



UNMIL

---

UNMIL/PIO/PR/47

Press release, 18 March 2004

**Gender Unit holds open forum with women's organizations**

(*Monrovia, Liberia*) – The Gender Unit of the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) held its first open forum on 16 March with Liberian women's organizations to share information on the diverse activities carried out by the different organizations and to identify ways of networking and collaborating.

UNMIL Senior Gender Adviser Joana Foster told the 18 representatives who participated that the Gender Unit was ready to collaborate with the organizations in order to improve the situation of Liberian women. "Our mandate is to help you build your capacity," she said. She also explained UNMIL's mandate, as well as Security Council resolution 1325, which underscores the importance of gender mainstreaming within peacekeeping missions.

The representatives made presentations enumerating their respective areas of emphasis and objectives, which include peace advocacy, micro-credit and agricultural activities, skills training, trauma-healing, advocacy on sexual and gender-based violence, legal advice and representation, leadership programs, research and activities relating to the reintegration of female ex-combatants.

They also identified their common needs, noting that their organizations were desperately in need of funds, capacity-building in the areas of women's rights, human resources, organizational management and awareness of international instruments relating to women. The women demanded a more active role in the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration process and better participation in decision-making and peace advocacy.

The Senior Gender Adviser discussed the importance of information exchange among the women's organizations and with UNMIL. Underscoring the importance of incorporating training on women's rights in every course conducted for women as preparation for the 2005 elections, Ms. Foster said, "There is a need for the electoral laws to be women-friendly."

Among the organizations represented at the meeting were: the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET), the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), the National Women's Commission of Liberia (NAWOCAL), the Association of Female Lawyers of Liberia (AFELL) and the Liberian Female Law Enforcers Association (LIFLEA), as well as several grassroots women's organizations from around the country.

\*\*\*\*\*