness.

"Nobody is lying here," the witness responded.

Mr. Koumjian further asked the witness that "when Charles Taylor says 'I am not in Gbangha in 1996,' that is a lie, correct?"

"That is not a lie, that is not a lie," the witness insisted.

As Mr. Koumjian pressed to know whether Mr. Taylor was "in Gbangha in 1996," the witness explained that "when Charles Taylor was attacked in Monrovia, he went to Gbangha briefly and came back to Monrovia."

As Mr. Taylor's defense lawyers now lead their witnesses to rebut the evidence of prosecution witnesses, prosecutors will also seek to discredit the evidence of such defense witnesses through cross-examination. In said cross-examination, prosecutors will seek to discredit the testimony of defense witnesses, just like Mr. Taylor's defense lawyers did with prosecution witnesses. It is in this light that prosecutors have been pushing to point out that Mr. Smythe's testimony is contradicting some aspects of Mr. Taylor's prior testimony.

Also in his cross-examination today, Mr. Koumjian attempted to point out that Mr. Smythe's evidence that Mr. Taylor's personal security personnel had heavy weapons contradicted that of the former president's — who prosecutors say told the court on September 30, 2009 that he did not even have arms and ammunition to give his personal security personnel and so could not have had same to supply RUF rebels in Sierra Leone. Mr. Taylor testified that the United Nations took away all his arms and ammunition during the disarmament process in Liberia. Mr. Koumjian today asked the witness to describe the kinds of weapons that Mr. Taylor's personal security carried.

"That weapon is ah, I think its GMG," the witness said, adding that GMG means "General Machine Gun."

Asked whether it was an "anti-aircraft type of weapon," the witness responded that "I don't know what you are talking about, I know it's GMG , General Machine Gun."

"And it was actually somehow fixed to the back of like a Pick Up truck, correct?" Mr. Koumjian enquired further.

"It's in a Pick Up truck," the witness responded.

Mr. Taylor during his testimony told the court that he never had an anti-aircraft weapon during the entire period of the Liberian conflict.

Mr. Smythe's cross-examination continues tomorrow.

- **Charles Taylor Did Not Work For the CIA, He Did Not Manipulate Prosecution Witnesses, He Says.....H7**

Charles Taylor did not work for the United States' top spy agency while he was a rebel leader in Liberia, but did receive sophisticated communication equipment from the agency in the hope that Mr. Taylor's forces could help protect American citizens and property during Liberia's brutal civil conflict, he told the Special Court for Sierra Leone today.

Prosecutors have previously accused Mr. Taylor of working for the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) while at the same time collaborating with the Libyan government which provided support to his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group. In his re-examination today, the former president denied working for the CIA.

"I have never, ever, and will not ever work for the CIA or any other intelligence agency, never, no," the former president told Special Court for Sierra Leone judges today.

Mr. Taylor's lead defense lawyer, Courtenay Griffiths, further asked the former president about prosecution allegations that he provided information to the CIA. Mr. Taylor insisted that he did not. However, Mr. Taylor did return to a statement he made during

cross-examination on November 16, 2009, in which he denied that he was an agent of the CIA but indicated that his NPFL rebel group did share information with the US intelligence agency.

"The organization [NPFL] provided information to the CIA. The NPFL at the time did provide information to the CIA and there was information from the CIA to us too. There was exchange of information, mostly from between 1991-92," Mr. Taylor said.

Mr. Taylor also said that the CIA provided sophisticated communications equipments to the NPFL because they wanted his rebel group to protect American citizens and properties in Liberia during the country's conflict.

In other developments today, Mr. Taylor denied prosecution allegations that he used his telephone services in his detention facility to manipulate witnesses set to testify for the prosecution. Prosecutors have previously alleged that Mr. Taylor worked with associates in Liberia to intimate and discourage people from testifying against him.

Mr. Taylor today dismissed the allegations, telling judges that the court's registrar, who oversees his detention in The Hague, has never accused him of misusing the telephone services provided to him. He said that all his telephone calls are fully supervised and are arranged after intensive investigations on who he wants to call.

"First, I have to submit a number of an individual that I would like to call at some time, the process takes two weeks for the Sierra Leonean court and the facilities to do their security checks on the number and the individual," Mr. Taylor said. "After about two weeks, that number is approved for calling. I cannot just automatically get up and say, please call this number, no, it has to be vetted and approved by the Sierra Leonean court."

Mr. Taylor also today distanced himself from a January 5, 1999 letter written by former Sierra Leonean president, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, to the United Nations Secretary General in which the former Liberian president was accused of providing support to Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels who were at that time waging war in Sierra Leone.

"I have a mountain of evidence that rebel offensive has been supported and sustained by the Taylor government," President Kabbah's letter noted.

Dismissing the letter as nonsense, Mr. Taylor explained how he would have reacted if he had received a copy of the said letter.

"I would have taken a different disposition during that particular period that Kabbah — who was calling me and talking to me and visiting Liberia — could write a letter making such an accusation. It would have probably changed me significantly," Mr. Taylor said.

The former Liberian president added that if he had received the said letter, he would have removed himself from the Committee of Five, a committee established by West African leaders to facilitate a peaceful end to the conflict in Sierra Leone.

Mr. Taylor is charged with 11 counts of war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law in relation to his alleged role in supporting and controlling Sierra Leonean rebels who committed mass crimes during the brutal civil conflict in his neighboring country.

Mr. Taylor's re-examination continues tomorrow.

- **My Statement Was Misrepresented," Witness Says As Prosecutors Point Out Inconsistencies in His Written Statement and Oral Testimony....H7**

Charles Taylor's defense witness, Mr. Yanks Smythe has said that certain aspects of his written statement were misrepresented as prosecutors today pointed out inconsistencies in his written statement to defense lawyers and his oral testimony in court.

Prosecution counsel Nicholas Koumjian today tried to point to Mr. Smythe that certain things about which he has testified in court differ from what he had said to Mr. Taylor's defense lawyers when they obtained a statement from him in June 2009.

For example, Mr. Koumjian pointed out that the witness has testified in court that Mr. Taylor's rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) did not use child soldiers. However, his written statement made to defense lawyers in 2009 differed from this account. In his response, Mr. Smythe said that such inconsistencies were as a result of misrepresentations made of what he had said in his written statement.

The witness in his testimony has said that contrary to what prosecution witnesses said in court, there was no group for child soldiers called Small Boys Unit (SBU). He said that the term SBU was created by NPFL commanders who had rescued and were taking care of children abandoned in the frontlines. Mr. Koumjian pointed out that the witness's written statement revealed a different story.

"Mr. Witness, you told the defense last year, didn't you that there was an SBU unit, that these were under-aged, and they were part of the NPFL," Mr. Koumjian put to the witness.

"This is a complete misrepresentation of what i said, i never said that. This was not what i said," the witness responded.

"The defense invented this, is that what you are saying?" Mr. Koumjian again put to the witness.

"I don't know what you mean by they invented but this is not what i said. I said SBU as i stated in my testimony here, yes, this is what i know about SBU," the witness again responded.

As Mr. Koumjian pressed further on what the words "SBUs were under-aged" meant when he said so in his written statement, the witness responded that "I'm saying this is a complete misrepresentation of what i said in my statement. This is not what i said."

Mr. Koumjian also pointed out that while the witness in his testimony in court said that he never fought on the frontlines for the NPFL, his written statement revealed a different story. In the witness's statement, he was quoted as having taken part in an attack during "Operation Octopus," a 1992 attack on Monrovia by NPFL rebels. The witness insisted that he had again been misrepresented by those who obtained his statement.

Asked whether he had taken part "in an NPFL attack from Mount Barkeley during 'Operation Octopus'," the witness responded that "I didn't take part, i was on that side but i was not at the frontline." When Mr. Koumjian asked him whether he had said he "attacked from Mount Barkeley" as stated in his written statement, the witness again said that "I'm saying i don't know whether the person that wrote this misquoted me but i didn't say i attacked."

The witness also in his testimony in court had said that the first time he met Mr. Taylor was in 1987 at the Mataba guesthouse in Libya where Mr. Taylor reportedly lived alongside dissident leaders from Gambia and Sierra Leone. Mr. Koumjian pointed out that the witness's written statement revealed that he had met Mr. Taylor at the Libyan revolutionary training camp Tajura, not Mataba.

Reading from the witness's written statement, Mr. Koumjian quoted that "the first time witness met CT [Charles Taylor] was in 1987 in Tajura, not at Mataba meetings."

"Did you tell the defense that last year?" Mr. Koumjian asked the witness.

Again, the witness said that "this was a misrepresentation of what i said."

"The person that wrote it is misrepresenting what you said?" Mr. Koumjian asked further.

"This is not what i said, that's what i am saying," the witness insisted.

"So you are saying that the person who wrote this has told something that isn't true," the prosecutor again put to the witness.

Mr. Smythe insisted that that was a complete misrepresentation of what he said. "I never saw Mr. Taylor in Tajura," he said.

While Mr. Smythe in his testimony been rebutting prosecution evidence against Mr. Taylor, prosecutors have also under cross-examination been trying to discredit the

witness's testimony. Like defense lawyers did with prosecution witnesses under cross-examination, prosecutors have also been trying to highlight inconsistencies in Mr. Smythe's oral testimony in court and his written statement made to defense lawyers. It will be left with the judges to determine the credibility of the witness and whether his testimony can be relied upon.

As prosecutors concluded the cross-examination of Mr. Smythe today, Mr. Taylor's defense lawyer, Morris Anyah commenced the re-examination of the witness. Under re-examination, Mr. Anyah will seek to clarify some of the issues that have been covered by prosecutors under cross-examination.

Mr. Smythe's re-examination continues tomorrow.

• **President Sirleaf's South-Eastern Tour Kicks-Off.....H1**

Monrovia — The President of the newly established William V. S. Tubman University in Harper, Maryland County, Dr. Elizabeth Davis-Russell, was on Saturday, February 27, inducted into office at a well-attended convocation ceremony attended by President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and other senior Government officials.

In a speech marking the convocation, the President, who is also Visitor of the University, congratulated Dr. Davis-Russell for responding to the national call to return home and contribute to the rebuilding process.

The President described the opening of the William V. S. Tubman University on September 14, 2009, as a fulfillment of the educational sub-pillar of the "Lift Liberia" Poverty Reduction Strategy, which called for the establishment of at least one new institution of higher learning outside of Monrovia by September 2009.

The President lauded Dr. Davis-Russell and her staff for their determination and perseverance in achieving the goal to open the doors of the University as promised.

She challenged the new administration of Tubman University to work toward ensuring that the institution serves as a regional magnet for young people in the southeast and beyond, offering degrees in a host of disciplines "so that students can be assured of getting the best education Liberia has to offer."

The Visitor praised the academic program of the University, which she noted is in line with the country's transformation. Tubman University is offering courses in Health Sciences, Management, Technology, Agriculture and Food Sciences and Education.

In her inaugural address, Tubman University's new President, Dr. Davis-Russell, thanked the Liberian President for her preferment. She assured the Liberian leader that her administration will work to ensure that the institution meets its full potential. Dr. Davis-Russell promised to operate a transparent and accountable administration that will be responsive to the academic pursuit of students.

Saturday's ceremonies also included the dedication of the Tubman University Campus a tour of the campus facilities, and a fundraiser.

The President arrived in Harper on Saturday, February 27, to an enthusiastic welcome by a cross-section of citizens of Maryland County, who sang and performed traditional dances in appreciation of the President's visit, which marked the first stop-over of a southeastern tour that includes River Gee and Grand Gedeh Counties, where a Cabinet Retreat will be held.

The President on Saturday led other senior cabinet officials to the Liberian-Ivorian border town of Kablaken, dedicating the newly rehabilitated Harper-Kablaken road.

The Liberian leader departed Harper for River Gee County on Sunday morning, Feb. 28.

Meanwhile, ground-breaking and dedicatory ceremonies have taken place in Maryland and River Gee Counties of several development projects.

President Johnson Sirleaf on Sunday broke ground for the construction of the Manolu Public School, in Maryland County, and a number of projects funded by the African Development Bank in the southeast region, in keeping with an agreement with the Liberian Government.

Other projects dedicated by the President in Kanweaken included a district administrative building in Kanweaken City; the Gbeapo-Kanweaken General Market; a sub-police station; and the Gbeapo- Geeken Elementary School in Dweken, River Gee County.

The dedicated schools were constructed by the Liberia Agency for Community Empowerment (LACE), with funding provided by the Liberia Education Trust (LET), a private initiative launched by President Johnson Sirleaf four years ago to raise funds to train teachers, construct schools throughout the country, and provide scholarships to deserving students, particularly girls.

The President arrived in Zwedru, Grand Gedeh County, late Monday night, March 1, on the latest leg of her southeastern counties tour. En route to Zwedru, the Liberian leader visited the Putu Mining Site, located midway between River Gee and Grand Gedeh Counties, where mining operations are being concluded.

Residents of the area, in a statement, welcomed the plans by Government to resume mining activities in the area. They hoped the process would get under way soon to help provide employment opportunities to thousands of unemployed youths in the area, particularly residents of Putu Konobo Statutory District #3.

The President and Cabinet convene Tuesday in a Retreat session. This will follow a Town Hall meeting with the citizens of Grand Gedeh County. Later on Tuesday, the

Liberian leader will convene a meeting of chiefs, traditional leaders, market women, county officials and the Nimba and Mandingo communities as well as other stakeholders.

- **Liberia’s biggest prison launches agriculture training for inmates....H7**

UN Deputy Envoy, Ms. Henrietta Mensa-Bonsu has described an agricultural pilot project for inmates at the National Palace of Corrections “as a bold step towards institutionalizing active programs for rehabilitation of inmates.”

According to a press release, Ms. Mensa-Bonsu made this statement at the weekend, at the launch of the project by the Minister of Justice in Zwedru, the provincial capital of southeastern Grand Gedeh County, located on the border with Cote d’Ivoire. The program sets the basis for the development of an efficient and effective rehabilitation and reintegration program for prisoners.

The Minister of Justice, Counselor-at-Law Philip Banks cited his coordination with the Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) for the Rule of Law and the support and encouragement provided to the rule of law sector, as the foremost blessing to his tenure as Minister of Justice. Cllr. Philip Banks highlighted the pilot project as a direct example of such encouragement, explaining how the idea for the project had originated from a DSRSG-initiated visit to correctional facilities in Ghana operating successful agricultural programmes.

Minister Banks expressed his hope that the project would be merely the beginning of rehabilitation projects in correctional facilities in Liberia and that it would prove beneficial for the inmates and the facility and assist in the inmates’ successful rehabilitation into society on their release. The Minister assured corrections officers during the visit that the Ministry of Justice could be called upon for assistance at any time but warned that absence from duty or harassment of inmates would not be tolerated.

The DSRSG for Rule of Law expressed her view that: “The farming initiative is a first step on the long road towards achieving some measure of rehabilitation for those serving terms of imprisonment in correctional facilities.” Under the pilot phase of this project, prison inmates will be taught farming skills on land inside the National Palace of Corrections (NCP), and the food they will grow will supplement their rations.

Underscoring the need for rehabilitation of inmates as productive citizens, Ms. Mensa-Bonsu urged the communities around the prison to purchase the prison’s excess crops. “This will not only encourage the inmates to grow more, but would provide necessary funds to the Corrections Palace to improve the quality of life of the inmates,” she added. To the inmates, the DSRSG advised: “there is dignity in labor; the sense of achievement and material benefits it will produce will ensure that your stay at this facility would be a watershed in your life.”

The project is an initiative of the Ministry of Justice, with support provided by the Ministry of Agriculture, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), and non-governmental organizations such as German Agro Action and Catholic faith-based Caritas. Also attending the ceremony were Liberia's Assistant Minister for Corrections and Rehabilitation, Ms. Fatumata Sheriff, Grand Gedeh County Superintendent Christopher Bailey, the Chief of UNMIL Corrections Advisory Unit, Ms. Marjo Callaghan, and an array of local and UNMIL officials.

This support is crucial for strengthening the development of rehabilitation which is an integral part of the mandate of the Bureau of Corrections and Rehabilitation (BCR) of Liberia's Ministry of Justice. The efforts of the BCR shall contribute to the security, growth and development of Liberia by striving to change offenders' behavior by training, rehabilitating and counseling in order to help them lead law-abiding self sustainable lives after their release.

- **Ellen: Audit report on iron sale submitted to Justice Ministry....H2**

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf says she has submitted the Special Forensic Audit Report of the Auditor General on the Sale of Iron Ore for the period January 2004-January 2006 to the Justice Ministry for review and subsequent action.

President Sirleaf made the disclosure last Saturday at her Foreign Ministry Offices during a tete-a-tete with editors and Media Managers.

The Chief Executive, who spoke on wide range of national issues during the tete-tete, said she submitted the audit report after she went through said report.

She said the submission of the audit report to the justice Ministry is part of her continuous campaign against corruption.

However, she said she could not state whether the Justice Ministry has commenced preparing indictments for those implicated in the report.

Auditor general John S. Morlu, II, in his Transmittal Letter to the president and members of the National Legislature recommended that former Lands and Mines Minister Johnson Mason, former President and CEO of LIMINCO S. Ciapha Gbollie, and businessman George Haddad are jointly or severally held to account and are made to restitute US\$3,938,201.09, adding , "this being part of the proceeds from the direct sales of Shandong."

Auditor General Morlu: "I have further recommended that former Lands and Mines Minister Johnson Mason and the former President and CEO of LIMINCO S. Ciapha Gbollie be held to account and made to restitute jointly or severally for US\$1,478,965.87, representing portion of the iron ore proceeds paid by Metalimex."

He continued: “I have furthermore recommended that former Deputy Finance Minister Tugbeh Doe should therefore be held to account and made to restitute US\$2,038,977, representing the amount for which he falsified a letter in the name of the former Minister of Finance. This amount supposedly represented the Government of Liberia’s share of the proceeds.”

He finally recommended that former Auditor General Francis B.S. Johnson is reprimanded for producing a “purported audit report” that undermined the financial interest of the Government of Liberia.

“As you will note in the details of the report with respect to the pricing scheme employed, this iron ore transaction was asset stripping of the highest order and a demonstrable blatant assault on public resources by Government officials and their private sector,” the Auditor General asserted in his Transmittal Letter, which was contained in the audit report on the Sale of Iron Ore.

- **No Swine Flu in Liberia.....H6**

Deputy Health and Social Welfare Minister, Dr. Bernice Dahn, has disclosed that there is no Swine Flu virus in Liberia.

“Up to date, there is no sign of the virus in the country,” she said.

According to her, there is also no need to be panic because Liberia is free from the pandemic.

Dr. Dahn made the disclosure last Thursday when she addressed the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNIML) regular press briefing in Monrovia.

She said the Liberian Government has put into place series of mechanism to battle the virus in the instant where the Swine Flu or A (H, M,) happens to surface in the country, stressing “the Ministry of Health is on top of things”.

Speaking further, the Deputy Health Minister stated that the ministry has already set up a task force to help the Liberian Government mobilize funds where the needs arise.

The Deputy Health Minister further disclosed that the epidemic and Lab Committees of the task force set up by the ministry are working hard to ensure that people affected with the virus coming into the country are identified and treated so as to avoid the disease spreading.

Dr. Dahn revealed that the World Health Organization (WHO) has provided funding for combating the Swine Flu if it surfaces in Liberia.

She further revealed that ministry has some vaccines available as well as one thousand masks for use by health workers in the country.

She said Geneva has promised some additional doses of vaccines while the Liberian Government is about to procure more, noting, “we have planned training for health workers in the country to deal with the virus”.

The Health Ministry Official indicated that the training would take place in the various regions of the country to ensure that health workers are well placed to withstand the challenge of the Swine Flu.

For his part, the Country Representative of the World Health Organization (WHO) Dr. Nestor Ndayimirije, said for the fact that the Flu had spread in twenty three countries in two weeks is an issue of concern.

He said since the outbreak of the pandemic was announced on April 24, 2009, one thousand eight ninety three cases (1,893) including twenty one death have been reported.

He used the occasion to announce the donation of one thousand Tarmid Flu to the Ministry of Health.

According to him, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) have been brought in the country to be used by health workers on their jobs.

Meanwhile, Dr. Ndayimirije revealed that people with the virus must be separated from their family members to ensure that it does not spread to others. He gave the symptoms of Swine Flu as cough, running nose, and fever among others.

Mali:

- **Reality check" needed in proposed changes to family code....H7**

A husband and wife can keep separate homes, but only with the husband's approval. A divorcée can keep her ex-husband's name – if he agrees. A girl should be able to marry at 15. These and a dozen other changes to the family code are being proposed by Mali's top Islamic council, even though they were blocked last August after strong opposition from some Muslim leaders.

Legislative efforts to update a decades-old family code sparked nationwide protests from Muslim associations, which said the new code would threaten religious values.

“Without these amendments, it would be an open road to debauchery,” the head of the group within the council created to propose changes to the family code, Mamadou Diamouténé, told IRIN. He said that while Koranic law allowed spouses to keep separate homes, “it is not that anyone can go wherever she wishes without her husband's approval, because we cannot forget that the man is the head of the family”.

However, Bakary Togola, a teacher and Malian Association of Human Rights member, told IRIN that Council members pushing for the amendments had to face reality. “The world is evolving every day and we must change with it... there are countries all over the

world passing laws to authorize marriage between homosexuals and we Muslims are moving heaven and earth over details that are not worth anything.”

These amendments risk pushing people to extremism, said Rokia Traoré Sanogo, a housecleaner who is Muslim. “Here in Mali, not everyone is Muslim... They [High Islamic Council] are acting as if Mali were an Islamic state. At this rate, they will soon demand that Sharia law be imposed.”

Article 291 currently states that marriages are celebrated publicly in front of a government registrar, to which the Islamic council wants to add “and religious and traditional leaders”. Diamouténé said that otherwise, “it is as if we were trampling over religious and traditional marriage ceremonies”.

Article 311 of the draft currently puts spouses on an equal footing. “Spouses owe each other fidelity, protection, relief and assistance. They commit themselves to the community of life on the basis of affection and respect.” The council wants to add: “The wife must obey the husband.”

The council is proposing amending articles on inheritance, marriage, adoption and family responsibilities, which are at the core of Mali’s social and religious values, said the council’s Diamouténé.

April vote

Parliament is treading more carefully this time in trying to pass a new family law. “We recall that the Islamic associations, led by the High Islamic Council, sparked unprecedented protests throughout the country to remove language [they] considered blasphemous,” the head of the national assembly, Dioncounda Traoré, told IRIN.

Two lawmakers, one of whom is a religious leader, are to reconcile the proposed amendments, the code under draft and the existing law, which they will present to parliament for approval in April.

Political analyst and University of Bamako professor, Badra Alou Macalou, told IRIN that lawmakers were hoping to reach a consensus on the contested articles. “The president of the assembly... was clear in saying that the legislators will never adopt a code that will affect again the social climate. I think that in April if the code is not voted [on] and adopted unanimously, it will simply be shelved.”

Domestic worker Sanogo is not optimistic of any significant change even if the code is passed. “Whether or not the code is adopted, it does not matter much to me because we know here in Mali, laws are not enforced.”

Niger:

- **Military junta appoints transitional government.....H1**

Niger's military junta has named a new transitional government of 20 ministers, including five soldiers, after seizing power from former President Mamadou Tandja on February 18. Junta leaders have promised to hold democratic elections in the future.

The military junta in Niger on Monday formed a new transitional government of 20 ministers, including five soldiers and five women, according to an official statement read on state radio.

The defence, sport and environment portfolios went to three generals close to toppled president Mamadou Tandja, the statement from the Supreme Council for Restoration of Democracy (CSRD) -- the junta -- said.

CSRD leader Salou Djibo said on Sunday that no member of the junta that seized power in a coup this month or member of the transitional government would stand in promised presidential elections.

The CSRD seized power on February 18, ousting Tandja, who had changed the constitution to stay in office beyond two terms.

It suspended the constitution of the uranium-rich west African state, dissolved the cabinet and promised to organise elections at the end of a transition period, whose length has yet to be decided.

Niger's newly-appointed civilian prime minister Mahamadou Danda urged his military bosses this week to ensure a swift return to democratic rule, a call echoed by the international community.

"The days of autocratic regimes in this country are over," Djibo said on Sunday, insisting "our only goal is to accompany the return to democracy in our dear homeland."

"The Council commits itself to restoring the constitutional order that will be proposed by the consultative council," set up to advise the transition authorities on Niger's political future, he said.

- **Salou Djibo: The quiet successor.....H1**

Former tank commander Salou Djibo took over as Niger's interim president after ousting President Mamadou Tandja in a military coup on Feb. 18. Djibo is described as a timid, self-effacing man. But he holds the strings of power.

"Destroyer of the dictatorship", "Saviour of democracy"...Salou Djibo, a man largely unknown across Niger before a Feb. 18 coup is now a household name – and a popular one at that - in this West African nation. The day after the coup, the head of the Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy (CSRD) – as the junta called itself after seizing power – was welcomed in the streets of the capital, Niamey.

For many citizens of the uranium-rich nation, Djibo is a hero who ousted the autocratic president Mamadou Tandja, who had been in power since 1999. Re-elected in 2004, Tandja amended the constitution in 2009, enabling him to stay in power in a move widely condemned by the international community.

Nevertheless, Djibo's first steps as Niger's leader seemed to show that he lacked the charismatic appeal capable of enflaming public passions. A week after he took power, Djibo had not yet addressed the people, leaving it to his aides to relay the junta's goals and reassure governments across the region.

Timid man, strong leader

"He's a calm and timid man. Even the press hardly knows him," says Moussa Kaka, head of a local radio station and Niger correspondent for Radio France Internationale (RFI). His reticence to speak in public is so severe that it has raised doubts about whether the coup chief was just a puppet in the hands of his spokesman, Colonel Djibrilla Hamidou Hima, known as "Pelé" due to his passion for football.

Hima was the number two during the 1999 military coup against Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara. The leaders of the 1999 coup promptly restored democratic rule and held elections in December of that year, which brought Tandja into power.

But behind the man's timid demeanour hides a leader with an iron fist. "He [Djibo] says nothing, but he holds the reins," explains Kaka. "He was on the frontlines when the army attacked the presidential palace. He epitomizes the honour of the military. His men would not accept it if he did not occupy high office."

"He's the one who took all the risks", adds a Tandja opponent. "Colonel Pelé knows he couldn't have done it all himself, so he accepts the situation."

Djibo himself seemed to implicitly confirm these remarks in a recent interview on RFI: "In this kind of situation, the person conducting operations automatically takes charge [...], and because he is at the head of armed forces, others tend to trust him," he explained when asked why the junta had designated him as their new leader. The commander's long and distinguished career in Niger's army earned him the respect of his peers.

Peacekeeper

Born in the western village of Namaro in 1965, this father of five joined the army as a simple footsoldier in 1987. He was enrolled in several different divisions before training as an officer in Ivory Coast. He then specialised in artillery warfare in training programmes in China and Morocco. He participated in two successive UN peacekeeping missions, in Ivory Coast and the Democratic Republic of Congo, before returning to Niger in 2006. There, he commanded a garrison, in Niamey, which led the recent coup against Tandja.

Yet another observer explains Djibo's strong popularity within the army by the fact that "he didn't go to elite military schools, he joined the infantry as a teenager and made his way up the chain of command step by step".

Now that he has reached his country's top office, will Commander Djibo keep his promise to organise new elections and lead his country through a democratic transition, or will he be tempted to cling to power in the same way Moussa Dadis Camara did in Guinea?

"Why must you always compare us to our neighbours?" an exasperated Bassou Mohammed, spokesman for Niger's PNDS socialist party, asks FRANCE 24. "The last time there was a coup, in 1999, Daouda Mallam Wanké handed power to a civilian government after eight months," he adds.

On Feb. 24, Salou Djibo named Mahamadou Danda, a civilian and former spokesman of Mallam Wanké's transition government 10 years ago, prime minister of the current transition authority. He also announced that no member of the junta would stand in the presidential elections. What better way for the "Saviour of democracy" to prove his good intentions?

- **Food pressures spread north.....H7**

The unusually large-scale migration of southern Nigerien farmers and pastoralists, heading north to look for work, has prompted concerns about food shortages in the northern Agadez region, according to local authorities.

"This seasonal migration always happens during the period between [harvests] and Agadez always welcomes people with open arms," said Almoumoune Ibrahim, son of the region's highest ranking traditional leader.

"Normally after the harvest [in the south], the men leave the women and children with a stock of food and they come here to find work as farm labourers," said Alhadji Guichem Kari, a member of a government committee set up after last September's floods in the Agadez region, which displaced thousands and destroyed more than 3,000 homes

But this year's increase in the number of migrants is testing the north's perennial hospitality.

"Due to the shortages [of food] in the south, people have come earlier and in greater numbers. This year entire families have been coming. Some have found work and others beg," Kari told IRIN.

Flood damage around Agadez is still evident: Destroyed crops and homes, dead cattle, and sand-infested vegetable gardens no longer able to employ seasonal migrants.

Near the airport, Mariama Adao camps out with hundreds of other migrants. Originally from the southern town of Matameye near the Nigerian border, she arrived in Agadez three months ago with six of her eight children.

"This year when we saw that the rain was not coming I came here very quickly," she told IRIN. "Normally we harvest 20-25 sacks [of millet, sorghum, cow peas and peanuts], but this year we did not even harvest five. We needed to make headway and get here quickly to find a way to survive."

Abnormal rains in several parts of the country, including Agadez have led to crop deficits, forcing families nationwide to dip into their food stocks earlier than normal. Over half the population had only two months of food reserves left as of February - to last them until the next harvest in October, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Mariama Adao found work cleaning homes, as did her 17-year-old son. "I come here every year but this year there are a lot more of us than usual. Everyone [from the Matameye region] has had problems," she said.

"People who come here would never die of hunger because there is a real sense of solidarity [between people from the south and the Agadez region]," Hama Dilla Abdoulaye, the mayor of Agadez, told IRIN.

Food prices up

However, the local population is already facing higher food prices as a result of the region's poor harvest and higher demand prompted by the influx of migrants.

Two and a half kilograms of millet, a local food staple, which previously cost at most 500 CFA francs (US\$1) between harvests, is now sold for 600 CFA francs in Agadez, according to residents

"Agadez is a small town; we feel the pressure of food and rent prices straight away," said Ousmane Issouf, a driver.

A recent national survey on household food security classified Agadez as one of the least vulnerable regions in the country - 7 percent of households faced problems getting food compared to the national average of 20 percent.

But the authorities were only able to carry out the survey in three urban areas of a 660,000sqkm desert region. A government travel ban and state of alert were recently lifted in the northern half of the country after years of rebel fighting, but rural zones - filled with pastoralists and farmers cut off from markets, hemmed in by sporadic fighting and hit by flooding - are still largely inaccessible.

Meanwhile, some say increased migration to the Agadez region has also been stimulated by rumours of free food handouts in the wake of the flooding. "People heard that food was being distributed in Agadez so they came here, [but that food] was only for people who been affected [by the floods]," Mayor Abdoulaye told IRIN.

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- **Mariama Adao, "We help each other... but it is hard".....H7**

Mariama Adao, aged 40 and a mother of eight, makes the 400km journey from Matameye in the south of Niger to Agadez in the north almost every year to make ends meet between growing seasons. However, this year's poor harvest forced her to leave earlier - and bring six of her children with her.

She told IRIN about her life:

"My husband is a farmer [in the Matameye region]. We grow millet, sorghum, cow peas and peanuts. Normally we produce 20-25 sacks, but this year we did not even get five. There was not enough rain. We have only known one other year like this [in 2005].

"When we saw that the rains were not coming I came here very quickly... with six of my children. I could not just stay there with my arms folded. I had to make headway and come here quickly [to Agadez] to make money to survive. My husband is old. He stayed with our two eldest daughters, who are married. They manage to provide him with food.

"We travelled for more than two days in a truck. A month after we arrived I managed to find a job doing housework in someone's home. My [17-year-old] son was also employed in another house. My youngest is two years old. The children do not go to school.

"We come to Agadez because, of the eight regions [of Niger], we feel that we will find the most solidarity here. You can find more food here too. We were told that there was a food distribution [intended for people in the Agadez area affected by the September 2009 floods] here, but we have not received anything yet.

"I come here every year but this year there are a lot more of us than usual. Everyone has

had problems [in the Matameye region]. Among my neighbours [in Agadez], a few have managed to find work and the others beg.

"At the moment we are getting by; we help each other. If one person has nothing to eat, we share with them. There is a sense of goodwill, but it is hard. I will not go back before the next rainy season in the south [May]. We need rain."

Senegal:

Sierra Leone:

Free Care for Expectant Mothers - is it enough?.....H6

***Dakar* — The government of Sierra Leone has announced that from Independence Day (27 April) it will abolish user fees for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five, but will this, on its own, improve their lot?**

Sierra Leone has the world's highest maternal mortality rate - 1,800 women die per 100,000 live births, according to UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

C.T.H. Bell, a gynaecologist with the privately owned New Life hospital in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown, says that more critical than free treatment is speed of decision-making in the home, an efficient transport infrastructure, and prompt treatment on arrival at a health centre.

He suggested that the expansion of free health required more preparation, and should not be seen as a cure-all.

"Have we put our house in order before inviting the guests? Women will go for free treatment - where? You are inviting people to your house, but do you have the drugs? Do you have the IV [intravenous] fluids you need? Do you have blood? Are your staff motivated?"

Abolishing user fees will not address life-threatening delays in delivering maternal care - even in the woman's own community, he said.

"At times, the husband - who has to decide - is not there. Or maybe the mother will say: 'No, let's wait. Or maybe there is an old woman in the community who will say: 'Wait, wait, and wait' - until it is too late," Bell told IRIN.

Monir Islam, head of WHO's Making Pregnancies Safer Programme, told IRIN poor roads and a lack of ambulances made it hard for people from rural areas to get to a city for emergency care. "Free care means little on its own. If women cannot make it to a centre, what good is free care?"

Traffic jams further slow down those trying to reach Sierra Leone's only hospital handling obstetric and gynaecological emergencies, in east Freetown, said Bell. "If somebody has an emergency in the west, that person has to drive through the city to the east... By the time the person gets to the hospital, maybe [the woman or baby] is dead."

Prompt treatment

Bell said there were often delays at clinics. "The patient... gets to the facility - no doctor, no nurse, no medicine, no blood and the patient has to wait until a doctor is called on duty."

He said poorly paid public servants - the average monthly doctor's salary is around US\$100, while a 50kg sack of rice costs \$34 - are worn out because they do multiple jobs to survive.

In June 2008 NGOs operated more than half the country's health facilities, according to the Health Ministry. There are almost as many international doctors employed by NGOs (50) as there are local doctors (60). Nursing graduates are only able to find temporary work, when someone resigns or dies, according to the UN Population Fund. Many immigrate to foreign countries in search of better jobs.

Lack of trained government healthcare workers is all too often an excuse by governments to delay improving maternal health care, WHO's Islam told IRIN.

In addition to training more health workers, governments should provide existing workers with the equipment and power supplies they need to do their jobs, he said. "If a woman makes it to the clinic, will there be trained midwives, an electricity generator?"

"Unless there is a comprehensive overhaul and improvement of maternal health care, poor people will continue to get only poor options, whether user fees exist or not."

No-cost medical care will do little to make pregnancies safer unless health centres are better equipped to serve expectant mothers, according to WHO.

- **SCHDO Donates Items to Orphans and Polio.....H8**

Freetown — The Sierra Canadian Humanitarian Development Organization (SCHDO) at Wellington has donated assorted gifts and items to some orphanages and polio homes in the western area of Freetown.

Supervisor of SCHDO, Joseph Katta said the items were to support the homes with feeding, medication, clothing, training tools, text books and beds to enable them become self-reliant.

He said it has been the dream of the organisation to help the less fortunate become self-reliant, noting, "We are grateful to the director of SCHDO, Alpha Abu, for making this possible".

Katta said the humanitarian items were donated by Ebbe Marquardsen, Don Smith, Karmel Sakran and Dr. Conrad Van Dijk - all in Canada, to elevate the social standard "of our brothers and sisters".

Managing director of Children in Need, Inna Maria Kamara commended SCHDO for their passionate gesture to their home, stating that the donation would go towards the upkeep of children in the home.

Chairman of the United Polio Brothers, Osman Kabia lauded the efforts of humanitarian organisations in helping the less fortunate to be self-dependent.

Togo:

- Incumbent Faces Strong Challenge at Polls.....H1

Togo's election campaign culminated in a major show of strength at rallies in the capital, Lomé, ahead of the presidential poll on Thursday.

Fasozine reports from Ouagadougou that supporters of the two main favourites, President Faure Gnassingbé of the Rassemblement du Peuple Togolais (RPT) and Jean-Pierre Fabre of l'Union des forces du Changement (UFC), were among those who took to the streets.

"Faure kpoyéla," meaning, in Mina, one of the local languages, that there is nobody other than the incumbent president, was the fashionable slogan among his supporters, whose endless caravan through the streets included a dance band. When the throng met the tide of yellow which constituted the supporters of the UFC, each side claimed victory and heckled one another, all in good spirit and without animosity.

For Arzouma Sibiti, who carried yellow posters bearing the image of Jean-Pierre Fabre, his candidate is the Barack Obama of Togo who will transform the ambitions of the UFC into reality.

In the run-up to the voting, efforts were made to prevent a repeat of the 2005 post-election violence, in which many innocent lives were lost.

Gnassingbé publicly condemned any kind of campaigning that encourages violence. As a precautionary measure, a 6,000-man force of agents specially trained for presidential elections has been deployed across the country.

Opposition parties and a number of observers have already raised concerns over early voting by military personnel on Monday. While the government argues that this was necessary to enable the military to maintain peace and order on Election Day, the

opposition believes this is a fraudulent mechanism that has been used by the government in the past to inflate results.

One observer also denounced the African Union's choice of former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo as head of the its observer mission, owing to his pledge of support to Gnassingbé when the latter succeeded his father.

Unequal access to resources has also been seen in the campaigns: the incumbent toured the country by helicopter, while the other seven candidates had to use modest modes of transport to canvas for votes.

That notwithstanding, Gnassingbé is expected to face fierce competition from Fabre and the UFC, backed by a group of parties priding themselves as Front Républicain pour l'Alternance et le Changement (FRAC).

- Vote counting in Togo.....H1

Vote counting is underway in Togo, a day after presidential polls closed, with electoral authorities saying they are concerned not to repeat the mistakes of the violence-marred 2005 ballot.

The head of the independent electoral commission, Tafa Tabiou, told IRIN that the results would not be announced progressively by voting districts, as in previous elections. "We are still learning our lessons about democracy, and we fear that partial results that would be a bit different from the final ones would only incite unrest."

Counting is taking place publicly so voters can see which ballots are rejected. The president of the truth and reconciliation commission - created to address past human rights abuses - said the largely peaceful election was a "significant" step on the country's road to reconciliation.

Togo's 2005 presidential election was condemned by much of the international community, and hundreds died in the ensuing opposition protest. Casting his ballot on 4 March, voter Ayaba Esiomlé commented, "It is not easy to pardon [past crimes] ... but if these elections are transparent, that will show us that reconciliation is possible, and we would be more likely to forget more quickly the past."

- President Faure Gnassingbe wins re-election.....H1

Faure Gnassingbe casts his ballot in Lome, 4 March

Faure Gnassingbe's family has been in power for more than 40 years and the current president of Togo has won re-election in a disputed vote, electoral authorities say.

The election commission said Faure Gnassingbe, son of a late dictator, had beaten opposition challenger Jean-Pierre Fabre.

He won 1.2 million votes of two million cast, officials said; considerably more than his rival's tally of 692,584.

Mr Fabre had also claimed victory in the election, alleging irregularities in the vote-counting system.

He said that a lack of adequate vote validation meant the count was now "illegal" and that "everything the electoral commission is doing is false".

Street uncertain

Earlier, Jean-Claude Codjo, an opposition member of Togo's electoral agency, walked out of a meeting in protest at what he called a "lack of transparency".

However, the provisional results as declared by the electoral commission showed the incumbent had won a comprehensive victory, widening the gap as fuller results were declared.

Jean-Pierre Fabre casts his ballot in Lome, 4 March

Jean-Pierre Fabre said he was confident of victory

The BBC's Caspar Leighton, in Lome, Togo's capital, says that Mr Gnassingbe's win must still be approved by Togo's constitutional court.

The opposition Union Forces for Change (UFC) is sure to challenge them, in court and on the street, our correspondent says, but it is unclear how organised or determined any street protests might be.

The AFP news agency reported that riot police were deployed on the streets of Lome, as the result was announced.

Earlier, police used tear gas to disperse some 200 opposition supporters.

"We do not know what is going to happen. We are all afraid. We do not know how we will wake up tomorrow," one man, named as Jean-Luc, told the agency.

- Togo opposition claims 'irregularities' in poll.....H1

The main opposition party in Togo has claimed widespread irregularities in the country's presidential election.

People in Togo voted on Thursday to chose a new head of state - five years after

hundreds died following the last, disputed election.

President Faure Gnassingbe is running for a second term, and his main challenger is Jean Pierre Fabre of the Union of Forces for Change (UFC).

All parties have been stressing the need for a peaceful poll.

The UFC has pointed to several problems with the voting that it says could lead to fraud.

The ballot papers did not have serial numbers, only the stubs did, says the BBC's Caspar Leighton in Lome.

The numberless ballot papers can be used to stuff ballot boxes from elsewhere, the UFC says.

"The electoral code has not been respected. Nothing has been done today to ensure the transparency of this vote," the UFC head of communications Eric Dupuy told the BBC.

More than 500 observers from the African Union, the West African group Ecowas and the European Union are monitoring the vote.

An election observer in Lome told the BBC the process so far was "slow but peaceful".

Correspondents say President Gnassingbe is hoping to be re-elected in circumstances that will win the approval that was so lacking at the last election.

'No chances'

The 2005 vote happened soon after the military had installed him in power on the death of his father, Gnassingbe Eyadema.

The main opposition party, the UFC, believes it won the last election.

Hundreds died in ensuing protests. Campaigning this time around was peaceful and at times strayed into good-natured rivalry.

But the authorities took no chances and mixed the message of harmony with the presence of a 6,000-strong election security force.

The structures in place for this election pointed to a desire to be seen to be doing the right thing.

For the first time there was an independent electoral commission.

The government website was being more than just a government mouthpiece and talked in fair terms about the opposition campaigns.

The electoral commissioner said election results should be ready after 72 hours. But there is a lack of clarity about how long the counting will actually take, our correspondent says.

- Disputed vote spawns fears.....H1

Victory claims by two presidential candidates and continued threats of violence from the opposition are keeping many Togolese indoors two days after the election as they fearfully await official results.

Business at the largest market in the capital, Lomé, has slowed after anxious merchants shuttered their stands. “I am waiting to see how the country will be after results are announced to continue my work in the market,” fish vendor, Da Vivi, told IRIN. “Since Friday [5 March] I have not been to the market because I do not know what will happen. My life is more important than money.”

Classrooms were emptier than usual the day after elections. “I did not let my six-year-old go to school yesterday [5 March] because I am scared that after results are announced, there will be clashes,” said a resident who only gave IRIN her last name, Akakpo.

On the evening of 5 March, residents told IRIN there was a military build up in the capital in anticipation of an announcement from the electoral commission.

The commission’s president told IRIN on 5 March that the commission will only release results when all votes have been counted to minimize the risk of violence.

Leading opposition candidate, Jean-Pierre Fabré, told IRIN that his party, the Union of Forces for Change, would instruct its followers to oppose violently any claim of victory from the ruling party, Rally of the Togolese People. “We will launch a popular uprising until victory is ours.” Even though counting has proceeded publicly, this has not stemmed the opposition’s accusations of fraud. “They [ruling party] want to hide the real results to put forth false ones. And we will not accept it,” Fabré told IRIN.

The ruling party has dismissed claims of fraud as “fantasies from the opposition to foment violence” in the country’s most closely observed election since Togo started holding multi-party elections in 1993. There were more than 3,000 local and international election observers covering almost 6,000 voting stations.

A newly formed youth group – Citizen Movement for Change – claiming hundreds of members trained in “democracy vigilance” is ready to take to the streets, said one of its leaders, Guillaume Messan. “People of Togo, if you love your country and are ready to die for it, know that the time has come to fight for the liberation of your country,” he told IRIN on 6 March.

A political and security professor at the University of Lomé, Sodokin Koffi, told IRIN how the armed forces responds to these threats and any eventual outbreak will determine if lives are lost. “The security forces were trained before the elections and I hope they use

conventional methods [to put down violence] that we have seen [used] elsewhere so the worst cannot happen.”

Relief workers have been trained in every potential election outcome, Togolese Red Cross director of relief services, Amah Victor Sodogas, told IRIN. “We went through simulation exercises in January and have been on alert. Given the tension, anything can happen and we are ready.”

- **Tip-toeing towards reconciliation.....H1**

As up to 3.2 million Togolese cast their ballots in the presidential election on 4 March, IRIN asked voters and experts what it would take to reach true reconciliation after decades of political violence. This is the first of a two-part series on Togo's road to reconciliation.

"Impunity will no longer be tolerated, the blood of Togo's sons and daughters will no longer flow freely on our land, the land of our ancestors." These words, penned five months after a bloody poll in April 2005 that killed at least 400 and dispersed tens of thousands, formed the basis of a truth and reconciliation commission, created to help the country move past decades of recurring political violence.

"Elections will not be enough to bring together the people," said Gameti Akuyo, a fabric vendor in the capital, Lomé. "Those who carried out violence must recognize their wrong and ask for pardon. If not, reconciliation is just a joke, and evil will continue."

President Faure Gnassingbé, whose post is up for grabs, took power after his father died in early 2005 in an election marred by a security crackdown that included torture, rape and extrajudicial killings, according to Amnesty International, a human rights watchdog.

The truth and reconciliation commission was formed in 2006 as part of a peace pact between the opposition and ruling parties, but its president, Nicodème Barrigah, told IRIN that the commission had not yet begun the formal process of reconciliation so as to not destabilize the country before the elections.

When to start?

"We decided not to inflame again the hearts of Togolese [so near the election], but instead to ensure the holding of transparent elections ... to begin the reconciliation process afterwards," Barrigah told IRIN.

The commission interviewed more than 20,000 people in July 2008 about their vision of justice and reconciliation, and decided not to proceed with identifying the perpetrators of human rights abuses, or rendering justice.

But peace pacts and elections do not always guarantee lasting peace. "The commission is here to offer to Togolese the peace of mind of 'never again'. We have had violence, but still do not know who is guilty," a Lomé-based traditional justice expert, André Anfanou,

told IRIN. "Beyond raising awareness [about its mission], which is a good thing, the commission should have the courage to propose harsh punishments."

Until the Togolese could close this chapter, there would always be the risk of renewed political violence, he said. "The same causes can produce the same effects ... You have to somehow attack as much as possible these germs of violence."

Voter Ankra Wiliam was sceptical about lasting reconciliation. "It is the same ruling party that was in place during the 2005 violence, and I am sceptical we will reach a true reconciliation when the process is managed by the same people who have hurt us - I strongly doubt it."

Next steps

Commission president Barrigah told IRIN that once the elections were over, the group would start identifying the perpetrators of human rights abuses and "soothe the hearts of Togolese, and help them heal their wounds."

The 2007 legislative election was judged to be mostly fair and free, which unlocked a 13-year partial freeze on funding by the European Union (EU), imposed in protest over Togo's human rights record. The EU, Togo's largest bilateral donor, has re-launched programmes and committed US\$441 million from 2008 to 2013.

Yet elections were only a first step in reconciliation. "A presidential election is not enough to reunite Togolese, but a well-run one would mark a very important step in the process of reconciliation," Barrigah commented.

Unlike the presidential poll in 2005, the 2010 presidential election is being scrutinized by hundreds of international election observers and more than 3,000 local observers.

The office of the UN High Commissioner of Human Rights in Togo is on alert; two hotlines have been set up to report any violence; 600 Togolese Red Cross volunteers were trained in election day scenarios and have been posted at all voting stations, and a number of Togolese simply chose to abstain from the vote.

Ajavon Zeus, president of the Collective of Associations Fighting Against Impunity in Togo, a local NGO, told IRIN: "Reconciliation is not an incantation, it is not a slogan, it is concrete acts that must be carried out."