

# **SECURITY SECTOR REFORM IN LIBERIA**

***A CASE OF THE LIBERIAN NATIONAL POLICE AND  
ITS CAPACITY TO RESPOND TO INTERNAL THREAT  
IN THE WAKE OF UNMIL DRAWDOWN IN 2012***

**RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN BY  
Search for Common Ground/Talking Drum Studio  
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH SIPRI**

**MARCH 2011**  
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## Acronyms

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
CAS	World Bank's Country Assessment Strategy
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DFIF	Britain's Department for International Development
ERU	Emergency Response Unit
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GRC	Governance Reform Commission
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Countries
IRC	International Rescue Committee
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
LD	Liberian Dollar
LNELA	Liberia National Law Enforcement Association
LNP	Liberia National Police
NACCSOL	National Coalition of Civil Society Organizations
NSS	National Security Sector
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
PSU	Police Support Unit
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SSR	Security Sector Reform
UN	United Nations
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNPOL	United Nations Police Unit
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

## **Acknowledgment**

**Search for Common Ground would like to thank a number of the individuals and organizations that were pivotal to this research study.**

Search for Common Ground is profoundly grateful to Stockholm International Peace Institute (SIPRI) for the partnership and opportunity to undertake this very important piece of research that is critical for the long-term consolidation of peace in Liberia. The research team received technical support from SIPRI's research staff in fine tuning the methodology and framework for conducting the study.

Search for Common Ground also received feedback on the initial report from other partners from across Africa who were also engaged in conducting a similar study. Their comments and input enriched the report.

**Search for Common Ground benefited considerably from the collaboration and support of all the persons who took time from their busy schedules to grant interviews. Finally, without their inputs the community members who made themselves available for the focus group discussions and the administration of the survey this research would not have been possible.**

## Executive Summary

### Key Findings

***The strength of the police is low:*** Up to date, there are close to 4,000 trained police officers. When doing a ratio analysis, there is on the average, one police officer for every 850 citizens.

***Visibility of the Liberian National Police (LNP) nationwide is low:*** Monrovia is not Liberia. Considering the size of the LNP as compared to the population, the presence of police officers in the counties is considerably low as compared to Monrovia thereby making the rural areas vulnerable to threats of violence and insecurity.

***Limited capacity to respond to threats of violence:*** Due to the combined factors of size and inadequate institutional capabilities, the police is not positioned to respond adequately to threats of violence. This will become an even greater challenge as the United Nations Mission in Liberia begins to drawdown.

***Limited budget allocation:*** The cost for training and logistical support is heavily depended on external partners or actors. While it is true that this initial support is needed, it is imperative that the government takes ownership of the process through adequate budget allocation done on a progressive basis. A recent decision by the United States to provide \$19.75 million to support the LNP will provide necessary funds for additional training, but the US ambassador herself has emphasized that the Liberian government must take responsibility for its police force. She noted, “The US\$19.75 million is intended to support capacity building within the LNP in terms of skills and resources. It is not a substitute for budgetary support that the Liberian government has responsibility for. We cannot pay salaries or provide rice.”<sup>i</sup>

***Weak Command Structure and supervision:*** Like many other governance structures, the power and authority of the police is overly centralized even though there are regional command structures. These structures have no control over allocated budgets, limited decision-making processes and inadequate logistical support. These deficiencies hamper their full operational capacity.

***Engagement of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) in the process is on an ad hoc basis:*** Apart from one or two security focused civil society organizations, the SSR reform exercise does not engage the wider civil society community such as human rights and pro-democracy groups in a sustained manner.

***Community-police relationship is cordial:*** Even though in some areas the services provided by Community Policing Forums are unknown to members, there is increasing engagement between the police and community members in joint problem solving, an indication of cordial working relationship.

***Unethical behavior among LNP is pervasive:*** Corruption and petty bribe seeking is still pervasive among LNP officers, particularly those deployed in the field. While training on professional conduct has been provided, low salaries and inadequate incentives are factors that undermine the integrity of the police reform process.

***Inadequate engagement between the police and the judiciary:*** While it is true that constitutionally the police and the courts fall in different branches of government, their engagement is critical as their work is interdependent. A lot of citizens do not understand that the police do not prosecute so when the court releases an accused person due to the lack of evidence to prosecute, communities perceive the police as compromising the case. This undermines the credibility of the police in the eyes of the community.

## **Recommendations**

In response to the key findings, the following recommendations are being advanced

**Improved Communication between the judiciary and the police:** The community believes that failures to deliver justice inside the court system are LNP failures as well. Any corruption or mismanagement of the judiciary exacerbates the relationship between the community and the LNP. The government must recognize this connection and understand that no matter how professional the LNP becomes, it will be viewed as a failure if the court system remains chronically flawed.

**Ensure Budget Allocation for LNP:** To engender national ownership, increase budget allocation needs to be a priority like other ministries so that the institutional capacity of the police is strengthened.

**Increase the strength of the police:** The government is under obligation to protect its citizens irrespective of location. The thin spread of police officers across the country does not guarantee the protection of citizens. It is critical for the size of the LNP to be increased to make it more visible in other parts of the country thereby contributing to citizens' confidence in the governance process.

**Improve Middle Management:** Improved oversight of middle management outside of Monrovia is a crucial issue that the Liberian government should address before UNMIL draws down. The LNP at all levels remain frustrated with the difficult and protracted communications between Monrovia and LNP outposts throughout the country. Without constructive oversight mechanisms in place upper management is unaware of the corruptions up-country and middle-level management up-country do not feel that concerns are heeded and their needs are met. Regular, formalized communication between middle management and upper manage is key to improving relations and increasing accountability.

**Ensure devolution of police structure:** Decentralization of police command structure is not enough. There is a need for the devolution of the LNP to give regional commanders more authority over decision-making and financial matters as well as to make the LNP more accountable to the communities they serve. Throughout Liberia, LNP regional leadership is embedded with LNP depots in the larger towns and cities outside of Monrovia. Developing regional headquarters separate from county-level police stations is critical to establishing clear chains of command and effective communications networks in Liberia's leeward counties.

**Station Emergency Response Units (ERUs) and Police Support Units (PSUs) Regionally**

Maintaining a small group of ERU officers in regional LNP headquarters could provide community members piece of mind and would ensure that there is capacity outside of Monrovia to quickly respond to murder, armed robbery and episodes of mass violence. Although there are a few notable exceptions, ERUs and PSUs are perceived as well trained and qualified to combat mob violence and corporeal threats against civilians. Currently, ERU and PSUs officers are headquartered in Monrovia, and due to logistical constraints, getting ERU units out of the city to respond to threats takes time. In Lofa County, ERU units used United Nation (UN) helicopters to reach ethnic skirmishes that killed nine people before they were quelled. Furthermore, murder and armed robbery suspects are likely to have fled well before ERU officers could respond to incidents.

**Improve access to information on Community Policing Forums:** The forums are an important platform through which community members can engage with the police. The forums are also a primary conduit through which LNP engages with and accesses information from the community.

**Engage a wider civil society network in SSR:**

Civil society organizations have thus far not offered a strong, unified voice in support of meaningful LNP improvement in anticipation of UNMIL's withdraw. Several organizations continue to do good work around police reform. However civil society lacks a meaningful coalition organized around LNP improvement. The space needs to be created for the active participation of civil society in the reform process to ensure greater accountability of the management of the LNP.

**Ensure that UNMIL Transfers Capacity to LNP Management and Civil Society**

Currently, security is predicated on UNMIL's continued presence. This is especially true in regions not easily accessible by Monrovia-based ERUs. As UNMIL security personnel begin to leave, priority must be given to ensuring that those regions entirely reliant on the UN's peacekeeping capacity to respond to violence are provided mechanisms to quickly respond to armed violence. ERUs can and should be deployed to respond to high profile instances. However, in counties such as Lofa or Maryland, they cannot get to regions in time.

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<sup>1</sup> March-May 2010, UN Focus, pg. 5