

Guterres welcomes successful wrap up of long-running UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia

Secretary-General [António Guterres](#) has welcomed the successful conclusion of the mandate of the United Nations Mission in Liberia ([UNMIL](#)), which officially closed its doors on Friday, and congratulated the West African country's people and Government for turning the page on crisis and conflict.

In a [statement](#) from a UN spokesman, the Secretary-General also commended the Government's ongoing efforts to keep Liberia on the path the peace and sustainable development.

The UN chief appreciated the contributions of all partners in the Liberian peace process over the years, particularly the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), whose green helmets laid the foundation for UN peacekeepers in Liberia ahead of UNMIL's establishment in 2003.

Mr. Guterres also expressed appreciation for the excellent leadership of his Special Representative for Liberia, Farid Zarif, and thanked all previous leaders of the Mission, and paid tribute to all uniformed and civilian personnel who served with UNMIL.

"The Secretary-General expresses his profound respect to the memory of the 202 peacekeepers who lost their lives in the service of peace during the nearly 15 years the Mission was deployed in Liberia," said the statement, adding that the UN chief also expressed his gratitude to all troop- and police-contributing countries.

Even though the peacekeeping operation has wound down, the UN family still present in Liberia will remain committed to supporting the Government-led reform process "with a view to ensuring that the hard-won peace can be sustained and the country and its people will continue to progress and thrive," the statement concluded.

Liberia, the first independent country in Africa, enjoyed nearly a century and a half of stability before falling into chaos, enduring two devastating civil wars between 1989 and 2003.

More than a quarter of a million Liberians were killed and nearly a third of the population was uprooted.

The UN Security Council established the peacekeeping mission for Liberia in October 2003, as violence lingered even after warring factions agreed to a cease-fire and a plan for political rebuilding.

Get all the facts and figures about UNMIL's operations [here](#).

Member States' support essential for an effective UN, says outgoing political chief

After nearly six years as the top United Nations political affairs official, Jeffrey Feltman on Thursday spoke to the press for the last time as the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, spotlighting the importance of multilateralism and the support of UN Member countries for the Organization's vital work.

"The list of [complex challenges](#) that Member States face today is enormous," said Mr. Feltman, noting that these challenges are addressed "much more effectively" through a multilateral system.

The support of the world body's 193 Member States is essential, "for the multilateral system, for the institution and for the Organization itself."

Mr. Feltman said he was concerned that some leaders were questioning whether a multilateral system was the right way to move forward.

"Frankly, if a leader is not committed to rule of law in his or her own country, how committed can we expect that leader to be to the United Nations itself?" he asked.

The outgoing political chief also underscored the importance of the Secretary-General's reform agenda in making the UN more effective, more transparent and "to show Member States that this Organization can evolve to address today's challenges."

Turning to Syria, which he called "the most tragic example" of the international community's failure "to address a peace and security, humanitarian, and human rights catastrophe," Mr. Feltman said he saw that crisis as "more of a reason for us to recommit ourselves to pursue peace and justice, with even more determination and holding those responsible for crimes accountable."

In December, Mr. Feltman's [visited](#) the Democratic People's Republic of Korea during a time of extremely high tension. While there, he highlighted the need to prevent miscalculations and open channels of communications to reduce risk of an escalation.

"I don't want to claim a bigger role for the United Nations than it actually had in the relative thaw since then," Mr. Feltman told the press. "But I do think that the confidence and trust in the UN the parties have demonstrated, and all that represents, is further evidence of why we do need to keep the

multilateral system strong, why we need the rules-based system.”

Earlier in the day, Secretary-General António Guterres paid tribute to Mr. Feltman’s “[extraordinary dedication](#), an enormous intelligence and a total commitment to the UN, to its values, and to peace and security in the world.”

The [Department of Political Affairs](#) monitors and assesses political developments globally to help detect and defuse crises before they happen. Its chief advises the Secretary-General on global peace and security issues, while overseeing field-based political missions carrying out peacemaking, preventive diplomacy and peace-building activities in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

Mr. Feltman’s successor, [Rosemary DiCarlo](#), appointed yesterday by the Secretary-General, will be the first woman to hold the position.

[Climate chaos to continue in 2018, UN chief warns; Will the world rise to challenge?](#)

Climate change “is still moving much faster than we are,” United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres warned on Thursday, calling for the political will, innovation and financing to cut global emissions by at least 25 per cent over the next two years.

“Scientists are now worried that unless accelerated action is taken by 2020, [the Paris goal may become unattainable](#),” the UN chief told reporters at the world body’s New York Headquarters.

The [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change, adopted by world leaders in December 2015, aims to keep global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius and pursues efforts to limit the temperature increase even further, to 1.5 degrees.

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“I am beginning to wonder how many more alarm bells must go off before the world rises to the challenge,” Mr. Guterres said, noting that 2017 had been filled with climate chaos and 2018 has already brought more of the same.

“Climate change is still moving much faster than we are,” he warned, calling the phenomenon the greatest threat facing humankind.

Recent information from the World Meteorological Organization ([WMO](#)), the World Bank and the International Energy Agency shows the relentless pace of climate change.

For instance, the UN chief said, energy-related carbon dioxide emissions rose 1.4 per cent, to a historic high of 32.5 gigatonnes.



UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe

Secretary-General António Guterres briefs the press at Headquarters on climate change.

Moreover, weather-related disasters caused some \$320 billion in economic damage, making 2017 the costliest year ever for such losses.

In social as well as economic terms, the 2017 Atlantic hurricane season was devastating, washing away decades of development in an instant.

In South Asia, major monsoon floods affected 41 million people.

In Africa, severe drought drove nearly 900,000 people from their homes.

Wildfires caused destruction across the world. Arctic sea ice cover in winter is at its lowest level, and the oceans are warmer and more acidic than at any time in recorded history.

“This tsunami of data should create a storm of concern,” Mr. Guterres said, noting that next year he will convene a climate summit in New York aimed at boosting global ambition to meet the level of the climate challenge.

“The Stone Age did not end because the world ran out of stones. It ended because there were better alternatives. The same applies today to fossil fuels,” he said, stressing the need for a further cut in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 25 per cent by 2020.

Businesses and localities might help US meet its commitments made in Paris

Responding to a question about the [United States' decision](#) to pull out of the Paris Agreement, Mr. Guterres said he received information from his Special Envoy on climate change and former New York City Mayor, [Michael Bloomberg](#), that there are expectations that the US – independently of the position of its Administration – might be able to meet the commitments made in Paris as a country due to the positive reactions of the American business community and local authorities.

“All around the world, the role of governments is less and less relevant. The role of the economy, the role of the society is more and more relevant,” he said.

[UN appeals for support to tackle 'massive' health needs of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh](#)

With relief agencies in Bangladesh struggling to assist more than a million vulnerable Rohingya refugees crowded into makeshift camps along the country's south-east coast, the World Health Organization (WHO) on Thursday appealed for international support to help the cash strapped health sector scale up its response.

“This is one of the [biggest humanitarian crises](#) in recent times,” Dr. Poonam Khetrupal Singh, the WHO South-East Asia Regional Director told a partners' meeting in the Dhaka, Bangladesh's capital.

“No single agency or the Government of Bangladesh alone can meet the massive health needs of such a large population group,” she said.

The Rohingya population has settled in an area prone to cyclones, and on terrain that will flood as soon as rains begin. “The risk of outbreak of life threatening water and vector borne diseases under such conditions is huge,” she explained.

Since August 2017, nearly 700,000 minority Muslim Rohingyas have fled violence in Myanmar across the border into Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar, joining several hundred thousand more that were already settled there in overcrowded camps.

Coordinating the work of over 100 partners on the ground, along with the

Ministry of Health, WHO has facilitated a contingency plan for the rainy season.

To minimize the risk of diseases and deaths, the plan aims to continue health services during rains and floods. Additionally, all 207 health facilities in the area have been assessed for vulnerability during rains, with 25 per cent of them slated for relocation.

Since the start of the Rohingya crisis, 900,000 doses of cholera vaccine were administered to the refugees and their host communities, in addition to two vaccination campaigns for measles and three for diphtheria, which concluded earlier this week with WHO support.

“However,” Dr. Khetrupal Singh warned “much of the health sector’s capacity to respond depends on availability of resources.”

Moreover, the vulnerable population will need continued services for reproductive, maternal and child health, communicable and non-communicable diseases, as well as psychosocial support, the WHO Regional Director added.

WHO has appealed to partners for \$16.5 million for continued support in 2018, which is part of the \$113.1 million being sought by all health partners under the Joint Response Plan for the Rohingya crisis.

[Their 15-year mission a success, UN peacekeepers depart a stable and grateful Liberia](#)

The conclusion of the 15-year operation follows a landmark election that resulted in the country’s first transfer of power from one elected president to another in 70 years. The newly elected President, George Manneh Weah, spoke for many Liberians as he thanked the UN for helping to make that possible.

“In our darkest days, the UN stood with us,” he said in his inaugural address in January.

Mr. Weah, a former football star, won the presidency in a runoff election in December, succeeding Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who had served since 2006.

Speaking at an event last week in the capital, Monrovia, to mark the completion of the peacekeeping mission, known as [UNMIL](#), he pledged that the good work of the UN will not be forgotten. “We will not fight again, we promise you,” he said.

In our darkest days, the UN stood with us – *President Weah*

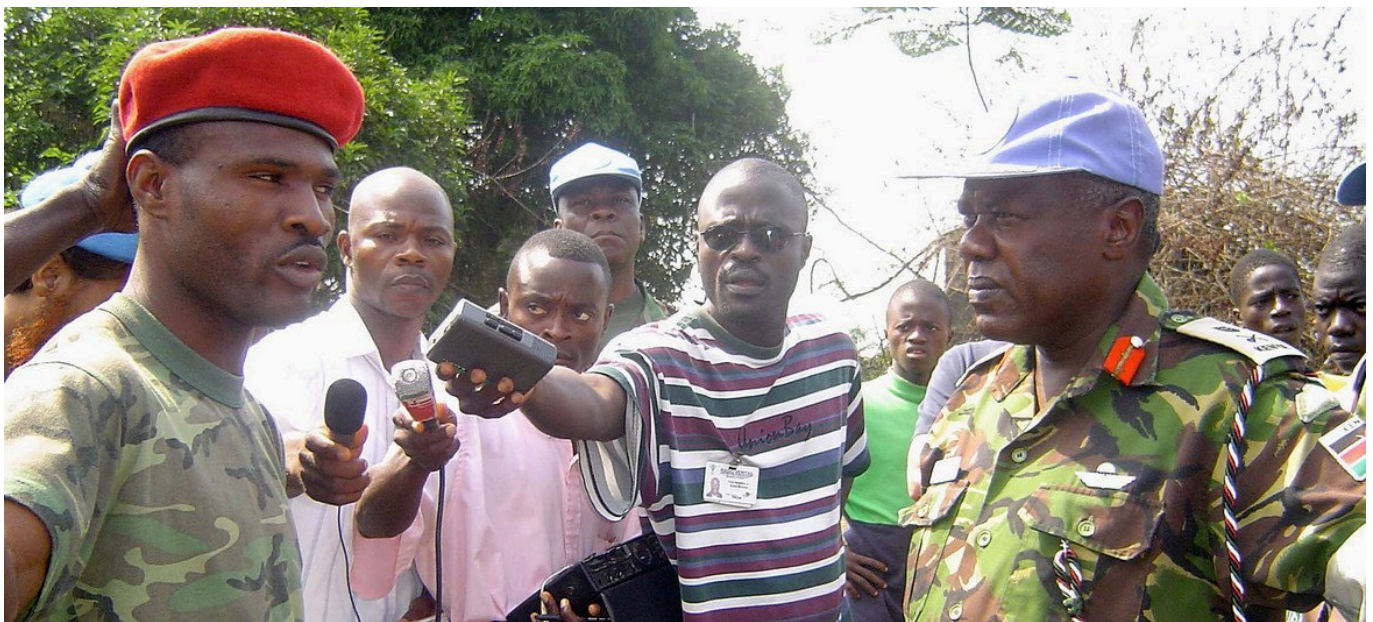
Liberia, the first independent country in Africa, enjoyed nearly a century and a half of stability before falling into chaos, enduring two devastating civil wars between 1989 and 2003.

More than a quarter of a million Liberians were killed and nearly a third of the population was uprooted. By some reports, 80 per cent of Liberian women and girls suffered conflict-related sexual violence.

The Security Council established the peacekeeping mission for Liberia in October 2003, as violence lingered even after warring factions agreed to a cease-fire and a plan for political rebuilding.

As peacekeepers first arrived, “the entire country was in turmoil,” recalled Lt. Gen. Daniel Opande, the first commander of UN forces in Liberia, in a recent interview. “People were moving from place to place, looking for safety or for food.”

A newly secure environment enabled more than a million refugees and internally displaced persons to return to their homes. The Government established its authority throughout the country and by now has successfully held three presidential elections.



UN Photo

Lieutenant-General Daniel Ishmael Opande (right), Force Commander of UNMIL, being briefed on troop deployment in Kley Junction – Tubmanburg, outside of Monrovia (December 2003).

Some 16,000 personnel from more than a dozen countries served with UNMIL. Their service did not come without sacrifice; 200 peacekeepers lost their lives due to illness, accidents or other causes while serving in Liberia.

With peace elusive in many regions where UN forces have been deployed for years, the auspicious conclusion of the Liberia mission represents a success for UN peacekeeping, which has 110,000 men and women deployed in 15 operations worldwide.

Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed noted during her visit to Liberia last week that a generation ago, Liberia and Sierra Leone were in “freefall,” and Côte d’Ivoire was embroiled in crisis. Peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone and Côte d’Ivoire have already completed their mandates.

And now, she noted, “the closure of UNMIL marks the transition of all three countries to peace and democracy.”

In a sobering [statement](#) to the Security Council in New York this week, [Secretary-General António Guterres](#) praised the successes in West Africa but highlighted the “serious challenges” that confront ongoing deployments in several other African countries.

Mr. Guterres called for advances in military equipment and preparedness, stronger measures to fight sexual exploitation and abuse and more clarity on the limits and roles of UN forces.

“Put simply,” he said, “peace operations cannot succeed if they are deployed instead of a political solution, rather than in support of one.”

Elections among many successes for Liberia

In Liberia, a broadly shared commitment to a new, democratic political order was an essential key to progress.

Last year’s presidential election, which led to the victory of Mr. Weah, was a collective success for all Liberians, said Farid Zarif, the former Afghan diplomat who has served as the Secretary-General’s Special Representative and head of UNMIL for nearly three years.

“It was a culmination of all the hard work that was done in post-conflict Liberia – on the part of the people of Liberia, the political leaders, the media, the civil society organizations,” Mr. Zarif said in an interview with *UN News*. The support of the international community, he added, was also enormously important “in bringing about the change that we saw culminating in the inauguration of the new President.”

Creating peace in Liberia has involved a lot more than wielding weapons. One of the UN mission’s tools has been public service radio broadcasts, in English and other local languages.

“We put a lot of emphasis on promoting peace and national reconciliation,” said Napoleon Viban, a Cameroonian who runs UNMIL Radio. The programming has followed the spirit, he said, of a popular catch-phrase: ‘Mama Liberia is all we have.’

Building national capacity for maintaining law and order

One of UNMIL's core mandates was to help the Liberia National Police build its capacity to take over security responsibilities. In July 2016, the UN handed over all security tasks to the Liberian authorities – a benchmark on the path to this month's full withdrawal of the mission.

"I think this has been our major achievement," said Timba Ngulube, a female police officer from Zambia serving with UNMIL. "From what I have seen," she said, the Liberian police and other security agencies "are able to stand on their own."

Bintou Keïta, the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, saw first-hand the results of the years of mentoring, training, and capacity-building.

"One proof that it worked," she said during a recent visit to Liberia, "is that there was no such huge violence during the preparations for the election."

Female peacekeepers serving with UNMIL were a key component of the mission, which was the first to have an all-female police unit, comprised of 140 members from India.

Having a large number of female peacekeepers in Liberia over the years, performing tasks such as military patrols and helping to strengthen local police, inspired Liberian women to join the security sector.

"I never had the slightest thought that I could be a police officer," said Teta Wilson, who works in the Operation Centre of the Liberia National Police.

"But when I came in the police station and I saw how things are working, I felt prompted that I can do more," she said.

Peace and development go hand in hand

With stability restored and UNMIL planning for its exit, the mission partnered with local organizations on development projects that could improve the lives of the Liberian people.

A series of "quick impact" projects were carried out across the country, including sustainable farming, agriculture, baking collectives, recycling, climate action, and urban development.

UNMIL helped fund an urban farming project in Paynesville, a suburb east of the capital, while in New Kru Town, a slum within the capital where Ebola cases were detected, the mission helped fund a recycling project involving youth from the community.

Yacoub El Hillo, the UN Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia, said that the projects are an example of ongoing UN support for sustainable peace and development.

“It is true that UNMIL is closing, but through projects like these, new openings are being made possible for Liberians to go further,” said Mr. El Hillo, who will stay on as the UN Resident Coordinator, working with numerous UN agencies whose development work in Liberia will carry on.

Despite all of its achievements, Liberia still remains fragile on many fronts, noted Special Representative Zarif. “We should not just presume that everything is fine and leave the country without any assistance.”

“Liberia is going to continue to require the solidarity, the support, and help of the international community for the long haul,” he said. “But they have already started demonstrating that they are the ones who are responsible for the future of their country.”