



## Florida High Schools Model United Nations

### FHSMUN GULF COAST 5

#### UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL

#### THE SITUATION IN LIBERIA

**Authors:** Brian D. Sutliff & Bryce Tapp

*“At 17, the first time I saw a dead body, I froze. By 31 it was a natural occurrence for me, and no group of people should live like that.”*

-Leymah Gbowee, Liberian peace activist and  
2011 Nobel Peace Prize recipient

*“Despite great battles, the survival of the human race is the clearest expression of mankind’s yearning for reconstruction, not for destruction, for progress, not for regression and death.”*

-Tawakkol Karman, Yemeni human rights  
activist and 2011 Nobel Peace prize recipient

### Introduction

Achieving lasting peace and sustainable development are two of the leading principles of the United Nations system; at times, though these principles are mutually reinforcing, the UN system is challenged in its ability to execute these principles inclusively and efficiently. In Liberia, the UN System is currently transitioning from peacekeeping to peacebuilding following the United Nations Security Council’s (UNSC) decision to renew the United Nations Mission in Liberia’s (UNMIL) mandate until 30 March 2018 after which, on 30 April 2018, “all uniformed and civilian UNMIL components, other than those required to complete the Mission’s liquidation” will be withdrawn from Liberia.<sup>1</sup> The UNSC also “[welcomed] the overall progress toward restoring peace, security and stability in Liberia” before “commending the successful completion of the transfer of security responsibilities from the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) to Liberia’s security services on 30 June 2016.”<sup>2</sup> There still remain, however, serious obstacles for the Liberian government regarding its ability to protect its citizens, to “sustain well-functioning and accountable government institutions, especially in the security and justice sectors,”<sup>3</sup> and strengthen the electorate’s confidence in light of transparency and reconciliatory matters before and after the October 2017 elections.

---

<sup>1</sup> S/RES/2333 (2016) p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 1

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

According to historical analyses, “it is estimated that Liberia has undergone about 90 wars since 1821/22,”<sup>4</sup> the founding of the country by the American Colonization Society. Liberia ranked 177 out of 185 countries in the 2015 Human Development Index (HDI)<sup>5</sup> and was the 27<sup>th</sup> most vulnerable country for armed violence and societal conflict in the 2016 and 2017 Fragile States Indices<sup>6</sup>, although the latter was a slight improvement from Liberia’s ranking as the 21<sup>st</sup> most vulnerable country in 2015. As Liberia prepares for presidential and legislative elections in October 2017, it is imperative that the international community work effectively with Liberia’s government and civil society actors to improve the sustainability of Liberia’s economic, human, and social development initiatives. Delegates should understand the importance of continuing UNMIL’s mandate following the 30 June 2016 transfer of security responsibilities to the Liberian government from UNMIL forces while increasing the efficiency of UNMIL’s new mandate in post-conflict Liberia. Regardless of how precarious the security situation in Western Africa remains, the Security Council must address the many ways in which the UN system can coordinate with regional, national, and local actors to create a sustainable future for the Liberian people.

## Background

Liberia in July 2017 is, at least on the surface, significantly safer than at almost time in the last 30 years. Consecutive civil wars (1989-1997 and 1997-2003) as well as civil and international wars throughout much of coastal West Africa, including neighboring countries Côte d’Ivoire, Guinea, and Sierra Leone, plunged Liberia into increasingly dangerous and violent situations. The illicit smuggling of “conflict” or “blood diamonds” fueled frequent armed conflict and widespread human rights violations.<sup>7</sup> The United Nations estimates that at least 150,000 people were killed between 1989-2003 and millions of people throughout the region were internally displaced and/or became refugees. Despite successes in establishing peace in Liberia, West Africa continues to be plagued by a rise in terrorism with neighboring Côte d’Ivoire suffering from three terrorist attacks in a five-month period in 2016.<sup>8</sup> The border between these two nations remains porous; only 60 of the 167 formal border crossing points along Liberia’s borders are manned while thousands of open, unmanned border crossing points permeate the borders. To date Liberia has not suffered from a terrorist attack – a success that is dependent upon adequate support from Liberian security forces operating independently from the UN peacekeeping system and the strengthening of Liberia’s borders.<sup>9</sup>

Armed conflict has not been the only serious threat to the health and stability of

---

<sup>4</sup> T. Debey Sayndee & Silke Pietsch, “Liberia between Reconciliation Commission and Roadmap – Steps Forward in a Halted Process?” Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation at the University of Liberia KAICT Policy Brief No. 1 June 2013 p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), “Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development” 2015 p. 210

<sup>6</sup> 2016 & 2017 Fragile States Index. Fund for Peace, “Fragile States Index 2017.” Found at: <http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data/>

<sup>7</sup> Harvey Morris, “Taylor Gone, But Blood Diamonds Are Forever” *International Herald Tribune* April 27, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Letter dated 15 April 2016 from the Panel of Experts on Liberia established pursuant to resolution 1521 (2003) addressed to the President of the Security Council. S/2016/348 p. 2

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 22

Liberia, though. Declines in global commodity prices and instability and economic damage caused by disease contributed to 0% economic growth and further depreciation of the Liberian dollar in 2015.<sup>10</sup> The Ebola epidemic of 2014-2015 killed thousands and created enormous instability and displacement throughout West Africa.<sup>11</sup> Despite the conclusion of the West Africa Ebola Outbreak in 2015, significant challenges still remain for a sustainable recovery such as, but not limited to, the revitalization of the economy and the creation of adequate healthcare resources capable of rapidly responding to future disease outbreaks. In order to prevent further epidemics from spreading, the World Bank Group identified the necessary actions to establish a healthy and sound economy, which will be procured through the adoption of 21<sup>st</sup> century trade policies and increased interactions with Liberia's neighbors.<sup>12</sup> In July 2016, Liberia joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) and concluded several bilateral market access agreements on goods and services, which, combined with further healthcare improvements, is likely to assist Liberia in terms of economic growth but without increases in commodity prices. Increased market access for Liberian exports is certainly a welcome development in the capital of Monrovia and Buchanan, the second largest city in Liberia, but given Liberia's current trade deficit of \$82 million USD<sup>13</sup>, increased market access for foreign companies may adversely affect Liberia's overall balance of trade. One of the important elements of Phase I of the UN's peacebuilding plan (as developed by Secretary General Guterres) is the necessity for "the Government to accelerate critical structural reforms and pro-poor policies aimed at private sector-led and shared economic growth" with significant guidance and support from the United Nations; Phase I is planned to end in 2018.<sup>14</sup> In their deliberations, delegates should underscore and enhance existing regional partnerships (i.e. the Economic Community of West African States [ECOWAS]) to support the further development and reconstruction of the Liberian economy as well as how the UN system can assist Liberian institutions in the renewal of its economic policies.

### **UN System Actions**

The UN System has maintained a significant presence in Liberia for over 23 years now. From September 1993 to September 1997, the United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia (UNOMIL) worked with the Liberian National Transitional Government (LNTG) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to implement existing and prospective peace agreements as well as to investigate allegations of ceasefire and human rights violations. UNMIL was established in September 2003 through Security Council resolution 1509 (S/RES/1509) and, after

---

<sup>10</sup> Ban Ki-moon, "Thirty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia" S/2016/706 August 12, 2016 p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Sheri Fink, "Wish to Do More in Ebola Fight Meets Reality in Liberia" *New York Times* October 27, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> "Summary on the Ebola Recovery Plan: Liberia - Economic Stabilization and Recovery Plan (ESRP)." World Bank. April 16, 2015. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/ebola/brief/summary-on-the-ebola-recovery-plan-liberia-economic-stabilization-and-recovery-plan-esrp>.

<sup>13</sup> Trading Economics Blog, "Liberia Balance of Trade 2003-2017" 2017. Found at: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/liberia/balance-of-trade>

<sup>14</sup> Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/282)

transitional security duties to the Liberian government, was granted an updated mandate in UNSC Resolution 2333 (S/RES/2333). The UN established the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) in 2000 and after the war in Sierra Leone ended in 2002, an indictment for former Liberian President Charles Taylor was issued and he sought refuge in Nigeria. When Taylor attempted to flee Nigeria in March 2006, he was detained and returned to Liberia to eventually stand trial before the SCSL; he was convicted and sentenced to 50 years in prison.

Over the past 13+ years, the peoples of Liberia, in conjunction with UNMIL personnel, the UNSC, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and domestic, regional, and international partners have achieved a fragile but relatively stable peace. UNMIL continues to work closely with the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) in the hopes that sustained cooperation between the missions and the respective host countries will strengthen and sustain current peace and reconstruction initiatives.

Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon concluded in November 2016 that “the Liberia to which UNMIL was deployed in October 2003 was a completely failed State” largely controlled “by three warring factions.”<sup>15</sup> The security situation in Liberia has improved since the conclusion of the Second Liberian Civil War and will face its greatest test of strength during the “presidential and legislative elections in October 2017 [followed by] a peaceful transfer of power in January 2018,” which will be a “monumental milestones that will consolidate Liberia’s transformation to sustained peace and democratic order.”<sup>16</sup> In order to ensure the success and legitimacy of these elections, the Security Council called for the deployment of election observers and updated the UNMIL mandate to ensure that UN personnel are able to provide election security and advisory support (c.f. S/RES/2333 [2016]). As the October 2017 elections approach, Liberian and domestic observers will be watching carefully as “Liberia will witness the first post-war transfer of power from one elected President to another.”<sup>17</sup> In the Liberian political system, “the President appoints nearly all public officials in the country,” meaning that “it [the election] will be seen as a ‘winner-takes-all’ contest and it could be highly contentious, as was the case in 2005 and 2011.”<sup>18</sup> Ensuring that campaigning, the elections, and the post-election periods are free from violence and intimidation are essential to the successful rehabilitation and reconstruction of Liberia, its sustained economic and human growth, and the prevention of further violence. Deploying more police to counties far from Monrovia and improving the capacity of the Liberian Coast

---

<sup>15</sup> Ban Ki-moon, “Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia” S/2016/968 November 15, 2016 p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> António Guterres, Thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia S/2017/510 16 June 2017 p. 14

<sup>17</sup> United Nations Security Council, “Final report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia submitted pursuant to paragraph 3(a) of Security Council resolution 2237 (2015)” S/2016/348 April 15, 2016 p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ban Ki-moon, “Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia” S/2016/968 November 15, 2016 p. 2

Guard are critical priorities for Liberia's government and people.<sup>19</sup> Delegates to the Security Council should continue to work within the updated UNIML mandate to ensure that peaceful, democratic, and transparent elections occur in October 2017. It is also critical that delegates to the Security Council work with regional and international bodies, such as the African Union (AU) and the United Nations Department of Political Affairs (DPA), to ensure a peaceful transition of power from the current administration to the next.

### **Reconstruction and Reconciliation**

Ensuring that Liberia avoids further cycles of violence and epidemiological devastation will require sustained commitments from variety of domestic and international actors. Reforming Liberia's justice sector will be a critical element of preventing future conflicts. Then Secretary- General Ban Ki-moon noted in November 2016 that "there remains almost total impunity for past and present human rights violations and abuses, particularly for sexual and gender-based violence including rape, due to factors such as limited capacity to administer justice, inadequate procedural laws, corruption and a lack of political will to hold perpetrators accountable."<sup>20</sup> Undermining any progress made in the justice sector is the serious lack of public confidence in the judiciary. Current Secretary General Guterres advised the UN system to "[s]upport the implementation of community-based policing, ... a national conference on reconciliation and assist in the roll-out of county reconciliation dialogues, [and] [f]acilitate bilateral cooperation with Sierra Leone, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire on border security and stabilization, in collaboration with regional and international partners"<sup>21</sup>

One of the many obstacles facing the Liberia court system is the massive backlog of cases and "pretrial detainees account [which] for 63 per cent of the national prison population,"<sup>22</sup> with many people waiting months in overcrowded and unsafe prisons until their trials. In his letter addressed to the President of the Security Council, the Secretary General addressed the importance of updating the current legal framework, improving governmental and judicial oversight, and increasing "human and institutional capacity" within the government and its numerous institutions.<sup>23</sup> The inadequacies of the Liberian justice system are particularly disheartening in the wake of the 2005 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRCL); delegates to the Security Council may wish to examine the work and findings of the TRCL including the extension of amnesty to former child soldiers and a more inclusive governmental approach to Liberia's cultural diversity.<sup>24</sup>

Liberia's success also depends on the inclusion of all individuals living within the country. The "participation by citizens and inclusivity [of citizens], ensuring that youth,

---

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Security Council, "Final report of the Panel of Experts on Liberia submitted pursuant to paragraph 3(a) of Security Council resolution 2237 (2015)" S/2016/348 April 15, 2016 p 17-19.

<sup>20</sup> Ban Ki-moon, S/2016/968 November 15, 2016 p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 21 pp. 10 -11

<sup>22</sup> Ban Ki-moon, S/2016/968 November 15, 2016 p. 9

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 21 p. 10

<sup>24</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (TRCL). Found at: <http://trcofliberia.org/>

women and marginalized groups are fully involved”<sup>25</sup> is one of the paramount challenges to any developing nation and yet one of the most important steps in procuring development. Crimes committed against women and children during the Liberian Civil War as well as ongoing crimes against minority groups should be included in any revisions to the current legal framework and should be a core principle of any further UN action in Liberia. The Human Rights and Protection Service (HRPS) of UNMIL reported in 2016 “that the number of reported cases of rape is extremely high and the perpetrators are rarely held accountable.”<sup>26</sup> These cracks in the state’s legal system should not exist if the legitimacy of the judiciary and other legal institutions is to be strengthened. The Secretary General has reported on the importance of passing a domestic violence bill and an affirmative action bill to update the legal protections of women in Liberia while also calling upon the UN system to “[establish] ... an office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Liberia by 1 April 2018.”<sup>27</sup> The Security Council should continue its work of assessing the current budgetary allocation to numerous UN efforts in Liberia (including UNMIL) and how much money is being allocated to promote gender equality and gender and youth empowerment. Delegates to the Security Council must also recognize the vital role that women played in ending the Second Liberian Civil War (i.e. Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace) and should assess how the UN system can support the Liberian government in promoting gender equality and empowerment.

## **Conclusion**

The successful winding down of a UN peacekeeping mission is certainly an important accomplishment but the real test of peacekeeping and UN System actions is how sustained and widespread are the peace, reconciliation, and development initiatives in place. Liberia’s fragile peace needs to be reinforced through effective international cooperation and programs that will ensure a peaceful transfer of power through free, fair, open, and peaceful democratic elections in October 2017, reconciliation of previous combatants and/or marginalized communities, reform of the justice sector, including effective prevention, prosecution, and punishment of human rights violations and gender-based violence, and long-term sustainable economic and human development. As delegates to the Security Council consider the most appropriate ways to wind down UNMIL, they must also work diligently to avoid creating a situation where the withdrawal of UNMIL personnel means imperiling Liberia’s present and future.

---

<sup>25</sup> Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council S/2017/282 p. 9

<sup>26</sup> Addressing the Impunity for Rape in Liberia October 2016, prepared by the Human Rights and Protective Service of UNMIL p. 6

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 31 p. 15

## **Guiding Questions:**

How effectively is the international community, including the UN Security Council, the government of Liberia, civil society representatives, and regional organizations and partners such as the African Union (AU), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Mano River Union, implementing the Strategic Road Map for National Healing, Peacebuilding and Reconciliation (2013-2030)?

Has your country contributed peacekeeping, police, and/or civilian personnel to the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL)?

How might the UN System, including the Security Council, the UN system, and its international partners ensure that Liberia holds free, fair, and open elections in October 2017? What actions can the international system take to promote a peaceful transition of power following the elections?

How might the government of Liberia, Liberian civil society actors, the UN System, and the international community most effectively ensure adequate and proper security for the October 2017 elections?

What steps can be taken to assist Liberia through the process of post-conflict and post-Ebola epidemic reconstruction?

How might the UNHCR, national governments, and civil society partners, including nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), assist in safe, timely, and voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees as well as refugees currently in Liberia?

## **UN Resolutions:**

United Nations Security Council resolution 2333 (S/RES/2333), “The Situation in Liberia” December 23, 2016.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2308 (S/RES/2308), “The Situation in Liberia” September 14, 2016.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2288 (S/RES/2288), “The Situation in Liberia” May 25, 2016.

United Nations Security Council resolution 2239 (S/RES/2239), “The Situation in Liberia” September 17, 2015.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1521 (S/RES/1521), “The Situation in Liberia” December 22, 2003.

United Nations Security Council resolution 1509 (S/RES/1509), “The Situation in Liberia” September 19, 2003.

United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/278 (A/RES/70/278), “Financing of the United Nations Mission in Liberia” June 17, 2016.

## **UN Documents:**

United Nations Security Council, “Letter dated 15 April 2016 from the Panel of Experts on Liberia established pursuant to resolution 1521 (2003) addressed to the President of the Security Council” S/2016/348 April 15, 2016. (This contains the final report from the Panel of Experts.)

António Guterres,, “Thirty-third progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia” S/2017/510 June 16, 2017

António Guterres , “Letter dated 4 April 2017 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council” S/2017/282 4 April 2017

Ban Ki-moon, “Special report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia” S/2016/968 November 15, 2016.

Ban Ki-moon, “Thirty-second progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Mission in Liberia” S/2016/706 August 12, 2016.

Human Rights and Protection Service (HRPS) of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), “Addressing the Impunity for Rape in Liberia” October 2016

