

Liberia prepares to turn a page as UN mission exits

As the United Nations peacekeeping mission warps up in Liberia and the West African country looks to secure a stable future, the UN deputy chief on Friday cautioned the Government that while it has made great strides, the road ahead will be challenging.

At the launch of the country's new National Development Plan in the capital, Monrovia, Amina Mohammed, the UN Deputy Secretary-General, congratulated all Liberians on a hard-won peace after 15 conflict-torn years and the progress made during the subsequent post-war period.

She, however, outlined that along with opportunities, serious challenges lie ahead.

"When I look at the young women and men, and the initiatives for peace that they have courageously carried forward, sometimes even risking their lives, [I am filled with pride and hope but also with fear](#)," said Ms. Mohammed, noting severe economic constricts in the country and high unemployment among its youth.

"We cannot fail them. We must [...] empower them, [...] meet their needs and expectations, and help them to fulfil their dreams," she added.

Applauding the country's new development framework, dubbed the *Liberia Moment*, Ms. Mohammed underlined five principles that must underpin the Plan.

These include national ownership; eliminating poverty; improve tax and revenue collection, strengthen rule of law, and end dependency on aid; enhance transparency; and ensure predictable and sustainable means for development financing.

When I look at the [courageous] young women and men, I am filled with pride and hope but also with fear – *UN deputy chief Mohammed*

She also underscored the need to consolidate peace and avoid a relapse into conflict, and in doing so reiterated the importance of implementing the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

"The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are the best tools we have to prevent conflict and we should make every effort to achieve them without delay," she said, noting that the UN stands ready to provide the Government with advice, expertise and support needed.

"We will be with you every step of the way. This is our commitment," said the Deputy Secretary-General.

Liberia, went through two civil wars spanning over 14 years between 1989 and 2003. Civil war in Liberia claimed the lives of almost 250,000 people and led to a complete breakdown of law and order.

The UN mission, known as UNMIL, was established by the UN Security Council in 2003 after a peace agreement was signed to end the fighting. The mission created a security environment that enabled more than a million refugees and displaced persons return to their homes; supported the holding of three presidential elections, and helped the government establish its authority throughout the whole country following years of fighting and instability.

ECOWAS Radio to take over UNMIL Radio

Meanwhile, as part of the closure of the UN Mission in Liberia ([UNMIL](#)), its official radio station, [UNMIL Radio](#) – which had been broadcasting since October 2003 to over 80 per cent of the country's population – will transfer to Radio ECOWAS, the radio station operated by the Economic Community of West African States.

Use of chemical weapons, under any circumstances, unjustifiable and abhorrent – UN

Alarmed at persistent reports of chemical weapons use in Syria, the United Nations Secretary-General has called on the Security Council to demonstrate unity and resolve in response to bringing to justice those who use.

In a statement [attributable](#) to his spokesperson, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) expressed that the use of chemical weapons, under any circumstances, is unjustifiable and abhorrent.

"Equally unjustifiable is a lack of response to such use, if and when it occurs. Impunity cannot prevail with respect to such serious crimes," he added.

The statement follows a meeting on 20 March, between Mr. Guterres and Ahmet Üzümcü, the Director General of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons ([OPCW](#)).

During the meeting UN chief reiterated his support for OPCW's work in investigating allegations of the use of chemical weapons in Syria as well as his confidence in its integrity and expertise as well as in that of its Fact-Finding Mission and its conclusions.

The OPCW is an international organization which works closely with the UN to implement the Convention against Chemical Weapons Convention ([CWC](#)), and eliminate the use of chemical weapons as well as the threat of their use.

UN mission will leave Liberia with great potential for lasting stability, democracy – UN deputy chief

As part of her visit to Liberia Amina Mohammed, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, celebrated the successful closure of the UN mission there, which she said set the stage for sustained peace in the months and years ahead.

“Liberia has made enormous progress in the past 15 years,” said Ms. Mohammed at an event in the capital, Monrovia, commemorating the completion of the work of the UN peacekeeping mission, known as [UNMIL](#), acknowledging its support for Liberians in restoring their country and building sustainable peace.

“In 2003, when UNMIL was created, Liberia was torn apart by conflict, with a traumatized population and no hope for its young people, especially our women and girls,” she continued.

She noted that 14 years of civil war left more than a quarter of a million Liberians dead, nearly one-third of the population displaced, and an estimated 80 per cent of women and girls injured by sexual violence.

Highlighting the important role of Liberian women, Ms. Mohammed commend their “leadership, courage and integrity” in pursuing peace.

She thanked the Special Representatives, civilian and military personnel and troop-contributing countries and paid special tribute to the 200 peacekeepers who lost their lives in pursuit of peace in Liberia.”

“Today, we remember their sacrifice, we remember their families,” she stressed.

At an “important turning point,” she noted Liberia’s progress and acknowledged that challenges lie ahead.

“Peace will not last without sustainable development; and development gains will be at risk without sustained peace and respect for human rights,” she warned.

“We need to give Liberians back their dignity, dreams and faith in a better

future,” Ms. Mohammed cited the UN [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and the African Union’s Agenda 2063 as the best roadmaps to achieve this.

She noted that a generation ago, Liberia and Sierra Leone were in freefall, and Cote d’Ivoire was embroiled in crisis. Yet, 20 years later, “the closure of UNMIL marks the transition of all three countries to peace and democracy.”

“This sub-region has a bright future,” she stated.

Speaking to the press afterwards, she referred to UNMIL as another successful peacekeeping mission in West Africa.

It was deployed in 2003 when State institutions in ruins, a non-existent economy and a disintegrated national police and army. Today, the State has been rebuilt and more than 100,000 former combatants disarmed, demobilized and reintegrated. Justice and security institutions were restored.

Ms. Mohammed said that today Liberians enjoy peace and UNMIL leaves behind a country that has great potential to achieve lasting stability, democracy and prosperity.

To President George Manneh Weah, she underlined the UN’s support to him in sustaining peace and advancing sustainable development – assuring him that the UN would remain committed beyond UNMIL’s 30 March mandate.

Although the mission is leaving, 17 UN funds and agencies will remain in Liberia to focus on development and improving the lives of Liberian people.

Meanwhile, yesterday, at the National Peace and Reconciliation Conference, she recognized that while the country had suffered so much, for so long, the people persevered with great determination.

She noted that UNMIL had supported the country “[every step of the way](#),” explaining that long-lasting peace requires wide-ranging confidence-building measures for solid foundations.

“This will only be possible if we ensure full and true reconciliation,” she asserted.

[Lake Chad Basin: Areas reclaimed from Boko Haram must be stabilized,](#)

Security Council told

Amina Mohammed said recent joint efforts by the four of the region's affected countries – Chad, Cameroon, Niger and Nigeria – have resulted in “considerable progress” in the fight against the extremists, including the liberation of hostages as well as territorial gains.

However, she reported that the group has stepped up the use of women and girls as suicide bombings, while children were deployed in 135 such attacks in 2017: a five-fold increase over the previous year.

“It is now key to stabilize the areas that have been reclaimed, and that we seize the opportunity to really promote sustainable development,” said the UN deputy chief, [speaking](#) via videoconference from Liberia where she is participating in celebrations to mark the end of the UN peacekeeping mission in that country, known as [UNMIL](#).

Ms. Mohamed was joined by Mohammed Bila, a representative of the Lake Chad Basin Commission based in the Chadian capital, N'Djamena, and Senior Conflict Advisor at Adelphi, Chitra Nagarajan, in painting a picture of the factors behind people's suffering in the Lake Chad Basin and driving some to terrorism one year after the Council [adopted](#) its first resolution on the activities of Boko Haram in the strife-torn region.

Boko Haram, an Islamist militant organization based in north-east Nigeria, has carried out raids, suicide bombings and kidnappings across the Lake Chad region over the past decade.

Their operations have led to displacement, insecurity, destruction of infrastructure and what Ms. Mohammed described as a “complex and dire” humanitarian situation, with nearly 11 million people requiring assistance.

The group gained international notoriety in 2014 after abducting more than 270 girls from a Government school in Chibok, Nigeria.

It is believed to be behind the kidnapping last month of 110 schoolgirls from the Nigerian town of Dapchi, most of whom were safely returned this week.

Overall, Boko Haram has abducted more than 4,000 women and girls, according to the UN deputy chief, who added that those who return to their communities are often stigmatized.

As the violation of human rights continues to fuel insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin region, Ms. Mohammed said investing in community justice mechanisms will be essential for reconciliation, as well as for ensuring accountability and promoting peace.

She stressed the need to incorporate human rights and gender dimensions into activities aimed at countering terrorism or preventing violent extremism.

For example, she said the increase in Boko Haram's use of women and girls as

suicide bombers could be due to a lack of women security officers who can search other women at checkpoints.

And she called for more international action to support children affected by the upheaval in the region.

Chitra Nagarajan, a Senior Conflict Advisor with the think tank Adelphi, who is based in north-east Nigeria, also used her briefing to touch on the gender-related aspects of the crisis and also its impact on persons with disabilities.

In addition to the threats outlined by Ms. Mohammed, she spoke of how women and girls are pushed into early marriage with combatants, for example, or they fall victim to sexual abuse and exploitation, including at the hands of people who are supposed to protect them.

“Men and older boys are often the first to flee insecure areas,” she said, speaking via videoconference from the city of Maiduguri.

“They are deliberately targeted, killed and forcibly recruited by armed groups. They’re viewed with suspicion, arrested, and detained by security agencies, and they are involved in fighting, leaving women of all ages, as well as girls, younger boys and older men struggling to cope.”

The Security Council meeting took place as the United Nations marked [World Water Day](#), which focusses attention on the importance of managing freshwater resources.

Mohammed Bila, a Remote Sensing Expert with the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), a decades-old initiative to regulate and control the use of water and other natural resources in the region, spoke of how climate change has had an impact on water governance.

He said the shrinking of Lake Chad has affected communities which depended on its shoreline to grow crops, leading to increased competition for water, accusations of river diversion, loss of livelihoods and social tensions.

He told the Council that the environmental monitoring network there is “inadequate, sparse, poorly funded and operated,” with only one water level measurement station for the entire lake.

“The environmental challenges facing the Lake Chad basin are interconnected to the challenges of climate change faced by the region of the Sahel of Africa,” he said.

“The Sahel is increasingly facing extreme variability of climate resulting in frequent droughts, short-duration high-intensity rainfall, desertification, water scarcity, land degradation, and ultimately food insecurity. Consequently, addressing the climatic root causes of local challenges through risk assessment and management will require a similar solution at the Sahel regional level.”

World cannot take water for granted, say UN officials at launch of global decade for action

The United Nations on Thursday launched a decade for action on water that seeks to forge new partnerships, improve cooperation and strengthen capacity to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Most directly linked to [Sustainable Development Goal 6](#), safe water and adequate sanitation are indispensable for healthy ecosystems, reducing poverty, and achieving inclusive growth, social well-being and sustainable livelihoods – the targets for many of the 17 Goals.

However, growing demands, poor management and climate change have increased water stresses and scarcity of water is a major problem in many parts of the world.

Furthermore, more than two billion people worldwide lack access to safe water and over 4.5 billion to adequate sanitation services, warned UN [Secretary-General António Guterres](#).

“By 2050 at least one in four people will live in a country where the lack of fresh water will be chronic or recurrent,” he said, speaking at the [launch](#) of the *International Decade for Action: Water for Sustainable Development, 2018-2028*.

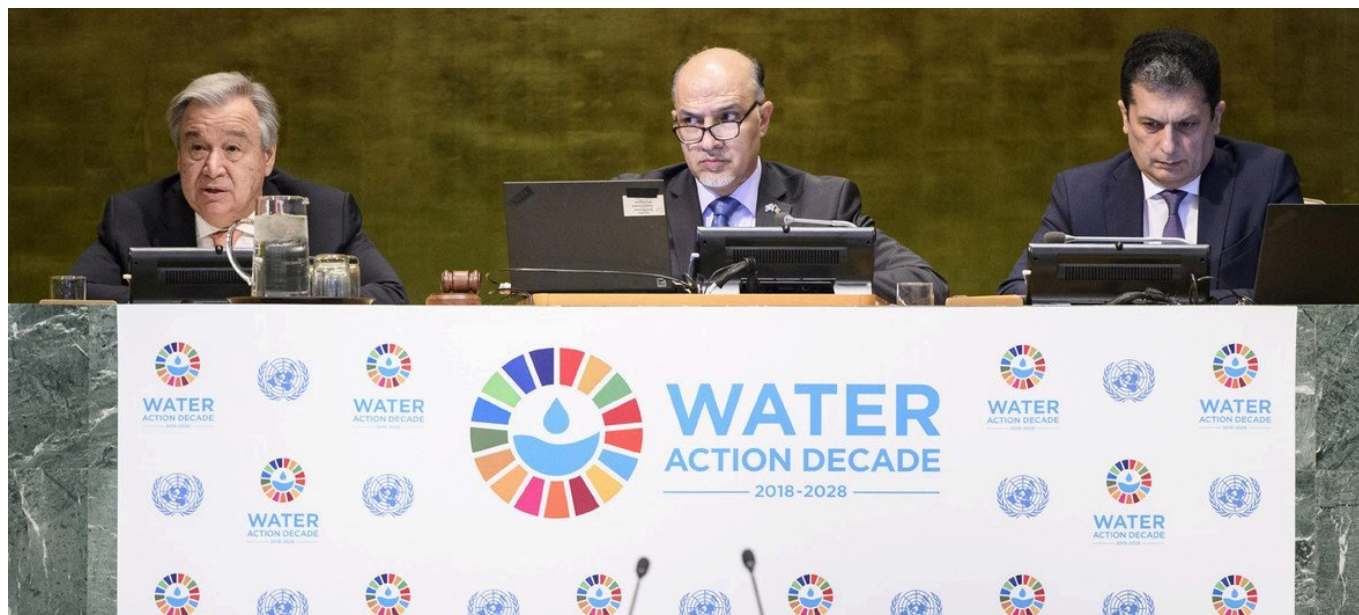
“[Quite simply, water is a matter of life and death](#). Our bodies, [...] our cities, our industries and our agriculture all depend on it.”

Stressing that water cannot be taken for granted, the UN chief said that while solutions and technologies to improve water management exist, these are often not accessible to all. In many cases, end up perpetrating inequity within and among countries.

“As with most development challenges, women and girls suffer disproportionately. For example, women and girls in low-income countries spend some 40 billion hours a year collecting water,” he stressed.

Addressing these and other challenges needs a comprehensive approach to water supply, sanitation, water management and disaster risk reduction, said the UN chief, highlighting that aligning existing water and sanitation programmes and projects with the 2030 Agenda will also be vital.

Also crucial is the political will for strengthened cooperation and partnerships, he added.



UN Photo/Manuel Elias

Secretary-General António Guterres (left) makes remarks during the high-level event to launch the International Decade for Action, “Water for Sustainable Development 2018–2028”.

Two realities – one where no one goes thirsty; other where billions don’t have water to drink

Alongside the Secretary-General, Mahmoud Saikal, the Vice-President of the General Assembly (speaking on behalf of Assembly President Miroslav Lajčák) said that while many in the world have adequate safe drinking water and sanitation facilities, billions on the same planet lack even a basic toilet and are forced to drink water that can make them ill.

“This is the reality we all have to face. It is not pretty. But, it should not come as a surprise. We have known about it for a while,” he said.

“Luckily, we still have enough time to do something about it,” added Mr. Saikal, calling on for action on everyone’s part to capitalize on the opportunities offered by the International Decade.

■ Learn more about the International Decade here:

<http://www.wateractiondecade.org/>

Water problems? The answer is in nature

The launch of the International Decade coincides with the [World Water Day](#), marked annually on 22 March, to focus attention to importance of and challenges facing freshwater availability.

Commemorated this year with the theme, *Nature for Water*, the Day [urges](#) people to explore nature-based solutions to contemporary water problems.

Some of these could include planting trees and increasing forest cover,

reconnecting rivers to floodplains, and restoring wetlands to rebalance the water cycle.