



UNMIL

PRESS RELEASE

UNMIL/PI/PR/145

Press Release, 6 November 2004

UN family in Liberia helps improve environmental governance as the world marks the International Day for Preventing the Exploitation of the Environment in War and Armed Conflict

(Monrovia, Liberia) - A direct impact of the breakdown of law and order due to the civil conflict in Liberia was an increase in the illegal exploitation of the country's resources: diamonds, timber and gold. Revenues derived from the unjust and unregulated exploitation of these resources were used to fuel the war resulting in the imposition of timber and diamond sanctions by the United Nations.

Other consequences of the war on the environment include the impacts associated with the social disruptions caused by the conflict. The mass movements of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and refugees placed increased pressure on natural resources. The establishment of refugee and IDP camps can, in the worst scenarios, lead to irreversible loss of soil productivity, higher threat or even extinction of wildlife species, loss of unique ecosystems, depletion of water supplies, long term pollution of land and water bodies. The destruction of crops and livestock during the conflict also had negative environmental consequences as people have had no alternative but to turn to wildlife as a food source.

A two-day seminar jointly organized in July by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Mission In Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), in collaboration with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of Liberia was attended by participants from government, non-governmental organizations, academia and the international community.

Key recommendations from the Seminar are being implemented by the National Transitional Government of Liberia (NTGL) and the United Nations. The NTGL has signed and adopted the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, which was formally launched on 28 October 2004. Steps are currently underway to finalize the appointment of the National Environment Policy Council and Board of Directors of the EPA that will further enhance the ability of the EPA to fully implement its legislative mandate as the central government body responsible for environmental matters. A Task Force on the Environment has been established aimed at coordination and mainstreaming of the environmental agenda throughout the reconstruction process, and to assist the NTGL and EPA to outline reforms in environmental governance across the board.

The United Nations is currently assisting in the National Capacity Self-Assessment (NCSA) project for global environment management that is currently being implemented by UNEP and executed by the EPA, with logistical support from UNDP. The first meeting was held in Monrovia on the 19-20 October 2004 and this will be complemented by additional meetings that

will now be held in Gbarnga, Tubmanburg, Zwedru and Buchanan. UNMIL will be providing logistical support for these regional meetings that will include representatives of EPA, UNEP, UNMIL, UNDP, local government officials and field workers, and the public. The main objective of the NCSA is to identify, through a country-driven process, gaps and priority needs for capacity building at various levels, to help implement the global conventions for the protection of the global environment, specifically the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
