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Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission formally launched; Deputy UN Envoy urges continued international support to the Commission

Monrovia, Liberia – The President of Liberia, H. E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, yesterday formally launched Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) at a colourful ceremony held at the Centennial Pavilion in Monrovia. Similarly, ceremonies were held in all the 15 counties to involve Liberians throughout the country in the launch of this important process of truth seeking and reconciliation.



President Johnson-Sirleaf with the TRC Commissioners

Highlighting the importance of healing and uniting the people of Liberia, the Chairman of the TRC, Cllr Jerome Verdier, explained the TRC's principle objective: "to find out the truth of the past and establish a firm basis for reconciliation, lasting peace and development in Liberia," and added that the process will be open, transparent and accountable. To aid the work of the Commission, he called on all Liberians and non-Liberians to submit memorandums and petitions on the root causes of the Liberian conflict; historical issues in need of public discourse and clarifications; human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian and human rights laws. He also asked the people to come forward with recommendations on issues and approaches for reconciliation and how Liberia can transcend its bitter past and build a future of sustained peace, unity and development based on the rule of law.

Speaking on behalf of the United Nations family in Liberia, UNMIL Officer-in-Charge and Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Operations and the Rule of Law, Mr. Luiz Carlos da Costa said: "today is another landmark in the process of seeking truth and justice, both of which are necessary for genuine peace and reconciliation in Liberia." He stressed the importance of delving into the past to find out the root causes of the conflict so that a relapse into war can be prevented. While commending civil society for their relentless efforts to set up the TRC, Mr. da Costa appealed to the international community to provide necessary support towards the successful completion of the Commission's mandate.

Before she formally launched the Truth Commission, President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf said: "Today marks a historic and defining moment in our effort to rebuild, reunite, reconcile and heal our nation. No matter how successful our efforts to restore basic infrastructure, provide jobs and establish good governance, the future and the stability of our country will remain in doubt unless we face ourselves as a people, unless we tell the truth of what we did to ourselves and to our nation." She urged all Liberians to "come forward and tell the truth. This is the greatest contribution that anyone can make to peace, reconciliation, unity and progress in Liberia." She commended the Commissioners for their commitment, and added: "We have chosen you not only to stop at narrating the truth, we also need for you to take action that will create a healthy balance between restorative and retributive justice." "The TRC is an unprecedented and exemplary testament to the courage we have summoned as a nation and a people, to reckon with our shameful past and to establish a consensus on national truth", the President said.

The launching ceremony was attended by Ministers and senior government officials, members of the international community and representatives of civil society organizations. UNMIL, through its Human Rights and Protection Section supported the drafting of the Act to establish the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and worked closely with the Transitional Justice Working Group on the Commission's establishment. The United Nations Development Programme was the first organization to provide substantial funding of US\$600,000, to ensure the success of the TRC.
