

UNMIL's Last Day – Thursday, 30 June 2016

by William Q. Harmon

Today, June 30, marks the end of the security mandate of United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), after which the UN will officially hand back security to Liberian government. This has been a long anticipated event that gripped Liberians with fear and anxiety, though the process began several years ago, with the gradual drawdown of UNMIL's foreign contingents. The Liberian government will re-assume full responsibility for the protection of its territorial integrity and inhabitants, nationals and foreign residents.

What initially came in August 2003 as the West Africa Stabilization Force (WASF) was later transformed into the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) deployed in every part of the country to ensure security and instill confidence in the people who have been traumatized by the savagery over the course of the 14-year crisis that claimed the lives of an estimated 250,000 people.

Beginning with a contingent of over 15,000 troops from all over the world including Nigeria, Ghana, The Gambia, Senegal, Kenya, Namibia, Tanzania, Ireland, the People's Republic of China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Jordan and India, among others, UNMIL has gone down in history as one of the largest peacekeeping operations by the United Nations to a war-zone anywhere in the world.

At their deployment, the Blue Helmets set up checkpoints and patrolled streets and communities across the country, creating the space for normal civilian activities to flourish. Gradually, over the years, the checkpoints disappeared as civilian life solidified. A newly recruited National Police (LNP), Immigration (BIN) and Armed Forces came to the foreground as UNMIL forces took the backseat, providing support to the LNP.

Thirteen years later, as UNMIL completes its transition, turning over its mandate to the national government, some Liberians remain apprehensive about the prospect of peace without the peacekeepers. The plan has been long in the making and, while many Liberians have voiced their concerns about the preparedness of the national security apparatuses to adequately take over the mandate, the various heads of Liberian security apparatuses, including the Commander-in-Chief, President Sirleaf, have continued to give assurances that her government is ready.

The Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), which was fragmented among various warring factions and blamed for heinous atrocities during the conflict, was disbanded when the war ended in 2003. Other former security forces were dissolved, and a new police, military and immigration forces were recruited and began training in compliance with the 2003 peace deal.

[END]