

MARWOPNET LIBERIA COUNTRY REPORT

December 2001 – December 2003

MARWOPNET –Liberia, in furtherance of the commitment and motivation that led to the establishment of the Network, has continued to collaborate and work with our sisters from Guinea and Sierra Leone. To this end, we have convened in Conakry, Freetown and Monrovia, to Network and share ideas on peace building and development within the Mano River Basin. A laudable result has been our combined efforts in getting the three Heads of States of the Mano River Basin to finally meet and discuss in Rabat, Morocco in February 2002, the hospitality of His Royal Highness, The King of Morocco.

SUB-REGIONAL EFFORTS

In December 2001, MARWOPNET obtained observer's status and presented a statement of Appeal for Peace to the 25th Session of ECOWAS Heads of States and Government in Dakar, Senegal. At this meeting, the efforts of MARWOPNET were lauded and the Network was encouraged to continue in its advocacy for peace. The Delegation comprises Hadja Tiguidanké Diakhaby of Guinea, Cllr Juanita K. Jarrett of Liberia and a representative from our partner FAS in the person of Madame Tiki Monekoussikou. The mission was funded by UNDP through the initiative of FAS. Our sisters from Sierra Leone were greatly missed.

From February 14 – 17, 2002, a delegation left from Liberia to visit our sisters in Guinea and Sierra Leone in order to discuss what appeared to be a stalemate in the peace Process in the Mano river Basin since our Head of States had not as yet met to iron out their differences. This delegation comprised Madame Mary Brownell, Mrs. Ruth Caesar and Cllr. Juanita K. Jarrette. Upon arrival in Conakry, they were received very warmly even though they were not expected. The president, Dr. Saran Daraba Kaba and Hadja Tiguidankay Diakhaby agreed that indeed MARWOPNET should continue to break the stalemate and Network with the appropriate authorities in Conakry, even though at that time Guinea was going through a difficult period because teachers were on strike and President Conté was in the process of reshuffling his Cabinet.

MARWOPNET met with the Foreign Minister of Guinea, who explained that President Conté was in support of the work of the women and was still waiting to talk with his brothers from Liberia and Sierra Leone “en famille”. An audience with the President was arranged but due to some misunderstanding in the

Protocol Office, the meeting was not held. We must mention that the Government of Guinea invited our delegation to be their guests, relocating us from our affordable hotel to a five star Hotel. The visit to Guinea was possible through funds received from the UNDP, Monrovia.

The consultative meetings continued and between January 18 – 20, 2002, we met with our sisters in Freetown; the delegation now comprised of MARWOPNET'S President, Dr. Saran Daraba Kaba, Hadja Tiguidankat Diakhabi, Madam Mary Brownell, Mrs Ruth Caesar, and Cllr. Juanita K. Jarrett. Upon arrival we were met by the 2nd vice President Mrs. Agnes Taylor-Lewis who again afforded us a warm welcome. Dr. Kaba had received an invitation to witness the symbolic Burning of Arms in Sierra Leone signifying the end of the war, therefore she, Mrs. Caesar and Mrs. Taylor – Lewis represented the Network at this significant occasion at Lungi. Whilst there and after some persistency with the encouragement of member Hon. Elizabeth Alfa Lavelli, the delegation was able to have a brief successful meeting with H.E. President Tejan Kabbah, who informed members that he had been looking forward to meeting them again pledged his support for peace in the region and congratulated MARWOPNET for all efforts.

From March 21-25, 2002, sisters from Liberia once more joined our sisters from guinea and Sierra Leone at a Consultative meeting in Freetown which was organised by our partner FAS. During this time we were invited to the UN Inter-Agency Meeting where we were later requested to become participants. Consequently, and after listening to the plans and limitations of MARWOPNET, the various Agencies promised to assist in strengthening the network and assured us that we would be hearing from them.

REGIONAL EFFORTS

During the latter part of January, 2002, MARWOPNET was invited to attend the Pre-workshop for the African Development forum III(ADF III). We were represented by Cll. Juanita K. Jarrett. The theme was: Defining Priorities for Regional Integration. The three main areas for discussion were: 1. Economic Integration; 2. Peace and Security, which also included humanitarianism and human rights; 3. Institutional architecture and Capacity. MARWOPNET'S focus was on Peace and Security and the role played by women in this regard.

Following the Pre-workshop, MARWOPNET was represented at the ADF III which took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 3-8, 2002. at the forum, the role of women was re-emphasised, stressing the fact that the resources of women have to be tapped in the formulation of programs, while the programs must necessarily also reflect the needs of women. Again in Addis Ababa, from

March 10-11, 2002, MARWOPNET was invited to attend a meeting on the New Partnership for Africa's development (NEPAD). The concept of NEPAD had not been widely publicized, therefore we were requested to again ensure that the participation of women as reflected in programs concerning NEPAD.

During this time, we consulted with ms. Erica Bennett, a journalist of CNN through whom, we met a Representative of the British government from London who appeared much interested in the work of MARWOPNET and promised to render assistance.

NATIONAL EFFORTS

On the domestic front, between October – December 2001, MARWOPNET intervened and negotiated with the Government of Liberia for the release of two (2) officers of the Liberian National Bar Association, who had been incarcerated over some human rights issues which they had brought to the attention of the Nation Legislature; they were subsequently released, clarification made and reconciliation followed.

In October 2001, and April 2002, MARWOPNET held briefing meetings with local women NGOS to acquaint them with progress made by the Network and encouraged them to apply for membership. These women groups were also informed that they should be prepared to assist in the implementation of MARWOPNET'S development programs in the future..

On March 27, 2002, Mrs. Margaret Voigt and Mr. Sammy Buo of the UN Political affairs office, NY, held a meeting with members of MARWOPNET to encourage the network and inform them that UNDP was ready to render support. The needs for elections 2003 and Peace Building strategies were discussed while the women were advised to take the lead and join with the rest of civil society for peace and development in Liberia.

A representative of the British Embassy residing in La Cote d'Ivoire held a meeting with MARWOPNET in April 2002, expressed interest in our work and also pledged support.

With regards to the deteriorating conditions in Liberia due to the war and the effect this has on civilians, particularly women and children, MARWOPNET has taken the following steps:

1. relief supplies were donated in February 2002 to one of the displaced camps in Virginia, near Monrovia; these supplies included clothing, rice, canned fish and toiletries.

2. In February 2002, letters were written to His Excellency Amb. Kofi Annan, United Nations secretary General, His Excellency President Abdulai Wade, Chairman, ECOWAS and Dr. Ibrahim Ibn Chambas, Executive secretary ECOWAS, requesting the timely intervention in bring at halt to hostilities in Liberia.
3. On May 15, 2002 letters of appeal for ceasefire and dialogue were again written to the above delegates.
4. On May 16, 2002, with funding from the UNDP a delegation comprising First Vice President, Theresa Leign-Sherman and National Focal Point, Juanita K. Jerret left Monrovia on a peace mission to meet with the aforementioned dignitaries at the Yammoussoukro Meeting of head of States and Government which took place on May 17, 2002. as a result, our letters of appeal were read both at the Ministerial Meeting and the Meeting of the Heads of states by Dr. Chambas. In their resolutions, their Excellencies denounced attacks by dissidents in Liberia and called for ceasefire and dialogue.
5. Also in May2002, MARWOPNET met with the Ministers of Foreign affairs, R.L, to find out from him, Government's position and what further assistance he felt that MARWOPNET could render.
6. At the end of May 2002, a letter was written to His Excellency President Chares Taylor of Liberia informing him of MARWOPNET'S efforts in assisting to bring an end to hostilities and requesting an audience with him.

Addendum to ACTIVITY REPORT, Year 2002

1. Initiated steps to advocate for peace in Liberia and the Mano River Union Basin (MRU):
 - Collaborated with the Inter-Faith Council of Liberia (LCC) on proposal to meet with LURD to mediate a cessation to hostility;
 - Meeting with both Sierra Leonean Ambassadors accredited to Liberia;
 - Undertook a field mission to Sierra Leone and Guinea, respectively, in furtherance of the MARWOPNET advocacy and networking in the MRU to ensure continued dialogue to the Heads of State
2. Capacity building for Peace Promotion:
 - Participated in DAW activities held in Guinea of two (2) representatives – Cllr. Juanita Jarrett, National Focal Point, and Mrs. Ruth Caesar, Chairperson of the Resources Mobilization Committee;
 - After the training held by ECA/FAS, a three-day meeting to discuss the Engendering the Peace Process in the MRU,
3. Regular activities including business meetings and mobilization of resources and identification of office space.
4. Assessment of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs):
 - Visited the Jah Tonion IDP Camp to ascertain their condition, especially the women and children under difficult circumstances. During the visits distributed relief items, which included rice, soap, fish kind, and other assorted consumable can food.
5. Commenced planning process to hold a national training programme at the borders on the Liberian side on peace promotion and reconciliation. A proposal was written to seek funding in order to hold the workshop and host the MARWOPNET Board Meeting scheduled for December 9 – 17, 2002.

Response of Donors was that the time of proposal was near the closing of their budget year, therefore suggested that MARWOPNET resubmit same in the ensuing year, 2003, for their consideration.

6. Continue to hold briefing with the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the Liberia situation in particular, and also the collaborations within the MRU, UN and ECOWAS to solve the Liberian and sub-regional problems.

2003 Activities

1. Held advocacy and briefings with the following organizations:
 - the ECOWAS parliamentarian
 - the ECOWAS team on the Liberian sanctions
 - the Liberian Foreign Minister
 - Civil society groups on the peace-building in Liberia
2. Commenced the process of resource mobilization to hold peace-building training activities, which was postponed last year (2002);
3. Contacted President and FAS on MARWOPNET activities, especially funding to national offices
4. Meeting with other women peace building groups on the present critical crisis of the Liberian situation,