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UN Envoy calls for end to illegal rubber trade in Liberia

Monrovia, Liberia – The head of the UN Mission in Liberia, Mr. Alan Doss, has called for an end to the illegal rubber trade and pledged the mission’s continuing support for government’s efforts to restore proper regulation of the country’s rubber production. Accompanied by the UNMIL Force Commander Lt.-Gen. Chikadibia Obiakor and the UNMIL Director of Reintegration, Andreas Tamagnini, Mr. Doss paid a visit to the Guthrie Rubber Plantation.



A female rubber tapper at work

“No trade in conflict rubber must be allowed,” the UNMIL leader stressed, as he spoke with workers and members of the Interim Management Team (IMT) at the Guthrie Rubber Plantation, about 50 kilometres west of the capital, Monrovia. “Illegal tapping and sale of rubber remains a problem and we need to have a proper certification or licensing for dealers and traders.” The Special Representative of the Secretary-General added that lessons could be learned from measures taken in two other natural resource sectors of the Liberian economy – diamonds and timber. “Regulation of the rubber industry needs to be strengthened. We must stop the trade in illegal rubber because it is one of the most important sources of income and growth for Liberia,” he said.

The UN Envoy highlighted the progress that has been made on the Guthrie Rubber Plantation since UNMIL supported the Government of Liberia to take over control of the plantation on 15 August 2006, “Despite some difficulties, we’re encouraged by the progress made.” Mr. Doss was pleased to note the employment of some 1,600 workers and said the families of those workers would also benefit from the restoration of order on the plantation. “The peace process is not just stopping war. It is also about rebuilding the economy and creating jobs” he said. He welcomed the effort underway to assist ex-combatants to find new occupations. But he warned that “we must ensure that nobody seizes this plantation again and harvests rubber illegally”.



SRSG Doss is briefed by interim management team chairman, A.T. Merchant

The UNMIL Military commander in the area, Lt.-Col. E.N. Kashopola of Namibia, said the setting-up of 24-hour checkpoints by UNMIL has helped to curtail the large-scale movement of illegally-tapped rubber.

The head of the IMT, Mr. A.T. Merchant, thanked UNMIL, the UN Police and the Liberia National Police for helping to restore and maintain order on the plantation. He said management has renovated the residence and offices of staff and also placed 13 teachers on its payroll. He added that the IMT has been organizing two-week training courses in tapping so that the rubber trees are not damaged.

The Special Representative of the Secretary-General visited a local school in the plantation, which is being assisted by an UNMIL Quick Impact Project. In his remarks to the pupils and teachers, Mr. Doss called for more Liberian children, especially girls, to enroll in school. “The war is over but the battle for education continues” he added.
