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**Over 700 ex-combatants graduate from Vocational Skills Training Programme**

**Monrovia, Liberia** – Over 700 ex-combatants and war-affected youth today graduated from an eight-month Vocational Skills Training Programme conducted by the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre. The programme was administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration, as part of the efforts to reintegrate former combatants into mainstream society.



President Johnson-Sirleaf and Mr. Jordan Ryan viewing the graduates' exhibits

The President of Liberia, H. E. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, congratulated the graduates for showing discipline, commitment and dedication during the past eight months “to improve yourself and contribute to the reconstruction of your country.” She asked the young people to exercise patience while her Government works with its partners to provide job opportunities for the new graduates. She also urged the Ministry of Youth and Sports to work jointly with the Ministry of Labour to register the graduates' skills and develop a skills roster – a suggestion welcomed by loud cheer. President Johnson-Sirleaf also commended the United Nations and staff of the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre for enhancing the potential of the Liberian youth.

The Officer-in-Charge of the United Nations Mission in Liberia and the UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. Jordan Ryan, welcomed the promises made by the youth to participate in rebuilding Liberia and never to resort to violence again. “Every one of your skills is needed throughout the country. Use your skills, knowledge and experience to make Liberia a beacon of hope, an example for Africa and an example for the rest of the world,” he challenged the young graduates.

International donors have provided financial contributions in excess of US\$53million to fund this and other rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. The programme, managed by the Joint Implementation Unit (JIU), is financed by contributions from the Governments of Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as the European Commission and the UNDP.

The 745 apprentices were taught skills in masonry, carpentry, plumbing, painting, welding, tailoring, refrigeration, air-conditioning and other trades and received a tool kit upon graduation. The ceremony was attended by government officials, members of the United Nations family and staff of the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre.

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