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**UNMIL focuses on Liberia's judicial system in latest human rights report**

*Monrovia, Liberia* - The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) today launched its fifth periodic public report on the human rights situation in the country, with a special focus on the challenges facing Liberia's judicial system and the impact on the promotion and protection of human rights in Liberia.

Launching the report during the UNMIL weekly press briefing, Chief of the Human Rights and Protection Section, Dorota Gierycz, said that the report seeks to draw attention to weaknesses in the judicial system and how they contribute to a state of impunity for crimes committed. "Circuit Courts in five counties were not operational during the May Term of Court, resulting in violations of the Constitutional and the human rights of both victims and suspects." Further, Ms. Gierycz said that where courts were operational, only a fraction of the cases listed for trial were heard. Also, inefficient investigation, prosecution and hearings led to prolonged pre-trial detention in many cases and frequently, suspects were released from detention without ever facing trial.

The report, which covers the period May to July 2006, was prepared with information gathered by 25 human rights monitors of UNMIL stationed in all of Liberia's 15 counties. While paying particular attention to the challenges facing the judicial system, the report also provides an overview of the most important human rights trends and developments during the quarter.

Sexual and gender-based violence, particularly against children, continued to be a major concern for UNMIL and all its partners working to uphold the fundamental rights of women and children. Six months after Liberia's Rape Amendment Act came into effect, with much clearer provisions outlawing rape and establishing stiff penalties, the cases listed in the report clearly brings out that far more effort is required by each and every person working in the judicial system to address this reprehensible crime.

A positive development has been that the joint UNMIL-Government of Liberia Rule of Law Task Force submitted its report to President Johnson Sirleaf which contains a three-year programme of initiatives designed to strengthen the judicial sector. As a first step in meeting these objectives, UNMIL and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights supported a three-day workshop jointly organized by the Ministry of Justice, to consider best practices to strengthen the Rule of Law.

UNMIL has been issuing these periodic public reports on the human rights situation, together with recommendations, as a contribution to the ongoing debate as to how the State can best promote, protect and respect the rights of all its citizens. In particular, UNMIL encourages civil society to address these issues actively and ensure its views are heard.

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*The full report is available at [www.unmil.org](http://www.unmil.org)*