

Business and Politics in the Muslim World

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By John-Paul

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POLITICS

GHANA

District Assembly amendment bill passed

Parliament on Wednesday passed the District Assembly Amendment Bill to over ride the earlier law that allowed only the Electoral Commission (EC) to mount common platforms for campaigning. This amendment affects the 2010 District Assembly Elections in September 2010.

Under the bill organizations desirous to mounting platforms could do so subject to the written approval of the EC.

The purpose of the bill is to amend Act 473 to facilitate the conduct of District Assembly Elections and to open up participation. Reports from the Committee for Local Government and Rural Development on the bill stated that the use of EC in mounting platform for campaigning was hampering the conduct of elections and affecting participation. Mr. Dominic Azimbe Azumah, Chairman of the Committee, said organizations other than political parties desirous to mount platform could only do so according to the terms agreed by the EC.

He cautioned that political parties, organisations and individuals that contravened the law shall be liable to conviction not exceeding 250 penalty units.

LIBERIA

UP Legislative Caucus Chief Blasts LP, CDC Executives

The Secretary General of the ruling Unity Party (UP) Legislative Caucus, Rep. Worlea Saywah Dunah has reacted harshly to claims by two opposition politicians that President Sirleaf personally contributed to Liberia's huge US\$4.9 billion debt that the World Bank and the IMF waved on June 29.

Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) senator Geraldine Doe-Sheriff and Liberty Party Political leader Cllr. Charles Brumskine recently claimed that President Sirleaf actively contributed to the culmination of the US\$4.9 billion, when she served as Finance Minister in the Tolbert government.

President Sirleaf recently admitted that as finance Minister in 1978, she personally went to Kuwait to sign a loan of US\$6.7 million which has grown to US\$12 million 32 years later.

"Back in 1978, I personally went to Kuwait and signed that loan myself, for US\$6.7 million. We built the Cape Mount road from that money, and that road is still good today. But because we didn't pay back the loan, the debt has grown to US\$12 million. The Kuwaitis want to come back to help us with other roads, once we settle this matter," President Sirleaf said in a nationwide address June 29

But Rep. Dunah said the utterances from the two opposition politicians are "cheap politics" which is unfair to President Johnson-Sirleaf and the State.

He told reporters on Monday at the Capitol that it was true that President Sirleaf served in Tolbert government and that it was during her administration that the Hotel Africa and the terminal at the Robert International Airport were built, thus adding to Liberia's debt.

"It is also true that the Samuel Doe' Military Junta credited huge sum of money , but what is equally true, which they(opposition politicians) are not telling the Liberian people is that Charles Brumskine and Sen. Doe-Sheriff were executives of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) that damaged these facilities", Rep. Dunah said.

Rep. Dunah indicated that their contributions were destructive and asserted that the RIA Terminal and the Hydro at St. Paul were damaged by the NPFL, while the Hotel Africa facility was looted by various warring factions including the NPFL.

He claimed that had it not been for Sen. Doe- Sherif and Brumskine's NPFL, these facilities would have been functional and serving the people of Liberia.

"For them to come and look at Madam Johnson-Sirleaf's role in a negative way is a disservice to Liberians and the truth must go out", he said in a harsh tone.

The Unity Party steward observed that President Sirleaf's contribution was positive while the NPFL's action was negative.

Rep. Dunah wants President Sirleaf be lauded for ensuring that the country's 4.9 billion debts are waived.

He said it was unfortunate that individuals like Brumskine and Doe-Sherif, who served in Para-military institution that damaged facilities erected with huge sum of money, will elect to criticize President Sirleaf for ensuring that the country's debts are waived.

He stressed that it is only loyal oppositions who would give President Sirleaf credit for ensuring that the country's debts are waived because they would inherit the debts where they to success in the future.

U.S. Congressional Delegation Tours NEC Headquarters

A Congressional delegation from the United States Congress and their spouses on Tuesday paid a working visit to the National Elections Commission (NEC) headquarters to familiarize themselves with the inner workings of the Commission.

During the visit, the Acting Chairman of the Commission, Cllr. Elizabeth 3. Nelson briefed the delegation on preparations the Commission is making for the Electoral Boundary Delimitation, Voter Registration and the 2011 elections. Cllr. Nelson also informed the Congressional delegation of challenges the NEC is faced with such as the non-passage of key electoral bills, including the population Threshold Bill currently docked at the National Legislature.

According to a NEC release, Cllr. Nelson alerted the delegation on work done on the harmonization of the local boundary structures, the drafting of key electoral bills and their submission to the National Legislature and the ongoing preparatory work for the pending voter registration.

Cllr. Nelson used the occasion to extend gratitude to the Government and people of America for their continuous support to the building of democracy in Liberia. She singled out the US\$17.5 million five-year electoral support grants that is being managed by USAID and implemented by IFES and the construction of a modern office complex for the NEC, the release said.

The release quotes the Country Director of the International Foundation For Electoral Systems (IFES/ Liberia), Shalva Kipshidze, as saying IFES was working in close collaboration with the NEC to set up the Information Technology Section of the NEC, because, according to him, that section is very critical in electioneering, especially when it comes to tallying and tabulation of results. Mr. Shalva also indicated that IFES was partnering with the NEC in sourcing and procuring election equipment and materials.

The visiting US Congressional delegation, headed by David Price expressed gratitude to the NEC family for keeping the flames of democracy burning and said the experience learned from their visit with the NEC was invaluable and will impact their work when they return to the United States, the NEC release said.

Kinship Binds Govt., U.S.

Historians and scholars often disagree over the exact nature of US-Liberia relationship.

Historians think it is one of colonial rejection and regeneration; scholars think it is a tale of two nations, one prosperous, and the other lingering in perpetual poverty - struggling with the issues of economic prosperity, bearing, and identity.

Pres. Sirleaf Hails US on Natal Day

But President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf thinks the debate lacks focus, purpose, and relevance for postwar Liberia. What matters, according to her, were the strides now being recorded by the relationship, which she described as familial. The Analyst, reports from the President's U.S. 234th Natal Day statement.

President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf has wished the American government and people prosperity on the 234th Anniversary of the founding of a nation, which she said kindled a flame that serves as a beacon of freedom and prosperity for the world.

The Liberian leader expressed the sentiments on behalf of the Liberian government and people, whom she described as the most resilient people on earth, when she delivered a statement, yesterday, during the 234th Independence Day Reception hosted by the Embassy of the United States of America at the Monrovia City Hall in Sinkor.

According to her, the founding of that Global Beacon Of Hope in North America 234 years ago on July 4, 1776 was the single most factor that inspired repatriated Africans and their kinsmen on the West African Atlantic Coast to found the Republic of Liberia exactly 71 years later on July 26, 1847.

Indicating that the founding of the US and Liberia were therefore not isolated, coincidental historical occurrences, the Liberia leader noted that there was a purpose to what happened so many years ago on both sides of the Atlantic.

That purpose, she said, was one of survival of humanity, of transforming the dreams of a people for freedom and liberty into nationhood.

"Our two nations are bound by a kinship that can never be broken. We were born of the same dream, the same ideals. We are not only friends of America; we are family," she said without further comment.

That Liberia and America were not only friends but family, she noted, has been consistently demonstrated by the US role in pulling Liberia out of the smoldering fallouts of a civil war that lasted nearly two decades, razed infrastructures, decimated the population, left it defenseless, left its economy in tatters, and rendered the economy impervious to simple repair formulae.

The Liberian chief executive could not be any more grateful. "On behalf of all Liberians, I say thank you to the American Government and the American people for your support in allowing Liberia to emerge from conflict, to have the opportunity to rebuild and to renew our nation, learning from the American experience of unity and reconciliation, putting national interest above personal, political, and financial gains."

She said as the result of the strong partnership between Liberian and the US, postwar Liberia has now overcome the security problem with the training and revamping of the military and the coast guard unit.

"A 2000-strong professional and ethnically balanced new Armed Forces of Liberia has been trained. Our National Coast Guard, with an initial strength of 40, was reactivated in January, following training provided by the United States," President said, recounting the results of US "family" involvement in Liberia's reconstruction.

Not only did the US government train and reactivate the military and coast guard unit, she said, it also renovated facilities at the Barclay Training Center, which houses the Ministry of National Defense, Kesselly Barracks at Schifflien, and the Sande Ware Camp in Careysburg.

These aside, she said, Liberia would shortly resort to a security model based on a study conducted by the Rand Corporation if the National Legislature passed a draft act currently before it.

She did not say what the act entails, but she said her administration was hopeful that the presence of some 64 mentors from the US Marine Africa Command was the beginning of a bigger AFRICOM presence in Liberia.

By "the beginning of a bigger AFRICOM presence", observers say, President Sirleaf was reiterating her administration's request to the US government to make Liberia the headquarters of the US Africa Command Force, a rapid deployment force the US government has set up to respond to military challenges in Africa.

It not clear whether the administration has made any formal representation to the US for the opportunity, which many say, would help remove the threat of the circular, communal violence that has been haunting the nation over the last few years and promote stabilization.

On the economic front, President Sirleaf said the US has not only been involved with the nation's security but that it has also been providing support for other sectors, including democracy and governance, health, education and economic growth.

She said she would be meeting, today, with the US Congressional delegation currently in the country to hold discussions on some of these sectors.

She did not say what the discussion would entail, but she indicated that the discussions came in the wake of Liberia's achievement, in record time, of the HIPC completion point and before the signing of the Millennium Challenge Corporation's Threshold Agreement.

The Millennium Challenge Corporation's grant, according to her, will go towards improving the policy environment in areas of land rights and access, girls' primary education, and trade policy - all of them crucial for Liberia's peace and socio-economic development.

"We could not have done this without support from the Administration, the Congress, and the people of the United States," the Liberian leader said of Liberia's achievement of the HIPC completion point.

She said the time and energy the US put into Liberia's achievement of the HIPC Completion Point has strengthened her administration's resolve do everything possible to remain afloat economically and as far as it relates to purposeless borrowing.

"We are also mindful and remain strongly committed to a fiscal discipline regime that will ensure that our country does not go into unsustainable debt again," she said.

She described the willingness of US oil company, Chevron, to explore for crude oil in Liberia and the agreement of the Delta Airlines to begin direct flight to Monrovia in September this year as milestone developments in US investment in Liberia, noting that all these were boosters to US-Liberia familial relations.

Also key boosters in the relationship, she said, were the US government's instrumentality in promoting good governance, transparency, accountability and respect for the rule of law.

She credited the preparedness of the National Elections Commission (NEC) to conduct local, mid-term, and the 2011 general and presidential elections to the support of the US government and noted that the 2011 elections were crucial to the survival of the nation.

"The 2011 elections will be a defining event for our country, challenging our ability and our resolve to continue on the path of peace, stability, and development as a means of consolidating democratic and development gains," President Sirleaf said, according to observers, parodying the view of the opposition that the elections would be a referendum against her administration.

Meanwhile, President Sirleaf reiterating her administration's gratefulness for the reassurance of the United States' unswerving commitment to Liberia's future, has proffered a toast to "the good health, long life and happiness of President Obama" and to the "bonds of friendship and bilateral cooperation that exist between the Republic of Liberia and the great United States of America".

The US 234th Natal Day reception was graced by a host of US Embassy officials, member of the visiting US Congressional delegation, and key officials of the government of Liberia.

Congressman Kennedy's Anti-Taylor Statement Backed

When United States Congressman Patrick Kennedy, a Democrat, Monday said the return of former President Charles Taylor to Liberia would not mean well for the peace and stability of Liberia, he was immediately resisted and rebuked by the Chairman Emeritus of Taylor's National Patriotic Party (NPP) Chief Cyril Allen.

Youth Group Approves; Barks At NPP's Cyril Allen

Chief Allen, bedfellow of the former President who is currently standing trial in The Hague on allegation of fuelling the Sierra Leone war that left dozens amputated, furiously described Congressman Kennedy's statement as irresponsible, but a youth advocacy group, Youth for the Promotion of Good Governance, has backed the statement is real, factual and timely.

Commenting on the Congressman's Statement vis-à-vis Chief Allen's immediate response, the organization's Board Chairman Tommy Goll praised the US lawmaker as someone who has enormous love for Liberia.

He told newsman at a hastily called press conference yesterday that Congressman Patrick Kennedy is a lover of Liberia and Liberians, and that it is on that basis he has made the statement of caveat to Liberians to understand that the return of Mr. Taylor to Liberia should he be acquitted has the propensity to cause more revolt for post conflict Liberia and the sub region.

Judging from the ounce of reality the statement bears, he described as very unfortunate and sad that supporters of the former Liberian president including Cyril Allen have forgotten so much so too soon what Charles Taylor and the NPP did in Liberia and the sub-region.

According to him, the former president who commanded so much powers at the time was going through a turmoil in The Hague that is a manifest of the evil he perpetuated when he President of Liberia as well as head of the NPFL.

Instead of barking at the US Congressman for his anti-Taylor return statement, Mr. Goll otherwise said every well-meaning Liberian needed to see his statement in the context of honesty and patriotism, and see him as someone who doesn't want to see the country returning to its darkest past as it was during the authoritarian regime of the NPP that bad governance and other former malpractices soared.

While other Liberians may be forgetting too soon of the activities of the former Liberian president, he rallied all and sundry not to underestimate the potential of the NPP and the former Liberian leader to cause havoc if he returns to the country, emphasizing "Mr. Taylor still possesses huge returns of the country's resources, and most notably his fighters were more than prepared to cause instability in Liberia and the sub region.

The youth advocate further urged Liberians not to see the statement of the Congressman as being undemocratic; rather it must be viewed from the holistic point of saving the nation and its people from returning to the ugly past.

He used the medium thank the United States Government and the UN Security Council and other world bodies for strongly acting to safe the country natural resources from the hands of Charles Taylor by placing sanction on the importation and exportation of the

country vast resources, something according to him were been abused and that proceeds used to fuel war in the sub region.

He used the time to appeal to Congressman Kennedy and other members of the US Congressional Delegation currently visiting the country to prevail on the UN Security Council not to lift the travel ban placed on Mr. Taylor's associates for now while the former president is standing trial.

If the US Security Council is considering lifting the travel restrictions, he asked that they delay a bit until the case can be ended; not necessarily what verdict will be. Monday, the United States Legislator, Patrick Kennedy, who along with other US Legislators is currently visiting Liberia, called on Liberians not to yearn for the return of Mr. Taylor in spite of the huge support for him on the ground.

He made it clear that Liberia, a nation that experienced bitter years of war, stands to be isolated once again and face the wrath of the international community should former president Charles Taylor be allowed to return to the country as a political man.

He said it would be dangerous for the nation and its people if Charles Taylor is set free and return to the country, and described the former Liberian president as a troublemaker. Former President Taylor is currently standing trial in The Hague, Netherlands for allegedly fueling the conflict in neighboring Sierra Leone.

The statement by Congressman Patrick Kennedy has sparked intense debate in every street corner, campus, and hatai center, the corridors of the National Legislature as well as ministries and agencies of government with many giving variant and dissenting views.

NTCL to Engage Legislators Today over Threshold Bill

The National Traditional Council of Liberia (NTCL) has expressed dismay over the delay of the passage of the Threshold Bill by members of the National Legislature, as the date for the 2011 National elections draw nearer.

According to the National Chairman of the NTCL, Chief Zanzan Karwor, the Threshold Bill is crucial and essential to the conduct of the pending 2011 National elections in the country, as such obstacles that will hinder the process needed to be removed.

Chief Karwor speaking over the week-end at a news conference held at the Council's Headquarters in the Sinkor suburb of Monrovia, said without the passage of the Bill, Liberians will be circumventing the democracy process they put into place in 2005 to form an Interim Government, which will not augur well for Liberia.

Chief Karwor urged members of the National Legislature to pass the Threshold Bill for Liberians to continue on the path of the 2005 General and Presidential Elections which brought the Unity Party of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf to state power, after years of civil unrest.

He said though the National Traditional Council of Liberia is not pleased with the delay of the Bill by that August Body, members of the Council from the Fifteen Sub-Political Division of the country, including other civil organizations will on Tuesday converge on the ground of the National Legislature to inquiry from them what is the actual cause of them delaying the passage of the Threshold Bill.

The National Chairman of the NTCL said the Threshold Bill has claimed the attention not only Liberian but the country's international partners whose over the years have applied efforts for it to pass, but yet the Bill is lingering in the corridors of National Legislature.

He noted that Liberians are tired of conflict and the Council will not sit on the fence and see things that will undermine the peace and stability in the country, without joining forces with others to find an amicable resolution to issues that affect the country and its people.

Speaking further, Chief Karwor said as part of the National Traditional Council of Liberia plans to see the passage of the Threshold Bill it has begun holding discussions with some Lawmakers whose counties may be affected directly, when the Bill is passed.

He assured Liberians and the international community that the Bill will be passed within three or four days after the Council meeting with members of the Legislation on Tuesday.

The Threshold Bill has been parading the corridors of the National Legislation on grounds that it will cause Government huge financial burden when it is passed at forty to forty-five thousands, and above that figure which will reduce the Representative seats are said to be the stricken issue of the Bill.

Many high profile individuals including the US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and the United States Embassy near Monrovia have spoke on the passage of the Threshold Bill which is essential to the 2011 National Elections.

NEC Continues Electoral Consultations

The National Elections Commission (NEC) is surely not giving up despite hurdles put in its way by the consistent dragging of key events which are germane to the process, such as the Threshold Bill which the National Legislature is yet to see reasons to pass.

So after holding series of successive and successful meetings with the media, political parties, women organizations and other civil society groupings, the Commission has turned its attention to holding similar meetings with youth and students organizations, also consider as major stakeholders in the electoral and democratic governance of the country.

A NEC issued Thursday quoted its communication office as saying that it is set to today, July 2, 2010, begin a two-day consultative forum with youth and students organizations in Gbarnga, Bong County.

The holding of the two-day forum out of Monrovia where the NEC is headquartered, according to analysts, is a show of its commitment to decentralizing its program.

The Consultative Forum which begins later on this morning, according to the statement, is intended for youths and students to brainstorm on areas of collaboration in the electoral process in helping to reduce the level of voters' apathy in the lead-up to the 2011 elections.

The Commission stressed that youths and students are important stakeholders in the electoral process and their involvement is pivotal in the mobilization and engendering a greater participation of the Liberian electorate.

The two-day forum will further afford the youth and student organizations an opportunity to get acquainted with the procedures of constituency delimitation and voter registration, the Commission's statement said.

At the same time, despite the exuberant spirit being shown in the conduct of these consultative meetings, the NEC has alarmed that it's facing a serious strangulation due to the failure of the National Legislature to pass the threshold bill.

Acting NEC Chairman, Madam Elizabeth Nelson told a gathering of NEC staffers yesterday that everything seemed to be at a standstill because of the delay in passing the threshold bill, being that it is a constitutional requirement that is to set the stage for the commission to execute an integral component of the 2011 electoral process.

Count Me Out of 2011, Ellen Is My Candidate – Sherman

Cllr. Varney Sherman, new Unity Party chair, has categorically declared that he has no intention of contesting the presidency in 2011, thus dispelling speculations he has a hidden agenda.

There have been speculations that Mr. Sherman, a declared foe of President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in the 2005 elections, was a dark horse within the UP.

At the induction ceremony of UP officers after a bruising rancour over the position of Secretary General finally settled with the resignation of the elected officer Henry Boima Fahnbulleh, Mr. Sherman said he has no plans of entering the race.

Varney Sherman's Speech at the induction of the New Unity Party.

"Now, the question has been raised by some Liberians on whether the only role that I, Varney Sherman, will play is to serve as National Chairman of the new Unity Party. Some have even speculated that my chairmanship is merely a "stepping stone" to some other higher political position of much greater weigh at Election 2011. On both counts, I submit that the assumers and the speculators are in error. You, our partisans have overwhelmingly reposed your confidence in me to steer new political dispensation to

succeed. I shall endeavour, with the Almighty God being my helper and my guide, to justify this confidence; and I shall solicit and look forward to your support and assistance as we exercise the responsibilities and perform the duties of National Chairman of the new Unity Party.

"Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is my candidate for President of Liberia at Elections 2011; and if you know anything about me, you know that I will employ and apply all my energies, intellect and personal resources to ensuring that she will be successful, overwhelmingly successful at our own convention later this year and at the polls in October 2011", he said.

He said making the UP a "formidable political machine" requires money and called on partisans to contribute.

He said although the "critics" and the cynics" would have Liberians believe that current progress is the work of international partners, the truth is that President Sirleaf and the UP "have done a magnificent job" in managing the country.

CAMEROON

Government Disburses FCFA 50.266 billion for Decentralisation

The money is mostly devolved to City and Local Councils that constitute the heart beat of the country's development.

The decentralisation process in Cameroon enshrined in the 1996 Constitution has since the beginning of the ongoing 2010 moved from theory to effective implementation. The Sub director of Assistance to Local Governments in the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Decentralisation (MINATD), Jean-Pierre Kuate in a recent seminar to build the capacities of journalists in the decentralisation process disclosed that by the end of 2010, the government must have disbursed FCFA 50, 266,363,000 to ensure the effective implementation of decentralisation.

Nine ministries have devolved some of their competence and the corresponding appropriate resources amounting to FCFA 23,072,363,000 to the 14 City Councils and 360 Councils in Cameroon. The transfer which reliable sources at MINATD say is effective since the beginning of this year, is within the framework of the first generation of transfer of competence to local councils. The finances which correspond to the projects each ministry had to carry out in the council areas, is already in the respective Council's bank accounts for the executives to incorporate in the budgets and use in executing the assigned projects, MINATD sources said. The projects as spelt out in regulatory texts are in the domains of economic, sanitation, health, social, educational, sports and cultural

development. The Ministry of Basic Education for instance, has the lion's share of the money amounting to FCFA 15, 448,404,000 to be used in building, equipping and maintaining nursery and primary schools, acquiring and furnishing school materials as well as for recruiting and paying additional staff.

Cameroon's City, Subdivision and Local Councils have within the framework of government's determination to put in place the decentralisation process benefited FCFA 6,004,000,000 from the General Endowment of Decentralisation. The total amount disbursed as general endowment of decentralisation in 2010 is FCFA 9,694,000,000. Reliable sources in MINATD explain that FCFA 3 billion of the amount will be used as salaries of council officials and another FCFA 3.004 billion as investments. The remaining money, the sources indicate, will be used to finance the functioning of decentralisation follow up structures such as the National Decentralisation Council, Local Services Inter-ministerial Committee and other structures that go to strengthen the decentralisation process. Besides the General Endowment of Decentralisation, the government in 2010 has also transferred taxes and duties to Councils totalling FCFA 17.5 billion.

The ball is now certainly in the court of the City and Local Council executives who need to properly understand the legislation governing the management of the transferred competence and appropriate corresponding resources to bring about the desired development. This explains the series of ongoing nationwide training seminars organised by MINATD to sharpen the skills and ensure the effective contribution of all actors in the decentralisation process.

Guinea poll losers say have challenged some results

The second-placed party in Guinea's presidential vote has said it will challenge some poll results after provisional figures put veteran opposition leader Alpha Conde behind former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo.

As results stand, the two front-runners will go head to head in a July 18 run-off for the presidency of the world's biggest bauxite exporter after the election commission said Diallo won the first round with 39.72 percent, ahead of Conde on 20.67 percent but short of an overall majority.

"We have already lodged some appeals, and we are preparing others for Monday," Moustapha Naite, deputy communications director of Conde's Assembly of Guinean People (RPG), said on Saturday.

The RPG said it would challenging some, but not all, the results after complaining that the lack of results from about 150 polling stations in the province of Haute Guinea and fraud in two districts in the capital had favoured its rivals.

Sidya Toure, who came third with 15.6 percent also denounced the results and said he had challenged ballots from eight towns.

"Sadly this election was marked by very serious irregularities. We would like to use all the legal channels possible before making any further statements," Toure said.

Some analysts had earlier said they expected the publication of results to lead to trouble, but the streets of Conakry were quiet on Saturday, apart from a small crowd of Toure supporters who gathered but were dispersed by police without violence. Candidates have eight days from the publication of results to contest them in the Supreme Court, which then has three days to make its ruling. Even if they are overturned, these results are unlikely substantively to affect the overall result of the first round of voting, which took place in over 8,000 polling stations. The poll has been billed as the best chance for the West African state, the biggest exporter of aluminium ore bauxite, to end over half a century of authoritarian and military rule since it won independence from France in 1958.

ALLIANCE-BUILDING

Election observers from the European Union and the Carter Center said they were broadly satisfied with the vote, while noting there were irregularities caused by logistical problems.

A successful poll would help draw a line under a turbulent year and a half of military rule since the death of President Lansana Conte in 2008 and kick-start further aid and investment.

Diallo's Union of Democratic Forces of Guinea (UFDG) said it had not yet decided whether it would challenge any results.

The two leading candidates, who come from Guinea's two main ethnic groups, are likely to form alliances with unsuccessful contenders from Sunday's 24-man ballot, a process in which the position of Toure will be crucial.

Diallo, a 58-year-old Peul who was a minister and prime minister under Conte, has already appealed to supporters of other parties to back him.

"I would like to invite my countrymen, those in political parties who have not been given the chance to enter the second round, to join with the UFDG ... and win votes from a maximum of Guineans in order to win this election," he said after results were announced late on Friday evening.

Conde, a 72-year-old Malinke, has opposed all Guinea's three recent and generally unpopular leaders -- junta leader Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, Conte, and Sekou Toure.

Guinea bans vote protests before court verdict

Guinea's caretaker government banned street marches called on Monday to protest against alleged fraud in the country's landmark presidential poll, now set for a run-off between the two front-runners.

Former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo won June 27's poll with nearly 40 percent of the vote and will now go forward into a July 18 head-to-head with second-placed Alpha Conde, according to provisional results released last week.

But losing parties in the poll, widely seen as the West African state's best chance in half a century of securing democratic civilian rule, said they have evidence of rigging such as ballot-stuffing and falsified voters' cards.

"I will not accept any public order disturbance by people contesting things for which they have no proof and while the Supreme Court has not pronounced its verdict," caretaker prime minister Jean-Marie told state television late on Sunday.

Candidates have eight days from Monday to lodge formal complaints with the Supreme Court, which will then rule on the validity of the election within three days.

A Reuter's eyewitness said there was no evidence of crowds forming in the capital Conakry. The party of third-placed Sidya Toure, a former prime minister, is among those who called rallies in the central Kaloum district for Monday.

Election observers from the European Union and the Carter Center said they were broadly satisfied with the vote, while noting irregularities caused by logistical problems. Guinea is the world's top exporter of the aluminium ore bauxite and a handful of mining firms are currently jockeying for position to exploit its iron ore resources.

A smooth poll would help draw a line under a turbulent 18 months of military rule since the death of President Lansana Conte in 2008 and open the door to further aid and investment.

Yet analysts point to the culture of decades of mismanagement in the civil administration and warn that efforts to build the economy and a functioning political system could take years and require international help.

The Guinean army, with a reputation for poor discipline that was reinforced last September when security forces massacred pro-democracy marchers in Conakry, has maintained a discreet security presence during and since Sunday's election.

Sekouba Konate, the soldier who took control of the country after former junta leader Moussa Dadis Camara was wounded in an assassination attempt late last year, has issued a batch of promotions to army officers for their part in securing the poll.

Guinea security forces break march with tear gas

Security forces in Guinea fired teargas to disperse a protest against alleged electoral fraud, called in defiance of a government ban on public demonstrations, a Reuters witness said on Monday.

Dozens of marchers, most of them women, had taken to the streets of the capital city Conakry to peacefully protest against what they said was fraud in the June 27 election. Former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo won the poll with nearly 40 percent of the vote and will go forward into the July 18 run-off with second-placed Alpha Conde, according to provisional results released last week.

But losing parties in the poll, widely seen as the West African state's best chance in half a century of securing democratic civilian rule, said they have evidence of rigging such as ballot-stuffing and falsified voters' cards.

"I will not accept any public order disturbance by people contesting things for which they have no proof and while the Supreme Court has not pronounced its verdict," caretaker prime minister Jean-Marie Dore told state television late on Sunday.

Candidates have eight days from Monday to lodge formal complaints with the Supreme Court, which will rule on the validity of the election within three days.

A Reuters witness said a peaceful group of several dozen protesters, mainly women dressed in red, crossed the centre of the capital city, holding placards accusing interim

head of state Sekouba Konate of preventing a free election. Security forces were in close attendance.

The party of third-placed Sidya Toure, a former prime minister, is among those who called rallies in the central Kaloum district for Monday. Many of the demonstrators said they supported Toure's Union of Republican Forces (UFR) party.

Guinea poll seen delayed until at least end-July

A run-off in Guinea's presidential election will not take place until at least the end of July after the Supreme Court has ruled on challenges to the first round of voting, the election commission signalled on Thursday.

The run-off had been due on July 18 between former Prime Minister Cellou Dalein Diallo, who came first with nearly 40 percent in the first round, according to provisional results, and second-placed veteran opposition leader Alpha Conde.

"In principle, the date for the second round will be set (for) 14 days after the declaration of the result (of the first round) by the Supreme Court," said Founba Kourouma, a spokesman for the election commission, CENI.

Election observers were broadly happy with the poll. But the Supreme Court has received complaints of fraud from virtually all 24 candidates who took part, including Conde, and third-placed Sidya Toure, another former prime minister.

From Monday, candidates had eight days to lodge their complaints at the court, which is then meant to rule on a final result after three days, which would be July 16. Two weeks after that would be July 30.

Kourouma said the two-week window between the confirmation of results from the first round and a second round of voting was set out in the country's election law.

Guinea is the world's top exporter of the aluminium ore bauxite and a handful of mining firms are jockeying for position to exploit its iron ore resources.

The first round on June 27 was widely seen as the West African state's best chance in half a century of securing democratic civilian rule after a series of authoritarian rulers since independence from France.

"NOT OBSESSED BY DATE"

A diplomat who follows Guinea said a delay would not overly worry donors, who are funding much of the process, especially if the run-off was likely to be close and delays gave time to iron out technical problems seen in the first round.

"As far as the international community is concerned, we are not obsessed with the exact date, but rather that the election takes place rapidly in the best circumstances," the diplomat said.

Election observers from the European Union and the Carter Center have said they were broadly satisfied with the vote, while noting irregularities caused by logistical problems. But the losing parties say they have evidence of rigging such as ballot-stuffing and falsified voters' cards.

Security forces fired teargas on Monday to disperse people protesting against the results, in defiance of a government ban.

But, contrary to some fears, there have been no wide-scale disturbances in the run-up to or since the poll. Over the weekend, the interim president rewarded the army with a batch of promotions for keeping the peace during voting.

A smooth poll would help to draw a line under a turbulent 18 months of military rule since the death of President Lansana Conte in 2008 and open the door to further aid and investment.

ECONOMY

GHANA

Gold Production Increased 3.1% in the First Quarter

Gold production in Ghana, Africa's largest producer of the metal after South Africa, rose 3.1 percent to 696,172 ounces (19,736 kilograms) during the first quarter from a year earlier, the Chamber of Mines said.

Compared with the previous three months, gold output fell 8.1 percent, the industry association said in a statement handed to reporters today in the capital, Accra.

Earnings from gold sales rose 25 percent to \$782.83 million during the quarter from a year ago, the chamber said. Gold futures have climbed by 8.7 percent so far this year on the Comex in New York.

Ghanaian bauxite production rose 16 percent to 212,879 tons during the quarter, while diamond and manganese production increased 86 percent and 64 percent respectively.

	1Q 2009	4Q 2009	1Q 2010
Gold (ounces)	675,151	757,146	696,172
Diamonds (carats)	55,382	86,849	102,784
Bauxite (tons)	183,039	128,927	212,879
Manganese (tons)	163,187	248,564	268,068

	Revenue (US\$)	1Q 2009	4Q 2009	1Q 2010
Gold	625,614,941	839,118,682	782,825,647	
Diamonds	800,969	2,126,080	3,267,258	
Bauxite	4,330,703	3,023,338	6,165,885	
Manganese	9,407,801	16,071,716	17,632,661	

Ghana's GNPC says rejects Kosmos-Exxon deal

Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC) said on Monday it had rejected a request by privately held Kosmos Energy to sell its stake in the Jubilee oilfield to ExxonMobil (XOM.N: Quote).

"They wrote to formally seek our consent for a Sale and Purchase Agreement they had struck with Exxon, and we have declined," Kwame Ntow Amoah, GNPC's head of Economic Evaluation and Monitoring, told Reuters of a Kosmos letter received June 29. Part of a confidential petroleum agreement entered into by all partners in Jubilee, and obtained by Reuters, provides that any company seeking to enter into any deal with an interested third party must give "prior notice" to GNPC and the government of Ghana. Ghana argues Kosmos did not give such notice.

"We'll encourage them (Kosmos) to sell to GNPC, and we are prepared to offer them a fair market price," Amoah added.

"GNPC has the resources to conclude the deal to purchase the stake, if they still want to sell."

Separately, Deputy Information Minister Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa confirmed that Kosmos had written to President John Atta Mills asking for the government's approval to enable it to conclude the deal with ExxonMobil.

"The government received their letter and from what I know, we will not approve the Exxon deal," he told Reuters.

Kosmos, backed by private equity firms Warburg Pincus WP.UL and Blackstone Group LP (BX.N: Quote), agreed last year to sell its interests in the field to ExxonMobil for \$4 billion, sources close to the deal have said.

"It is a serious breach that can influence the negotiation posture of Exxon Mobil and puts Ghana at a disadvantage," said Amoah.

Kosmos's interests amount to a 30.875 percent interest in The West Cape Three Points Block and an 18 percent stake in Deepwater Tano Block in the Gulf of Guinea.

First oil is due in the last quarter of 2010 with initial output put at 120,000 barrels per day.

Ghana oil output 120,000 bpd by mid-2011

Ghana will definitely pump its first barrel of oil in 2010 but it will take four to six months to reach its planned output of 120,000 barrels per day (bpd), its energy minister said on Thursday.

"We will definitely have first oil by the end of this year," Joe Oteng-Adjei, Ghana's minister for energy told Reuters at the sidelines of an investment conference in London.

"It will be between 4-6 months after we start production that we will hit the peak (120,000 bpd) and this level will stay there for 3 years," he added.

A string of discoveries in the Jubilee offshore oilfield since 2007 mean Ghana has total reserves of at least 800 million barrels and potentially much more.

The West African country's deputy finance minister, Fiifi Kwetey, told the conference that oil production would help boost GDP growth to 20 percent in 2011, up from the projected 6 percent this year.

Ghana intends to process most of its initial oil production to fuel its economy but Tema, its only refinery, is laden with debt and is only running at around 70 percent capacity.

Oteng-Adjei told Reuters that boosting the country's refining capacity would require significant outside investment.

"They can currently process 45,000 bpd but that is only half our demand. We want to expand our refining to 145,000 bpd. We are looking for investment to help with this, how long it will take depends on the investors and their expertise."

INVESTMENT

He added that Ghana's oil and gas industry would need a total of \$9 billion of investment over the next five years.

Gas production should also begin towards the end of this year or in the first half of 2011 but will initially only be used to generate power for use in oil production.

"During the period of ramping (up oil production) they will use the gas coming out of the wells to produce electricity on the FPSO (floating production, storage and offloading vessel). It has a 100 megawatt gas turbine on the facility so they will use it for internal use," Oteng-Adjei said.

He added that Ghana had no plans to export its gas.

Aside from the state-owned Ghana National Petroleum Corporation (GNPC), major players in Jubilee include UK-listed Tullow Oil Plc (TLW.L: Quote), U.S.-producer Anadarko Petroleum (APC.N: Quote) and privately held U.S. energy firm Kosmos. The future of Kosmos' 30.875 percent stake in the West Cape Three Points block and an 18 percent share in the Deepwater Tano block is unclear after Ghana said a reported \$4 billion deal to sell them to ExxonMobil (XOM.N: Quote) was illegal.

Oteng-Adjei told the conference on Thursday that Kosmos would not be able to sell its assets without the consent of the GNPC and the energy minister and it was still interested in acquiring the Kosmos stake.

"As a sovereign state we are free to say who is allowed to enter and work in our country. We said that as a country we want to have access to those assets and we will pay fair value," the minister said.

The deputy finance and energy ministers were speaking at a Ghanaian investment conference in London jointly organised by Developing Markets Associates and Africa Matters.

Ghana and India signs MoU for commercial production of fertiliser

Ghana and India on Tuesday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to capitalise on the nation's oil find to produce fertiliser to increase food production. Under the MoU the two countries will form partnership to tap gas from the commercial exploration of the oil to facilitate the venture.

Mr. Kwesi Ahwoi, Minister of Food and Agriculture and Dr Joe Oteng Adjei, Minister of Energy signed on behalf of Ghana, while Mr. Subbaroyan Krishnan, Secretary to Indian Government's Department of Fertilisers under the Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilisers, initialed on behalf of India. Mr. Ahwoi observed that Ghana is rated as the least user of fertiliser due to insufficient technical know-how in production. He explained that the country applied a mere eight kilogram per hectare for crop production as against 120 kilograms per hectare applied in some countries.

The Minister said increase production and application of fertiliser is critical, if the country is to achieve its 100 million tonnes of cocoa production target and reduce to significant proportion the importation of rice.

Mr. Ahwoi said he was hopeful that the project would assist in increasing rice and cocoa production to an all-time new peak, which could rake in the much needed revenue for socio-economic development. Dr Oteng-Adjei, expressed optimism that the business partnership would succeed, pointing to the expected commercial production of gas, stressing that the country is expecting more than five trillion cubic feet of gas. He said Ghana has the business prospects of using gas to create more jobs in the petro-chemical industry and reduce poverty in the country. Dr Oteng-Adjei said Ghana is expected to add 1,700 dollars to the Gross Domestic Product and create additional three million jobs after four years of commercial production of gas and oil.

Tullow Oil: First Oil on Course

Tullow Oil, has confirmed that first commercial oil flow from the Jubilee Field, where it is the Operator, is still on schedule for the fourth quarter of this year.

According to Tullow Oil, the around 40 months from the initial discovery of the Jubilee field in June 2007, to completion of appraisal, development activities and production of the first oil from this deepwater field, would be “an industry-leading performance.”

Tullow points out that the arrival in Ghanaian waters of the floating, production and storage offloading vessel, FPSO Kwame Nkrumah, was a significant development and operations were underway to connect all the flow lines and risers to the turret (the tower on the vessel).

The 330-metre long and 60-metre wide ‘FPSO Kwame Nkrumah’ has an oil processing capacity of 120,000 barrels per day and storage capacity of 1.6 million barrels and can produce 160 million standard cubic feet of gas per day.

“Well completions commenced in the first quarter of 2010, will continue throughout the year and production will see a gradual increase up to 120,000 bpd between 3-6 months after first oil, depending on the number of wells connected to the FPSO,” Tullow has revealed, giving responses to various questions.

FPSO Kwame Nkrumah is on a charter hire by the Jubilee Partners and is expected to produce first oil from the Jubilee Field in November this year, after successful test runs, under a first phase of operations which would initially be flowing 120,000 barrels of crude oil per day and is expected to double during the second phase, scheduled to commence in 2013.

Oil reserves in the Jubilee Field are estimated to be between 800 million and 1.5 billion

barrels of crude oil of the finest grade.

Tullow Oil, the operator of the Jubilee Field has 34.7046% stake, with Kosmos Energy (23.4913%), Anadarko Petroleum (23.4913%); Sabre Oil and Gas (2.8127%), EO Group (1.7500%) and GNPC (13.7500%) as partners.

Tullow Oil, has described the Jubilee Field, from where Ghana expects first Oil in November-December this year, as a world-class oil field, which compares very well to some of the larger discoveries in the Gulf of Mexico and Brazil. According to Tullow Oil, the Jubilee reservoirs are excellent quality and the crude is light and sweet (high grade). Jubilee has the distinct operational advantage of being located in an area of low current.

Additionally, “unlike the Gulf of Mexico there is no hurricane season to disrupt production and of course the environmental conditions in Alaska are significantly more challenging,” stated Tullow.

Tullow Oil, on June 12 deployed the Sedco-702 rig to commence drilling the Owo-1 exploration well in the Deepwater Tano licence. This well will be appraising the 1.4 billion barrels of oil equivalent upside potential in the Greater Tweneboa structure, which was initially discovered with the Tweneboa-1 & 2 wells. Tullow is the operator of the Deepwater Tano block, holding 49.95% interest in this acreage. The well is expected to take around 60 days to complete and Tullow has further scheduled high-impact appraisal wells on the Tweneboa field later in the year.

Upon completion of the Owo-1 exploration well on the Tweneboa field, the Sedco-702 rig is scheduled to move east to drill the Onyina-1 exploration well in the Deepwater Tano licence.

Located between the Jubilee and Tweneboa fields, this well carries great prospects and Tullow announces further high-impact appraisal wells in the pipeline on the Tweneboa field later in the year.

“The Atwood Hunter rig, which recently drilled the Mahogany-5 well, is due to recommence operations for the partnership at the end of the year with an exploration well planned in the West Cape Three Points license,” disclosed Tullow Oil.

Tullow has acquired acreages across the Equatorial Atlantic region over the last few years, and in West Africa the Group has deepwater exploration licenses in Ghana, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire.

Tullow reveals that it has been trying to replicate the success it has chalked in Ghana by identifying Jubilee-type leads and prospects across the region. In 2009 Tullow followed its Jubilee success with discoveries at the Tweneboa field in Ghana and the Venus field in Sierra Leone.

In the second half of 2010 Tullow will be drilling further 'high-impact' exploration wells in Sierra Leone, Liberia, French Guiana and Guyana to test the Jubilee play outside of Ghana.

In South America it has licenses in French Guiana and Guyana and has recently signed Heads of Agreements for a new license offshore Suriname. Explaining the benefits that its recent Capital Markets event brings to the Ghanaian economy, Tullow said by showcasing its operations in the country to analysts that produce investment research for global investors, as well as getting them to meet influential Ghanaian stakeholders and hearing from in-country management during a day of presentations, they aimed at increasing understanding for this major project and the impact it will have for the people of Ghana.

Whilst the Chief Executive of the Ghana Investment Promotion Centre (GIPC) made a presentation on the investment potential in Ghana, Tullow highlighted its Social Enterprise activities, localisation plans to increase Ghanaian employees from 80% to 90% and education/training initiatives to further develop in-country skills.

The analysts would be reporting back to investors on their experiences and findings, which Tullow hopes will increase investor interest in Ghana's new oil industry and the wider economy.

Tullow Oil, as a publicly listed company has Deloitte, as its independent auditors, who carry out a twice yearly audit on the company's financial results, which are then published in March and August each year. A statutory Annual Report and Accounts is published every year along with the company's Corporate Responsibility Report.

Ghana's Economy being managed prudently - Bank

Ghana's economy is benefiting from 1,113.8 million dollars approved by the World Bank to support her development efforts within the last 12 months Mr. Ishac Diwan, the Bank's Country Director, has said.

Mr. Diwan, who was addressing Journalists at the Bank's Accra Office on Thursday, said the Board of Directors in June this year approved 728.7 million dollars for various programmes and projects because of the prudent management of the economy.

The Bank approved 70 million dollars as additional financing for Ghana Energy and Access Project; 44.7 million dollars as additional financing for eGhana; 88.6 million dollars for Social Opportunities Project and 25 million dollars for Second Agriculture Development Policy Operation.

The others were 10 million dollars for the Third Natural Resources and Environmental Governance; 75 million dollars for Sustainable Rural Water and Sanitation Project; 143 million dollars for Economic Governance and Poverty Reduction Second Tranche

Release and 257.5 million dollars for the Abidjan-Lagos Trade and Transport Facilitation Project.

The Bank had earlier in 2009 approved 15 million dollars as Second Additional Financing for Small Towns Water Supply and Sanitation Project; 225 million dollars for the Transport Sector Project and 10 million dollars for the Second Natural Resources and Environmental Governance.

The monies were approved under the Ghana-Economic Governance and Poverty Reduction Credit (EGPRC).

The EGPRC aims to support Government's efforts in the midst of the current global crisis to bring their fiscal stance to a sound and sustainable track and to protect the development objectives set in Ghana Second Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS II) for the period 2006- 2009.

The GPRS II emphasises the centrality of private-led growth to reduce poverty, along with human development and governance efforts to promote equity. Specifically, EGPRC supports actions to restore budgetary discipline and tackle long-standing public sector and energy issues, while protecting the poor.

Mr. Diwan said since mid-2009 Ghana's economy has shown strong signs of stabilisation while weathering the impact of the global financial crisis and, notwithstanding the large expenditure slippages in 2008, both the fiscal and current account deficits were significantly reduced in the course of 2009, under the impact of positive exogenous shocks and significant fiscal stabilisation efforts and achievements.

"The fiscal deficit (on cash basis) reached 9.7 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2009 (against 14.5 per cent a year earlier) while the balance of payments' current account registered a 5.1 per cent of GDP deficit (against 18.7 per cent a year earlier).

He said since July 2009, the exchange rate has stabilised and even slightly appreciated against the US\$ (the dollar had depreciated by 45 per cent in the previous 12 months).

Mr. Diwan said: 93Consumer prices also broadly stabilised, growing at an annual pace of 6.7 per cent over the period June 2009 to April 2010. As such the year-on-year inflation target set forth by the Bank of Ghana for December 2009 96 14.6 per cent- was almost attained (15.9 per cent) and within the range agreed upon with the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

"By May 2010, six-month Treasury Bills were subscribed at 13.5 per cent, down from 28.4 per cent a year earlier," Mr. Diwan said.

Ghana receives EUR 41.8 million budget support from EU

The European Union (EU) in Ghana has disbursed about EUR 41.8 million to government through Ghana's Multi-Donor Budget Support (MDBS) framework this year. A statement issued in Accra on Friday by the European Union Delegation to Ghana, said the disbursement is under the Millennium Development Goals Contract (MDG-Contract) and Food Facility instrument. The MDG-Contract, EU's new approach under the 10th European Development Fund (EDF) for longer term and a more predictable general budget support, was signed by the EU and Government of Ghana in July 2009.

Under the financing agreement of the MDG-Contract, EU is to provide about EUR 174 million as general budget support to Ghana between 2009-2014, with an overall objective of contributing to sustainable growth and poverty reduction in Ghana so that the country can attain middle-income status including the achievement of the MDGs. It said the 2010 disbursement followed the satisfactory conclusions of the 2009 MDBS annual review, as well as the demonstrated commitment by government towards attaining macro-economic stability, implementing the Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy II (GPRS II), and in improving the country's public financial management.

Budget support is one of the three focal areas of cooperation between the European Union and Ghana. Contrary to a project approach, budget support involves the transfer of financial resources directly to the Government Treasury to complement government's own domestically generated revenues to facilitate the implementation of the national budget and its associated public expenditure plans. In 2009 alone, the EU disbursed about 69 million Euros as budget support to the government.

The MDG-Contract (EUR 174 million) together with other complementary instruments (EUR 15 million Food Facility and EUR 35 million Vulnerability-Flexes disbursed in December 2009) brings the size of EU's current budget support programme in Ghana to about EUR 224 million.

Further to this, EU is committed to providing more support in the strengthening of Ghana's institutions and systems with a key focus on Public Finance Management. This is particularly in view of the increasing need for more robust national institutions and systems to improve the effectiveness of aid.

Direct budget support to Ghana over the period 2008-2014 is part of a broader EU aid portfolio of more than 420 million Euros, or about GH¢800 million. Other important sectors for intervention include transport and interconnectivity for about EUR 80 million, governance, and non-focal areas such as trade. The EU was one of the first signatories to the Memorandum of Understanding on MDBS signed in June 2003 and revised in 2008. Currently, the MDBS has 11 participating donor partners, namely African Development Bank, Germany, France, UK, World Bank, EU, Canada, Denmark, Netherlands, Switzerland and Japan.

LIBERIA

U.S. Agency Commits U.S. \$15 Million for Land; Education and Trade Reforms

The Liberian government signed a grant agreement Tuesday with the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), awarding U.S. \$15 million to the country for what is called a threshold program grant.

The MCC is an independent U.S. government agency that assists countries deemed to be effectively pursuing economic and political reform. It provides grants to countries demonstrating a commitment to good governance, economic freedom and investments in their citizens. The grant for Liberia is for a three-year 'threshold program' focused on land rights and access, girls' primary education and trade policy.

"These areas represent key constraints to economic growth, identified by Liberians themselves as part of their own national development strategy," said Cassandra Butts, MCC senior advisor. She said the U.S. and Liberia partner on a number of fronts, including promoting democracy and good governance, and she thanked President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf for supporting the program, calling the Liberian leader "a beacon of optimism for Liberians and a model of progress for all Africa."

Through the threshold program, the MCC provides limited support to countries that are on course to meeting its stringent eligibility criteria, which are required to qualify for the next level of assistance, a five-year, large-scale compact.

The MCC signing event, which took place at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Monrovia, was graced by a large U.S congressional delegation, most of whom looked delighted to be part of the occasion.

The chairman of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, Donald Payne (Democrat-New Jersey), who spoke on behalf of the delegation, congratulated Johnson Sirleaf and the people of Liberia for meeting the "strict criteria which warrants the threshold agreement," and he highlighted the importance of the specific areas the grant money covers.

The delegation includes members of the House Democracy Partnership, chaired by Rep. David Price (Democrat-NC), which supports the development of democratic governments around the world.

Since the end of Liberia's civil war in 2003, land disputes have been a source of ongoing tension with worrisome potential to disrupt post-conflict peace. Payne welcomed the Liberian government's decision to prioritize land rights and access, warning that "until the land issue is resolved, we cannot have real true development."

Payne also endorsed the importance of girls' education and cited the president's fervent commitment to female education, quipping that Johnson Sirleaf told him girls in Liberia are now saying to the boys: "Don't tell me what to do, our president is a woman."

The U.S. ambassador to Liberia, Linda Thomas Greenfield, admonished the Sirleaf administration to press forward with the MCC program towards the Compact stage, where she said the "true reward comes to those countries that actually cross the threshold."

She cited the case of Ghana, Liberia's West African neighbor, which is receiving U.S. \$547 million from the MCC. "It's that kind of money that could make a real difference. It could build miles of roads, bring electricity to thousands of people, and make a real difference in the lives of so many Liberians," she said.

Out of the 19 MCC compacts signed to date, 12 are with African countries.

The ambassador acknowledged that the path to an MCC Compact is not easy, stressing that the MCC's byword is "accountability." She said the threshold program reflects U.S. confidence in and commitment to all that Liberia has achieved in five years. "Liberia now enjoys a free press, opened political debate, transparent budget, and ever-improving management of natural resources," she said.

For her part, Johnson Sirleaf thanked the congressional delegation for coming to Liberia and the Obama administration for continuing the MCC program, which was created by the United States Congress in January 2004 at the urging of former U.S. President George W. Bush.

She reiterated the importance of the grant's focus areas. Regarding land ownership, Sirleaf said she would like to see disputes resolved in a reasonable, rational and legal manner, adding that land redistribution may be a part of the resolution process.

The president also spoke of the establishment of the Liberian Education Trust (LET) that is providing scholarships for girls in order to breach the gender gap and is funded primarily by private institutions in the United States.

But there is more to be done, she said. "The problem is bigger than that, retaining them in school is the issue." While there may be many girls at the primary level now, she said, by the time they reach upper classes, they begin to drop out, due to poverty or sexual abuse. She said the MCC program will help her government tackle those problems.

Addressing the third MCC area, she said transitioning from a reliance on aid to economic growth built around trade is "our trade policy and Africa's long term ambition," adding that Liberia is committed to using its extensive natural resources to sustain its own development efforts.

EU Gives U.S. \$8.5 Million to Support Govt. Budget

The European Union has provided its first budgetary support to the Government of Liberia in recent years, days after the country reached the HIPC Completion Point.

According to the Ministry of Finance, the US\$8.59 million will go towards supporting the country's 2009/2010 fiscal year.

The money has already been credited to the Government of Liberian general account, the Ministry said in a press release issued in Monrovia.

The EU budget support has brought major relief to the US\$350 fiscal budget for 2009/2010, which suffered a shortfall of more than US\$60 million as a result of the recent global financial crisis.

Deputy Information Minister for Public Affairs Jorolinmek M. Piah told a press conference last Thursday that this is the 'first time' the EU is providing such a direct budgetary support to the Government of Liberia.

"Before the HIPC [Heavily Indebted Poor Countries] completion point, all support to the government came through NGOs," the happy government officials said.

This will now change since we have reached the completion point. And you can see that the EU has already started showing the benefit of our huge debt relief, he said.

Mr. Piah said the EU's magnanimous contribution to the Liberian people will greatly help the government meet several of its obligations.

He said the government experienced a shortfall of about US\$60 million, and "this support will help government meets its program goals".

The EU has been and remains a major partner in the rebuilding efforts of post war Liberia, evidenced by its numerous financial and technical supports, aimed at reducing poverty and creating an enabling environment for better living condition.

The EU support, among others has gone towards providing better health services, improved water and sanitation, better learning environment and electricity.

Since 1990 Liberia has received more than €240 million of EC support.

For the period 2003-2009 financial resources of €50 million were initially made available from the 9th EDF to support the peace process and to finance a post-conflict rehabilitation and capacity-building program, according to information on the EC website.

After the inauguration of the new Government of Liberia in January 2006, an additional €68.4 million was made available. Of this, €12 million was earmarked for the education sector.

The four-year County Development Program (€25 million) aims to develop basic services and income generation to develop larger scale infrastructure and to ensure access to safe water in Monrovia as well as to rehabilitate critical sections of rural roads, to improve institutional support and local governance to foster local development.

The Institutional Support and Capacity Building Program (€7.4 million) focuses on sustained institutional capacity building, governance, increasing revenues, fighting corruption as well as support to the health sector. D K Sengbeh writes

No Borrowing beyond U.S. \$40 Million - HIPC Delegation Gives Highlights

Finance and Planning Ministers Augustine K. Ngafuan and Amara Konneh yesterday returned to the country, relating details of Liberia's HIPC Completion Point success and benefits, but noted that the country will not borrow any loan beyond US\$40M.

Addressing a joint press conference at the Roberts International Airport, the ministers, who led the country's HIPC delegation to the US, said the issue of Liberia's US\$4.9Bn international debt burden was now history.

Liberia became the 29th country of the world to reach the completion point under the HIPC Initiative on June 29, 2010, making the post war West African state eligible for 100% debt relief.

"Today is a great day for Liberia! We have reached the HIPC completion point," President Ellen Johnson said Tuesday (June 29) moments after Liberia reached the HIPC completion point.

In 1996, the World Bank and IMF launched the HIPC Initiative to create a framework in which all creditors, including multilateral creditors, can provide debt relief to the world's poorest and most heavily indebted countries. The program is intended to ensure debt sustainability, and thereby reduce the constraints on economic growth and poverty reduction imposed by the unsustainable debt-service burdens in these countries.

Debt relief, combined with Liberia's strategy to encourage investment, offers the country a chance to rebuild.

On Tuesday (June 29) the IMF and the World Bank's International Development Association (IDA) decided to support US\$4.6Bn of debt relief for Liberia.

The IMF Executive Board met on Liberia on June 23, 2010 and the IDA Executive Board on June 29, 2010, Minister Ngafuan said.

"Our debt of US\$4.6Bn debt is now a history; it has been cleared from the book," Minister Ngafuan told journalist in a joyous mood.

"We are no more a pariah; our membership has been restored, Liberia's flag can now fly high as a partner," the Minister said and noted that this does not however means that Liberia can now go about borrowing indiscriminately.

He said a threshold has been set in which framework Liberia could borrow, and for specific projects: development.

He said though the country can borrow such borrowing will not go above 2% of the country's GDP. "That is we will not borrow above US\$40M annually."

Minister Ngafuan said if ever the country will borrow, such money would go directly to infrastructure development, road in particular, repeating what President Sirleaf said last Thursday during a talk show.

He said the government will continue to practice the fiscal discipline which led the country to reach the HIPC completion point.

A debt management committee, he said has since been established to manage the country's debt program, and nothing would be done to take the country back to where it has come from.

He described the debt cancelation as a big boost for Liberia's development and indicated that a huge burden has been lifted in the way of the country's growth.

The Minister said as a result of the debt relief, Liberia can now take loan to support its budget, something that has not happened since 2006, because of the debt burden.

Word Cup Victory

Planning Minister Konneh described the development as a World Cup Victory.

"The HIPC completion point is victory for Liberia. It is a World Cup victory, even though Liberia is not participating in the world cup", Minister Konneh said.

He said it was victory which symbolizes the sound decision of the Liberian people who elected President Sirleaf to the presidency in 2005.

He said each Liberian would have paid at least US\$1,300 (an equivalent of 40 bags of the country's staple food, rice) to pay the debt that was annulled last Tuesday.

Road: Major Priority

"It is a big victory for our country. It doesn't mean we should go and get more debt; it doesn't mean our economic burden as a country and people are over," Minister Konneh indicated, adding, "What it means is that we now have a little bit of space to borrow and do more projects to build the country and the economy."

He said priority areas for development would be road infrastructure, which would create free movement, expand investments in rural Liberia and boost employment among the jobless people.

Road reconstruction, the Minister indicated would focus on the Redlight-Gnata-Guinea Border, the Fish Town-Harper, the Monrovia-Gbarnga and the Gbarnga-Foyah routes.

He said the Gbarnga-Foyah was very pivotal to the country's economic growth because the area is the country's agricultural sector base, which accounts for about 50% of Liberia GDP.

Plaudits to Partners

The two Ministers then lauded President Sirleaf for her sound leadership, the international community for supporting Liberia development progress and the IMF and the World Bank for the pragmatic roles in removing the country's debt.

They also lauded relevant government authorities including the General Auditing Commission, the National Legislature and the five HIPC audited ministries for their respective roles and commitments in working for Liberia to reach the debt cancellation point.

"Though we had some differences, we all worked together in the interest of the people of Liberia," Minister Ngafuan said. D. K. Sengbeh writes

IMF Celebrates with State

The International Monetary Fund says debt relief will open a new financial front and opportunities for Liberia.

IMF First Deputy Managing Director John Lipsky said concessional financing from donors should be available giving the hope that critical infrastructure projects could be properly financed.

Mr. Lipsky hopes that such investment in infrastructure would lead to more jobs creation, enhance growth and help reduce poverty.

The IMF First Deputy Managing Director said it is only rapid and sustained economic growth that will deliver substantial and wide spread gains for the living standard of Liberians. He said concessional financing will allow Liberian authorities to relax its cash based balanced budget policy to some degree as a result of reaching the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative Completion Point.

The IMF Deputy Managing Director was speaking during a round-table forum held in Washington DC to celebrate Liberia's HIPC Completion Point. The program was organized by an American think-tank the Center for Global Development. Mr. Lipsky pointed out that recovering from a long civil war requires leadership, patience and time.

He commended the Liberian authorities for providing the exemplary leadership that was critical in reaching the completion point and said it is now the challenge of the international community to provide adequate assistance to Liberia to finance the country's development needs.

Mr. Lipsky disclosed the IMF will remain closely engaged with Liberia stating the country will continue to benefit from a large IMF technical assistance program covering tax policy administration, public financial management among others. He also spoke of the fund's continued support to Liberia under its Extended Credit Facility Program.

Also speaking at the forum was Liberia's Finance Minister Augustine Ngafuan who promised the Liberian government will continue to keep the strong fiscal and financial discipline that led the country to reach the HIPC Completion Point. Minister Ngafuan recounted the steps that country had to go through to first reach the Decision Point before the Completion Point.

Minister Ngafuan said though the HIPC triggers were ambitious targets, the Liberian government was able to achieve them because of the government's recognition that they were critical to rebuilding the nation. He said the HIPC triggers were not imposed by the international community but were firmly rooted in Liberia's national development agenda.

Minister Ngafuan commended the international community for the level of responsiveness it demonstrated at the most crucial moments during the HIPC process. The Liberian Finance Minister said in order to maintain fiscal discipline and regain the confidence of the international community, the government operated the cash-based balanced budget which kept government spending within revenue availability. Minister Ngafuan revealed the Liberian government has already established a Debt Management Committee that would properly guide the country's future borrowing decision.

He told the gathering of financial experts, academicians and civil society leaders that Liberia was committed to transparency and would ensure that future borrowing will target key infrastructure projects including roads, ports among others that will have huge positive economic and social impacts on the country and its people.

For his part He said the efforts exerted in reaching the HIPC Completion Point were a national initiative and paid homage to all branches of government especially the legislature for passing crucial bills that helped to make HIPC Completion a reality. Minister Ngafuan also hailed bilateral and multilateral partners including the US, Britain, Germany, France, the African Development Bank, the World Bank, and the IMF among others for their support throughout the journey to Completion Point and noted that Liberia would still need support of the international community as, according to him, "HIPC Completion Point is not a partnership termination point."

For his part Planning Minister Amara Konneh who also spoke at the forum revealed government is trying to draft a new economic plan that will focus on key indicators in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Minister Konneh said Liberia's post HIPC strategy is anchored on a growth and development corridor concept that will accelerate growth by crowding in investment and creating fringes among diverse activities along axis where users can share rails, roads, ports and power. The Planning Minister said Government has identified five main growth corridors around transportation axis. He said focus will be placed on revitalizing agriculture, mining, forestry, electricity and roads.

The forum was held under the theme "Life after Debt" and was also attended by United States Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield, USIAD Country Director Pamela White and other senior US Government Officials.

Personalities who attended the roundtable organized by the Center for Global Development commended Liberia for achieving debt waiver in so short a period and called on other countries in the HIPC process to learn to copy how Liberia successfully achieved the feat by meeting all the triggers in so short a period of time. Indeed, the IMF is celebrating with Liberia's triumph

Lawmaker Sets Record Straight On CRC/BSP Issues.

Sodoken Electoral District Representative Dr. Bhofal Chambers has been putting into proper perspective the issues regarding both the Cavalla Rubber Corporation (CRC) and a foreign multi-million dollar concession firm called BSP to invest into the operations of the Decoris Oil Palm in Maryland County.

According to Dr. Chambers, BSP is financially equipped to operate Decoris Oil Company as compared to CRC.

He intimated that BSP intends to invest US\$133million while CRC wants to give in US\$2.4million.

The lawmaker who furthered that the BSP has also agreed to give to the government US\$6.4million, pointed out that the central government was indebted to CRC US\$2.2m

and there visible signs that both the CRC and the national government could dialogue around this figure.

Again Dr. Chambers has indicated that he does not think it augurs well for Liberians to lose glorious opportunity as BSP has good intentions.

The Sodoken District lawmaker noted that BSP means well for the country as far as opening new windows for jobs creation is concerned.

The entity (BSP) has assured Liberians that it intends to provide over 10,000 jobs including 20,000 bags of rice to the workers on a monthly basis.

Govt. Grants Amnesty to Domestic Debtors

President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has issued Executive Order No.26, granting a 9-month temporary amnesty to domestic debtors throughout the country.

The amnesty is strictly on government collection of penalties and interest relation to arrears of tax payment.

The temporary clemency which took effect yesterday (July 1) was issued under the signature of President Sirleaf on June 29, the day the World Bank and the IMF declared Liberia a country that has reached the HIPC completion point, dumping its US\$4.9bn debt.

The amnesty waves between 30-100% all interest and fines accrued on domestic tax payment as a result of delinquent payments. It requests debtors to pay the actual taxes between July 2010 and March 31, 2011.

Deputy Information Minister for Public Affairs Jerolinmek M. Piah told a news conference yesterday that gesture was reciprocation by the government as a result of the HIPC completion point celebration.

He said it was the government own way of helping the people to pay their taxes to government, not worrying about the accumulated interest.

This will help to generate revenue for government to enable government deliver to the people, the Deputy Minister said.

The Executive Order stated that the Government of Liberia is aware of significant tax and fee payment arrears from individuals and businesses as a result of unpaid Income Taxes, Goods and Service Tax, Real Estate Tax, and Annual Vehicle and Business Registration Fees.

It also noted that the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) has assessed penalties and interest upon some individuals and businesses in relation to these unpaid taxes, and such taxes, penalties and interest remain unpaid.

The Order: "Whereas, in the exercise of Executive Power vested in the President by the Constitution, the President may issue executive orders in the public interest, either to meet emergencies or to correct particular situations which cannot await the lengthy legislative process; now therefore, the Government of Liberia establishes a Temporary Amnesty Scheme on the collection of specified penalties and interest assessed as being due on Income Tax, Goods and Service Tax, Real Estate Tax, as well as Vehicle and Business Registration fee payment arrears. The scheme will be known as the Tax Arrears Payment Incentive Scheme (TAPIS)..."

It said the primary objective of TAPIS is to encourage non compliant taxpayers to pay their tax arrears by providing a time limited amnesty period whereby assessed penalties and interest shall be reduced or extinguished.

TAPIS shall apply to individual resident and non-resident taxpayers, as- well as corporate taxpayers.

A secondary objective, according to the Executive Order is to encourage vehicle owners, small businesses and petty traders that are in arrears with vehicle registration payments and/or business registration payments to become compliant.

Taxes covered under the Amnesty include outstanding assessed penalties and interest due in relation to Income Taxes including Personal Income Tax, Corporate Income Tax, Rental Income Tax and all Withholding covered under PIT/CIT/Real Estate, Goods Tax and Service Tax, Failure to File and Real Estate Taxes calculated by BIR as of June 30, 2010.

Others include assessed penalties and interest on tax assessments subject to official objection or appeal by the taxpayer; un-assessed penalties and interest which shall come from voluntary self declaration or blowing "own whistle".

The amnesty also covers arrears of Motor Vehicle Registration Fees - Outstanding vehicle registration fees for year 2008 and earlier, subject to specific conditions to be published by the Minister. Motor vehicle registration fee payments that have been issued in 2008 or earlier years, and are currently in arrears and outstanding, shall be waived, if and only if the motor vehicle registration fee is-fully paid for years 2009 and 2010.

The Executive order stated that the "TAPIS shall have a maximum duration of 9 months for individual, petty, small and medium taxpayers during which taxpayers may apply for penalty and interest relief."

Large Taxpayers, Custom Fines and Penalties and Penalties and Interest from Audit Assessment will have a maximum of 90 days to benefit from the Amnesty.

"As of the expiration of the TAPIS Amnesty, enforcement and compliance actions for penalties and interest covered will resume in accordance with the provisions enshrined in the Law to ensure that all outstanding taxes due to the people of Liberia are recovered without any form of concession on the amount of accrued interest," the Executive order warned. D. K. Sengbeh writes.

ENERGY

LIBERIA

LEC - Going from Better to Best

A new contract management which signed an agreement with the Liberian government to run the affairs of Liberia's electrification program for five years, was paraded Thursday at the Waterside offices of the Liberia Electricity Corporation (LEC).

With the parading and introduction of the Manitoba Hydro International Ltd, observers are confident that the LEC, which has been providing meager electricity to Monrovia and adjacent parts under what is now known as 'emergency power supply' (EPP) since the inauguration of the Ellen-led government, is on its way to going from "better to best."

Seen as a consummation of the contract management, the red-lettered program which marked the official introduction of the new management contractor saw in attendance members of the LEC Board, and officials of the LEC management team.

Also in attendance were Lands, Mines Minister Eugene Shannon who signed the agreement for and on behalf of the government, Energy Advisor to President Sirleaf, Christopher Neyor, Natty O. Davies from the Ministry of State, Madam D. Sheba Brown as well as many others.

The colorful ceremony was characterized by intriguing speeches of gratitude and pledge of commitment to keep the agreement and confidence intact for the benefit of the country and its people.

In his statement, Joseph Myers, newly named Managing Director of the LEC, described the moment as the dawn of a new day for the LEC and the country.

Thanking the management of Manitoba Hydro International Ltd, he assured them of the commitment and cooperation of the LEC to the agreement, pledging also that they will do nothing to impede the operation of the company.

He said he and his staff were willing to do what he called "dress by dress," meaning that they are prepared to give the company whatever chance and space they would need to ensure the success of its operations.

He also used the time to appreciate the government of Norway, the World Bank, major partners in the electrification process of Liberia. The government of Norway provided most of the power generating machines the LEC currently using to electrify Monrovia and its environs.

Also, the counselor of the Royal Norwegian Embassy based in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, Thorvad Boye congratulated the Liberian government, the LEC management for panning the agreement which will see the electrification process upgraded.

Mr. Nigel Wills, Manitoba Hydro International Ltd/Liberia Managing Director was full of words of appreciation when he made remarks, and used the time to introduce members of the team that will work to transform the system in Liberia.

Lands, Mines Minister Eugene Shannon who joined the program in the middle of proceedings, outlined government's resolve to get the country back on course. He said lots of programs were being considered to get electricity and other development activities to all parts of the country.

However, he used the time to appeal to Liberians to consider the work being done by the LEC and partners as being in their interest, and urged them to stop damaging the facilities of the entity.

It may be recalled that on April 19, 2010, government of Liberia represented by Lands, Mines, Minister Eugene Shannon, the LEC and Manitoba Hydro International Ltd signed the contract management agreement for the LEC.

Under the agreement which began as of yesterday, July 1, 2010 Manitoba Hydro International Ltd is obliged to work with the LEC to improve its operational and financial performances.

According to the agreement, donor funding countries will provide funds for the reconstruction and expansion of the LEC in order to achieve these objectives.

"The amount earmarked for the reconstruction and expansion projects is put at US\$53.5 million to be disbursed over the next five years," an LEC statement, which named the funding partners as Norway, USAID and the World Bank, said.

The contract agreement, according to the LEC is being funded by the Royal government of Norway with an initial amount of US\$10 million grand aid to the Liberian government.

All has not been flowery for the LEC, but the Liberian Government is not letting down window of opportunities at its disposal to change the situation to bring it (LEC) to its lost pre-war status.

So, after long years of employing these selfless efforts, it appears it has paid dividend, as evident by the contract management agreement the government signed with an acclaimed international electrical company to manage the LEC for five years.

HEALTH

GHANA

Public Health and Tobacco Control Bill before Cabinet

The Ministry of Health on Tuesday said the Tobacco Control Bill which formed part of the Public Health Bill was before Cabinet for consideration and onward submission to Parliament for approval. A statement issued by the Ministry in Accra and signed by Mr. Dan Osman Mwin, Head of Public Relations, said it was in reaction to prevailing misinformation being put out by a section of the media. "The misinformation is that the Tobacco Control Bill is still lying on the shelf of the Attorney General's Department and that Ghana has breached the World health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) commitment". The Ministry assured the public that Ghana was in conformity with the treaty it ratified in 2004 as adopted in 2005 and would continue to abide by it. "Indeed the Ministry is fully aware that the Public Health Bill, if approved, would seek to provide a comprehensive legislation on public health and is therefore leaving no stone unturned to get the Bills approved by Parliament to bring about equal opportunity for all in the health delivery system," the statement said. "It should be noted that the Public Health Bill is among several health bills receiving Cabinet consideration and the Ministry would continue to follow the laid down procedures to get the various Bills passed," it added. The statement said "The Ministry's doors are opened at all times for enquiries on the matter".

The Influenza 'A' (H1N1) vaccine is safe- GHS

The Ghana Health Service (GHS) on Wednesday gave the assurance that as far as available evidence indicates, the Influenza 'A' (H1N1) vaccine is safe. However, it was following up and monitoring reports on all adverse reactions following the vaccinations, just as being done after all vaccinations, to inform policy decisions.

This was contained in a statement issued by GHS and signed by Ms Rebecca Ackwonu, Public Relations Officer, on public reactions to the vaccination. The statement said "our attention has been drawn to media reports of adverse reactions following vaccinations

with the Influenza 'A' (H1N1) vaccine." Even though such adverse reactions following vaccination and even after any drug administration are not unusual, the Ministry of Health and Ghana Health Service wish to indicate that we take such reports with all seriousness and are following all such adverse events, including the death of someone in Accra.

"We wish to assure all that the vaccines in question are WHO pre-qualified after satisfying relevant procedures, including safety and efficacy trials. We are aware of associated adverse reactions, following such vaccinations but almost all of them are minor, except an occasional severe event," it added. It said that was why, as part of the vaccination exercise, post-exposure surveillance had been instituted with all people who received the vaccine. Those vaccinated are advised to report all adverse reactions to the nearest health facility for appropriate management and documentation. It said so far, over two million doses of the vaccine had been given to individuals, and almost all reported that the reactions had been mild such as pain and stiffness at the site of injection, fever, headache, running nose and occasional lump in the armpit, almost all of which had resolved after a few days. Influenza 'A' H1N1 is a highly contagious disease caused by a virus, and since the first cases were identified in Mexico in April 2009, many countries have registered cases. Since the first case was identified in August 2009 in Ghana, surveillance, public education and patient care have ensured reasonable reduction in transmission.

To date, about 907 cases have been confirmed in Ghana with one infant death. Globally, as of July 2, 2010, 61 countries had completed vaccine deliveries to protect their population, administering 45,440,550 doses. Ghana started its vaccination against Influenza H1N1 on June 14 and has to date administered two million doses including 1,500 individuals who were protected before travelling to South Africa for the World Cup Tournament. The pandemic influenza vaccine used in Ghana is Pandemrix. The vaccine is safe and complies with WHO recommendation. One dose (0.5ml) administered into the left shoulder muscles provide protection.

The vaccine is not administered to pregnant women in their first trimester and people with known hypersensitivity reaction to any of the vaccine constituents. Ghana received 2.3 million doses of Pandemrix. The priority groups receiving the vaccine are healthcare professionals, pregnant women, some security personnel and certain individuals. Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFI) surveillance is kept as in routine immunization and mass campaign exercises. AEFI Forms are available in all health facilities to record and investigate all reports of adverse events linked to vaccine administration. Where adverse effects are reported, District Health Teams conduct follow up investigations and make the appropriate recommendations for action. There are adequate preparations in all vaccination points in Ghana to manage serious rare and uncommon adverse events. In a mass campaign of this nature it is not unexpected that a few individuals may come up with uncommon or rare adverse events. It is, therefore, advised that anyone who feels unwell or have any complain and feels it could be related to H1N1 vaccination should report to the nearest facility.

Ghana near to completion of Guinea worm eradication - Dr Korkor

Ghana has achieved 96 per cent reduction in Guinea Worm cases and is expected to hit the 100 per cent reduction mark towards completion, Dr Siedu Korkor, Guinea Worm Eradication Programme Manager said on Thursday.

"If Ghana achieves 100 per cent reduction, she would undertake a three-year surveillance and when no case is recorded, World Health Organisation (WHO) would also undertake its own surveillance to certify Ghana as a Guinea Worm free country", said Dr Korkor in an interview with the Ghana News Agency in Accra. He said only six new cases had been recorded so far this year, as compared to 146 cases the same period last year and expressed the hope that it would improve.

The disease which has crippled millions in Africa and Asia is nearly being eradicated in Ghana with efforts from the Carter Centre, which has been working with health workers in Ghana over the last 20 years. People are infected after drinking water contaminated with Guinea worm larvae. The larvae grow in the body for about a year, reaching as much as a meter in length before exiting through blistering sores on the skin. The only method for treatment is extraction of the worm, centimeter by centimeter over several weeks; victims feel excruciating pain and some are left crippled.

Affected communities suffer because victims cannot undertake their farming activities, attend school or care for their families. When an emerging worm comes in contact with water, it releases thousands of eggs, and without education and treatment, the cycle of the disease continues.

When Carter Centre began its campaign in 1986, there were about 3.5 million cases of Guinea Worm in 20 countries. Now there are fewer than 5,000 cases in six countries - Sudan, Ghana, Mali, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Niger - and Guinea Worm is likely to become the first disease to be eliminated without vaccines or medicines. Ghana, the first nation targeted by Carter Centre's Guinea Worm Eradication Programme in 1987, had 180,000 cases at that time and just 501 cases in 2008.

With the efforts of local volunteers and simple methods like water filtration and health education, the number of cases continues to drop with six recorded in the first quarter of 2010. Carter Centre is a non-profit, non-governmental organisation established in 1982 by Former US President Jimmy Carter and his wife, Rosalynn.

Its mission is "to wage peace, fight disease and build hope".

LIBERIA

Fake Doctors Infiltrate State

The Liberian government through the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare and the Medical Dental Council have alarmed about the infiltration of the medical field by people they referred to "fake doctors" that have inundated the society.

Dr. Walter Gwenigale - Liberia's Health Minister

The present of the so-called "fake doctors, according to the MOH and the Dental Board of Liberia is wrong for the country as a negatively imparts the healthcare delivery system. They made the assertions at the weekend at a called news conference intended to decry the ugly practices which they said has the potential to cause Liberia a huge loss.

Besides the presence of quack doctors, Dr. Moses Pewee, Deputy Health Minister and Dr. Robert Kpoto, the National Chairman of the Medical Dental Council who addressed the conference said there are also several mushroom hospitals, clinics among others illegally established in the country without the full knowledge of both the Ministry of Health and the Council.

The Medical Board established by law is an autonomous institution empowered to regulate and to certify medical practices in the country, but regrettably he said such was not the case in the country as some medical practitioners not licensed are roaming the country.

He said such is a complete violation of the country's medical law and disrespect to the authorities of both the Ministry of Health and the Medical Dental.

According to them, uncertified doctors and health practitioners are operating several quack medical centers including clinics among others across the country without getting permits from the medical board and the authority at the ministry of Health as required by the law.

They made specific reference to a group of medical outreach team from the United States of America in the country currently carrying out medical practices in River-cess County without the full knowledge of both the ministry of Health and the Medical Dental Council.

Describing such practice as dangerous, Doctors Kpoto and Pewee said all efforts by the Rivercess County health coordinator to stop the team from operating unless it got a permit proved futile.

He accused the county's Legislative caucus and the administration for shielding the group, thus making it impossible for them to stop the group from further operations.

According to them, the medical mal-practices are not only taking place in Rivercess County, rather it is happening almost in all of the 15 counties of Liberia.

The two medical officials said several cases of complaints of the unwarranted situations are carried out not only by uncertified medical practitioners, also those that are licensed by the Medical Board. The problem if not dealt with as urgently as possible, the two health experts said, the country's health delivery system could be plunged into chaos.

In order to crack down their activities, Doctors Kpoto and Pewee said they will shortly begin appraising medical institutions in the country as well as the credentials of those operating them in a bid to set quality and standards.

"No one is allowed to practice medicines in the Republic of Liberia without being duly registered and certificated by the Medical Board and approved by the Ministry of Health," they said.

According to them, extreme punishments will be meted against those found practicing medicines without the full knowledge of both the Ministry of Health.

"The period of emergency in the country has since ended, and we will not allow any one individual or institution to make bad use of the country's health care delivery system," they added.

HUMAN RIGHTS/ GENDER/ SOCIAL ISSUES

GHANA

Senior Citizens asks Government to reduce pension pay age

The Ghana National Pensioners Association has appealed to the Government to reduce the age of benefiting from pension pay from 70 to 60 years, to cover all pensioners. In addition, diseases and drugs coverage of the National Health Insurance Scheme should be made more relevant to the health care needs of older persons.

These were contained in a release from the Association, signed by Mr. Edward Ameyibor, General Secretary of the Association on Tuesday. The Association noted that between year 1970 and 2000 when the last population census was conducted in Ghana, the number of people aged 60 and above had tripled and continued to grow, and older persons were gradually becoming a demographic force which required a more serious look of issues related to the aged.

In that connection the Pensioners Association demanded of Government to increase the monthly basic pension from GHc 40 this year, to GHc 80 by the next review period in January 2011. "This demand corresponds with the hike in the daily minimum wage to GHc 90 per month," the release said.

The Association asked the draft National Ageing Policy submitted to the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare for cabinet approval to be sent to Parliament by early next year to be incorporated into the laws of Ghana. It also requested the LEAP cash transfer Programme to be expanded to cover older persons in the districts under the Social Protection Strategy of Government, and called for further steps to be taken to remove the discrimination against older persons especially in the branding of women as witches.

¢100 Billion Relief Items Missing

The Coordinator of the National Disaster Management Organization (NADMO) has disclosed that the organization is having difficulties tracing relief items worth about ¢100 billion purchased under three Ministers of Interior who served in the previous administration.

Mr. Kofi Portuphy, the NADMO boss, told Herald that the purchases took place during the tenures of Messrs Hackman Owusu-Agyemang, Kwamena Bartels and Dr. Kwame Addo-Kufuor, who at various times served at the Ministry of Interior as ministers.

He did not accuse the ex-Ministers of stealing or carting the relief items away, but insisted that the purchases were unusually done at the ministry level instead of allowing NADMO headquarters to purchase the items which have gone missing.

Mr. Portuphy made the revelation when he was reached by The Herald with documents indicating that the Member of Parliament for Akyem Abuakwa North, Prof. Samuel Amoako then a parliamentary candidate on NPP ticket milked the Eastern Regional NADMO Store in Koforidua dry during the 2008 Presidential and Parliamentary electioneering campaign.

Reports are that Prof. Amoako fetched the relief items, estimated at several millions of cedis, in the name of East Akyem Municipal NADMO office and shared it with his colleague candidate from Abuakwa South, Atta Akyea to bribe electorates to vote for them as well as the then NPP Presidential candidate, Nana Akufo-Addo.

Available records reveal the relief items as boxes of mosquito coil, 153 bags of rice, 25 bags of maize, 3 bags of beans, 2 bags of sugar, 270 cutlasses, 72 bottles of cooking oil, 16 plastic buckets, 27 pieces of mattress and 16 blankets, 37 pieces of plastic plates, hundreds of mosquito nets and cooking utensils.

Other items include 3 bales of used clothes, 37 plastic cups, 22 plastic bowls, 48 pieces of

lanterns, 18 pockets of roofing sheet, boxes of nails, 31 wellington boots and 22 pieces of poly mats and six cartons of key soap.

Prof. Amoako, now MP for the Abuakwa North Constituency is specifically mentioned to have stormed NADMO Regional Stores for the items on December 16 and 30, 2008 respectively, saying he was taking them on behalf of the East Akyem Municipal Assembly. However, the items did not reach the municipal stores, one of the documents signed by the Regional NADMO Coordinator, Mr. T.K. Hussein said.

Interestingly, at the time the relief items were given out, there had not been any disaster in the East Akyem Municipality to justify the requests made by the two MPs. It is, therefore, not clear why the MPs forwarded a requisition and subsequently collected the items worth hundreds of millions of cedis.

Prof. Amoako in a telephone interview with The Herald last Saturday admitted going for the huge items from the NADMO Eastern Regional Stores and said he gave them out to people in the constituency as relief items for various disasters they had suffered.

He mentioned a certain “Osonoba” as the one who gave him the relief items, and said those meant for Abuakwa South Constituency which he collected on Atta Akyea’s behalf were dutifully handed over to Atta Akyea personally by himself (Prof. Amoako).

He denied reports that there had not been a disaster at the time he went for the relief items from the stores of NADMO.

Interestingly, however, Atta Akyea vehemently denied ever receiving any NADMO items from anybody at the time for distribution.

“I don’t remember receiving any items from anybody in the name of NADMO and sharing it”, he told The Herald when he was also reached on the phone with Prof. Amoako’s claim that he personally gave him the NADMO items meant for disaster victims in the constituency he was going to lead.

Atta Akyea described himself as a lawyer who was a novice in politics at the time and had no clout then to go before anybody for such items to distribute for campaign, and said he was hearing about the issue for the first time. Mr. Portuphy told The Herald that although the Eastern Regional NADMO office was yet to draw his attention to the items which were released to the parliamentary candidate; NADMO records show that the situation is widespread.

According to him, since last year when he took over as NADMO boss, he had being making frantic efforts to know the whereabouts of the ₵100 billion relief items but to no avail. Even vital documents which could have assisted him in locating the items have also been expunged from NADMO’s records, he disclosed.

He further revealed that when he took over, he was told that the items were in a

warehouse in Tema, but they were not there when he visited with some NADMO officials and there were also no documents to prove as to whether the items have been allocated to disaster victims.

In some cases the purchases were done but the items cannot be traced, and in other cases the purchases were not done at all yet monies went out of the system.

Government identifies key ingredient for women participation in governance

Government on Wednesday lashed at the negative perception against women and other socio-economic barriers that continue to work against gender mainstreaming in governance. "These negative trends have eroded confidence and created fear on the part of most women to take up political or decision making position," Mrs. Juliana Azumah-Mensah, Minister of Women and Children's Affairs stated in Accra.

Mrs. Azumah-Mensah was speaking at a day's capacity workshop for aspiring assembly and unit committee women on the theme: "Reinforcing Women's Participation in Ghana's Local Governance System." The workshop was organised by the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE) in collaboration with two non-governmental organisations: ActionAid Ghana and Abantu for Development.

It was aimed at sensitising, educating and impacting the skills of leadership, governance, confidence-building and public-speaking to women, and galvanise the position of women in leadership and governance. The Minister noted that women's reluctance to put themselves forward and the unwillingness of some men to allow their wives to participate in decision making processes continue to hinder affirmative actions. She expressed concern about lack of consistency and sustainability in the implementation of affirmative action policies. Mrs. Azumah-Mensah said in view of these challenges, gender activists should effectively sensitise and encourage women to realise that "women's leadership and participation is imperative for democracy and good governance". The Minister noted that socio-cultural issues, which allow men to assume domineering status in society, further, cow women from advancing into the echelon of politics. She explained that no legislation in the statutory books of the country debar women's participation in politics or other endeavours and described the negative phenomenon as superficial, which had only taken deep-root in the society.

Mrs. Azumah-Mensah who is also the Acting Minister of Tourism debunked the notion that politics is a preserve for men and urged the participants to rise above intimidation and other tendencies geared at lowering their self-esteem and aspire to greater heights. Mrs. Joyce B. Afutu, Greater Accra Regional Director of NCCE noted that the old structure of men-dominated society had been nullified by the established laws of democracy and democratic governance system. She said it had provided women the strong leverage to dismantle the remaining few pickets towards women's freedom and emancipation.", adding "this is the time to provoke thought and promote positive action

towards women's leadership in governance and effective democratic participation in all facets of life".

Mrs. Augustina Akosua Akumanyin, Deputy Chairperson of NCCE urged the participants to avoid frivolous promises that were never attainable, smearing campaign with monetary influence and concentrate on their capabilities and integrity in a humble manner to win voters. In an interview with Ghana News Agency, Mrs. Akumanyin admonished Ghanaians to eschew undemocratic practices in the up-coming district assembly elections.

She however, expressed concern about vote buying, misuse of State resources, incumbency on the part of some candidates and partisan campaigns by some aspirants.

Mrs. Akumanyin emphasised that corruption undermine human rights, democracy and good governance, economic progress and private sector development and stressed the need to combat the canker to ensure rapid development of the country.

She therefore, called on government to strengthen existing laws to include the imposition of stiffer punishment for perpetrators of corruption and a strong code of conduct for civil and public servants, as well as political appointees.

NDC executives tour constituencies

A three-member delegation of the Brong-Ahafo Regional Women's wing of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) has toured constituencies in Nkoranza and appealed to women to take part in the impending district assembly election.

They are Nana Adwoa Takyiwaa, the Regional Women's Organizer and her deputies, Madam Georgina Poupiel and Madam Ntene Adam. Addressing the supporters at Nkwabeng and Donkro-Nkwanta in Nkoranza South district, Nana Takyiwaa urged women to also get involved in unit committee elections.

She expressed concern about the lukewarm attitude of women to participate in public activities, saying this had caused their low representation in the assemblies.

Nana Takyiwaa appealed to the supporters to be wary of politicians who would attempt to create divisions within their rank and advised the youth against the use of insults and provocative language during campaigns. Mr. Emmanuel Kwadwo Agyekum, District Chief Executive, commended the wing for their initiative and gave the assurance that the assembly would perform to win the confidence of the people. At Nkwabeng, Madam Margaret Fordjour, zonal women's organizer, called on the government to provide credit facilities for women in the area.

Civil servants on demonstration

Civil servants on Tuesday staged a peaceful demonstration through the streets of Sunyani to register their protest over the delay in the payment of a 17 per cent increase in salaries. The demonstrators, numbering more than 100, were accompanied by about 20 policemen.

They wore red arm bands and carried placards some of which read, "Review job evaluation and placements", "President, please see to the welfare of your sons and daughters", "Smith-Graham is not fit for the job", "CLOGSAG members deserve a good and fair deal", "Smith-Graham why are you treating us this way".

Other inscriptions were "Don't bring your Cuban law here", "Graham we are in Ghana", "Fair wages commission has not been fair to CLOGSAG" and "Fair wages stop being anti-CLOGSAG".

The demonstrators paraded through the principal streets of Sunyani from the main Sunyani Post Office through VRA offices, Electoral Commission offices the roundabout and converged at the premises of the Regional Coordinating Council.

Addressing them Mr. Kwadwo Nyamekye Marfo, the Brong-Ahafo Regional Minister, advised the workers to exercise restraint whilst the Coordinating Council worked to ensure that their grievances were addressed. He assured them of government's commitment to fulfilling their campaign promises as well as improving the conditions of service of workers. One of the demonstrators who later spoke to the GNA on conditions of anonymity said: "We will advise ourselves if the government fails to address our problems".

CLOGSAG petitions President Mills

Members of Civil and Local Government Staff Association, Ghana (CLOGSAG) on Thursday embarked on a demonstration to draw government's attention to their right to negotiate. The demonstration was undertaken simultaneously throughout the country. CLOGSAG presented a petition to President John Evans Atta Mills on issues relating to negotiations on the 2010 salary adjustment and other conditions of service. However, the demonstrators marching to the Osu Castle were prevented by armed police personnel at the Independence Square and this brought about verbal confrontation. In an interview with Ghana News Agency (GNA), Naa Yakubu, Chief Superintendent of Police said the Castle is a restricted area and would not allow the demonstrators' access to President Mills. He said before members of CLOGSAG embarked on the demonstration, the Police held a meeting with their leaders to inform them to stop at the Independence Square.

However, the leaders did not inform the demonstrators about this development, which therefore degenerated into anger. Six leaders of CLOGSAG were allowed to the Castle to present the petition. Some of the placards read: "Fair Wages Must Respect CLOGSAG," "10 per cent increase is too low," "We want to negotiate our pay," "SSSS is our Baby." Speaking to the GNA, Mr. James Amissah, and Executive Secretary of CLOGSAG said

the association was at a loss why the Fair Wages and Salaries Commission (FWSC) stalled salary negotiations for 2010 with civil servants. He said government's White Paper on the Single Spine Pay Policy (SSPP) did not indicate that there should be a one round of negotiation, adding FWSC had reneged on its duty to develop standards to guide human resource managers concerning the implementation of the policy.

Mr. Amissah explained that CLOGSAG's demonstration was not against the SSPP but rather to draw government's attention to the refusal of FWSC to negotiate with CLOGSAG for 2010 salaries. He said the petition was presented to President Mills because the association suspects their concerns have not been conveyed to him. Mr. Edward Tennyson Foli, Acting President of CLOGSAG said the association had not mandated any institution to negotiate on their behalf adding "CLOGSAG is independent and a responsible association". "We have analysed the base pay (GH¢3.42) and the relativities of the Single Spine Salary Structures announced by FWSC on July 1 and in our opinion, fairness and equity have eluded the FWSC while pursuing the objectives of SSPP," he said. He said issues relating to conditions of services were still being pursued. Mr. Alex Segbefia, Deputy Chief of Staff who received the petition on behalf of President Mills gave the assurance that President Mills would attend to them by the close of the day.

Right to information bill is flawed- Coalition

The Right to Information (RTI) Coalition, on Thursday urged Parliament to scrutinise the Bill presented by the Executive, due to some serious shortfalls, which would undermine full enjoyment of the RTI regime in Ghana.

In a statement copied to Ghana News Agency in Accra, the RTI Coalition emphasised that the rationale for the passage of the Bill was to ensure that the public, citizens and non-citizens had access to information. It explained that public body holds information in trust for the people; therefore the Bill should make sure that the right to information is not curtailed.

The coalition said the Bill should ensure maximum disclosure and should cover public and private institutions whose activities affect human rights or are publicly funded.

"These institutions should aim at providing maximum disclosure of all information that is in their possession. Information should be voluntarily disclosed without waiting for specific requests from the public," it said. The statement called for maximum disclosure of information and acknowledged that the right to information is not absolute, as stated in Article 21(1) (f) of the 1992 Constitution.

"However, the coalition is of the view that exempt information in the Bill should be narrowly formulated, reasonable, and necessary. Exemptions should be based on whether the harm in disclosure outweighs the harm in non-disclosure to the public," the statement said.

The coalition noted that the right to information is a fundamental human right guaranteed under the 1992 Constitution, "its limitation can be justified only if it is reasonably necessary for the protection of the public interest or the rights and freedoms of others". "Every person shall have the right to information subject to such qualifications and laws as are necessary in a democratic society". "What this means is that exemptions can be justified only if they are necessary to protect the public interest or the rights and freedoms of others," the statement explained.

The coalition noted that exemptions must be subjected to a sufficient harm or public interest test.

"The limitation should be narrowly formulated and proportional to the legitimate purpose for which the exemption is required. These means blanket exemptions cannot be justified. Exemptions that are too broadly formulated as to have the effect of derogating from the right to information cannot be justified," it said. The coalition said the Bill lacked an independent enforcement organ as the Attorney-General has been mandated to be responsible for the implementation and enforcement of the Bill. "As part of Cabinet and Government, this represents a clear conflict of interest. An Independent Commission should be established to monitor the implementation of the law once it is passed." The coalition stressed the need for an elaborate penalty regime, which is a necessary tool for enforcement, which would uphold timely access and accountability.

Therefore, the Bill needs to ensure that appropriate penalty measures are included to serve as a deterrent for gross misconduct, gaining personal record through false pretence, making willful false statements, and deliberate denial of information.

The coalition noted that the Bill contained provisions that risked undermining the principle of providing timely access to information. "Time periods for decision-making and accessing information should be reduced. Such reductions include adjusting the 21-day timeframe to decide to provide information access to 10 days, extensions of time to deal with an application from 21 days to 14 days, and reviewing the 30-day time limit within which to notify an applicant of a decision to extend the time to deal with an application," the statement said.

The coalition pointed out that the fee requirements in the Bill are scattered and allows room for arbitrary action by public officials. "There should be no requirement for application fees beyond the actual costs for reproducing the information requested." Application fees and deposits listed throughout the Bill should be reviewed, with all fees-related provisions contained in one section of the Bill," it said.

The Bill lacks recognition of chieftaincy institutions as public organs, adding that bodies that have considerable political authority and functions can impinge on public interests if they are not included under the Bill. The statement said such institutions should be covered under the Bill as public organs, with the term 'government agency' replaced by 'public body'. Private institutions that are substantially funded by public institutions or

undertake public functions ought to be held accountable in providing information to the public and should therefore be included in the Bill.

LIBERIA

Women Push for Greater Political Representation as ECOWAS Parliament Convenes in Monrovia

Liberian lawmakers were on Tuesday, July 6, urged to let ECOWAS parliamentary deliberations, taking place in Liberia, help them support a bill before them seeking greater political representation for women. The National Legislature is considering a bill which would call for 30 percent women participation in political representation.

Addressing the meeting President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf recalled that Liberia is a signatory to the United Nations resolution which seeks greater women representatives in politics, and hoped the meeting in Monrovia would give courage to the Legislature to give serious consideration to the bill.

The Liberian leader made these remarks when she officially opened the Delocalized Parliament Joint Committee on Health, Social Services, Gender, Labor, Employment and Social Welfare.

The meeting, being held under the theme of "Development and Promotion of Quota in the Representation of Women in Politics within ECOWAS, is taking place at the Joint Chambers of the National Legislature in Monrovia.

The President pointed out that the selection of Liberia to host the event is an attestation of the country's increasing role in the affairs of the sub-regional body. Liberia, the President said, is a founding member of ECOWAS, including some of its institutions -- the African Development Bank and the ECOWAS Fund.

"We've paid our dues; we've paid our levies, and now we seek a leading role in leadership," the President told ECOWAS parliamentarians. Liberia is seeking a higher leadership role in the organization.

Speaking earlier, the Protocol Officer of the ECOWAS Parliament, Ezekiel Fwangder, commended the Liberian President for setting the precedence as the first elected woman President on the continent of Africa. He observed that women have the talents, vision,

ideas, innovation and could transform governments within the region, and must not be left behind.

The President Pro-Tempore of the Liberian Senate, Hon. Cletus Wotorson, and House Speaker Alex Tyler, also spoke at the opening ceremony. They underscored the leading role Liberian women have played over the years in shaping the political direction of the country. The lawmakers welcomed the meeting in Liberia and promised to promote ideals which encourage greater women representation and participation in politics.

RUF Leader Testifies: Says Taylor Neither Supported Rebels, nor Receive Diamonds from Them

A former Sierra Leonean rebel leader – released from his jail cell in Rwanda to testify on behalf of Charles Taylor – this week distanced the activities of his rebels from the former Liberian President. Mr. Taylor did not control the rebels' actions, receive diamonds from them, nor provide assistance to them during Sierra Leone's bloody civil conflict, he said.

Issa Hassan Sesay, who led the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebel group for a short period from May 2000 to the end of the conflict in 2002, has himself been convicted of charges including war crimes and crimes against humanity for his role in the Sierra Leonean conflict and is serving a 52-year long jail sentence in a Rwandan jail.

Prosecutors allege that Mr. Sesay had traveled regularly to Liberia to deliver diamonds to Mr. Taylor in exchange for arms and ammunition during the country's brutal conflict, and that he had received direct orders from Mr. Taylor. Mr. Taylor has denied all allegations against him.

On Monday, Mr. Sesay told the court that Mr. Taylor was never in charge of the RUF rebel group and allegations that the RUF leaders took diamonds to the former Liberian president are false.

“Was Charles Taylor ever in charge of the RUF, Mr. Sesay?” Mr. Taylor's lead defense counsel, Courtenay Griffiths, asked the former RUF leader on Monday.

“To my knowledge, no,” Mr. Sesay responded.

Previous prosecution witnesses have told the Special Court for Sierra Leone that Mr. Sesay was not the only rebel leader to bring diamonds to Mr. Taylor — others, including RUF founder and head, Foday Sankoh, and leading commander, Sam Bockarie, also traveled regularly to Liberia with diamonds for the former Liberian president. In his testimony on Monday, Mr. Sesay denied taking diamonds to Mr. Taylor, and said neither Mr. Sankoh nor Mr. Bockarie told him about taking diamonds to Mr. Taylor either.

“Did you ever give diamonds to Charles Taylor, Mr. Sesay?” Mr. Griffiths asked the witness.

“Me, I never one day gave diamonds to Mr. Taylor,” Mr. Sesay responded.

“To your knowledge, did Foday Sankoh ever give diamonds to Mr. Taylor?” Mr. Griffiths asked again.

“Foday Sankoh never told me that,” Mr. Sesay said.

Asked whether Mr. Bockarie ever gave diamonds to Mr. Taylor, Mr. Sesay responded: “Sam Bockarie never told me that.”

Mr. Sesay also spoke extensively about the training of RUF fighters at Camp Naama in Liberia and how the rebel group conducted itself during the civil conflict in Sierra Leone. Speaking about the RUF’s plans to invade Sierra Leone in 1991, the witness told the court that Mr. Taylor never played any role in the formation of the RUF.

He did, however, admit that the RUF committed crimes against Sierra Leonean civilians, including rape, murder, looting, forced labor and recruitment and use of children for combat purposes – crimes for which prosecutors say that Mr. Taylor bears responsibility (and which Mr. Taylor denies).

Contrary to prosecution allegations that it was Mr. Taylor who appointed him as interim leader of the RUF, Mr. Sesay told the court that he was appointed by the West African leaders during a meeting in Liberia. His appointment was not made by Mr. Taylor alone, he told the court.

On Tuesday, Mr. Sesay continued to distance Mr. Taylor from wrongdoing during the conflict in Sierra Leone, pointing instead to the United Nations and other Liberian rebel groups who did more to further the rebel cause through weapons supplies and other assistance than the former Liberian president ever did.

Mr. Sesay on Tuesday testified to an arms trade between the RUF and United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO), a rival rebel faction which fought against Mr. Taylor’s National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) rebel group. In 1997, Mr. Sankoh had allegedly given Mr. Bockarie, USD 7000 to buy ammunition from ULIMO forces as the group had come under fire from a government-aligned militia group, the Kamajors. Mr. Sankoh was arrested and imprisoned not long after handing over the money.

Mr. Taylor’s lead counsel, Mr. Griffiths, then read aloud sections of the “salute report” – a report prepared by Mr. Bockarie, already highlighted during the trial, that described RUF activities while Mr. Sankoh was in jail.

“Upon your departure, I initiated contact with ULIMO as per your instructions. We recommenced a mutually beneficial relationship...I used the \$7000 you gave me to purchase materials from ULIMO,” Mr. Griffiths read to the court, promoting a reaction from Mr. Sesay.

“This is the \$7000 that I was talking to you about when I was explaining to the court that Mr. Sankoh gave to Sam Bockarie to purchase materials from ULIMO,” Mr. Sesay said.

Mr. Sesay explained that the arms trade between RUF and ULIMO continued from late December 1996 up to sometime in 1998 after the removal from power of the military junta which had overthrown the Sierra Leonean government in 1997.

Mr. Sesay said that apart from using the money left by Mr. Sankoh to make payment to ULIMO, RUF also sold produce harvested by civilians from farms. The money made from produce sales was used to pay for more ammunition. At the time, disarmament had not yet been completed in Liberia, he said. ULIMO fighters and their commanders came with arms and ammunition on a regular basis, and other items were also used to make payment to them.

“They’ll ask for money, generators, tape recorders...it came to a time, even if you gave them anything, they’ll take it if you don’t have money. It became very rampant,” he said.

In response to a question as to whether they received any arms and ammunition from Taylor at this time, Mr. Sesay said “No. At this time we did not even have any contact with Charles Taylor.”

“It was not possible [to contact Taylor]. At this time ULIMO was controlling from Foya right up to Bomi. It was not possible to get any contact with Charles Taylor or the NPFL,” he added.

When asked whether they had any radio communication with Mr. Taylor, he said “No. We hadn’t any radio contact with Mr. Taylor.”

Mr. Sesay also told the court that Mr. Sankoh had said he had given \$50,000 to another RUF commander called Kposowa to purchase arms and ammunition from West African peacekeepers based in Liberia.

“When Mr. Sankoh came, he told me that he had given money to Kposowa to buy ammunition...” Mr. Sesay said.

Mr. Sesay also denied allegations that Mr. Sankoh had given instructions to Mr. Bockarie, to take orders from Mr. Taylor when Mr. Sankoh was arrested and imprisoned in 1997.

He also denied that Mr. Taylor ordered a merger between the RUF and disgruntled Sierra Leonean soldiers who had overthrown the country’s elected government and formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Mr. Sesay, who was one of the RUF leaders at that time, on Tuesday told the court that such instructions did not come from Mr. Taylor, but from Mr. Sankoh while he was incarcerated in Nigeria.

As Mr. Sesay continued his testimony on Wednesday, he took pains to distance Mr. Taylor from a shipment of weapons that prosecutors say was bought with the same batch of diamonds as those he allegedly gave to supermodel Naomi Campbell after a star-studded dinner in South Africa in 1997. Mr. Sesay rather tied Libyan leader Muamarr Ghadaffi, Mr. Sankoh, Commander in Chief (CIC) of the Burkinabe Army, General Diendere, and AFRC leader, Johnny Paul Koroma, to the flight full of arms and ammunition which landed in northern Sierra Leone in late 1997.

Prosecutors have alleged that RUF/AFRC fighters gave Mr. Taylor rough diamonds for sale and to use the proceeds to purchase arms and ammunition for them during his 1997 trip to South Africa. Prosecutors say that some of those diamonds were given to supermodel Ms. Campbell for whom a subpoena has been issued to testify in The Hague in three weeks' time, on July 29. On Wednesday, one of the men at the forefront of RUF activities in Sierra Leone said that prosecution allegations are false.

“It was Mr. Sankoh who paid for the arms and ammunition, it was Johnny Paul Koroma who paid for its transportation,” Mr. Sesay told the court on Wednesday.

“Was it not Charles Taylor who paid for them with diamonds he had taken to South Africa?” Mr. Griffiths, asked Mr. Sesay.

“No. It was Mr. Sankoh who paid for them. At that time, Mr. Sankoh and Mr. Taylor did not even have any contact,” Mr. Sesay responded.

Mr. Sesay described a letter sent from Mr. Sankoh – who was in jail in Nigeria at the time — to Mr. Koroma and Mr. Bockarie. The letter, delivered by another RUF commander, Gibril Massaquoi, informed the two men that Mr. Ghadaffi had given Mr. Sankoh USD 2,000,000 with which he had bought weaponry. These arms and ammunition were to be collected from Burkinabe CIC General Diendere and transported to Sierra Leone for use by the AFRC and RUF. Mr. Sankoh asked Mr. Koroma to provide money for a chartered flight to take the materials to Sierra Leone. These materials, Mr. Sesay told the court, were the ones that were dropped off at an airstrip in northern Sierra Leone in late 1997.

Speaking about Mr. Sankoh, Mr. Sesay told the court that “he had travelled to Libya and had got some money from the Libyan leader and that is the money he used to buy the arms and ammunition.”

“So he sent Gibril Massaquoi to meet General Diendere and Ibrahim Bah to make arrangements for the arms and ammunition to be taken to Sierra Leone,” Mr. Sesay told the court.

“Mr. Sankoh told Johnny Paul to provide money to charter a flight for the arms and ammunition to be taken to Sierra Leone,” he continued.

He said that “RUF agent,” Ibrahim Bah, was invited to Sierra Leone and AFRC leader Mr. Koroma gave him USD 90,000 to pay for a chartered flight to transport the arms and

ammunition from Burkina Faso to Sierra Leone. The said money was taken from the Bank of Sierra Leone, Mr. Sesay told the court.

Mr. Griffiths asked Mr. Sesay how he came to know all these details.

“Well, I took part in this. Even Gibril Massaquoi told me about the letters that he brought, Sam Bockarie told me. I was a senior commander and so was involved in what was going on,” Mr. Sesay said.

“I was part of the team that went to receive the shipment,” he added.

Asked by Presiding Judge of the Trial Chamber, Justice Julia Sebutinde, whether it is his testimony that “the funds that bought these arms and ammunition came from the Libyan led Muamarr Ghadafi,” Mr. Sesay said “yes, that was my understanding.”

“Mr. Sankoh bought these arms and ammunition from General Diendere and he was able to keep them because he was the head of the army in Burkina Faso. If it were not for Mr. Sankoh’s arrest, they would have come before then because Mr. Sankoh had given instructions to Peter Vandy to prepare an airstrip in Buedu,” Mr. Sesay explained.

When asked whether it was possible for the flight carrying the arms and ammunition to have passed through Liberia before heading to Sierra Leone, Mr. Sesay said: “No. It would not have been possible because at that time, ECOMOG [West African peacekeepers] were based in Liberia.”

On Thursday, Mr. Sesay told the court that another rebel group supplied the ammunition used to attack the diamond-rich town of Kono for “Operation Fita Fata” – not Mr. Taylor, as prosecutors have alleged. ULIMO rebels sold ammunition to an RUF member, named Kennedy, Mr Sesay said. The ammunition was buried before it was eventually handed over to Mr. Bockarie, who passed on some of it to his colleague, Superman, to launch the attack on Kono, according to Mr. Sesay.

“The ammunition that Bockarie gave to Superman for Fiti Fata – where did they come from?” asked Griffiths.

“It was the ammunition that Kennedy bought from ULIMO that had been buried in the ground,” Mr. Sesay told the court.

“Did the ammunition for the Fiti Fata operation come from Charles Taylor?” Mr. Griffiths asked again.

“No, it did not come from Charles Taylor,” Mr. Sesay responded.

Mr. Sesay explained that Kennedy had established a base in Voinjama—the base of the ULIMO fighters in Liberia– in order to effectively facilitate the arms and ammunition

trade with ULIMO. Mr. Sesay said he personally visited Kennedy in Voinjama where he saw the ammunition that had been dug out from the ground and put in rice bags.

“I met Kennedy in Voinjama – I saw the ammunition in his room, he said he had bought them from ULIMO...they were in bags...Kennedy told me that these are the ammunition that I have bought, but they were a bit messy,” Mr. Sesay said.

He said that the bags of ammunition were brought to RUF headquarters in Buedu, in eastern Sierra Leone, and they were cleaned with gasoline before being handed to Superman for the “Fiti Fata Operation.”

Mr. Griffiths read portions of the RUF “salute report” that was presented by Mr. Bockarie to RUF leader Mr. Sankoh after his release from prison in Nigeria in 1999. In the report, Mr. Bockarie told Mr. Sankoh that “I renewed my contacts with ULIMO and obtained ammunition from them. It was out of these materials that I gave Superman to attack Kono.”

“Did Charles Taylor plan and order the Fiti Fata mission?” Mr. Griffiths asked again.

“No. It was not Mr. Taylor because as far as I know, Bockarie was not in contact with Mr. Taylor,” Mr. Sesay responded.

Also in his testimony on Thursday, Mr. Sesay dismissed allegations that it was Mr. Taylor who sent traditional herbalists to Buedu to perform ceremonies on RUF fighters to protect them from bullets during “Operation Fiti Fata.” In 2008, several prosecution witness — including Samuel Kargbo and Alice Pyne — testified that Mr. Taylor sent these traditional herbalists to perform these ceremonies in Buedu and Kono as part of preparations to attack the diamond-rich town. While Mr. Kargbo testified that he underwent the ceremony in Buedu, Ms. Pyne said that she was present in Buedu when the herbalists arrived, and that she was part of those who underwent the ceremony in Kono. On Thursday, Mr. Sesay told the court that the herbalists were from Lofa County, where ULIMO forces were based, and their services were facilitated by an ex-ULIMO fighter called Titus.

“The medicine men came from Lofa County,” Mr. Sesay said.

“It was one of the ex-ULIMO fighters called Titus, he was a Lorma guy. Titus was a friend of Bockarie and he was a brother to one of our vanguards, Major Moiba. So it was Bockarie who made this request to Major Moiba to get the men who were protecting the ULIMO fighters,” Mr. Sesay said. “They called Titus and Bockarie gave him some money and he came with the people, two men and one woman.”

“They came and treated people in Buedu and then went to Kono and treated people there. They were Lorma people based in Voinjama,” Mr. Sesay said.

On Friday, Mr. Sesay told the court that RUF commander Mr. Bockarie, bought arms and ammunition from Mr. Taylor's top security personnel, including Benjamin Yeatean — a close associate of Mr. Taylor and the former Director of the country's Special Security Services (SSS). But this did not mean Mr. Taylor knew about it, according to Mr. Sesay.

"Did Bockarie say whether or not these purchases were with the knowledge and permission of Charles Taylor?" Mr. Griffiths, asked Mr. Sesay on Friday morning.

"The answer is no. Bockarie did not tell me that Mr. Taylor knew about the purchase of those ammunition," Mr. Sesay responded.

Mr. Taylor has long maintained that he did not have arms and ammunition for his own military and so it was not possible for him to have supplied them to the RUF. Prosecutors maintain that the former Liberia president and his associates, including Mr. Yeaten, provided support to the rebel forces in Sierra Leone through the supply of arms and ammunition in return for diamonds.

Mr. Sesay's testimony continues on Monday.

CAMEROON

Separatists Call for Prisoner Release

A senior leader of a movement seeking self-determination for the English-speaking part of Cameroon has called for the release of more than 50 of his members he says are detained around the country.

Nfor Ngala Nfor, of the Southern Cameroon National Council (SCNC), was speaking in Paris on Thursday where he is winding up a two-month tour of Europe designed to draw attention to the movement.

The group is campaigning for autonomy for the former British Trust Territory of Southern Cameroons. It is branded by the government as an illegal secessionist movement.

"We are not trying to create an identity for the British Trust Territory of Southern Cameroon," Ngala Nfor told RFI. "We are acting in conformity with legality and history and culture to restore what La République has made disappear.

"Our country is under military occupation by La République du Cameroun. Because of this, many of our people are languishing in prison; many have died in prison simply because they are in favour of peaceful restoration of the statehood of the former UN Trust Territory of Southern Cameroon."

He points to the case of university lecturer Justice Muluh Mbu, who has been in prison since last year without trial.

"Our colleagues who are imprisoned are not even allowed access by their relations," says Ngala Nfor.

The Republic of Somaliland in Somalia has effectively broken away, but the African Union and international organisations have refused to recognise it because, they say, it would set a bad precedent. But Ngala Nfor is still optimistic.

"It is achievable because the law states clearly that any people subjected to oppression to an accession have a right and this right is inherent in the people and it is unquestionable and it is their duty to restore their identity in order to enjoy their complete freedom."

The movement has taken the Cameroonian government to court at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights.

"The ruling is not 100 per cent perfect, but it has recognised the southern Cameroonian people as a people distinct from the people of La République, and as such entitled to the enjoyment and exercise of their rights under international law," he said.

"No colonial authority has ever wished to get rid of its colony especially the source of its revenue and cheap labour. As all other empires have collapsed in conformity with the unstopability of the right to self-determination, La République is going to lose Southern Cameroon."

The commission has recommended dialogue and offered to help mediate.

"We have declared our readiness for dialogue," said Ngala Nfor. "It is the occupier of our land that is dilly-dallying, but with time they will bow down to the supremacy of truth and legality."

The government has been invited to respond to this article.