

# Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission (LRRRC)

July 17, 2008

## Briefing Notes

### I. Preamble

Liberian refugees at the Buduburam Refugee Camp in the Republic of Ghana, on 19 February 2008, staged a demonstration in demand of repatriation assistance to voluntarily return to Liberia, as opposed to integration into Ghanaian communities. Ghanaian security agencies viewed the action of the refugees as being in contravention of the Public Order Act (Act 491) and subsequently arrested a cross-section of the protesting refugees.

The Government of Liberia, having learned with deep regrets and passionate about the situation at the Buduburam Refugee Camp in the Republic of Ghana, urged restraint on all parties and requested consultations between the Governments of Liberia and Ghana in finding durable solutions to the unfortunate situation.

As a manifestation of Government's resolve to finding an amicable resolution to the crisis, a technical team was dispatched to Ghana on 21 March 2008, to gather first hand information on the crisis and set the foundation for a high-level ministerial delegation led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, which arrived in Ghana on Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

### II. Achievements from Discussions between the Governments

Cognizant of the gravity of the crisis, the Ministerial Delegation, with directives to derive a full understanding of the security-refugee dynamics, during the period 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008, held open and candid consultations with its Ghanaian counterparts, which, at the close of their deliberation on 28<sup>th</sup> March 2008, resulted to the following concrete achievements:

- a. Termination of the month-long demonstration by the Liberian refugee women in the camp as of 24<sup>th</sup> March 2008;
- b. The decision by UNHCR to resume its Norman humanitarian assistance in the camp as well as the voluntarily repatriation programme;
- c. Recognition and acceptance by the Liberian refugees that repatriation back to Liberia is the only viable option.

The Governments agreed for the formation of a Tripartite Committee made up of representatives of the Governments of Liberia and Ghana, and the UNHCR, to oversee the implementation of decisions reached on the repatriation, as well as the handling and monitoring of the situation of Liberian refugees in Ghana.

It was also agreed that the repatriation would phase out in consultation with the UNHCR and the two Governments and there would be bi-monthly reviews of the exercise within the framework of the mandate of the Tripartite Committee, and that refugees at the Buduburam Refugee Settlement, in the meantime would be dispersed for better management and monitoring in consonance with the mandate of the Tripartite.

### **III. Conclusions of the Tripartite Committee Meetings**

Since its formation, the Tripartite Committee has met twice. The first meeting was held in Accra, Ghana, on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008, and amongst other points, agreed as followed:

- a. Voluntary repatriation remains the preferred option for Liberian refugees in Ghana;
- b. Achieve a repatriation level of at least 50% of registered Liberian refugees within seven months, ending October 2008;
- c. Monitor levels of success, challenges and constraints, and hold bi-monthly meeting, and convene special meeting midway to advise on the way forward;
- d. Establish a technical working group to effect the decisions reached by the Tripartite Committee.

The second Tripartite Committee Meeting was deliberated in Monrovia, Liberia, on 15 July 2008. The Meeting recalled the decision of the 16 April 2008 Tripartite Meeting, acknowledged the progress made thus far in the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees since the resumption of the exercise on 18 April 2008, commended all actors for their respective roles in enhancing the effectiveness of the ongoing process, and agreed as followed:

- a. The registration and repatriation process will continue to be enhanced to accelerate the return movement;
- b. To maintain family unity, non-Liberian spouses of registered Liberian refugees will be encouraged to obtain the relevant documentation prior to repatriation;
- c. To commence an organized pilot land convoy and to work out the necessary modalities for land movement from Ghana in addition to the air transport before the next Tripartite Committee Meeting in September 2008 in Accra, Ghana.

### **IV. Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration of Liberian Returnees**

Liberian refugees from the Republic of Ghana and elsewhere began returning to Liberia on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2008, three days prior to the signing of the tripartite agreement, which demonstrated a true manifestation of their determination to return to Liberia as opposed to being integrated into the Ghanaian society. To date (July 13, 2008), a total of 4,053 Liberian refugees in the sub-region (3,679 of whom sought refugee in Ghana) have returned and resettled into various communities in Liberia.

The Government of Liberia in collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is instituting the needed mechanisms aimed at ensuring the safe and dignified return, resettlement and reintegration of our compatriots within the diaspora. An LRRRC/UNHCR managed reception/transit center has been constructed along the ELWA – RIA Highway for the receipt and transiting of Liberian returnees.

### **V. Fast Track Repatriation, Resettlement and Reintegration Initiatives**

#### **1. Repatriation**

- a. The President, H.E. Madam Sirleaf, on 23 May 08, held a formal reception programme at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in honor of Liberian returnees – (57 returnees attended);
- b. UNMIL allotted 100 seats on its Fridays and Sundays flights out of Ghana for the repatriation of Liberian refugees;
- c. Commercial flights and UNMIL dedicated flights engaged to enhance the repatriation process;

- d. LRRRC managed reception/transit center along the ELWA – RIA Highway provides for the reception and screening of returnees, and as well, provides accommodation and hot meals;
- e. Communication strategy developed for the voluntary repatriation of Liberian refugees from the sub-region;
- f. LRRRC/UNHCR Staff dispatched to Ghana to accelerate the data management and sensitize the Liberian refugees;

## **2. Resettlement**

- a. Returnees received US\$100.00 per adult and US\$50.00 per child (under 18-years) prior to being repatriated to Liberia;
- b. Returnees provided assorted non-food items (blankets, sleeping mats, kitchen set, bucket, lantern, mosquito net, plastic sheet, jerry can, etc);
- c. Beginning July 17, 2008, the LRRRC, in fulfillment of President Sirleaf's directive, has begun the distribution of one mattress to each of the 57 returnees present at the reception programme held at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

## **3. Reintegration**

- a. Office of Employment Referral established at the LRRRC, aimed at linking returnees with available job opportunities at public and private institutions and scholarship donors;
- b. Reintegration proposal submitted at Liberia's Partners' Conference held in Berlin, Germany;
- c. Database established at LRRRC on all returnees received through points of entry and shared with relevant Government ministries and agencies, including Ministries of Labor, Commerce, Youth and Sports, UNMIL, etc;
- d. The Union of Liberian Association in the Americas (ULAA) engaged, and has established a national fund drive to assist in the reintegration of Liberian returnees.