

Final Draft and Delivered

Statement

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02 March 2007, 11:30 Hrs, Pan African Plaza, Monrovia

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to report on this press conference. Before I comment on the ongoing and inspiring Joint Field Visit of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund; UNDP, the United Nations Development Programme; UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund; and WFP, the World Food Programme, I first would like to thank the United Nations Mission in Liberia for hosting this morning's press conference on behalf of the four UN funds and programmes.

Mr. Alan Doss, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia, and Mr. Jordan Ryan, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Recovery and Governance and United Nations Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Liberia, have been exceptionally generous in providing the 19-members of the Joint Field Visit with the resources, materials, logistics, and guidance we've needed to get on with and complete our work. On behalf of the Joint Field Visit team, we say thank you – and thank you as well to the dedicated staff members of WFP, UNFPA, UNDP, and UNICEF who have made us feel so welcome and provided us with exceptional briefings, programme visits, and comardarie – especially UNICEF Representative Rozanne Chorlton, UNDP Representative Steven Ursino, UNFPA Representative Rose Gakuba, and WFP Representative Louis Imbleau.

Ladies and gentlemen of the press, many of you know we arrived in Liberia on Sunday and we are scheduled to depart this weekend. During our visit we've had a series of meetings with Government officials, including with Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, President of the Republic of Liberia, and we humbly thank the President and the Honourable Cabinet Ministers who took time from their extremely busy schedules to meet with us – as did many other Government officials and representatives of civil society, the private sector, the diplomatic and donor community, non-governmental organizations, as well as community and faith based organizations. To them, and indeed to the Liberian people, we say thank you. Our mission has been a success and a moving and uplifting experience for us all.

I first need to briefly explain the mission of the four executive boards and why we are working in Liberia this week. The Executive Boards are the governing bodies of the UN funds and programmes. The boards are responsible for providing inter-governmental support to and supervision of the activities of the UN funds and programmes, in

accordance with the overall policy guidance of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. In order to better understand and appreciate the mission of the UN funds and programmes, joint visits of the executive boards are made to the field annually. We are in Liberia to see first hand how the UN funds and programmes operate and deliver programme results at the national and county levels. Liberia was also selected to host this joint visit because it is an example of how the United Nations can contribute to the transition of nations from post-conflict to reconstruction, recovery, and development.

Despite the enormous challenges facing the Liberian people as the country moves from a humanitarian emergency to development, we want to commend the four UN funds and programmes on the exceptional work they are doing in Liberia and the cordial and supportive relationship that exists between the Government of Liberia and the integrated UN mission in Liberia. One clear example of this is the Government's National Integrated Measles Campaign, which we learned about on Wednesday during a briefing at the Foya Health Center in Lofa County. With the support of all 15 County Support Teams, the campaign reached 97 percent of its target goal and protected 629,676 children under the age of five from measles – while hundreds of thousands of Liberian children also received Vitamin A supplementation and de-worming tablets. It wasn't just the Government and the four UN funds and programmes who united to protect more than 600,000 Liberian children from a vaccine-preventable disease, but the whole UN family, as well as NGOs, both international and national, CBOS, and faith based organizations. This level of cooperation could become a best practices model.

Liberia also has great potential to lead on girls' education. We kept hearing all over the country this week: When you educate a girl, you educate a nation – and as a member of the UNICEF Executive Board, this makes me extremely proud. As many of you know, girls' education started receiving governmental attention at the end of the civil war in 2003. The Ministry of Education with support from UNICEF drafted a National Girls' Education Policy, which was officially launched on 18 April 2006 by President Sirleaf. We salute the Government's commitment to not only improving the quality of education for all boys and girls in the country but also to increase girls' enrolment and completion rates.

When we met with the President on Tuesday, we learned a great deal about the priority the Government is placing on job creation, especially youth employment. Yesterday, some of my colleagues visited the excellent work UNDP is supporting at the Monrovia Vocational Training Centre for former combatants on Somalia Drive.

It's not just in public health campaigns in which Liberia is becoming a model nation. Regarding gender equality, with a woman holding the highest office in the land and with many senior female cabinet officials, including the Ministers of Finance, Justice, and Gender and Development, Liberia is indeed a pioneering and trailblazing nation. Furthermore, in all of our meetings with the four funds and programmes, we were pleased to learn of the highest levels of commitment in preventing and sanctioning misconduct, in particular, the abhorrent practice of sexual exploitation and abuse. The UN policy is

clear - zero tolerance to sexual exploitation and abuse and all UN personnel have a duty of care and responsibility, especially to women and children, and are bound to uphold the highest standards of integrity in professional and personal conduct.

We are also encouraged about the clear consolidation of the ongoing peace and security process in the country and the positive implications this is having – and will have – for the region, especially in the Mano River Union.

As we listened this week, the Joint Field Visit heard consistent messages. One, is that the Government's Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (iPRS) is a collaborative strategy and a strong starting point for the Government and its partners to work towards meeting the Millennium Development Goals. By all accounts, the Poverty Reduction Strategy will also set the course for Liberia to move from emergency to development.

But with the world's fifth highest under-five mortality rate and an unacceptably high maternal mortality rate, Liberia has a double challenge – to fund and implement emergency humanitarian interventions while funding and implementing sustainable development strategies and programmes. We are extremely concerned about a funding gap which may occur between today and 2009 as emergency-oriented NGOs leave Liberia before the Government has the capacity to service the basic needs of its people. As the Common Country Assessment reports, it is estimated that the UN, NGOs, and CBOs are today directly funding 85% of activities in the areas of health, education, and water and sanitation. The international community needs to remain fully engaged in Liberia to help sustain and grow the remarkable progress the Government of Liberia is achieving. For example, Liberia remains highly food insecure and strong donor support is still needed for the WFP's vulnerable group and school feeding programmes.

In closing, I have two final messages to share with you on behalf of the Joint Field Visit of the Four Executive Boards. The first is to congratulate the Liberian people on their patience. While peace dividends have been delivered since Liberia's exemplary elections in 2005 – like the impressive streets lights and piped water which are now evident in parts of Monrovia – it will take more time to adequately address other serious issues such as unemployment, health care, educational opportunities, infrastructure, and security. Liberia **will** rise again and from what we have observed this week, the four UN funds and programmes are committed to assisting the Government reach its ambitious and noble plans.

Lastly, I encourage the members of the Fourth Estate to increase public awareness about the development policies of the Government -- and to continue reporting on the strategies and programmes which are putting Liberia on a path of peace, growth, and development. I also call on you to continue and augment the public service role of the press to deliver lifesaving messages to the Liberian people about HIV/AIDS prevention, food security, gender based violence, reproductive health, hygiene practices, health and nutrition strategies, respect for the rule of law, good governance, and human rights.

On behalf of the Joint Field Visit team, I can also state that we will report on our findings and observations to our respective Executive Boards. I thank you and now turn the microphone over to Anthony and Patrick for questions.