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Investing in food security is essential for public security in Liberia, UN Envoy says

Ganta, Liberia -- The resuscitation of agriculture aimed at achieving food security in Liberia was the main highlight at the 26th World Food Day celebrations, under the theme, “**Investing in Agriculture for Food Security.**” Over the weekend the Government and people of Liberia were joined by the United Nations family, local and international partners to commemorate World Food Day at a two-day event held in Ganta, Nimba County, about 240 kilometers northeast of Monrovia.



SRSG Doss and President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf view agricultural products

Speaking at the event, Liberia’s President, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, threw out a challenge to her agriculture minister and his team, as well as farmers: “that World Food Day is not a one-day event; this must represent a kick-off towards starting how you are going to carry out your agriculture agenda; how you are going to work together to assist the farmers to grow more. We are going to give prizes to the county that produces more food next year. Start preparing yourself.” The Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Alan Doss, said food security was critical to the future growth, development and public security of Liberia. “Hungry people can become violent people. So an investment in food security is an investment in national security,” he observed.

Quoting a recent FAO and WFP sponsored report released in October 2006 by the Liberian Government, Mr. Doss said an estimated 40 percent of the people of Liberia are highly vulnerable to food insecurity, “39% of children under 5 are stunted or too short for their age, indicating signs of chronic malnutrition.” And he added, “While we need to increase food production, we have to ensure that poor and vulnerable benefit.”



Agricultural products on display at the exhibition

“The first of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to reduce extreme poverty and hunger by half, by the year 2015,” the UN Envoy noted. “To achieve this goal, we need policies that give the right incentives for farmers to produce food backed up by access to education and skills training for people in the rural areas. We need to empower women farmers who do so much of the hard work.”

In a related development, the Liberian president performed a ground-breaking for the 20-mile Ganta-Sanniquellie road rehabilitation project funded by the United States and the European Commission. President Johnson Sirleaf told the people of the area, “the road project will assist you to achieve your development objective; assist the farmers to bring their crops to market; assist marketers bring their goods from the farms

and other places to market; and assist school children to get to school quickly.”

During the World Food Day celebrations, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Alan Doss, also announced that UNMIL will collaborate with the World Bank, UNDP and Liberia’s Public Works ministry to rehabilitate the Ganta-Tappita highway. Mr. Doss said, “no one is going to invest in agriculture if they cannot get supplies to the farm or produce to the markets.”

The Charge d’Affaires a.i, Embassy of Japan, Mr. Yutaka Nakamura, officially launched the US\$4 million project for “Rebuilding Communities in Post-conflict Liberia: Empowerment for Change”, expected to benefit the people of Nimba. Mr. Nakamura said Japan is committed to the development of Africa and the consolidation of peace in Liberia.

As part of the festivities commemorating World Food Day, there were visits to farms, including the Kpain seed multiplication site where a symbolic harvest of seed rice was done. This agricultural project is receiving assistance from UNMIL’s Bangladeshi contingent located in Nimba County. Roots and tubers multiplication and aquaculture projects assisted by non-governmental organizations were show-cased.

The celebrations ended with an exhibition of agricultural products produced by farmers throughout Liberia and cultural displays on the importance of self-sufficiency in food production in Liberia. Senior officials of Government, the United Nations family, members of the Diplomatic Corps, non-governmental organizations, farmers and students thronged the commercial capital of Nimba, Ganta, to observe this two-day event.
