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**INFORMATION NOTE ON THE SITUATION AND THE
POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS IN LIBERIA**

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RECONSTRUCTION EFFORTS IN LIBERIA**

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement (ACPA) of 18 August 2003 brokered by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), with the support of the international community, including the African Union (AU), set the tone of the Liberian peace process. It also paved the way for the deployment of the second largest UN peacekeeping mission in the world, (the United Nations Mission in Liberia – UNMIL, consisting of up to 15,000 military personnel and 1,115 civilian police officers), to restore order and create the political space for rebuilding the structures of governance and the social fabric in Liberia. The completion of the transitional period, which led to the handover from the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) to the new democratically elected Government of Liberia, under the leadership of Madam Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, paved the way for the reconstruction of the country.

2. Council will recall that, at its 35th meeting held on 25 July 2005, it reiterated its conviction that the ACPA remained the most viable framework for the consolidation of the peace process and the reconstruction of Liberia, and encouraged all the parties and stakeholders to scrupulously implement and respect the provisions and timelines of the Agreement. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the period of transition provided for in the ACPA saw some noticeable achievements in such areas as security sector reform; reestablishment of the rule of law; access to all counties, including remote ones; disarmament and demobilization of over 100,000 ex-combatants; rehabilitation and reintegration of over 65,000 ex-combatants; return and reintegration of over 300,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees; gradual restoration of state authority; and successful completion of the all important October/November 2005 general elections leading to the election of a new legislature and the first elected female President in the history of Africa. Driven by strong donor support, improvement in education, water and sanitation services are having significant impact on school enrolment, livelihood opportunities and social conditions for women and children who carried the greater brunt of the social consequences of the Liberian civil war. It is this achievement from the transitional period that now serves as the basis on which the new Government of Liberia will have to build on.

3. The present Note starts by providing an update on the political, security, humanitarian and human rights developments in Liberia since the 35th meeting of the Council, and proceeds to highlight the post-conflict efforts in the country and the challenges ahead, as well as the role of the AU. The Note concludes with recommendations on how best the AU and its Member States could continue to support the post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Liberia.

II. POLITICAL AND OTHER DEVELOPMENTS

4. The legislative and presidential elections of October and November 2005 represented a watershed in the Liberian peace process. They also brought to an end the transitional arrangements put in place by the ACPA. However, the electoral process did not run through without challenges, as the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) of George Weah, who was the loser in the run-off presidential elections, contested the results, which were certified by the National Elections Commission (NEC), on 23 November 2005, and judged free and fair by the international observers, including those from the AU, threatening not to allow the inauguration of the new Government to go ahead. In mid-December 2005, the NEC, having completed its hearings on the complaints of irregularities in the run-off, ruled that, while minor technical errors may have occurred in the electoral process, they were not of a nature as to undermine the credibility of the electoral process. Subsequently, Mr. Weah, who was urged by all stakeholders, including the international community, to accept the outcome of the elections and allow democracy to prevail, indicated that he would not challenge the Commission's ruling in the Supreme Court.

5. The newly elected bicameral legislature convened on 13 January 2006 and elected Mr. Edwin Melvin Snowe, an independent candidate, as the Speaker, while Mr. Mulbah Tokpah of George Weah's CDC emerged as the Deputy Speaker. At the Senate, Mr. Isaac Wehyee Nyenabo was elected as the President Pro-Tempore of that institution.

6. On 16 January 2006, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was sworn into office as President. The event was a remarkable one in the annals of the history of Liberia. In her inaugural speech, she emphasized the overall thrust of her Government's policy, which she said is anchored on the following points:

- a. national reconciliation and opening of a political process;
- b. development and reformation of the economy;
- c. improvement of the lifestyle of the citizens;
- d. fight against corruption;
- e. refusal to allow Liberia to serve as a base for destabilization of the sub-region.

7. Subsequently, the President appointed members of the Cabinet and the Supreme Court and announced nominations to other key positions, including county superintendents, who were later confirmed by the Senate. Furthermore, a number of measures have been taken by the President to address the issue of governance and corruption, including, among others, the transparent management of the country's forestry resources and reforms in the timber sector, nullification of some contracts awarded by the NTGL in view of the non-transparent and non-competitive procedure that was followed, and the extension and revision of the mandate of the Governance Reform Commission so as to include the preparation of an anti-corruption strategy and a code of conduct for public servants.

8. One of the major events that occurred during the period under review was the decision by Nigeria, at the end of March 2006, at the request of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and following consultations with other African leaders, to release the former Liberian President, Charles Taylor, to the custody of the Government of Liberia. Upon arrival in Liberia, Mr. Taylor was apprehended and detained by the UNMIL and transported to Freetown, where he was handed over to the Special Court for Sierra Leone, to be tried for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other serious violations of international humanitarian law in Sierra Leone. It should be stressed that UNMIL was acting in accordance with Security Council resolution 1638(2005) of 11 November 2003, which expanded its mandate to include apprehending and detaining former President Charles Taylor in the event of his return to Liberia and transferring him or facilitating his transfer to Sierra Leone for prosecution before the Special Court for Sierra Leone.

9. The event generated a lot of reactions from the entire spectrum of the Liberian society. From the former President's political party, the National Patriotic Party (NPP), and its sympathizers, deep resentment was exhibited and they immediately challenged the legality of the arrest in the public domain. The NPP made spirited effort to solicit public support and urged the Liberian Parliament to pronounce itself on the issue, an action which was avoided by the Parliament. Other sectors of the society applauded the transfer and felt that Charles Taylor should have been tried immediately, in order to send a strong message that impunity would not be tolerated; some human rights groups went as far as calling for the establishment of a War Crimes Court for Liberia. Others felt that Charles Taylor's trial would be disruptive to the Liberian reconciliation process.

10. On 20 June 2006, and following the adoption by the Security Council, a few days earlier, of resolution 1688 (2006) endorsing the trial of Charles Taylor by the Special Court for Sierra Leone in the International Criminal Court (ICC) premises in the Netherlands, Mr. Taylor was transferred to the Hague. In the meantime, the United Kingdom offered to provide detention facilities at the end of his trial, should he be convicted of the crimes he has been charged with.

11. The period under review also witnessed the launching of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), on 20 February 2006. This was a development in the right direction, as it tallies with the yearnings of all segments of the population as to the necessity for an alternative justice system of this nature. The TRC has already begun collecting information on alleged human rights abuses and atrocities linked to the country's 14-year civil war. However, the Commission urgently requires some US\$ 10 million for its two-year operation. It has only received US\$ 600, 000.00 from the UNDP for its initial three-month preparatory phase, Euro 300, 000.00 from the European Union (EU) for logistics and technical assistance, and US\$ 120,000.00 out of a total pledge of US\$ 260,000 from the Government of Liberia. The Government has also provided the Commission with some logistical support.

12. Since the Council's meeting of 25 July 2005, some developments have taken place regarding the sanctions imposed on Liberia since 2001. In this respect, it should be recalled that, on 22 December 2003, the Security Council adopted resolution 1521 (2003) in which it decided to dissolve the Committee established by resolution 1343 (2001) and to revise the legal basis of the sanctions to reflect the changed

circumstances in Liberia, in particular the departure of Charles Taylor, the formation of the NTGL and progress with the peace process in Sierra Leone. Under resolution 1521 (2003), the Security Council established a new Committee to oversee the implementation of measures as modified and re-imposed by the resolution. These relate to the arms embargo, the restriction on travel of individuals designated by the Committee on the basis of the criteria contained in the resolution and the prohibitions on the import of rough diamonds and round logs and timber products originating in Liberia.

13. Following a request of the NTGL, through a letter dated 2 September 2005, in which it petitioned the Sanctions Committee for an exemption to allow for the importation of side arms for the use of the Liberia National Police (LNP) and also a review of the other sanctions relating to rough diamonds and round logs, the Committee decided to carry out an assessment mission to Liberia. The mission, which was led by the Committee's chairperson, Ellen Margretha Loj, Permanent Representative of Denmark to the UN, visited Liberia from 1 to 6 February 2006. In early June 2006, the President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf wrote to the Security Council requesting that organ to consider lifting the sanctions imposed on Liberia under resolution 1521(2003), given that the Government of Liberia had fully complied with the demands of resolution 1521(2003) and taken additional measures to facilitate the lifting of the sanctions. This request was supported by the ECOWAS Ministerial Conference held in Monrovia on 15 May 2006, which called for the lifting of sanctions for the new Government to have access to resources needed to execute its programme and improve the standards of living of its people.

14. On 13 June 2006, the Security Council adopted resolution 1683(2006) providing for the partial lifting of the arms embargo for limited supplies of weapons and ammunition for the new security forces of Liberia, subject to the prior approval of the Sanctions Committee on a case-by-case basis. On 20 June 2006, the Security Council adopted resolution 1689 (2006) in which it decided not to renew the measure contained in resolution 1521(2003) that obligates Member States to prevent the import into their territories of round log and timber products originating in Liberia. The Council further decided to review the decision after a period of 90 days, and expressed its determination to reinstate the measure contained in resolution 1521(2003), unless it is informed by that time that the forestry legislation proposed by the Forest Reform Monitoring Committee (FRMC) had been passed. The Council also decided that the measure imposed by resolution 1521 (2003) obligating all States to take the necessary measures to prevent the direct and indirect import of all rough diamonds from Liberia to their territory shall be renewed for an additional six (6) months with a review by the Council after four (4) months, to allow the Government of Liberia sufficient time to establish an effective Certificate of Origin regime for trade in Liberian rough diamonds that is transparent and internationally verifiable, with a view to joining the Kimberley process.

15. Another crucial aspect of the sanctions that has been of concern to a section of the Liberian stakeholders is the travel ban on certain individuals. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Edwin Melvin Snowe, who is affected by the travel ban, has been one of the most outspoken critics of the continuation of the ban. This is understandable given his present position and the concomitant need for him to

undertake official travel outside the country. Also included under the ban within the political class is Mrs. Jewel Taylor, a senator and estranged wife of former President Charles Taylor. In her letter to the Security Council referred to above, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf asked for a review of circumstances regarding sanctions in the travel of designated individuals.

16. It is pertinent to note that the Government of Liberia has received enormous international goodwill, which is a reflection of the confidence reposed in the country's leadership and is matched by the Government's willingness to do things differently in handling the post-conflict recovery process and peace-building efforts. This is evidence of the importance attached to the need to secure peace by supporting the development process in Liberia.

III. SECURITY SITUATION AND RELATED ASPECTS

17. The security situation in Liberia remains stable, but is still fragile. The country, particularly in Monrovia, is faced with a number of potential threats, emanating from several disaffected groups, namely, demobilized personnel of the defunct Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), who are still being owed back payment of salaries; former members of the Anti-Terrorist Unit (a militia group formed by former President Charles Taylor without legislative approval), who want to be treated at par with enlisted men for the purpose of regular demobilization and its benefits; former combatants for whom rehabilitation and reintegration opportunities are not yet available; and the deactivated members of the Special Security Service (SSS) and LNP. In addition, there are the disgruntled widows of deceased members of the AFL who carried out a sit-in protest in front of the Executive Mansion on 6 January 2006, to highlight their plight.

18. All these groups have sometimes been staging restive demonstrations, almost bordering on violence. Thanks to UNMIL's security measures, which have assumed increased robust patrolling within Monrovia, law and order have not been compromised.

19. The continued illegal occupation by former combatants of rubber plantation concessions also remains a potential threat to the stability of the country. These former combatants are part of those yet to benefit from the reintegration programme. They are causing considerable disturbances on the plantations as a result of the illicit rubber tapping, property theft, illegal possession of firearms and aggravated assaults against ordinary citizens who live in the vicinity.

20. Furthermore, as refugees and IDPs return to their localities, a number of disputes that can compromise national security are already surfacing. The most visible has been that relating to the land and other property disputes. A recent incident in Nimba County underscored the potential for these types of disputes to escalate into violence that could destabilize the rural areas. On 17 May 2006, residents of Ganta Town in Nimba took to the streets wielding machetes, following rumors that Mandingoes living in Guinea intended to return to forcibly reclaim property that they had left during the war, from members of the Mano and Gio ethnic groups. The potentially violent situation was defused by local leaders with the aid of UNMIL.

21. Also worth noting is the situation which occurred during the first week of August 2006, involving the leadership of the SSS. The Director and his Deputy were involved in sporadic shootings at each other's residences, leaving the Aid de Camp of the Director dead. These incidents are extant pointers to the need for continued efforts by all stakeholders, including the international community, to enhance the security and to remain vigilant.

22. Following the completion of the demobilization of the former AFL in December 2005, the United States Government took the lead in launching the recruitment and restructuring programme for the new Liberian Army on 18 January 2006. The recruitment drive for the new AFL remains on track. As at 1st June 2006, some 4,265 applicants had signed up to join the new army and about 1,776 applicants have passed the initial screening and are still required to undergo a medical test and the vetting process before being admitted for basic training. The assistance being offered by the United States Government also extends to the construction of facilities for the initial training of these recruits.

23. Steady progress continues also to be made regarding the reform and restructuring of the LNP. To date, a total 1,663 personnel have graduated from the National Police Academy. The target of 3,500 fully trained police personnel was expected to be reached by July 2007. In addition, about 392 Special Security Services Officers and 155 Liberian Seaport Police have since graduated from the National Police Academy. At the moment, 377 new police personnel are undergoing field training while another 190 are undergoing basic training. Also, Nigeria undertook the training of 300 newly recruited police officers in specialized policing to deal with mob action, including crowd control, at its Mobile Police Training Centre back in the country. It is also in the process of partially arming and equipping the LNP, in keeping with the relevant UN resolution. The operations of the LNP, however, continue to be seriously hampered by the lack of basic equipment. Not least, police facilities across the country are in urgent need of renovation and rehabilitation.

24. In its resolution 1626(2005) of 19 September 2005, the Security Council requested the UN Secretary-General to provide recommendations on a drawdown plan of UNMIL, including specific benchmarks and a tentative schedule. As a follow-up to this request, the Secretary-General dispatched an assessment team to Liberia, from 3 to 15 February 2006. The team met with all stakeholders, including President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, ECOWAS, UNMIL and the AU.

25. As indicated in the tenth progress report of the Secretary-General on UNMIL dated 14 March 2006, the mission concluded that UNMIL had completed many aspects of its initial mandate and had made substantial progress in implementing several remaining key tasks. At the same time, it stressed that the security situation in Liberia and neighboring countries remains fragile and that measures need to be urgently taken in order to ensure sustainable peace and stability in the country. Accordingly, the mission held the view that a coordinated and sustained effort would be required to consolidate the gains made thus far, and that there was a need for a consolidation phase of up to two years during which UNMIL would focus on an adjusted mandate, including maintaining a stable and secure environment, assisting the Government in

completing the reintegration and rehabilitation programme for ex-combatants, assisting the Government in the consolidation of state authority throughout Liberia, supporting the Government in building the capacity of state institutions, assisting the Government in the implementation of the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP) and other initiatives to ensure national revenues are captured and utilized for the public good.

26. It was the view of the assessment mission and other stakeholders that it was too early for a major drawdown of UNMIL. It was felt that a significant UN presence would continue to be indispensable during the consolidation phase, in order to guarantee peace and stability and provide the Government the necessary time to establish its authority. However, in view of the accomplishment of some of the initial tasks assigned to UNMIL, it was recommended to review the size and reconfiguration of the Mission.

27. In its resolution 1667(2006) of 31 March 2006, the Security Council decided to extend the mandate of UNMIL until 30 September 2006. It requested the Secretary-General to review his recommendations for a drawdown plan for UNMIL and to present further recommendations. As at 1st June 2006, UNMIL troop strength stood at 14,794, while the police component stood at 1,051. On 13 July 2006, the Security Council, through resolution 1694(2006) and following recommendations by the Secretary-General, decided to increase the authorized size of UNMIL's civilian police component by 125 and to decrease the authorized size of UNMIL's military component by 125. The increase of the civilian police component is notably aimed at enhancing UNMIL's capacity to respond to situations of public unrest and to support the Government reform initiatives.

IV. HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

28. During the period under review, the humanitarian situation in the country continued to improve. On 20 April 2006, the resettlement of the IDPs was completed and all the camps for the IDPs were formally closed. From November 2004, when the resettlement programme started, to date, some 312,015 IDPs have been assisted to return to their localities. However, there are still small pockets of IDPs living in and around the closed camps out of choice. In addition, the UNHCR continues to promote the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees from the sub-region, with a large number recently returning from the Republic of Ghana. As at July 2006, about 71,000 refugees had returned to their localities, while an estimated 200,000 had returned spontaneously since the end of hostilities in 2003. Some 170,000 registered refugees still remain in various countries in West Africa.

29. With regard to the promotion of human rights and the rule of law, the on-going efforts include to finalization of the re-establishment of the Independent Human Rights Commission, which will oversee the status of human rights protection in the country. In the meantime, UNMIL continues to build human rights awareness and conducts, from time to time, training for the newly formed police and security guards at various commercial concessions (Plantations).

V. POST-CONFLICT RECOVERY EFFORTS AND THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

30. The new Government has introduced a robust and coherent successor arrangement to the modest achievement under the NTGL, known as the Liberian Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC), which is aimed at meeting the development challenges of the country. The Government has set for itself an ambitious task of tackling the issue of development through a four-pillar agenda, namely, the peace and security pillar; the economic revitalization pillar; the governance and the rule of law pillar; and the infrastructure and basic services pillar. The elaboration of these pillars will dovetail into the preparation of an Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (IPRSP), which will be designed for turning the gains of the transitional framework into a more holistic and comprehensive post-transition poverty reduction, economic growth and sustainable development strategy. The IPRSP is also designed as an MDG-based strategy to serve as the foundation for a comprehensive Poverty Reduction Strategy.

31. The peace and security pillar aims at building a credible, capable and democratically accountable military force within the above context. The architecture will include the provision of training and employment opportunities for ex-combatants to prevent further recruitment for purposes of conflict. The need to reduce small arms proliferation is also highlighted. At the same time, the Government will take measures to strengthen the LNP, including other security services. The need to create a stable society also dictates facilitating the reintegration of refugees and IDPs.

32. The economic revitalization pillar is geared towards the creation of a robust and stable macro-economic environment, while at the same time establishing sound financial expenditure management and budgeting system. The need to ensure legality of concessions and contracts, including the revitalization of agricultural, forestry and mining production, is also integrated into the pillar. Furthermore, the need to create an enabling environment that will catalyze private sector-led growth and development also forms part of the pillar. Over and above all these aspects, is the need to develop a medium – term poverty reduction strategy.

33. The governance and rule of law pillar is principally set to create and implement steps to address corruption and initiate the process of wide ranging reforms that will encompass the civil service, as well as constitutional amendments or reforms, including the strengthening of the governance reform process. The pillar also aims at developing national development planning capability, including leadership of the poverty reduction process, while at the same time addressing the problem of the shortage of capacity.

34. The infrastructure and basic services pillar is to rebuild and rehabilitate road networks, bridges and dams, as well as rehabilitate both the sea and airports in the city of Monrovia. It also aims at regenerating and providing electricity throughout the country, including the improvement and expansion of the telecommunication network. The pillar will also rehabilitate social infrastructure and engage in the fight against the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

35. In order to meet the challenges of the enormous tasks set above, there is need to strengthen accountability and transparency in all the sectors. The prevalent and openly held view that corruption was endemic in the system led the NTGL to agree with its international partners to put in place an arrangement that will assist the country to manage its resources for the benefit of its citizens, and the Government has actively been imbibing the ideals of the programme known as “the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Programme (GEMAP). The GEMAP is a framework whereby Liberian institutions and international partners have put in place systems to ensure that revenue from Liberia’s institutions and natural resources flow into the Government, which should manage it well and transparently, and spend it effectively on rebuilding the country. It is to be noted that the programme has yielded significant results as the Government has already collected about 35% more in revenue over the same budget period than in the previous year.

36. Specifically, the GEMAP process has enabled key Liberian institutions and internationally – recruited experts, working with Liberian leadership, to establish transparent financial management systems, train and build the capacity of Liberian staff, and report openly on their operations, revenue and expenditure. The two sides also have co-signing authority so that no major transactions take place without being examined by both a Liberian manager and an international expert. At the moment, the following institutions are involved:

- Ministry of Finance;
- Central Bank of Liberia;
- Bureau of Budget;
- Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy;
- National Port Authority (NPA);
- Roberts International Airport;
- Liberia Petroleum Refining Corporation (LPRC); and
- Forestry Development Agency (FPA).

37. It is envisaged that more line Ministries will be part of the GEMAP framework in the near future.

38. As the Liberian Government strives to rebuild the country, it is faced with numerous challenges. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the problem of external debt burden. The country’s external debt is huge, amounting to US\$3.7 billion, about half of which is accrued interest. The debt level ratio to the Gross Domestic Product and Exports is among the highest in the world. The encouraging news is that the Government and its major creditors are now initiating a process that should lead to substantial debt reduction and the complete elimination of the majority of these debts over time, through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries’ Initiative (HIPC).

39. The second major challenge is the Government’s limited financial capacity, which is a result years of mismanagement and misappropriation of the meager public resources. However, the new Government has made significant progress in implementing basic financial management systems and procedures that have for years

been lacking in Liberia. The authorities are committed to implementing the measures envisaged under the GEMAP framework. It is in this light that the Government has called on partners to assist with budget support, while recognizing their fiduciary concerns on the likelihood of such resources being used for unintended purposes. The Government has expressed its commitment to introduce a robust and efficient modern public financial management system.

40. The third challenge is the high level of unemployment in both urban and rural areas. Estimates in 2003 indicate that 85% of the labour force was without jobs. Hence the urgency of effective economic recovery to facilitate the creation of employment and the reduction of poverty.

41. The forth-major challenge is the lack of capacity in the system. Addressing the capacity challenge is necessary to advance equity and the rights of citizens, as well as the realization of the country's economic potential. This lack of capacity is a consequence of long-lasting conflict that resulted in the destruction of Liberia's productive base and social infrastructure, and has undermined the entire fabric of the society.

42. The fifth challenge relates to reconciliation within the society. To this end, the NTGL passed the Act establishing the TRC, and the Government has since inaugurated the Commission, which is now operational. It is hoped that, in the face of the enormity of the violations of rights and untold atrocities that took place, the Commission will live up to public expectations by carrying out its duties faithfully. Though there is a growing clamor for the establishment of a Special Court on War Crimes, this can only come about at the behest of the TRC, upon conclusion of its work. To further ensure that human rights are safeguarded in the new dispensation, it is also envisaged, as indicated above, to establish an Independent Human Rights Commission, to monitor the promotion and protection of human rights.

43. Furthermore, there is the challenge of rebuilding and reforming the justice system. This is necessary in order to reestablish the rule of law in the society in all its ramifications.

44. The last but not least challenge is the sub-regional security environment. The security risks include the flow of refugees, small arms and light weapons, as well as the movement of numerous ex-combatants, who may want to trade their "expertise" across the borders, with the attendant destabilizing effects resulting from this phenomena.

VI. ROLE OF THE AFRICAN UNION

45. During the period under consideration, the AU has continued its engagement with Liberia at various levels in order to support the efforts aimed at promoting lasting peace and stability in the country. In this respect, it is worth noting the continued involvement of the Special Envoy of the Chairperson of the Commission in Liberia, Ramtane Lamamra. The Special Envoy undertakes regular visits to Liberia to have a first hand view of the situation, and the last of such visits was in the second week of July 2006. During that visit, the Special Envoy met with President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the

Minister of Defense, as well as the Speaker of the House of Representative and the Pro-Tempore President of the Senate. He shared the optimism of the AU for a sustained rebuilding of Liberia and reiterated AU's commitment to continue supporting Liberia's peace building efforts. He also led the AU delegation to the preparatory partnership meeting in Monrovia during that visit. The meeting shall be followed, in October, by a partnership meeting in Washington D.C.

46. The Commission also participated actively in the election monitoring and observation of the general elections, which ushered in the present dispensation. Indeed, the conclusions reached by the AU Election Observer Team and other international observers was germane to the credibility bestowed on the electoral process, in the wake of the dispute that followed the announcement of results.

47. At the moment, the Commission, through its Liaison Office, is contributing to the efforts of the Government of Liberia in reconstructing and shaping the future of the country. The Liaison Office participates, alongside other key international partners, in the work of all the institutional mechanisms put in place by the Government. These institutions include the Economic and Governance Steering Committee (EGSC) and its Technical Committee, which implements the GEMAP. The Office also sits as a member of the LRDC, which articulates, monitors and executes Government's development programmes. The Liaison Office, again, is on the Board of the Bureau of Veterans Affairs and is, at the same time, a member of the Defense Advisory Monitoring Committee, which is charged with the demobilization and deactivation of the AFL, as well as the reformation of the latter. In the area of governance, the Liaison Office is a member of the Task Force on the Rule of Law.

48. In addition to the above, the Commission contributed to the sensitization of Member States and partners to provide financial support towards the payment of severance packages to members of the now defunct AFL. This facilitated the successful demobilization of the Force.

VII. OBSERVATIONS

49. Over the past three years, significant progress has been made in Liberia. In particular, the new Government, under the leadership of President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, has shown a strong commitment to tackle the root causes of the problems facing Liberia and to fulfill the hopes of the Liberian people after so many years of violence and suffering. The establishment of an inclusive Government, the measures taken to combat corruption and implement the GEMAP, the adoption of a reconstruction and development agenda are all steps that bear testimony to the determination of the Liberian authorities to open a new era in the history of their country and to contribute to the overall efforts aimed at promoting peace and stability in the region as a whole.

50. However, Liberia can only succeed if it continues to enjoy the full support of the international community, including the AU and its Member States. In this respect, it is worth recalling that in her address to the Security Council on 17 March 2006, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf stated that "it (was) imperative to provide tangible assurance to the people of Liberia that democracy will bring change for the better. They must see

early improvement in health and education and economic opportunity, starting with jobs". She reiterated that she would need the support of the United Nations and the international community to make the changes necessary to achieve these important national goals.

51. Against this background, and while acknowledging the tremendous contribution made by the region and other African countries in the promotion of lasting peace and stability in Liberia, it remains imperative that the continent, in addition to the support rendered by the partner countries and institutions, contribute actively to the post-conflict reconstruction of Liberia. In order to facilitate a concerted effort, the Commission envisages dispatching a multidisciplinary team to Liberia to assess the situation and come up with concrete recommendations on the assistance that could be rendered by the AU and its Member States, within the framework of the Policy on Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development (PCRD) adopted by the Executive Council at its Banjul session held in June 2006.

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